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Govt likely to extend term of 7 councils by a year

House passes Bills to allow Guv to take charge of autonomous councils if polls delayed

GUWAHATI, March 6: The Assam Assembly on Thursday passed amendment Bills related to seven autonomous councils, authorising the governor to take over the functioning of these bodies if holding of elections is found to be "impractical" even at the end of the mandated extended term of the elected committees.

Tribal Affairs minister Ranaj Pegu, who introduced the Bills, said that there is a provision of extending the term of the elected councils running these bodies for a maximum of one year. "The problem will arise if elections cannot be held even after the end of the extended period. And hence, these amendment Bills have been brought," he said.

The amendment Bills pertained to Mising Autonomous Council, Bodo Kachari Welfare Autonomous Council, Thenagal Kachari Autonomous Council, Deori Autonomous Council, Sonowal Kachari Autonomous Council, Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council and Tiwa Autonomous Council. The amendment states that if the governor is "satisfied that circumstances so

exist which render holding of elections impractical" after the completion of the term or extended term of the general council and the executive council, he may assume to himself any or all of the powers and functions of these councils and appoint any person or interim council or authority to exercise the powers and functions.

The normal term of the elected councils is five years. Taking part in a discussion on the Bills, Leader of the Opposition in the assembly, Debabrata Saikia of the Congress maintained that the arrangement for the interim period can also be done by bringing an ordinance and there was no need for making amendments to the original Acts.

Another Congress MLA, Abdur Rasheed Mandal, said the amendment will "weaken the councils" and give power to the governor to practically take over the functioning of these bodies. AIUDF legislator Rafiqul Islam pointed out that the amendment Bills do not specify the period for which the governor can (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



'Jorhat MP's comments on Advantage Assam a reflection of frustration and jealousy'

Come clean on sedition charges, BJP tells Gaurav

HT Bureau
 GUWAHATI, March 6: The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Assam has asked Congress MP Gaurav Gogoi to address the sedition charges against him and refrain from conspiring against the Advantage Assam initiative.

The Assam BJP unit stated that Gogoi's comments on Advantage Assam were merely a reflection of frustration and jealousy.

"Congress MP Gaurav Gogoi has been actively attempting to spread misinformation regarding Advantage Assam 2025. After failing to mislead the public and obstruct this major investment initiative, the Congress leadership is now resorting to desperate and envious tactics. His statements re-



garding the event reflect nothing but frustration and jealousy," an official statement quoted BJP Assam Pradesh spokesperson Subhash Dutta as saying.

Dutta further pointed out that the signing of investment agreements worth nearly ₹5 lakh crore has left

Congress leaders in despair and envy. He also highlighted that investment summits are being organized in various states across India as part of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visionary goal to make India the world's third-largest economy by 2030.

"The NDA government, under Modi's leadership, has adopted a clear policy to attract investments, with both central and state governments working tirelessly towards this mission," Dutta added.

Dutta also criticised Congress for its narrow-minded approach, which he claimed kept Assam lagging behind during its tenure. He affirmed that under the leadership of chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Over 3.35 lakh hectares of forest land encroached in Assam: Minister

GUWAHATI, March 6: Over 3.35 lakh hectares of reserved forest land in Assam is under encroachment, including by neighbouring states, Forest Minister Chandra Mohan Patowary said in the assembly on Thursday.

Nearly 11,000 hectares have been cleared of encroachment by the government since 2021, he added. Replying to a question from Asom Gana Parishad MLA Pradip Hazarika, Patowary said the total reserved forest area under encroachment (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Bill for provincialisation of municipal employees passed by Assam assembly

GUWAHATI, March 6: The Assam assembly on Thursday passed a legislation for provincialisation of services of employees of municipal boards in the state.

Housing and Urban Affairs minister Jayanta Malla Baruah, who moved the bill, said the urban local bodies appointed their employees and also paid salaries and other dues.

"However, many municipal boards are facing financial crunch and are being unable to pay the salaries on time. Also, there is a difference of pay for the same posts depending on the municipal

board," he said. To bring parity of pay and ensure timely disbursement of monthly salaries from the state exchequer, The Assam Municipal Employees (Provincialisation) Bill, 2025 has been introduced, Baruah said. He said it will cover employees appointed by the boards on or before September 4, 2013 and they will be treated as fresh appointees from the date of provincialisation. Baruah said the provincialisation will entail appointment against the individual employed, and not create any cadre against that post.

"Cadre formation will be done

as per need basis by the state government," he said. Independent legislator Akhil Gogoi, taking part in discussion of the bill, sought "pay protection" for the existing employees, claiming that most of them will undergo a salary cut as they will be deemed new appointees. They will also be deprived of pension benefits for the duration already served, he said. The minister, however, said that no pay protection can be provided as it is not admissible under the provisions of the bill. The bill was passed by a voice vote in the assembly. (PTI)

Ex-militants accuse former DHD leader of halting earthwork in Dhansiri Forest

HT Bureau
 DIPHU, March 6: Former members of six disbanded armed organisations submitted a memorandum to the Chief Executive Member (CEM) of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), Tuliram Ronghang, accusing Pronob Nunisa, the former leader of the disbanded outfit Dima Haram Daoga (DHD), of halting the ongoing earthwork in the Aao Kasiram area under the Rangapahar Forest Range of the Dhansiri Reserve Forest.

The former members submitting the memorandum include Wilingson Phangocho of the Karbi Longri and NC Hills Liberation Front (KLNLF); Goodwinson Kro of the Karbi People's Liberation Tigers (KPLT) of Run Rongpi; Mensing Tokbi of KPLT Mensing Kramsa; John Tandon Bey (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



National AIDS Control Organisation

Health & Family Welfare Department

ASSAM STATE AIDS CONTROL SOCIETY

Red Fest

The Northeast

Multi-Media Campaign 2025

Raise awareness Empower communities Defeat HIV

Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma
Chief Minister, Assam

PERFORMANCE

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- MANIPUR - Times Squared
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- ARUNACHAL PRADESH - Meenam Goi
- SIKKIM - Sofiyum

North East stands united against HIV/AIDS

Organized by:
Assam State AIDS Control Society (ASACS)

Date: **7 March, 2025** | Time: **12 noon**
 Venue: **Srimanta Sankaradeva Kalakshetra Auditorium, Guwahati**

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Janasanyog/D/13335/24/7-Mar-25

Sensex rallies 610 points to end above 74K on buying in RIL, firm global trends

MUMBAI, March 6: Benchmark Sensex rallied nearly 610 points to end above the 74,000 mark while Nifty closed above 22,500 on Thursday following heavy buying in Reliance on easing crude oil prices and firm global trends after US President Donald Trump softened stand on tariffs.

Recovering from early losses, the 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 609.86 points or 0.83 per cent to settle at 74,340.09, marking its second straight day of gains. During the day, it surged 660.57 points or 0.89 per cent to hit a high of 74,390.80.

The broader Nifty of NSE advanced 207.40 points or 0.93 per cent to close at 22,544.70. In the session, the 50-share barometer jumped 219.15 points or 0.98 per cent to hit an intraday high of 22,556.45. From the Sensex pack, Asian Paints, NTPC, Reliance Industries, Tata Steel, Bajaj Finserv, Hindustan Unilever, Sun Pharmaceuticals, Adani Ports & SEZ, Axis Bank, Tata Consultancy Services, Titan and Bajaj Finance were the major gainers.

Tech Mahindra, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Zomato, Tata Motors, and IndusInd Bank were the laggards.

"The Indian indices exhibited resilience, owing to positive global cues following Trump's softened



tariff stance on automakers from Canada & Mexico amidst the weakening dollar index," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services said.

A correction in crude oil prices, influenced by a slowdown in demand and further economic stimulus from China, ignited optimism in the energy and metals sectors, Nair added.

Broader markets also closed higher with the BSE smallcap gauge climbing 1.63 per cent and midcap index advancing 0.65 per cent.

Among the BSE sectoral indices, Energy, metal, Oil & Gas, Commodities, Utilities, Services, Power, healthcare, FMCG and In-

dustrials were the gainers.

Telecommunication and Realty were the laggards.

As many as 3,007 stocks advanced while 989 declined and 107 remained unchanged on the BSE.

The market capitalisation of BSE-listed firms climbed by ₹ 4,53,808.84 crore to ₹ 3,97,57,850.59 crore (USD 4.57 trillion). "The benchmark indices continued their positive momentum. Among sectors, the Oil & Gas and Metal indices rallied over 2 per cent, whereas intraday profit booking was observed in IT and Realty stocks," Shrikant Chouhan, Head Equity Research at Kotak Securities, said.

"Markets extended their rebound, gaining nearly a percent on the weekly expiry day, driven by strong cues. After a gap-up opening, Nifty dipped in the early session but witnessed a notable recovery in heavyweight stocks across sectors, pushing the index higher and closing near the day's high at 22,528.15 level," Ajit Mishra - SVP, Research at Religare Broking Ltd, said.

Mishra further said the recent cool-off in crude oil and the dollar, along with the potential negotiations on US tariffs, has improved global sentiment and fuelled this rebound. In Asian markets, Tokyo, Shanghai, Hong Kong and Seoul ended higher.

European markets in the mid-session deals were trading on a mixed note. Wall Street ended in the positive zone on Wednesday.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude rose by 0.52 per cent to USD 69.66 a barrel.

Meanwhile, Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth ₹ 2,895.04 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data. On Wednesday, the BSE Sensex surged by 740.30 points to close at 73,730.23. Cutting short its record 10-day falling streak, the broader Nifty of NSE rebounded by 254.65 points to settle at 22,337.30. (PTI)

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done so and continues the facility in Goalpara district of Assam. "All Indians languishing at the centre should be immediately released and the foreigners should be deported. The detention centre should be demolished. Many decisions are taken ex-parte there and the Supreme Court has also questioned this," he added. Independent MLA Akhil Gogoi drew the attention of the House that not only Hindus and Muslims were declared as 'D' voters, but people from the Nepali, Koch-Rajbongshi, Hajong, Garo and Rabha communities were also put under the category.

"This entire problem would have been sorted out if the National Register of Citizens (NRC) were completed. The NRC found who was Indian and who was not. But it is just lying. If the NRC is wrong, please rectify it. The final NRC was released on August 31, 2019 by excluding 19,06,657 people. However, it has not been notified by the Registrar General of India yet, leaving the document without any official validity. "I request the government to table the NRC in the Assembly. Then we can recommend it to the Centre and settle this foreigner issue permanently," he added.

Stating that the detention centre is against human rights, Gogoi also claimed that very few foreigners have been deported after Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma came to power compared to his predecessor Sarbananda Sonowal, while it was the highest during Congress CM Tarun Gogoi's tenure.

"The biggest hurdle in deporting the foreigners is the absence of an extradition treaty with Bangladesh. So, I feel an Assembly resolution should be adopted requesting the Centre to sign a treaty with the neighbouring nation," he added.

Citing examples, Congress legislator Nurul Huda said thousands of Indian citizens have been suffering in the detention centre for years.

"People are dying inside the centre, but their bodies are not sent to Bangladesh. These are handed over to the relatives in Assam for the last rites. If they were Bangladeshis, why don't you send them to that country?" he questioned the government.

In a written reply on Monday, the CM said there are 1,18,134 'D' voters at present in Assam as informed by the Election Department.

He also said that there are 258 inmates at the transit camp as on February 24. Supporting the existence of the detention centre, BJP MLA Dipayan Chakraborty urged the government to release all the Hindu 'D' voters from the facility. AIUFD MLA Ashraf Hussain said 'D' voters are deprived of all basic facilities and identity documents like Aadhaar Card, PAN Card and Voter ID Card. "It is a political problem and cannot be solved by the legal system. A political solution has to be found for a permanent solution. This entire system was created to economically weaken a community," he added. Slamming the Foreigners Tribunals (FTs), Hussain said that if 'D' voter cases are registered against 126 MLAs of the Assam Assembly, 50 per cent of them will not clear the FT judgement. (PTI)

counterpart, Howard Lutnick, and US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer on the proposed deal. There is an expectation in New Delhi that it may escape the reciprocal tariffs being imposed by the Trump administration on February 2. Since assuming office on January 20, Trump has on multiple occasions criticised India for higher tariffs and even described the country as a "tariff king" and "tariff abuser".

In its Union budget for 2025-26, India announced its decision to lower tariffs on the Bourbon whiskey, wines and electronic vehicle (EV) segments. The decisions were seen as an attempt to send a signal to the Trump administration that New Delhi is open to bringing down tariffs in specific sectors. Washington is also pushing New Delhi to buy more American oil, gas and military platforms to bring down the trade deficit that stands at around USD 45 billion in India's favour. The US was the largest trading partner of India with the overall bilateral trade in goods and services amounting to USD 190 billion for calendar year 2023. (PTI)

Language reflection of nation's

During the event, a special edition of the departmental magazine, 'Rajbhasha Bharti', was unveiled, along with the launch of the alpha version of Kanthasha (3.0), a multilingual translation software developed for the Bhartiya Bhasha Anubhag. The conference also featured an award ceremony recognising excellence in the use of the official language. Sarma presented awards to various government offices, banks and undertakings for their contributions to promoting Hindi. Town Official Language Implementation Committees (TOLICs) were also honoured with the TOLIC Rajbhasha Samman.

A total of 48 awards were distributed, selected based on the quarterly progress reports submitted through the Information Management System, the statement said. This regional conference covered both the East and Northeast regions. The East region comprises West Bengal, Odisha, Bihar, Jharkhand and the Andaman & Nicobar Islands, while the Northeast region includes Assam, Tripura, Mizoram, Nagaland, Manipur, Meghalaya, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh. The first regional conference was held on January 4 this year in Mysore, Karnataka, followed by the second conference on February 17 in Jaipur.

The primary objective of these conferences is to ensure the effective implementation of the Official Language Policy across central government offices, banks, PSUs, autonomous bodies and Town Official Language Implementation Committees in these regions. (PTI)

B'desh got 'no official response'

Hasina, the military and police are also accused of a violent crackdown on protesters in July and August, which the UN estimates killed as many as 1,400 people in the days before the former prime minister fled. Yunus, who assumed office on August 8, in the past claimed that about 1,500 people, including students and workers, were killed while 19,931 others were wounded during the protest against the Hasina government. (PTI)

Nearly 83,000 hectare of Assam's

Arunachal Pradesh has encroached upon 16,144.01 hectare of land, while 3,675.78 hectare is in the possession of Mizoram, he added. Among the affected districts of Assam are Sonitpur, Biswanath, Lakhimpur, Dhemaji, Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Charaideo and Jorhat, the minister said. (PTI)

Day not far when India will

ease of tourism and boost local employment. Highlighting the expansion of the Mudra Yojana to support homestays, Modi also stressed on initiatives like 'Heal in India' and 'Land of the Buddha' to attract global tourists. "Efforts are being made to establish India as a global tourism and wellness hub."

"To cater to a larger population, planned urbanisation is essential. We have decided to allocate ₹ 1 lakh crore to the Urban Challenge Fund. The private sector, especially the real estate industry, must focus on planned urbanisation," he said. The government has given importance to skill development at par with the infrastructure sector, he added. AI, he said could contribute lakhs of crores to the economy. "In this direction, we have allocated ₹ 500 crore for AI-driven education and research in the budget." He also stated that India will set up National Large Language Model for development of AI capacity. "India has become the third-largest startup ecosystem in the world," said the Prime Minister, adding that several measures have been introduced in this budget to promote startups.

He mentioned the approval of ₹ 1 lakh crore corpus fund to boost research and innovation. This will increase investments in emerging sectors.

Modi noted the provision of 10,000 research fellowships at IITs and IISc, which will foster research and provide opportunities for talented youth. The Prime Minister also highlighted the role of the National Geo-spatial Mission and the National Research Foundation in accelerating innovation, stressing the need for collective efforts at all levels to elevate India to new heights in research and innovation.

Underlining the significance of Gyan Bharatam Mission in preserving India's rich manuscript heritage, Modi announced that over one crore manuscripts will be digitized under this mission, leading to the creation of a National Digital Repository.

This repository will enable scholars and researchers worldwide to access India's historical, traditional knowledge and wisdom. The Prime Minister also mentioned the establishment of a National Gene Bank to preserve India's plant genetic resources. This initiative aims to ensure genetic resources and food security for future generations. He urged for expansion of such efforts and called on various institutes and sectors to actively participate in these initiatives. (PTI)

Britannia Industries CEO Rajneet Singh Kohli quits

NEW DELHI, March 6: Britannia Industries Ltd on Thursday said its Chief Executive Officer Rajneet Singh Kohli has resigned to pursue an opportunity outside the company.

Kohli, who is an Executive Director and CEO submitted his resignation on March 5, 2025 to pursue an opportunity outside Britannia, the company said in a regulatory filing.

The Board of Directors said he will be relieved from the services of the company with effect from close of business hours on March 14, 2025, the filing added.

Kohli had joined Britannia in September 2022.

Before joining the biscuits and bakery major, he had stints at Jubilant Foodworks, which operates popular fast food chains such as Domino's, Popeyes and Dunkin, along with Asian Paints and Coca-Cola Co. (PTI)

Bandhan Mutual Fund launches Bandhan CRISIL-IBX Financial Services 3-6 Months Debt Index Fund

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 6: Bandhan Mutual Fund on Thursday announced the launch of the Bandhan CRISIL-IBX Financial Services 3-6 Months Debt Index Fund, an open-ended Constant Maturity index fund which has been designed to provide investors with a structured short-term fixed-income investment opportunity, an official statement said.

"The fund offers exposure to a portfolio comprising AAA-rated Certificates of Deposit (CDs), Commercial Papers (CPs), and Corporate Bonds issued by leading banks, NBFCs, and financial institutions. With a systematic roll-down strategy from 6 months to 3 months, the fund aims to capture short-term yield advantages while maintaining liquidity and minimising interest rate risk," the

statement further said.

The New Fund Offer (NFO) opened on Thursday, March 6 and will close on Tuesday, March 11.

Investors can subscribe to the fund through licensed mutual fund distributors, investment advisors, online platforms, and directly at <https://www.bandhanmutual.com>.

Commenting on the launch, Vishal Kapoor, CEO, Bandhan AMC, said, "Fixed-income investments, particularly short-duration debt, provide a structured approach to navigating market fluctuations while preserving capital. The financial services sector—comprising banks, NBFCs, and financial institutions—has remained resilient, supported by strong capital buffers, low NPAs, and steady credit growth. This creates a compelling opportunity to access high-quality, AAA-rated

debt instruments with attractive yields".

Speaking about the advantages of debt index fund, "Bandhan CRISIL-IBX Financial Services 3-6 Months Debt Index Fund systematically captures these advantages, offering a transparent, cost-effective, and liquid investment solution that is well-suited to today's market conditions."

"The Bandhan CRISIL-IBX Financial Services 3-6 Months Debt Index Fund aims to leverage the roll-down strategy by investing in CDs, CPs, and bonds within the 3-6 months maturity, capitalising on strong demand for short-term securities," the statement said.

This approach makes it an appealing option for investors looking to generate potential income through exposure to shorter-maturity instruments on the yield curve, it concluded.

Rupee falls 6 paise to settle at 87.12 against US dollar

MUMBAI, March 6: The rupee snapped its three-day rally and settled with a loss of 6 paise at 87.12 against the US dollar on Thursday amid uncertainty over trade tariffs and persistent foreign fund outflows.

Forex traders said the depreciation in the Indian rupee was influenced by several factors, including the weakening of regional currencies, selling pressure from foreign investors, and a recovery in global commodity prices, all of which put downward pressure on the local currency.

While a positive equity market, weakness of the American currency in the overseas market and easing crude oil prices contained the losses for the local unit.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened stronger at 86.96 and touched the high of 86.88 against the greenback during the day. The unit later turned volatile and hit the day's low of 87.16 before ending the session at 87.12 against the dollar, 6 paise lower from its previous closing level.

On Wednesday, the rupee settled 13 paise higher at 87.06 against the US dollar, registering the third straight day of gain. In the preced-

ing two sessions, the unit had gained 18 paise.

Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst at Mirae Asset Sharekhan, said the rupee lost initial gains and fell against the US dollar on selling pressure by FIIs, while the American currency fell to a four-month low as the US decided to delay implementing higher tariffs on imports from Canada and Mexico.

Choudhary further said the rupee is expected to trade with a slight positive bias on positive domestic markets and weakness in the US dollar. However, FII outflows may cap sharp gains in the local unit.

"Uncertainty over the trade tariff issue may also weigh on the rupee. Traders may take cues from weekly unemployment claims data from the US and ECB monetary policy decision. USD-INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of 86.80 to 87.25," he added.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading lower by 0.31 per cent at 103.95.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, rose 0.17 per cent but stayed at six-month low levels of USD 69.42 per barrel in futures trade.

Additionally, market participants took advantage of the lower USDINR rates to close their short positions, further contributing to the rupee's slide, said Dilip Parmar, Research Analyst, HDFC Securities.

Looking ahead, the USDINR exchange rate is anticipated to fluctuate within a range of 86.40 to 87.70 in the short term, he added.

In the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex surged 609.86 points, or 0.83 per cent, to settle at 74,340.09, while the Nifty advanced 207.40 points, or 0.93 per cent, to close at 22,544.70 points. Both the indices had closed Wednesday's session with a gain of more than 1 per cent.

Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth ₹ 2,377.32 crore on net basis on Thursday, according to exchange data.

The Reserve Bank on Wednesday said it will conduct open market purchases of government securities and undertake USD/INR swaps totalling about ₹ 1.9 lakh crore during the month.

On February 28, the central bank conducted a US dollar-rupee swap worth USD 10 billion to inject long-term liquidity into the system, with the auction eliciting robust demand. (PTI)

Wagh Bakri Tea Lounge launches special initiative to support women tea pluckers

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 6: Wagh Bakri Tea Group, launched a special initiative 'Cup of Goodness' for supporting tea pluckers in North-East India, reinforcing its commitment to women's health, hygiene and education on the occasion of International Women's Day, said an official statement on Thursday.

"Under the initiative, 5% of the total bill at Wagh Bakri Tea Lounges will be donated towards a dedicated fund aimed at improving health and hygiene awareness and supporting the education of tea pluckers' children," the statement claimed.

The campaign will run for the next 13 months.

Earlier, Wagh Bakri Tea Group ran a pilot project for the initiative, benefiting around 700 tea pluckers from tea gardens in Assam.

Wagh Bakri Tea Group contributed Rs 12 lakh raised through the initiative which had benefited the tea pluckers in Assam.

Commenting on the initiative, Vidisha Parag Desai, director of



Wagh Bakri Tea Group, said, "Through this initiative, we aim to make a tangible difference in the lives of tea pluckers, who form the backbone of our industry, by addressing critical issues related to health, hygiene and education".

Speaking on the past pilot project, Desai said, "The success of the pilot project has reinforced our belief in the positive impact we can create, and we are committed to continuing this support for the next 13 months".

He further expressed his grati-

tude to his customers at the event. "We are also thankful to our customers for their support of the initiative and want to reiterate that every cup of tea they consume at Wagh Bakri Tea Lounge is a cup of goodness," he said.

Kritanjali Kashyap of BAL RAKSHA BHARAT NGO said, "Tea pluckers face significant challenges in accessing basic healthcare and hygiene facilities, and their children often lack educational resources. This collaboration with Wagh Bakri Tea Group

will provide much-needed support and create meaningful opportunities for these communities. We are grateful for this initiative and look forward to its sustained impact."

Launched on International Women's Day, the programme will touch and improve the lives of tea pluckers and their families, furthering Wagh Bakri Tea Group's long-standing commitment to corporate social responsibility.

Wagh Bakri Tea Group supports a host of CSR initiatives focusing on areas such as women's empowerment, education, healthcare, and environmental sustainability, which have had a significant impact on local communities.

Wagh Bakri Tea Group runs 50+ tea lounges across several cities, including Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Mumbai, New Delhi, Pune, and many more.

"Through its latest initiative, Wagh Bakri Tea Group reaffirms its dedication to not just serving high-quality tea but also uplifting the lives of those who make it possible," the statement concluded.

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Borjan to get Sainik School

it was initially proposed at Khanduli in West Karbi Anglong but faced opposition from the people, adding, "A second proposal to set up in Langkaijan was also rejected because of its proximity to the Marat Longri Wildlife Sanctuary. Finally, Borjan was chosen as the project site."

"This is not just a Rs 1 or 2 crore project but a ₹ 4,000 crore project. It will provide jobs to 1,000 local youths. Candidates from other constituencies will not interfere—100% of the job opportunities will be given to local candidates of Borjan. The adjoining villages will benefit from road connectivity, and all households will receive free electricity. Additionally, the KAAC will earn revenue from this project," the CEM said.

He further mentioned that the Sainik School is a ₹ 375 crore project that will also create employment opportunities. Addressing concerns that students from outside Karbi Anglong might fill the seats, he clarified, "As per the agreement, 80% of the students will be from Karbi Anglong. The Sainik School will offer various facilities that students can benefit from." The CEM also announced a proposal to establish a biogas plant in Karbi Anglong. This proposal emerged after the Advantage Assam 2.0 summit held in Guwahati recently.

He stated that Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma had identified Karbi Anglong as a potential location for a biogas plant to be set up by Reliance.

Speaking on the proposed biogas plant, the CEM explained that it would run on grass, which could be cultivated by villagers.

"This project will generate employment for many local youths, both skilled and unskilled. Around 40,000 people from our district migrate to other states for work. Andhra Pradesh signed an MoU with Reliance for a similar project, which became a major revenue source for the state. We are not rushing into this. An interaction with all stakeholders, including student and youth organisations, intellectuals, and political leaders, will be held on March 8 in Diphu. If everything goes well and people agree, we plan to sign an agreement to lease land at ₹ 10,000 per bigha per year. If we provide 30 bighas, our revenue from the project could reach ₹ 50 crores annually," he said. Comparing the project with Andhra Pradesh, where seven lakh local youths were employed, the CEM assured that 100% of jobs in Karbi Anglong would be given to local youths.

He also highlighted the financial prospects for local farmers, stating that if grass for the biogas plant is cultivated, the income per bigha could reach ₹ 50,000 annually. For 20 hectares of land, the estimated annual income could be around ₹ 12 lakhs.

"The company will provide seeds free of cost and offer technical support for grass cultivation," he added.

Ronghang also criticised opposition leaders for opposing the KAAC's efforts to implement various central and state-sponsored welfare schemes.

Additionally, he assured the people of Borjan that the KAAC would implement the demands outlined in their memorandum, which included improvements in road connectivity, access to safe drinking water, better medical facilities, school infrastructure, and playgrounds.

Assembly turns spotlight

done so and continues the facility in Goalpara district of Assam. "All Indians languishing at the centre should be immediately released and the foreigners should be deported. The detention centre should be demolished. Many decisions are taken ex-parte there and the Supreme Court has also questioned this," he added. Independent MLA Akhil Gogoi drew the attention of the House that not only Hindus and Muslims were declared as 'D' voters, but people from the Nepali, Koch-Rajbongshi, Hajong, Garo and Rabha communities were also put under the category.

"This entire problem would have been sorted out if the National Register of Citizens (NRC) were completed. The NRC found who was Indian and who was not. But it is just lying. If the NRC is wrong, please rectify it. The final NRC was released on August 31, 2019 by excluding 19,06,657 people. However, it has not been notified by the Registrar General of India yet, leaving the document without any official validity. "I request the government to table the NRC in the Assembly. Then we can recommend it to the Centre and settle this foreigner issue permanently," he added.

Stating that the detention centre is against human rights, Gogoi also claimed that very few foreigners have been deported after Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma came to power compared to his predecessor Sarbananda Sonowal, while it was the highest during Congress CM Tarun Gogoi's tenure.

"The biggest hurdle in deporting the foreigners is the absence of an extradition treaty with Bangladesh. So, I feel an Assembly resolution should be adopted requesting the Centre to sign a treaty with the neighbouring nation," he added.

Citing examples, Congress legislator Nurul Huda said thousands of Indian citizens have been suffering in the detention centre for years.

"People are dying inside the centre, but their bodies are not sent to Bangladesh. These are handed over to the relatives in Assam for the last rites. If they were Bangladeshis, why don't you send them to that country?" he questioned the government.

In a written reply on Monday, the CM said there are 1,18,134 'D' voters at present in Assam as informed by the Election Department.

He also said that there are 258 inmates at the transit camp as on February 24. Supporting the existence of the detention centre, BJP MLA Dipayan Chakraborty urged the government to release all the Hindu 'D' voters from the facility. AIUFD MLA Ashraf Hussain said 'D' voters are deprived of all basic facilities and identity documents like Aadhaar Card, PAN Card and Voter ID Card. "It is a political problem and cannot be solved by the legal system. A political solution has to be found for a permanent solution. This entire system was created to economically weaken a community," he added. Slamming the Foreigners Tribunals (FTs), Hussain said that if 'D' voter cases are registered against 126 MLAs of the Assam Assembly, 50 per cent of them will not clear the FT judgement. (PTI)

India looks at ways to navigate

counterpart, Howard Lutnick, and US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer on the proposed deal. There is an expectation in New Delhi that it may escape the reciprocal tariffs being imposed by the Trump administration on February 2. Since assuming office on January 20, Trump has on multiple occasions criticised India for higher tariffs and even described the country as a "tariff king" and "tariff abuser".

In its Union budget for 2025-26, India announced its decision to lower tariffs on the Bourbon whiskey, wines and electronic vehicle (EV) segments. The decisions were seen as an attempt to send a signal to the Trump administration that New Delhi is open to bringing down tariffs in specific sectors. Washington is also pushing New Delhi to buy more American oil, gas and military platforms to bring down the trade deficit that stands at around USD 45 billion in India's favour. The US was the largest trading partner of India with the overall bilateral trade in goods and services amounting to USD 190 billion for calendar year 2023. (PTI)

Language reflection of nation's

During the event, a special edition of the departmental magazine, 'Rajbhasha Bharti', was unveiled, along with the launch of the alpha version of Kanthasha (3.0), a multilingual translation software developed for the Bhartiya Bhasha Anubhag. The conference also featured an award ceremony recognising excellence in the use of the official language. Sarma presented awards to various government offices, banks and undertakings for their contributions to promoting Hindi. Town Official Language Implementation Committees (TOLICs) were also honoured with the TOLIC Rajbhasha Samman.

A total of 48 awards were distributed, selected based on the quarterly progress reports submitted through the Information Management System, the statement said. This regional conference covered both the East and Northeast regions. The East region comprises West Bengal, Odisha, Bihar, Jharkhand and the Andaman & Nicobar Islands, while the Northeast region includes Assam, Tripura, Mizoram, Nagaland, Manipur, Meghalaya, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh. The first regional conference was held on January 4 this year in Mysore, Karnataka, followed by the second conference on February 17 in Jaipur.

The primary objective of these conferences is to ensure the effective implementation of the Official Language Policy across central government offices, banks, PSUs, autonomous bodies and Town Official Language Implementation Committees in these regions. (PTI)

B'desh got 'no official response'

Hasina, the military and police are also accused of a violent crackdown on protesters in July and August, which the UN estimates killed as many as 1,400 people in the days before the former prime minister fled. Yunus, who assumed office on August 8, in the past claimed that about 1,500 people, including students and workers, were killed while 19,931 others were wounded during the protest against the Hasina government. (PTI)

Discussions on implementation of Bodo Accord, 2020 clauses in letter and spirit CEM-ABSU meets Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, March 6: The chief executive member of Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) and All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) have sought swift passage for Constitutional Amendment Bill to empower Sixth Schedule Councils with stronger administration and financial autonomy to usher more developmental aspects in the region.

A three member joint delegation team, representing Govt of BTR and ABSU under the leadership of Pramod Boro, the CEM of Bodoland Territorial Region, ABSU president Dipen Boro and general secretary Khanindra Basumatary, met union defence minister, Rajnath Singh on Thursday in New Delhi.

The delegation discussed at length on the swift passage of the Constitutional Amendment Bill to empower the sixth schedule council with stronger administration and financial autonomy, formation of the Territorial Army, Home & Hearth Battalion in Bodoland - paving the way for the youth to



serve the nation while strengthening peace and progress in the Bodoland region.

The delegation team also urged the Defence minister to take bold initiative for speedy implementation of the Memorandum of Settlement (MoS) of historic BTR Peace Accord, 2020 and conduct of recruitment of Army and paramilitary as per BTR accord clauses mentioned in 10.2 including Agniveer etc.

The meeting was fruitful and the defence minister heard the delegation team with keen patience.

CEM Pramod Boro stated that the joint delegation team met defence minister Rajnath Singh and urged for a speedy implementation of the clauses in the BTR Peace Accord.

"It was an honour to meet Hon'ble Raksha Mantri Shri Rajnath Singh Ji in New Delhi today. We discussed the swift passage of

the Constitutional Amendment Bill to empower Sixth Schedule Councils with stronger administration and financial autonomy. We also explored the formation of the Territorial Army Home & Hearth Battalion in Bodoland - paving the way for our youth to serve the nation while strengthening peace and progress in BTR", Boro said.

ABSU president Dipen Boro said that the ABSU and CEM of BTR, Pramod Boro met Union Defence minister Rajnath Singh in New Delhi India Thursday.

The team has emphasised for speech implementation of the BTR peace accord clauses in letter and spirit.

"I had the privilege to meet Shri Rajnath Singh, Hon'ble Defence Minister, India today at 4.30 PM at 17 Akbar Road, New Delhi at his official residence. We discussed speedy implementation of the MoS of Bodo Accord, 2020 and recruitment of Army and paramilitary as per BTR accord mentioned in 10.2 including Agniveer etc", ABSU president Dipen Boro said.

NABARD organises special awareness workshop on ACABCs in Nagaon



HT Correspondent

NAGAON, March 6: A special district-level workshop on Agri-Clinics and Agri-Business Centres (ACABCs) was organised by the National Bank for Agriculture & Rural Development (NABARD) DDM Office at the Seminar Hall of College of Fisheries (CoF), Raha here recently.

Over 50 graduate, post-graduate and PhD students were benefitted from the deliberations.

The participants were guided by the co-district commissioner (CDC), Raha, Phyllis Hrangchal; DDM-NABARD, Rajendar Perma; dean (I/c) of CoF Dr Kamaleshwar Kalita; assistant professor, Dr Kaustubh Bhagwati; SBI credit officer, S Chakraborty and fishery development officer, Kamakhya Kalita among others.

In her inaugural address, the CDC Hrangchal spoke about the present-day vacancy as aspirants scenario for various types of jobs and encouraged the participants to become job providers, by establishing their own start-ups and enterprises.

She also spoke about the initiatives by the Government of Assam and congratulated NABARD for organising the workshop on time for the students of CoF, so that they can take an informed decision about their career.

DDM-NABARD, Rajendar Perma made a detailed powerpoint presentation regarding the scheme guidelines including the status of the sector.

He further said that the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Govt of India had initiated the

ACABC scheme for promoting entrepreneurship and self-employment opportunities along with creating an enabling environment for providing quality extension services through private players for the development of agriculture & allied sectors in the country.

He also informed the participants that NABARD being an apex development bank of the country has always been formulating and implementing various pilots aimed at developing the entrepreneurial characteristics of its intended beneficiaries and stakeholders in the rural areas.

In his address, the dean (I/c) of college of fisheries, Raha, spoke about the potential available for development of the fisheries sector in the state, through individual start-ups and shared that Nagaon is the largest producer of fish and fish seed in the state.

He also highlighted the support received from NABARD for establishing Biofloc Fish Farming units, Fishery Waste to Wealth projects etc.

The Assistant Professor & Fishery Development Officer also guided the participants.

Thereafter, the queries of the participants regarding establishing enterprises, bank loan, subsidy etc. were clarified by SBI Credit Officer & the DDM-NABARD.

Cuidine seized in Karbi Anglong

HT Correspondent

BOKAJAN, March 6: Khatkhathi police in Karbi Anglong recovered large quantities of cough syrups and arrested one in this connection.

The police were checking vehicles on Wednesday night at Khatkhathi when they came upon a motorcycle, NL 07 EC 3884, at 8 pm.

On checking the bag of the motorcyclist, the police recovered 100 bottles of cough syrup Cuidine.

Cuidine is a cough syrup that is abused by drug addicts.

The bottles of cough syrup and the motorcycle were seized by the officials and arrested the motorcyclist.

The rider has been identified as Tinku Das, a resident of Rangkar Village Phulbari, Khatkhathi in Karbi Anglong.

It may be mentioned here that Karbi Anglong is a consummate route for drug and arms smuggling that is smuggled on to Guwahati and to different parts of India from there.

Drugs and arms are often caught and seized by the police.

NFR to operate few Holi Special Trains to clear the festive rush

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 6: NF Railway will be operating 8 pairs of special trains to accommodate the increase in passenger demand during the festive season of Holi, an official statement said on Thursday.

These special trains will run between Narangi - Gorakhpur Jn - Narangi, Katihar - Amritsar - Katihar, Kamakhya - Anand Vihar Terminal - Kamakhya, Dibrugarh - New Jalpaiguri - Dibrugarh, New Jalpaiguri - Howrah - New Jalpaiguri and Anand Vihar Terminal - Jogbani - Anand Vihar Terminal, the statement informed.

Special train no 05633 (Narangi - Gorakhpur Jn.) will depart on every Thursday from March 6 till March 27, 2025.

Similarly, special train no 05634 (Gorakhpur Jn - Narangi) will depart on every Friday from March 7 to March 28, 2025.

Special train no 05734 (Katihar - Amritsar) will depart on every Thursday from March 6 till March 27, 2025.

Similarly, special train no 05733 (Amritsar - Katihar) will depart on every Saturday from March 8 to March 29, 2025.

Special train no 02525 (Kamakhya - Anand Vihar Terminal) will depart on every Friday from March 7 to March 28, 2025.

Similarly, special train no 02526 (Anand Vihar Terminal - Kamakhya) will depart on every Sunday from March 9 to March 30, 2025.

Special train no 05762 (Dibrugarh - New Jalpaiguri) will depart on every Friday from March 14 to March 28, 2025.

Similarly, special train no 05761 (New Jalpaiguri - Dibrugarh) will depart on every Wednesday from March 12 to March 26, 2025.

Special train no 05764 (Dibrugarh - New Jalpaiguri) will depart on every Sunday from March 16 to March 30, 2025.

Similarly, special train no 05763 (New Jalpaiguri - Dibrugarh) will depart on every Saturday from March



15 to March 29, 2025.

Special train no 03028 (New Jalpaiguri - Howrah) will depart on every Thursday from March 13 to March 20, 2025.

Similarly, special train no 03027 (Howrah - New Jalpaiguri) will depart on every Wednesday from March 12 to March 19, 2025.

Special train no 04009 (Jogbani - Anand Vihar Terminal) will depart on Wednesday on March 12 & March 19, 2025.

Similarly, special train no 04010 (Anand Vihar Terminal - Jogbani) will depart on Monday on March 10 & March 17, 2025.

Special train no 04027 (Jogbani - Anand Vihar Terminal) will depart on Saturday on March 8, March 15 & March 22, 2025.

Similarly, special train no 04028 (Anand Vihar Terminal - Jogbani) will depart on Thursday on March 6, March 13 & March 20, 2025.

"The details of stoppages and timings of these special trains are available at IRCTC website and are also being notified in various newspapers and social media platforms of NF Railway. Passengers are requested to verify the details before undertaking their journey," the statement concluded.

NABARD official visits Karbi Cultural Society office in Diphu

HT Bureau

DIPHU, March 6: Kamkhogin Vaiphei, the assistant general manager and district development manager (Karbi Anglong) of NABARD, visited the Karbi Cultural Society (KCS) office at Karbi People's Hall, Taralanso, Diphu, on Wednesday last.

The visit was organised following an invitation extended by the KCS.

Upon his arrival, Vaiphei was welcomed by KCS officials led by General Secretary Sunil Tokbi. He was felicitated with the traditional Karbi turban. Discussions on future collaborations

and alignments between NABARD and the KCS, focusing on the development and promotion of cultural initiatives, community empowerment, and sustainable projects in the region were discussed in the meeting.

NABARD has also agreed to launch projects for the development of bamboo and handicraft products by providing training sessions to interested members.

The visit marked a positive step towards strengthening institutional ties and exploring opportunities for cooperation in the interest of Karbi Anglong's cultural and economic progress, the KCS stated.

Noted pediatrician passes away

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, March 6: Dr Robindra Nath Saikia, an octogenarian pediatrician and resident of Fauzdaripatty in Nagaon town, passed away at a hospital in Guwahati last night on Wednesday. He was 88 years old at the time of his demise.

Dr Saikia, popularly known as R N Saikia in Nagaon, was a well-known figure in the district.

As a pediatrician, he had earned a reputation for his expertise and dedication to his profession.

He was also actively involved in various social and cultural activities in Nagaon. Dr Saikia was a lifetime member of the Nagaon Kala Mandir, a prominent cultural organisation in the district. He was also associated with various other organisations and institutions in Nagaon.

The news of Dr Saikia's demise has sent shockwaves throughout Nagaon, with various organisations and institutions expressing their condolences.

The Indian Medical Association (IMA), Nagaon branch, and the Communist Party of India (CPI), Nagaon district council, among others, have mourned the loss of Dr Saikia. Dr Saikia's mortal remains will be brought to his residence in Nagaon after his son arrives from his foreign residence.

His last rites will be performed in the morning, according to family sources. Dr Saikia is survived by his wife, son, daughter, and a host of relatives and well-wishers.

Another arrest made in TLC 2.0 crypto scam in South Salmara Mankachar

HT Correspondent

DHUBRI, March 6: In a significant development in the ongoing investigation into the cryptocurrency scam related to TLC 2.0 (Trillionaire Crypto), police have arrested another accused in connection with the case registered under SSM PS Case No. 31/25 in South Salmara Mankachar district. Acting on intelligence inputs, a police team led by SI Jayanta Rajkhowa of South Salmara Police Station and supervised by ASP HQ apprehended Mohabur Rahaman Ahmed (29), son of Giasuddin Ahmed, a resident of Tumni Simlakandi village in South Salmara Mankachar district.

Training for masons on earthquake-resistant construction underway in Nagaon

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, March 6: The Nagaon district administration, in collaboration with the Assam State Disaster Management Authority, organised a three day training programme for masons on earthquake-resistant construction techniques at the Lions Club in Nagaon on Thursday.

The programme, which is part of a three-day training initiative, aimed to equip masons with the knowledge and skills required to construct earthquake-resistant buildings.

The training programme will be attended phase wise by 160 masons from eight development blocks in the district.

The programme was inaugurated by Debahuti Bora, additional district commissioner and CEO, District Disaster Management Authority, Nagaon while Baijayanta Goswami, district programme officer, DDMA, Nagaon mentored the programme.

While inaugurating the programme, ADC Bora emphasised the importance of earthquake-resistant construction in the region.

She highlighted the need for masons to acquire the skills and knowledge required to construct buildings that can withstand earthquakes.

The training programme was attended by Afzalur Rahman, assistant engineer (Building), PWD, Nagaon, and Geetarth Kalita, assistant engineer (Building), PWD, Barhampur as the resource persons here on Thursday.

The trainers provided hands-on training to the masons on various earthquake-resistant construction techniques, including the use of reinforced cement concrete and earthquake-resistant design principles.

The district administration plans to conduct similar training programs for masons in all eight development blocks in the district.

The initiative aims to promote earthquake-resistant construction practices in the region and reduce the risk of damage to buildings and infrastructure during earthquakes.

The program was also attended by officials from the District Information and Public Relations Department, Kaliabor Development Block, Khagarijan Development Block, and Pakhimoria Development Block, among others.

Illegal band saw mill seized by Dhubri forest officials

HT Correspondent

DHUBRI, March 6: In a significant crackdown on illegal timber operations, forest officials from multiple divisions successfully detected and seized an unauthorised band saw mill in Dhubri on Thursday.

The joint operation was conducted by the Sapatgram staff, Protection staff of Dhubri Forest Division, Khoraghat Range staff of Parbatjhora Forest Division, and was led by Sofikur Rahman, Protection Range Officer, Dhubri.

The illegal saw mill was identified and dismantled under the jurisdiction of Kokrajhar, as authorities continue their efforts to curb unauthorised logging and protect forest resources.

Forest department sources confirmed that such operations would continue to ensure the protection of forest cover and prevention of illegal deforestation.

The seizure marks another step in the ongoing efforts of the forest department to enforce environmental laws and to prevent the exploitation of natural resources.

61 senior citizens leave for a pilgrimage tour from BTR

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, March 6: A total of 61 senior citizens from different parts of Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) left for Madhya Pradesh, under a pilgrimage tour.

The group of pilgrims will be visiting various historic and religious sites in Indore.

Pramod Boro, the chief executive member of Bodoland Territorial Region facilitated the pilgrimage tour for senior citizens from different parts of the BTR.

On Wednesday, the pilgrims embarked on their spiritual journey from Kokrajhar Railway Station, boarding the Gandhidham Express to visit various historic and religious sites in Indore in Madhya Pradesh.

Before departure, the senior citizens were honoured with traditional Aro nai and Phulam Gamos "at the railway station.

They were also provided with fruits, bottled water, and dry snacks, including chira, muri, and gur-mithai, as a gesture of goodwill.

Lok Sabha MP Joyanta Basumatary and UPPL General Secretary Raju Kumar Narzary, and several dignitaries graced the event, who wished the pilgrims a safe and fulfilling journey.

Dr Surath Narzary, a senior citizen in Kokrajhar, expressed his gratitude and thanks to the CEM of BTR, Pramod Boro for facilitating the tour pilgrimage for the senior citizens of the Bodoland region.

'LINGUA DI GENERE: PERSPECTIVES ON GENDER IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE STUDIES'

TU organises seminar on Gender Perspectives in Foreign Language Studies

HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, March 6: The Department of Foreign Languages at Tezpur University commenced a two-day National Seminar titled "Lingua Di Genere: Perspectives on Gender in Foreign Language Studies" on Thursday.

The keynote address was delivered by Dr Usha Chandran from the Centre for Chinese & Southeast Asian Studies, School of Language, Literature, and Culture Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU).

Her presentation, titled "Gender in Language and Expression with Chinese Language as a Point of Departure," provided a thought-provoking analysis of how gender is embedded in linguistic structures and expressions.

Another highlight of the seminar was a lecture by Dr Rounak Mahtab from the Department of Foreign Languages, Gauhati University.



Dr. Mahtab's talk on "Teaching Languages from the Perspective of Gender" offered valuable insights into pedagogical strategies that incorporate gender sensitivity

in language education.

The event was inaugurated by Prof R R Hoque, dean of academic affairs, Tezpur University, who emphasised the importance of integrating gender perspectives into language studies to foster inclusivity and deeper understanding.

The inaugural session was chaired by Prof Chandan Kumar Sharma, dean of the school of humanities and Social Sciences, who highlighted the relevance of gender-sensitive approaches in academia.

Dr Hemjyoti Medhi, head of the department of foreign languages, delivered the welcome address, setting the tone for the seminar by underlining the need to examine language as a medium that shapes and reflects gender identities.

A contingent of the Indian Army was also present on the occasion.

The team was led by Major Luv Rao of the Indian Army.

No one can figure out your worth but you
- Pearl Bailey

Is China getting ready to challenge Trump?

How is China, the second largest economic and military power of the world after the United States is planning to confront the second term US President Donald Trump's resurgence disrupting the so long established global order to impose his total domination on international politics? Every political analyst is looking at the current deliberations of the National People's Congress of China which began its week long session in Beijing on March 5. The timing of the session was decided earlier but the taking over of the U.S. presidency once again by the maverick leader on January 20 this year and his series of actions including the announcement of additional tariff on Chinese exports to the US just one day before the beginning of the Chinese Congress session has given a new dimension to the thinking of the policy makers of the Chinese Communist Party who have been closely monitoring the actions of the U.S. president regarding the earlier Israel-Hamas ceasefire deal and now the moves regarding ending the war in Ukraine. So far, China has been out of big focus of Trump as the U.S. President is deeply engaged in his moves regarding Ukraine involving President Vladimir Putin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky but China knows that after consolidating his position in the event of the ending of Ukraine war, Trump will put all his guns to aim at China. Trump's advisers are saying that President Trump is hoping to conclude a deal with the Chinese president Xi Jinping on the basis of economic collaboration and investment sidelining other geo political issues for the present. Those will be taken up in the second phase since dealing China will be a tough task and the process will take time.

So far China has reacted to the tariff hike by making the point that Trump cannot threaten China to submission, China is also imposing reciprocal tariff hikes and if Trump wants to have a trade war, China is equally ready for a war. This assertion emanates from the confidence of the Chinese leadership in the growth of the Chinese economy and its market and investment potential which has to be taken into account by the shrewd businessman Donald Trump who is a hardcore transactionist believing in what sort of package brings benefits to the American economy. The Chinese economy, despite its occasional hiccups like in the last two post covid years, is gearing up to fill the gaps and becoming vibrant in 2025 and 2026.

Chinese Prime Minister Li announced the growth target of 5 per cent in 2025 in the annual government work report, which also outlined plans to stabilise economic growth by boosting domestic demand and creating 12 million new urban jobs. In the last two years, there was dissatisfaction in Chinese youth regarding the quality of jobs in urban areas. The sentiments got reflected in the social media pages of the high tech youth also. The Chinese report has taken note of that quality issue this time and appropriate jobs are being created in urban areas. Some western economists have been doubting about the possibility of recording five per cent growth in 2025 in view of the current trade war.

Trump is out to destroy the world for the sake of American profits



The world has barely emerged from the shadow of the COVID-19 pandemic, a crisis that ravaged economies, disrupted supply chains, and sent financial markets into turmoil. Just as nations are striving to rebuild, another storm is brewing—one that threatens to be more insidious and longer-lasting than the pandemic itself. The economic virus known as the Trumpian tariff has begun its disruptive march, casting a pall over global trade and economic stability. The tremors are already evident; markets are reacting with unease, businesses are recalibrating their strategies, and governments are bracing for impact. The world is witnessing a chaotic and unpredictable shift in economic diplomacy, engineered by a leader who treats international trade like a high-stakes game of power and dominance.

Donald Trump's approach to tariffs is not merely a policy shift but an assault on the established world order. Trade wars are nothing new, but the way Trump has wielded tariffs as a weapon of retribution is unprecedented. Countries that have long been economic allies of the United States find themselves in the crosshairs. First, it was China, then Canada and Mexico, and now even India, led by Trump's so-called friend Narendra Modi, is feeling the heat. No nation is immune from his erratic economic dictates. His trade policies are not dictated by long-term economic strategy but by the impulsive instincts of a leader who sees global markets as a battleground where America must emerge victorious at any cost.

Trump's trade policies bear a striking resemblance to the tactics of a mafia don. He has turned economic negotiations into coercive deals, threatening punitive tariffs unless countries bow to American demands. The traditional norms of diplomacy have been replaced by ultima-

turns and intimidation. Countries that dare to resist are met with escalating economic aggression. This is not trade policy; it is economic extortion on a global scale. The victims of this coercion are not only nations but also the businesses and consumers who bear the brunt of rising costs, supply chain disruptions, and an atmosphere of global economic uncertainty.

The repercussions of Trump's tariff rampage extend far beyond the immediate economic shockwaves. By relentlessly targeting multiple countries, he has set in motion a destabilizing chain reaction that could take years, if not decades, to undo. The global economy thrives on interdependence, with nations leveraging their comparative advantages to create a system that benefits all. Trump's unilateralism threatens to dismantle this intricate web, replacing cooperation with conflict, trade with tariffs, and growth with stagnation. If his vision prevails, the world may descend into an era of economic nationalism, where self-interest trumps collective progress, and protectionism replaces the free flow of goods and services.

Trump's behaviour suggests a leader who is not merely implementing policies but exacting revenge. His body language when signing executive orders, his fiery rhetoric against trading partners, and his refusal to engage in constructive diplomacy

all point to a leader driven by grievance rather than governance. The world order he inherited—a system built on alliances, agreements, and mutual benefit—has become, in his eyes, an instrument of American weakness rather than strength. He seeks not to reform but to obliterate, not to negotiate but to dictate. In doing so, he is pushing the global economy into an abyss of uncertainty where trust is eroded, and every nation must defend for itself.

There is an unmistakable element of recklessness in Trump's trade wars. He appears to revel in the disruption he causes, much like a trigger-happy child handed a weapon he barely understands. The analogy is striking: a leader who approaches global trade with the mindset of someone who has spent too many hours immersed in video games, where destruction is thrilling, and consequences are minimal. In the real world, however, the fallout is tangible. Jobs are lost, businesses shutter, and consumers face rising prices. The economic casualties of his policies are real, and yet, he remains unfazed, convinced that his strong-arm tactics will ultimately force the world to acquiesce.

The fundamental flaw in Trump's economic doctrine is the belief that America can achieve super profits through

brute force. He envisions a world where the United States, through sheer economic muscle, dictates terms while others comply out of necessity. This approach is dangerously myopic. The reality of the global economy is that interconnectivity breeds resilience. No nation, not even the United States, can thrive in isolation. By undermining trust and cooperation, Trump is inadvertently weakening America's own economic standing. While he may secure short-term gains through coercion, the long-term damage to America's credibility and economic partnerships could be irreparable.

Perhaps the most alarming aspect of Trump's trade wars is the erosion of rules-based global trade. The post-World War II economic order, painstakingly built through institutions like the World Trade Organization (WTO), was designed to prevent exactly this kind of economic anarchy. By bypassing established norms and replacing them with unilateral decrees, Trump is effectively dismantling the global economic system that has ensured global economic stability for decades. His declaration that jungle law will now govern the global economy is not hyperbole but a stark warning of the chaos to come. If every nation were to adopt his approach, the result would be an economic free-for-all, where power, not principle, determines trade relations.

The world must recognize Trump's tariffs for what they truly are—not just economic policy, but an ideological crusade against globalization. The current crisis is not simply a matter of import duties and trade imbalances; it is a battle over the very nature of global economic engagement. Will the future be one of cooperation, where nations work together for shared prosperity? Or will it be a fractured, hostile environment

where economic power is wielded as a weapon? The answers to these questions will shape the trajectory of the global economy for generations.

For nations caught in the crossfire, the challenge is daunting. Retaliation risks further escalation, yet submission validates Trump's tactics. The only viable path forward is unity among affected nations. The more the world stands together against Trump's economic belligerence, the more difficult it becomes for him to dictate terms. Multilateralism must be the antidote to his unilateralism. If countries can forge stronger alliances, reinforce global trade norms, and resist the temptation to engage in tit-for-tat tariffs, they may yet contain the damage. History has shown that economic nationalism, however powerful in the short term, ultimately sows the seeds of decline. Trump's tariffs risk repeating history on an even larger scale. As markets tumble, businesses struggle, and global economic uncertainty deepens, it is clear that his trade war is not a path to prosperity but a descent into economic chaos. The world must respond not with panic, but with a firm commitment to upholding the principles of fair and open trade.

The Trumpian tariff is more than just a policy—it is a test of the resilience of the global economic order. It challenges nations to decide whether they will succumb to economic intimidation or stand firm in defence of a system that has lifted millions out of poverty and spurred unprecedented growth. The coming years will determine whether Trump's vision of economic warfare prevails or whether the world can resist his attempts to rewrite the rules in America's favour. The stakes could not be higher, for what is at risk is not just trade balances and profit margins, but the very fabric of global economic stability. (IPA Service)

Bengal saffron ecosystem aims to evolve for winning assembly polls

By Arun Srivastava

Threat perception of electoral dissipation in the 2026 assembly election and the resolve of the RSS cadres and leaders not to undertake electioneering in West Bengal unless the party president J P Nadda apologises for his Lok Sabha election eve remarks against the RSS, has finally forced the state BJP leaders to have a two-day long meeting with the state RSS leaders.

The importance of the two-day meeting could be gauged from the simple fact that almost all the state BJP leaders were present to sort out their differences with the RSS and provided an undertaking that they would abide by the directives of the Sangh. Even the turnout leaders did not muster courage to oppose the stand of the RSS. The electoral exigencies could be made out from the fact that all the 27 frontal organisations of RSS were present at the meeting.

The meeting held in Uluberia of Howrah, is significant for the reason that it would send a positive message to the rural voters. Yet another reason that made the BJP to hold the joint coordination meeting has been the fact that the suburban areas of Kolkata have significant supporters and followers of the party in the lower middle class and intermediate migrant castes. These areas have sufficient number of RSS karyakartas (cadres).

Insiders maintain that state BJP leaders were the targets of the RSS functionaries, who charged the former with neglecting the task of the party building and simply being concerned with their personal gains and benefits. The leaders of these frontal organisations sought to know from the BJP leaders what was their contribution in strengthening the party at the base level and what they have done to reach out to the poor Hindus and voters of the state.

They were also asked to clarify what they had done to win over the trust of the Bengali people, and whether they had made any inroads into the Bengali aristocrat section. This is the class which plays the crucial role in building positive political narrative and thus expand support base among all sections of Bengali society. It



was pointed out that though this section was not happy with the functioning of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and her government, it has not yet distanced itself from her. While the Mamata government has not performed to the satisfaction of the common people, and especially to liking of the upper strata of the Bengali society, the BJP leadership had as yet failed to exploit the performance gap and win over the people.

Mamata Banerjee had virtually finished off the Congress in the state. Almost all the TMC cadres and leaders are old Congress workers. They were averse to the state Congress leaders joining hands with the CPI(M), which was why they had followed Mamata in her endeavour to float TMC. However, now in a changed situation, with Rahul Gandhi unwilling to go along with CPI(M), has been motivating some of these old workers to come back to Congress. It is worth mentioning that Congress won one Lok Sabha seat and got around 7 per cent of the popular vote in Bengal. In 2021 assembly election, the Congress had secured only 2.38 per cent. The RSS leaders also pointed out that BJP has lost around 4 per cent of its vote in 2024, which it had got in 2019.

The RSS insiders maintain that dynamics of intense differences between the RSS and the BJP has forced the national leadership to intervene. Initially, the turncoats led by the leader of opposition in

the assembly, Suwendu Adhikari, had fed the central leadership with the impression that everything was fine and they were in command of the situation. They had even assured them that the saffron ecosystem would succeed in defeating Mamata Banerjee's TMC. But the 10-day visit of RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat had exposed them.

At his meeting with the RSS cadres of south and central Bengal, Bhagwat had come to comprehend from the briefings by the Sangh cadres, that BJP would not even be able to keep the seats it had won in 2021 elections. This time its seats may even decline to 30 from the present 77. This scenario has been indeed a matter of serious concern for the RSS, more than the BJP. In the defeat of BJP, the RSS will lose its support base and that would also symbolise shifting of its cadres to the TMC.

RSS is omnipresent. During the ten-year rule of the BJP government, it has penetrated deep into the police, military, judiciary, bureaucracy and academic sectors of the country. All the frontal organisations have accomplishing their missions diligently. Though Modi has been harping on political slogan of Hindutva, the strategy of RSS to engage the people at psychological level has been most dangerous for the secular and democratic forces. The RSS has been achieving its mission through cinema and literature. This has aroused the communal

passion amongst the Hindus to an unbelievable level.

RSS leaders want to capture power in Bengal as it enables the Sangh to bring Bengal's culture and social tenets under its control and thus dictate its course. Bengali society is still relatively liberal and open. Unless it is regimented, the RSS cannot aspire to rule over the entire east as well as north India. To depend on the turncoats is its compulsion. RSS leadership has been actively interfering in the political activities and ensuring the victory of BJP in various elections at the national and state levels, even though the RSS continues to project itself purely as a cultural organization.

The painstaking initiative that RSS undertook during the Haryana, Maharashtra and Delhi elections has strengthened peoples' perception of it being an active political tool. Nevertheless, RSS hangs on to the image of the Sangh being an 'apolitical' and 'cultural' organization, with nothing to do with the BJP's election efforts or its decision-making process. Its participation in the electoral process would also be projected as a mechanism to protect and strengthen the cultural and social ethics of the Hindu society, than working to ensure the victory of BJP. It is this compulsion of winning the assembly elections of Bihar and Bengal that has forced the RSS to adopt a more obliging stance. (IPA Service)

Can govt complete delimitation process before Lok Sabha election 2029?

By: Dr. Gyan Pathak

Politics in South India, especially in Tamil Nadu, has become hotter on the issue of delimitation of constituencies in India, after the first Census to be completed after 2026. Census process in yet to be started, though it was to be started in early 2025, a process which takes about 18 months to be completed. Registrar General and Census Commissioner's tenure was extended until August 2026, which was an indication that the Centre had planned the Census process to be completed by that time. Centre plans to complete the delimitation process by 2028 and the Lok Sabha General Election 2029 to be held as per new delimitation order. However, a new twist has come after the all-party meeting in Tamil Nadu on March 5, 2025, when Chief Minister M K Stalin demanded postponement of delimitation for the next 30 years.

Only a week before Union Minister of Home Amit Shah had assured in an event on February 26 in Tamil Nadu, "Today a meeting will be held to ensure the South does not suffer on account of delimitation. The public in Tamil Nadu is disturbed. This is why the Tamil Nadu CM (Stalin) and his son (Udhayanidhi) are trying to distract the public. Mr Stalin, the Modi government has made it clear in Lok Sabha that after delimitation, on pro rata basis, not a single seat will be reduced in any southern state. And I want to reassure the public of South India that Modi has kept your interest in mind to make sure that not even one seat is reduced pro rata. And whatever increase is there, southern states will get a fair share, there is no reason to doubt this."

Only a day earlier, CM Stalin has described the delimitation process as a "sword hanging over the head of South India." He had warned that Tamil Nadu could lose up to eight of its 39 Lok Sabha constituencies due to the delimitations exercise, potentially reducing its seats to 31. He had called for all party meeting on the issues on March 5, 2025.

The outcome of the meeting held a week after Amit Shah's assurance suggests that there were no takers of his assurance. Barring the BJP and its ally TMC, all the political parties of the state participated in the meeting. The meeting passed a resolution demanding that the freeze on the number of seats in Lok Sabha based on the 1971 Census should be extended for another 30 years. A joint committee of MPs from all parties in South India has also been proposed to draft a joint response to the issue.

CM Stalin said that Tamil Nadu and Southern states should not be punished for effectively implementing population control measures, adding, "Delimitation exercise solely based on population figures will be a gross injustice to Tamil Nadu and other Southern States. We are not against Delimitation exercise, but we want justice to be rendered to us."

South Indian states have serious apprehension about the real intentions of PM Narendra Modi led BJP government suspecting them of trying to establish political hegemony of the BJP through increase of Lok Sabha seats from the Hindi belt states, chiefly Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan.

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The basis of delimitation is yet to be worked out, but there are speculations on the basis of certain indication, such as the increase of seats in the new parliament building in New Delhi. The New Parliament building has 888 seats. Currently, we have altogether 543 MPs, which works out to be one MP representing about 10 lakh people. The delimitation was based on the 1971 population.

Population of the country has been something around 142 crore in 2025. The increase of seats in Parliament building is indicative of the government intention to increase the number of MPs. If we decide one MP for 20 lakh population there would be 707 seats. If we decide for one MP in 15 lakh population, total seats would be 942. As per the 2024 Lok Sabha election figures, each Lok Sabha Constituency had 17.84 lakh voters on projected population of 25.8 lakh.

During a parliamentary debate in September 2023, on Women's Reservation Bill, the implementation of which was also linked to delimitation on the first Census after 2026, the issues of parliamentary seats was discussed, in which MPs for Southern states have raised the issue and expressed their concern of losing their representation in the parliament of India.

If one MP per 20 lakh population is adopted Tamil Nadu's seats would remain the same at 39, while seats in Uttar Pradesh including Uttarakhand would increase from current 85 to 126 and Bihar including Jharkhand would increase for 54 to 85.

On projected population of 142 crore, Lok Sabha Constituencies are to rise to 848. In that case the number of seats in Uttar Pradesh would increase from 80 to 143, Bihar from 40 to 79, Rajasthan from 25 to 50 and Madhya Pradesh from 29 to 52. On the other hand, in the southern states—in Tamil Nadu it would increase from 39 to 49, Andhra and Telangana from 42 to 45, Karnataka from 28 to 41. As for Kerala is concerned its seat will remain at 20.

Southern states say that in that case the party who will win in Hindi belt states would be able to form government at the centre, which would bring them under the dominant political party in the Hindi belt states—UP, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan. BJP is interested to establish its permanent government in India on the basis of new delimitation order before the Lok Sabha election 2029.

In this situation, one can expect more twists in the delimitation row, in the coming months when the issue of reservation of seats for SCs, STs, and Women will bring some more trouble and rows. The million dollar question remains—Could India be able to complete delimitation process before Lok Sabha election 2029? (IPA Service)

'Trump Gaza proposal was pre-meditated with Israel'

By: Ranjan Solomon

In an article in the Palestine Chronicle: "Arab Consensus Challenges Trump's Ethnic Cleansing Proposal for Gaza", Dr. Mohannad Mustafa from the Haifa University's School of Political Sciences exposes the *raison d'être* behind Trump's original proposal for the ethnic cleansing of Gaza, and what now appears his intent to back away.

Mohannad Mustafa avers that Trump's plan was not a mere afterthought. It was pre-meditated. Trump had wanted "to implement (the plan) since the beginning of the assault. The Israel far-right had embraced the idea with great zest after it was clandestinely agreed upon between the US and Israel. In the thick of war, Israel's Ministry of Intelligence had developed a meticulous plan for the extinction of Palestinians from Gaza and sending them to several countries - not just in the region, but even in lands far from Palestine.

Dr. Mustafa describes the plan as one that was, in fact, one of the unofficial objectives of the war. In the event of a victory, which would have left Gaza battered-beyond-reconstruction, Israel's Ministry of Intelligence had prepared a detailed plan for the deportation set-up in Gaza. This gives further credence to the suspicion that this was Trump's plan and that he had no intention to be a peacemaker. In his mind, he would be just another land grabber much like his colonialist collaborators. But he wore the garb of a 'solution finder'.

His threat that all "hell would break loose" if the fighting did not end on the day he assumed Presidency, was meant to be a threat to Hamas fighters, and the people of Gaza. Mohannad Mustafa reports that the Institute for Jewish Peoplehood Policies found that 53% of Israeli Jews supported the proposal and its implementation, while 30% supported it but thought it not viable. Clearly, there was a build-up to the plan to ethnically cleanse Gaza. Very few Israeli's expressed qualms about this malevolent plan. The Peace Movement,

though convinced of its mischievous intent, was simply too feeble to make a difference.

The plan had acquired broad consensus among policy makers to the extent that the Israeli Security Cabinet officially adopted Trump's plan during its first meeting after Netanyahu's return from the USA. Israel had jumped the gun when it thought that it was rid of the Gaza imbroglio once and for all. But foolishly! Dr. Mustafa writes that Netanyahu publicly conceded that Israel had worked with the US administration in shaping the plan and influenced Trump's position on it. The plan lies down in the dumps as deadwood, and has no chance, whatsoever, of turning up.

When Trump eventually pulled back from the plan in a policy, he had to rationalize his conclusion. His reversal included a lame statement saying that "he would not impose it but only recommend it". That was not only patronizing, but a downright perversion of the facts. The doves of displaced Gazans who returned to their battered homes in Northern Gaza clearly showed that, despite the mauling they received during the war, the death-count, and destruction of basic infrastructure, they were not going anywhere. Gaza was theirs and they were there to stay. They declared in no uncertain terms that "Gaza is not for sale" referring to Trump's dodgy proposal to turn Gaza into a "Riviera of the Middle East".

The Arab League was decisive. They would find a relevant resolution that fitted in with the realities of the region. Jordan nor Egypt declared they would not accept Palestinians if they were forcibly displaced. And they had good reason. The Egyptian regime knows full well the Palestinians in Gaza will not stop resisting until all of Palestine is liberated. If Hamas attacks Israel from the Egyptian Sinai, Israel would respond with military force. The Egyptian regime would have faced two choices: One, not responding and immediately, thus losing the little acceptance it still

has among Egyptians. Two, responding and going to war with Israel would mean the end of the proxy regime. Simply put, allowing the population of Gaza into Egypt would mark the end of the Egyptian surrogate regime.

Many have claimed that Egypt is also rejecting Trump's plan to avoid being viewed as complicit in ethnic cleansing. In truth, Egypt has already been complicit for the past 16 months, standing by as Gazans were massacred without taking action to protect them. Their current position only reinforces this complicity. The deaths and injuries of hundreds of thousands were not enough to prompt a stand. The real red line was marked when Israel's actions posed a threat to Egypt's sovereignty and the survival of its regime.

Jordan, as a neighboring country, has a complex relationship with Palestine and Gaza. Jordan is concerned about potential security threats from Gaza, given the ongoing conflict with Israel. Jordan also has qualms about the potential impact of Gazan refugees in terms of the country's stability and domestic politics. Jordan is already hosting a large number of refugees from Syria and other countries, which puts a significant strain on its resources. Jordan's economy is facing significant challenges, including high unemployment and debt, which might make it difficult to absorb more refugees. To add to the complexities, Jordan has a peace treaty with Israel, and accepting Gazan refugees might be seen as complicating that relationship. Jordan's decision to accept Palestinian refugees would also be influenced by regional dynamics, including its relationships with other Arab states and the international community. Given that Gazans confront a severe humanitarian crisis, including a blockade, poverty, and lack of access to basic services, Jordan would inherit the responsibility to be the provider of humanitarian assistance to Gazans.

While Trump and Israel, as well the Real Estate syndicates elsewhere in the world, notably in the USA, had their lips

smacking at the thought of a sea-front villa on free land, Trump had to back-track swiftly seeing the repercussions and consequences were potentially disastrous. Trump still had to save face. He got the world to make-believe that his chic mode to the reconstruction of Gaza, which the US would own, was workable. No. It simply was not. The 'Riviera' construct was going to be ethnic cleansing with a fancy name and just another war crime. Trump shifted from his political idiom to virtual silence on the initiative, and shut down all banter within his US administration. In fake pride, he adamantly declared that his plan "was excellent". He conceded he would "not impose it but only recommend it".

Clearly, Hamas had won the war on another front. And, their only weapon was sheer defiance and resilience. It reminds this writer of what Mahatma Gandhi once said about the struggle for India's independence: "First, they ignore you, then they laugh at you, then they fight you, then you win." Gaza could claim 'Zafer' (Arabic for victory) The Arab League in atypical tone rejected U.S. President Donald Trump's Gaza relocation plan, terming it unacceptable. Arab League secretary-general Ahmed Aboul Gheit said today their focus is on Gaza and tomorrow it will shift to the West Bank. Gheit said the Arab world has opposed this idea for 100 years and they are not about to cede now.

Now, with a ceasefire in place, Trump and Netanyahu are seeking to upset the applecart with a string of pretexts. Even those are going nowhere. They have shed crocodile tears about the condition of Israeli hostages. Trump did not want the exchange in drips and drabs; rather he wanted a quick and total transfer of hostages. Washington does not understand the Palestinian spirit of "Sumud" (steadfastness). The cultural divisions and worldview are like cheese and chalk.

Every Israeli hostage has, upon release, extolled the quality medical care, ability to receive family visits, obtain

adequate diets for the sick, and medical attention. Israeli hostages were unequivocal in their praise for the religious and humane values of Hamas hostage takers. One of them declared that "if there were another war involving Gaza and Israel, he would probably join Hams as a mujahidin for Hamas".

In stark contrast, Palestinian prisoners have been subjected to cruelties while in Israeli detention. Reports from Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and the Palestinian prisoner rights group Addameer have documented widespread torture and ill-treatment of Palestinian prisoners. Palestinian prisoners have been subjected to various forms of torture; including physical beatings, sleep deprivation, and psychological abuse. These practices cause long-lasting physical and psychological trauma for prisoners and their families.

There is also the question of International Law and Accountability. Torture is strictly prohibited under international law, including the Geneva Conventions and the Convention Against Torture. It is essential to hold perpetrators accountable for torture and ill-treatment, ensuring justice and reparations for victims and their families. The systematic torture and ill-treatment of Palestinian prisoners are grave human rights abuses.

When one holds conversations with Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, they are deeply concerned that the Israel Army can be ruthless and will use their superior armory to kill and maim in the West Bank while Gaza gets less attention. Jenin and other cities have been brutally attacked. Even there, the Palestinian remains bold and resistance-prone. Of course, they fear for their children and youth. So the Israeli Occupying forces (IOF) are now using two fronts - both tacitly - and outside the radar of international attention. But they have been called out.

AA, Turkey reports that there have been over 350 violations of the January 15 ceasefire agreement by Israel. Ismail al-Thawabteh, chief of government media, has said: "The Israeli occupation

has violated the ceasefire agreement more than 350 times since it was signed, clearly demonstrating its continued breach of commitments and its defiance of the international community." Since the ceasefire was signed on Jan. 15, the Israeli army has killed and injured dozens of Palestinians through airstrikes, including those carried out by fighter jets and drones, as well as direct shootings or drone strikes. Further violations include Israeli incursions into border areas east of the Gaza Strip.

Hamas reported multiple Israeli breaches of the ceasefire, such as delaying the return of displaced individuals to northern Gaza, targeting Palestinians with airstrikes and gunfire, obstructing the entry of shelter supplies, and delaying the arrival of medical necessities. Since the start of the ceasefire agreement, Israel has killed 92 Palestinians and injured 822 others in direct attacks.

United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres affirms: "Any refusal to accept the two-State solution by any party must be firmly rejected." The denial of the right to Statehood would indefinitely prolong the conflict, and a one-State solution - huge Palestinian populations inside that State without any real sense of freedom, rights and dignity - would be inconceivable. Riyadh Al-Maliki, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the State of Palestine, said that Israeli leaders "do not see our people as an empirical and political reality to coexist with, but as a demographic threat to get rid of through death, displacement or subjugation".

There are only two paths ahead, he stressed - one that starts with Palestinian freedom and leads to shared peace and security in the region, or one that continues denying this freedom and dooms the region to endless conflict. "Israel should no longer entertain the illusion that there is somehow a third path whereby it can choose continued occupation and colonialism and apartheid and somehow still achieve regional peace and security," he emphasized. (Courtesy: The Citizen)

Bangladesh: Can a student-led party become a force for change?

By: HM Nazmul Alam

The political landscape of Bangladesh has long been shaped by dynastic legacies and the gravitational pull of charismatic leaders. The recent emergence of the National Citizens Party, a student-led political formation, raises a compelling question: Can a party born out of a student movement, lacking an established political pedigree, truly become a dominant force in the country's politics?

To answer this, we must examine the critical elements that drive political success in Bangladesh. The factors pose significant challenges to the National Citizens Party's ambitions, making its rise to power an uphill battle. However, the political environment is also ripe for transformation, given the disenchantment with traditional parties and a growing appetite for reform among the younger generation.

A wasted momentum?
The National Citizens Party emerged from the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement and the National Citizens Committee, both of which played crucial roles in last year's protests that led to the overthrow of Sheikh Hasina's government. Yet, the party's formal launch came months after the height of the movement, raising concerns that it squandered its political momentum.

Revolutions are driven by emotion, and as famed political scientist Samuel P Huntington noted in *Political Order in Changing Societies*, "Revolutionary movements are most successful when they consolidate power before the fervor of the masses dissipates."

Had the National Citizens Party been formed immediately after the July-August uprising, it could have capitalised on the raw energy of the people, channeling it into a structured political movement. Instead, the delay has allowed competing political forces to reclaim lost ground, diminishing the party's initial advantage.

Additionally, in the months following the protests, public focus has shifted toward deteriorating law and order, economic instability, governance concerns, and global crises, further diluting the impact of the movement that gave rise to the National Citizens Party. This delay has resulted in a loss of urgency, making it harder for the party to maintain relevance.

Where is the charisma?
Politics in Bangladesh is deeply personal. The country's most successful political movements have been spearheaded by leaders who commanded near-religious devotion. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Ziaur Rahman, Hussain Muhammad Ershad - these were not just politicians; they were symbols of their movements.

The National Citizens Party, by contrast, lacks a comparable figure. Its leadership structure is collegiate, with Nahid Islam as the convener and other members filling key positions. While this structure reflects an attempt at collective leadership, history suggests that movements without a singular, unifying leader rarely succeed.

Without a leader who can electrify the masses, the National Citizens Party risks becoming another faceless organisation lost in Bangladesh's chaotic political arena.

Additionally, the party's reliance on an intellectual and academic base, while beneficial in policy-making, does not necessarily translate to mass appeal. Successful



political figures often possess a combination of personal charm, rhetorical skills, and an ability to connect with diverse demographics.

The National Citizens Party's current leadership must find a way to embody this inspiration if they hope to transition from student activists to national leaders.

New voters equation
One factor that could work in favour of the newly formed political party in Bangladesh is the emergence of nearly four crore new voters over the past 16 years, a period marked by multiple voterless elections under the Awami League.

These young voters, disillusioned by the lack of democratic processes, might have been expected to form a potential base for an alternative political force. However, the reality is far more complex.

These new voters are scattered across the country, making it extremely difficult for any single party - especially one without established grassroots networks - to mobilise them effectively.

While they may collectively yearn for change, their geographical dispersion means they do not form a concentrated voting bloc capable of making a significant electoral impact.

Without a centralised structure to harness their collective power, their votes will likely remain fragmented, reducing their overall influence in the political process.

The new party may gain pockets of support among the youth, but without a mechanism to convert that support into a strategic advantage, it will struggle to make a meaningful difference.

The missing infrastructure
Bangladesh's major parties - the BNP, the Awami League, and Jamaat-e-Islami - have extensive grassroots networks that stretch into the remotest villages. These networks are crucial for mobilising voters, influencing local politics, and ensuring electoral success. The National Citizens Party, despite its urban student base, lacks such an infrastructure.

History teaches us that no political party can sustain itself without a strong grassroots network. The Aam Aadmi Party in India, for example, found early success in Delhi but struggled to expand nationally due to its weak rural presence.

The National Citizens Party must recognise that mobilising students and urban activists is not enough. Without an extensive network of local organisers, it will struggle to convert enthusiasm into electoral victories. Building strong alliances with trade

unions, farmers' associations, and local organisations could provide the National Citizens Party with a much-needed foundation beyond the university campuses.

Can it break the dynastic grip?
One of the biggest hurdles facing the National Citizens Party is Bangladesh's entrenched culture of dynastic politics. The Awami League is synonymous with the Sheikh Mujib family, while the BNP remains centered around the Zia family. In a political culture where legitimacy is often equated with family lineage, new parties struggle to gain traction.

Even outside Bangladesh, dynastic politics remains a formidable force. In India, the Nehru-Gandhi family has dominated the Congress Party for decades. In Pakistan, the Bhuttos and Sharifs continue to wield power. The challenge for the National Citizens Party is convincing voters that political legitimacy does not require a famous last name.

While the fall of Sheikh Hasina's government created a momentary crisis, it has not yet been sufficient to upend the dominance of established dynasties.

'Second republic' - a political gambit?
The National Citizens Party's call for a "second republic" signals its intent to radically reshape Bangladesh's political landscape. This vision includes drafting a new democratic constitution, eliminating corruption and nepotism, and strengthening national security.

While these goals are ambitious, radical political transformations are difficult to implement without significant institutional backing. As noted by historian Theda Skocpol, "Revolutions succeed not because of ideals alone, but because they control the machinery of the state." Without control over major institutions - military, judiciary, bureaucracy - the National Citizens Party's vision risks being more rhetorical than actionable.

Despite its challenges, the National Citizens Party is not necessarily doomed to irrelevance. Political history is full of movements that overcame initial skepticism. If the party can overcome all challenges, it might carve out a viable political space. Otherwise, it risks becoming another forgotten chapter in Bangladesh's political narrative. As Nelson Mandela once said, "It always seems impossible until it is done." The National Citizens Party must prove whether its vision is more than just an idea - or if it can truly redefine Bangladesh's political future. (Courtesy: Scroll.in)

The F-35 gamble: Will India roll the dice?

By: Diptendu Choudhury

India's urgent search for 114 multi-role fighter aircraft and aspiration for the fifth-generation development programme just got more complicated. United States (US) President Donald Trump has sprung a surprise offer of the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter (JSF), while the Russians have offered to partner with India on their S-57 Felon production with Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) by this year itself. These offers have caught the mainstream and social media's attention, fuelling widespread debate and speculation. With the US actively leveraging the imposition of trade tariffs while boosting military sales to India, the offer comes with added complexities. Two questions immediately come to the fore: Does the platform satisfy the operational requirements of the Indian Air Force (IAF) with its depleting fighter squadron bench strength? Does the deal make strategic sense for India's geopolitical dynamics?

An analysis of a fighter aircraft is much than the surge of somewhat simplistic number-crunching comparisons being aired. The F-35 has been a trouble-ridden programme that has faced serious reliability, availability, and maintenance issues as it struggles to meet testing guidelines and mission readiness goals. Its stealth features are difficult to maintain and have not been fully tested, and its logistics train is so long that it is difficult to deploy. Are some key issues as per the US 'Fiscal Year 2024 Annual Operational Test and Evaluation report published at the end of January 2025. Cost overruns are another chal-

lenge as the original estimate was US\$200 billion to develop and purchase approximately 3,000 F-35s, which today, have doubled to US\$412 billion for a fleet of 2,456 platforms. The JSF has been called a 'trillion dollar trainwreck' that has 'hollowed out the US Air Force'. The project has also come into the crosshairs of Elon Musk, who leads the unofficial US Department of Government Efficiency for fiscal cuts in governmental spending.

The exorbitant F-35 will severely limit the number of squadrons that can be purchased, and numbers matter for retaining India's conventional deterrence. It will also have enormous hidden costs for setting up dedicated maintenance and repair infrastructure, facilities, and equipment, as the IAF has had to do with the US C-17, C-130, and Apache fleets. Then comes the cost of weapons with their environment-controlled storage and testing facilities and operational mission support systems. Given the limited number of squadrons that the IAF can afford, it means that it would have effec-

tively added yet another country-specific variant with no maintenance, repair, and overhaul interoperability to its already diverse fleet of Russian and French platforms, adding to its fleet management challenges.

The stringent US foreign military sales policies and protocols mean that the control source codes for fighter radar, radar warning receiver, electronic warfare (EW) equipment, and self-protection suites, vital for operational mission-programming, will not be available with all aircraft of US origin. This is possibly the most critical operational constraint from the IAF's perspective. These platforms would also be operationally stand-alone as they will not be able to integrate into IAF's net-centric operations as the data-link and networking protocols of its mainstay fleet of SU 30, airborne warning and command systems, airborne early warning control aircrafts, indigenous radars, and Active Denial Systems (ADS). This also means that the platform cannot be a part of any composite multi-platform packages necessary for penetrating, attacking, and surviving adversarial air defence systems in the IAF's offensive counter-air missions and



operational freedom. From a strategic perspective, how the first-time purchase of US fighters will impact the long-standing Indo-Russian relations will need to be seriously considered. The deal will certainly impact India's own fifth-generation Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft development, its future Combat Air Teaming System programme, and the future AD systems, as it is all-important they integrate operationally with all of IAF's mainstream combat platforms and sensors of 'non-US' origin. India's further development of the Tejas fighter that remains hostage to US-supplied engines and has already been interminably delayed highlights a big red flag. The US offer will need to be closely assessed against the long, steady, and relatively more reliable strategic relationships with Russia and France to ensure the preservation of India's strategic autonomy. The final choice must take into consideration that the Rafale and the Su-57 are 'well-balanced platforms' with 'solid upgrade programs', 'free of US content' and would be more cost-effective to operate in the long run.

The necessity to arrest the IAF's reducing combat strength since over two decades, continues in its downward spiral especially with the urgently needed purchase of the 114 multi role fighter aircraft (MFRA), is also stagnating amidst indecision, apathy, a 'broken' procurement system[3], and a systemic failure to grasp the long-term consequences. The nation's MFRA requirement is entirely separate from the indigenous fifth-generation fighter aircraft production aspirations, and the distinction is imperative to prevent the further exacerbation of an already complex imbroglio. An expedited MFRA purchase is a critical requirement to prevent air power's contribution to the nation's conventional deterrence from weakening any further, as it will directly impact our national security in the air, land and sea domains. The Indian military can ill afford to ignore air power, considering that our two main adversaries have strong air forces. The fifth-generation fighter requirement, on the other hand, is a natural process of continuous improvements in platform, systems and weapons capabilities, which, if not ensured, will swiftly lead to the redundancy of IAF's air power. Considering the inevitable proliferation of fifth and sixth gen fighters in the inventory of India's adversaries, the choice must be military-driven to bolster the nation's conventional deterrence, balanced with its future growth, geopolitical trajectory, and strategic autonomy. (Courtesy: ORF)

EU leaders open emergency summit on defence and Ukraine aid

BRUSSELS, March 6: Facing the prospect that the United States might cut them adrift under President Donald Trump, European Union leaders launched a day of emergency talks Thursday in a bid to beef up their own security and ensure that Ukraine will still be properly protected.

Friedrich Merz, the likely next chancellor of Germany, and summit chairman Antonio Costa discussed over breakfast in Brussels ways to fortify Europe's defences on a short deadline.

Merz pushed plans this week to loosen the nation's rules on running up debt to allow for higher defence spending.

Meanwhile, the 27-nation bloc was waking up to news that French President Emmanuel Macron would confer with EU leaders about the possibility of using France's nuclear deterrent to protect the continent from Russian threats.

It all underscored the sea change that has taken place in the two months since Trump took office and immediately started questioning the cornerstones of cooperation between the United States and Europe that had been the bedrock of Western security since World War II.

Given these profound shifts in

US policy, and the existential threat of another war on the continent, Europe must manage its essential defence tasks, the European Policy Center think tank said in a commentary.

The bloc will take decisive steps forward," Macron told the French nation Wednesday evening. Member states will be able to increase their military spending and massive joint funding will be provided to buy and produce some of the most innovative munitions, tanks, weapons and equipment in Europe, he said.

Adding to the ebullient message, he said that Europe's future does not have to be decided in Washington or Moscow.

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is taking part in the summit.

Limited room to increase spending

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen has proposed a plan to loosen budget rules so countries that are willing can spend much more on defence. Her proposal is underpinned by 150 billion euros (\$162 billion) worth of loans to buy priority military equipment.

Most of the increased defence spending would have to come from national budgets at a time when



many countries are already overburdened with debt.

France is struggling to reduce an excessive annual budget deficit of 5% of GDP, after running up its total debt burden to 112% of GDP with spending on relief for businesses and consumers during the COVID-19 pandemic and the energy crisis that followed Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Five other countries using the euro currency have debt levels over 100% of GDP: Belgium, Greece, Spain, Italy and Portugal.

Europe's largest economy, Germany, has more room to borrow, with a debt level of 62% of GDP.

Pressing security needs
Part of any security plan is also to protect the increasingly beleaguered position of Ukraine.

A Russian missile killed four people staying at a hotel in Zelenskyy's hometown overnight. He said that a humanitarian organisation's volunteers had moved into the hotel in Kryvyi Rih, in central Ukraine, just before the strike. The volunteers included Ukrainian, American and British nationals, but it wasn't clear whether those people were among the 31 injured.

Early this week, Trump ordered a pause to US military supplies to Ukraine as he sought to press Zelenskyy to engage in negotiations to end the war with Russia, bringing fresh urgency to Thursday's summit.

Thursday's meeting is unlikely to address Ukraine's most pressing needs. It is not aimed at urgently drumming up more arms and ammunition to fill any supply vacuum created by the US freeze. Nor will all nations agree to unblock the estimated 183 billion euros (\$196 billion) in frozen Russian assets held in a Belgian clearing house, a pot of ready cash that could be seized.

Still, the Europeans underlined the importance of the moment. Europe faces a clear and present danger on a scale that none of us have seen in our adult lifetime. Some of our fundamental assumptions are being undermined to their very core, von der Leyen warned in a letter to the leaders ahead of their meeting.

But perhaps the biggest challenge for the EU will be to take a united stance at a moment when it's fractured, since much of what the bloc does requires unanimous support. Hungary is threatening to veto part of the summit statement on Ukraine.

Even if the challenges are so daunting, Thursday's summit is unlikely to produce immediate decisions on spending for Ukraine or its own defenses. Another EU summit where the real contours of decisions would be much clearer is set for March 20-21. (AP)

Donald Trump's move towards multipolarity suits India: Jaishankar



LONDON, March 6: The US administration under President Donald Trump is moving towards multipolarity, which suits India's interests, and the two nations have agreed on the need for a bilateral trade pact, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar has said.

India's role in the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict, the trajectory of the BRICS grouping of nations and relations with China were among the other major foreign policy issues touched upon during a session titled 'India's rise and role in the world' at the Chatham House think-tank here Wednesday evening.

"We have been one of the few countries who have been regularly talking to both Moscow and Kyiv at various levels... Wherever there's been a sense that India can do something, we have always been open-minded about it. Our consistent position has been that they need to do direct negotiations," he said.

Jaishankar was asked about his thoughts on the first few weeks of the new US government and, specifically, about Trump's reciprocal tariffs.

"We see a president and an administration which, in our parlance, is moving towards multipolarity and that is something that suits India," said Jaishankar, who is on a six-day visit to the UK and Ireland.

"From President Trump's perspective, the one big shared enterprise that we have is the Quad, which is an understanding where everybody pays their fair share... There are no free riders involved. So that's a good model which works," he said. The Quad alliance consists of the US, India, Australia and Japan.

On the specific issue of tariffs, the minister noted that Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal is currently in Washington to discuss a bilateral trade pact, following discussions between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Trump at the White House last month.

"We had a very open conversation about it (tariffs) and the result of that conversation was that we agreed on the need for a bilateral trade agreement," he said.

During the exchange with Chatham House Director Bronwen Maddox, he covered a broad spectrum of issues, including his "cautious optimism" over the India-UK Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations after his ministerial discussions over the past few days.

"It's a very complicated process. So, given the complexity, it's natural that it would take time... from my discussions with Prime Minister (Keir) Starmer, Foreign Secretary David Lammy and [Business] Secretary Jonathan Reynolds, I got a consistent message that the British side is also interested in moving forward. I had a few points to convey on behalf of my concerned colleagues as well. So, I'm cautiously optimistic and hope that it doesn't take that long," he said.

On China, Jaishankar noted some positive movement since October 2024, including the opening of the Mount Kailash pilgrimage route in Tibet.

"We have a very, very unique relationship with China as the only two billion plus populated countries in the world... we want a relationship where our interests are respected, sensitivities are recognised and works for both of us," he said.

Responding to an audience question on "solving" issues in Kashmir, the EAM stated: "On Kashmir, actually we have done, I think, a good job solving most of it. Removing Article 370 was step number one, restoring growth and economic activity and social justice in Kashmir was step number two, and holding elections with a very high turnout was step number three.

"I think the part we are waiting for is the return of the stolen part of Kashmir which is under illegal Pakistani occupation; when that is done, I assure you Kashmir will be solved." (PTI)

Trump, tariffs and potential European defence surge loom over ECB meeting

FRANKFURT, March 6: The impact of a potential trade war with the United States and massive increases in European defence spending and government borrowing loom over a policy meeting Thursday at the European Central Bank, which is expected to cut interest rates by a quarter percentage point.

Analysts are widely expecting a cut in the European Central Bank's (ECB) benchmark deposit rate to 2.50 per cent, a step to lower borrowing costs for consumers and businesses in an economy that's struggling to get out of first gear.

The bank's monetary policy statement and post-meeting news conference by President Christine Lagarde will be scrutinised for hints about how far the bank will cut rates amid concerns about weak growth. The bank has already reduced the benchmark rate by 1.25 percentage points since June.

Meanwhile new concerns that would massively reshuffle the economic picture are likely to intrude: the potential impact of new tariffs on European imports from US President Trump, which could slow growth, and plans for massive new defence spending and borrowing, which could mean more growth but also more inflation.

Those two forces could push the ECB in opposite directions: a hit to growth would call for lower rates, while more persistent inflation would argue for keeping rates higher in coming months.

Growth estimates for Germany, the eurozone's largest economy, shot up overnight and long-term interest rates rose following an agreement by the two parties that will form the country's next government to loosen constitutional limits on borrowing and exempt defence spending.

That is a major turnaround in German budget policy and opens the way for a trillion or more in new borrowing and spending over the next decade. (AP)

Trump issues 'last warning' to Hamas to release all remaining hostages held in Gaza

WASHINGTON, March 6: President Donald Trump on Wednesday issued what he called a "last warning" to Hamas to release all remaining hostages held in Gaza, directing a sharply worded message after the White House confirmed that he had recently dispatched an envoy for unprecedented direct talks with the militant group. In a statement on his Truth Social platform soon after meeting at the White House with eight former hostages, Trump added that he was "sending Israel everything it needs to finish the job."

"Release all of the Hostages now, not later, and immediately return all of the dead bodies of the people you murdered, or it is OVER for you," Trump said. "Only sick and twisted people keep bodies, and you are sick and twisted!"

The pointed language from Trump came after the White House said Wednesday that US officials have engaged in "ongoing talks and discussions" with Hamas officials, stepping away from a long-held US policy of not directly engaging with the militant group.

Confirmation of the talks in the Qatari capital of Doha came as the Israel-Hamas ceasefire remains in the balance. It's the first known direct engagement between the United States and Hamas since the State Department designated the group a foreign terrorist organization in 1997.

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt declined to provide detail on the substance of talks, but said President Donald Trump has authorized his envoys to "talk to anyone."

Egyptian and Qatari intermediaries have served as mediators with Hamas for the US and Israel since the group launched its Oct 7, 2023 attack on Israel that sparked the war.

"Look, dialogue and talking to people around the world to do what's in the best interest of the American people is something that the president... believes is a good-faith effort to do what's right for the American people," she said.

Leavitt added that Israel has been consulted about the direct engagement with Hamas officials, and noted that there are "American lives at stake."

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office offered a terse acknowledgement of the U.S.-Hamas talks. "Israel has expressed to the United States its position regarding direct talks with Hamas," the prime minister's office said.

Israeli officials say about 24 living hostages — including Edan Alexander, an American citizen — as well as the bodies of at least 35 others are believed to still be held in Gaza.

Adam Boehler, Trump's nominee to be special envoy for hostage affairs, led the direct talks

with Hamas. Boehler, founder and CEO of Rubicon Founders, a healthcare investment firm, was a lead negotiator on the Abraham Accords team during Trump's first term that strove to win broader recognition of Israel in the Arab world.

The talks, which took place last month, focused mainly on the release of American hostages, and a potential end of the war without Hamas in power in Gaza, according to a Hamas official who was not authorized to comment publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

The official added that no progress was made but "the step itself is promising" and more talks are expected. Egyptian and Qatari mediators helped arrange the talks.

The direct engagement comes as continuation of the Israel-Hamas ceasefire remains uncertain. Trump has signaled that he has no intentions of pushing Netanyahu away from a return to combat if Hamas doesn't agree to terms of a new ceasefire proposal, which the Israelis have billed as being drafted by U.S. envoy Steve Witkoff.

The new plan would require Hamas to release half its remaining hostages — the militant group's main bargaining chip — in exchange for a ceasefire extension and a promise to negotiate a lasting truce. Israel made no mention of releasing more Palestinian prisoners, a key component of the first phase. (AP)

Sri Lanka's police chief hunted by his own force

COLOMBO, March 6: Deshabandu Tennakoon, theoretically still the island nation's police chief, is being treated as a fugitive and his team members are on a trail to arrest him, police spokesman Buddhika Manathunga said here on Thursday. A warrant has been issued for arresting Tennakoon, under suspension since July 2024 and is on the run, and the Criminal Investigations Department (CID) had been tasked with locating him. The Magistrate's court in the southern town of Matara had last week ordered Tennakoon to be arrested over a shooting incident in the southern resort town of Weligama, about 150 kilometres southeast of Colombo, on December 30, 2023.

Tennakoon, as the inspector general, had sent police officers from the Colombo Crime Division (CCD) to the resort hotel in Weligama for a raid in connection with illegal drugs.

However, the Weligama police, unaware of the undercover operation, opened fire at the CCD vehicle killing an officer.

Manathunga told reporters that the court ruled that the undercover operation was illegal and eight police officers, including Tennakoon, must be arrested. Tennakoon, who was suspended by the highest court, is absconding and raids have been carried out since last week at locations where Tennakoon was likely to be. The court has issued a travel ban on him. We seek public support to arrest him. We treat him as a suspect, Manathunga said. (PTI)

Hamas brushes off Trump's threat, says it will only free hostages in return for lasting truce

CAIRO, March 6: The Hamas militant group on Thursday brushed off President Donald Trump's latest threat and reiterated that it will only free the remaining Israeli hostages in exchange for a lasting ceasefire in the Gaza Strip.

Hamas accused Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of trying to back out of the ceasefire agreement they reached in January. The agreement calls for negotiations over a second phase in which the hostages would be released in exchange for more Palestinian prisoners, a permanent ceasefire and an Israeli withdrawal from Gaza.

Hamas spokesman Abdel-Latif al-Qanawa said the "best path to free the remaining Israeli hostages" is through negotiations on that phase, which were supposed to begin in early February. Only limited preparatory talks have been held so far. On Wednesday, Trump issued what he said was a "last warning" to Hamas after meeting with eight former hostages. The White House, meanwhile, confirmed it had held unprecedented direct talks with the militant group, which Israel and Western countries view as a terrorist organization.

"Release all of the Hostages now, not later, and immediately return all of the dead bodies of the people you murdered, or it is OVER for you," Trump wrote on his Truth Social platform. "Only sick and twisted people keep bodies, and you are sick and twisted!"

Both Israel and Hamas have a longstanding practice of holding onto the remains of their adversaries in order to trade them in hostage-prisoner deals.



Israelis are believed to still have 24 living hostages, including Israeli-American Edan Alexander, taken in the October 7, 2023 attack that triggered the war. It is also holding the bodies of 34 others who were killed either in the initial attack or in captivity, as well as the remains of a soldier killed in the 2014 war.

Hamas is believed to still have 24 living hostages, including Israeli-American Edan Alexander, taken in the October 7, 2023 attack that triggered the war. It is also holding the bodies of 34 others who were killed either in the initial attack or in captivity, as well as the remains of a soldier killed in the 2014 war.

Hamas released 25 Israeli hostages and the bodies of eight more in exchange for nearly 2,000 Palestinian prisoners in the first, 42-day phase of the ceasefire, which ended on Saturday.

Israel supports what it says is a new US plan for the second phase in which Hamas would release half the remaining hostages immediately and the rest when a permanent ceasefire is negotiated. Hamas has rejected the proposal and says it is sticking with the agreement signed in January.

Israel has cut off the delivery of food, fuel, medicine and other supplies to Gaza's roughly 2 million Palestinians in an attempt to pressure Hamas into accepting the new arrangement. It has threatened "additional consequences" if Hamas does not resume the release of hostages. (AP)

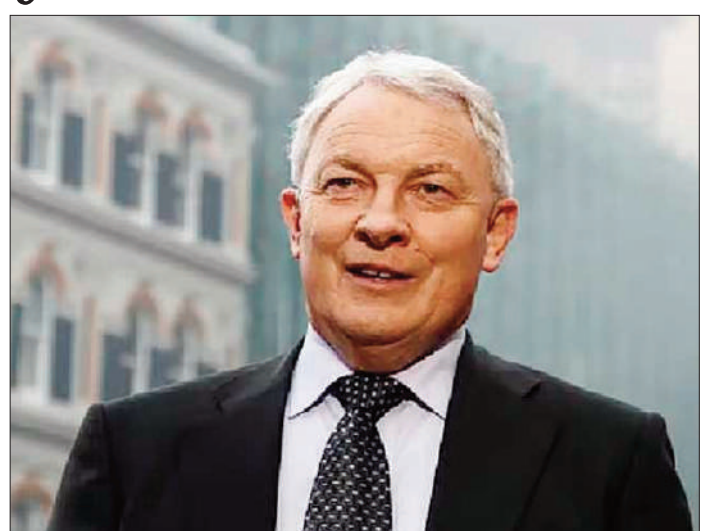
New Zealand's most senior diplomat in London loses his job over remarks about Trump

WELLINGTON (NEW ZEALAND), March 6: New Zealand's most senior envoy to the United Kingdom has lost his job over remarks he made about US President Donald Trump at an event in London this week, New Zealand's foreign minister said Thursday.

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

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

Churchill's speech rebuked Britain's signing of the Munich Agreement with Adolf Hitler, allowing Germany to annex part of Czechoslovakia. Goff quoted Churchill as saying to Chamberlain, "You had the choice between



war and dishonour. You chose dishonour, yet you will have war."

Goff then asked Valtonen: President Trump has restored the bust of Churchill to the Oval Office. But do you think he really understands history?

As the audience chuckled at the New Zealand envoy's question, Valtonen said she would limit myself to saying that Churchill has

made very timeless remarks, according to video of the event published by New Zealand news outlets.

Valtonen's speech on Tuesday was billed as covering Finland's approach to European security at an event entitled Keeping the peace on NATO's longest border with Russia.

In response to questions from

reporters, Foreign Minister Winston Peters said that Goff's remarks were disappointing and made the envoy's position untenable.

We have asked the Secretary of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Bede Corry, to now work through with Mr. Goff the upcoming leadership transition at the New Zealand High Commission in London, Peters said in a written statement.

Goff has been New Zealand's envoy to the UK since January 2023. He did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Officials were in discussion with High Commissioner Goff about his return to New Zealand," according to a written statement from New Zealand's foreign minister, which did not divulge more detail.

Former Prime Minister Helen Clark who was Goff's boss during his time as a lawmaker denounced his sacking in a post on X, where she wrote the episode was a very thin excuse for removing a highly respected former foreign minister from his diplomatic role. (AP)

Top Hong Kong court overturns convictions of 3 former organisers of Tiananmen vigils

HONG KONG, March 6: Hong Kong's top court on Thursday overturned the convictions of three former organisers of an annual vigil in remembrance of the 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown over their refusal to provide information to police, marking a rare victory for the city's pro-democracy activists.

Chow Hang-tung, Tang Ngok-kwan and Tsui Hon-kwong — core members of the Hong Kong Alliance in Support of Patriotic Democratic Movements of China — were convicted in 2023 during Beijing's crackdown on the city's pro-democracy movement. They received a sentence of 4 1/2 months and have already served their terms.

The alliance was long known for organizing candlelight vigils in the city on the anniversary of the Chinese military's crushing of the 1989 pro-democracy protests in Beijing. But it voted to disband in 2021 under the shadow of a sweeping national security law imposed by China.

Critics said the shutdown and the case showed that the city's

Western-style civil liberties were shrinking despite promises they would be kept intact when the former British colony returned to Chinese rule in 1997.

Before the group dissolved, police had sought details about its operations and finances in connection with alleged links to pro-democracy groups overseas, accusing it of being a foreign agent. But the group refused to cooperate, insisting it was not.

On Thursday, judges at the Hong Kong Court of Final Appeal unanimously ruled in the trio's favour. Chief Justice Andrew Cheung announced the decision in court.

The prosecution needed to prove that the alliance was a foreign agent, the judges wrote, adding that the lower courts "fell into error" in holding that it was sufficient merely that the police commissioner said he had reasonable grounds to believe the alliance was a foreign agent.

In a lower court trial, the appellants also took issue with crucial details that were redacted, including the names of groups that were

alleged to have links with the alliance.

The judges ruled that by redacting the only potential evidential basis for establishing that the alliance was a foreign agent, the prosecution disabled itself from proving its case.

"Non-disclosure of the redacted facts in any event deprived the appellants of a fair trial," they wrote.

After the ruling, Tang told reporters outside the court that he hoped the top court's ruling proved that the alliance was not a foreign agent and that in the future they could prove that the 1989 movement was not a counter-revolutionary riot.

"Justice lives in people's hearts. Regardless of the outcome, everyone knows the truth in their hearts," he said.

During an earlier hearing at the top court in January, Chow, who represented herself, said her case highlighted what a police state is.

"A police state is created by the complicity of the court in endorsing such abuses. This kind of complicity must stop now," she said. (AP)

Three Kuki organisations urged to join the proposed march Meitei civil society organisation to go ahead with peace march on March 8



IMPHAL, March 6: A Meitei civil society organisation on Thursday said it will proceed with its planned peace march from Imphal to Senapati district on March 8, along with other like-minded organisations.

Federation of Civil Society (FOCS) president Th. Manihar told reporters, "We appreciate Union Home Minister Amit Shah's announcement allowing the free movement of all people on all roads in Manipur from March 8. In line with this, we are proceeding with our peace march to convey a message of harmony, not to provoke anyone."

Acknowledging opposition from three Kuki organisations, Manihar urged them to support the march instead.

"Three Kuki organisations have objected to our proposed march. We appeal to them to join us in this effort for peace. The march is also a way to see if the Centre stands by its commitment to allowing free movement," he said.

The march is set to begin at 8 am from Kangla Gate and will proceed to Senapati district. FOCS has also planned another march to the border town of Moreh in the near future.

Manihar claimed that organisations like the Committee on Tribal Unity (COTU) and the Indigenous Tribal Leaders' Forum (ITLF) have not opposed the march and called on them to support this gesture of peace.

The march from Imphal to Senapati will pass through Kangpokpi district, which is predominantly Kuki-inhabited. (PTI)

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Arunachal govt to strictly deal with illegal gambling, lotteries: Dy CM



ITANAGAR, March 6: The Arunachal Pradesh government would strictly enforce laws to tackle the menace of illegal gambling and unauthorised lotteries, the assembly was informed on Thursday.

Responding to a Private Member Resolution (PMR) moved by the lone Congress MLA Kumar Waii, Deputy chief minister Chowna Mein acknowledged that despite existing laws, problems of illegal gambling, unauthorised lottery ticket sales and forceful donations continue in the state.

Mein assured the assembly that the government would strictly enforce laws to curb the menace. Moving the resolution, Waii urged the government to take im-

mediate steps to halt the rampant sale of unauthorised lottery and 'housie' game tickets, as well as the illegal collection of donations, which he said had become a widespread issue, particularly in the state capital Itanagar.

Termining the resolution 'relevant', Mein stated that the government has already instructed deputy commissioners to enforce existing laws more rigorously.

"Illegal gambling has ruined many families in the state, with people losing their hard-earned money in the hope of profit. Laws are already in place, and law enforcement agencies have arrested many involved in such activities," Mein said.

He said that the state govern-

ment was committed to tackling the issue, emphasising that only a goal-oriented administration could effectively put an end to it.

Mein also urged lawmakers to spread public awareness about the harmful effects of gambling and forced donations, stressing the need to develop civic responsibility.

"We must educate people and instil a sense of civic duty to eradicate such practices," he added, while requesting Waii to withdraw the resolution.

During the discussion, senior BJP leader Pani Taram highlighted that while many organisations in the state claim to collect donations for noble causes, often setting fixed amounts, effectively turning them into extortion rather than voluntary contributions.

Earlier, Waii suggested that if illegal gambling could not be controlled, the government should consider legalising it to generate revenue.

Mein, however, stated that the government would study the pros and cons before making any decision on this. He reiterated that all steps to curb the issue would be taken in consultation with the members of the house.

Later, Waii withdrew the resolution. (PTI)

Three arrested with Yaba tablets worth ₹ 5 crore in Agartala



AGARTALA, March 6: Tripura Police arrested three individuals and seized yaba tablets worth over ₹5 crore during a raid in the Maheshkhala area of Agartala in the early hours of Thursday.

West District Superintendent of Police, Kiran Kumar, stated that the raid was conducted following specific intelligence inputs about a large stockpile of contraband at the residence of one Md Babul Miah (45).

"Acting on a tip-off, the West Agartala Police Station team raided his house and recovered 1.06 lakh yaba tablets valued at around ₹5 crore in the illicit market. Along with Babul Miah, two other individuals, Sanjay Miah (42) and Sipan Hossein (26), have been arrested. Several mobile phones and bikes were also seized. A case has been registered, and the accused will be presented before the court," he said.

The SP further highlighted that Tripura Police have intensified their crackdown on drug-related activities in Agartala. Over the past week alone, 10 cases have been registered, leading to the arrest of 21 individuals. Authorities have confiscated 369 kg of cannabis, 2,017 bottles of cough syrup, 66 grams of heroin, and 1.06 lakh yaba tablets during the ongoing special drive.

Arunachal Assembly introduces four Bills for better governance

ITANAGAR, March 6: The Arunachal Pradesh Assembly on Thursday introduced four Bills aimed at improving governance and administrative efficiency in the state.

Deputy chief minister Chowna Mein, who also holds the tax and excise portfolio, introduced the Arunachal Pradesh Goods and Services Tax (Amendment) Bill, 2025 to amend the state's Goods and Services Tax Act of 2017.

Mein, who also serves as the planning and investment minister, introduced the Arunachal Pradesh Arun Parivar Authority Bill, 2025.

The Bill seeks to establish a legal framework for good governance and ensure efficient, transparent and targeted delivery of public welfare benefits and services to residents.

Land management minister Balo Raja introduced the Arunachal Pradesh Public Premises (Eviction of Unauthorized Occupants) Bill, which seeks to amend the existing Arunachal Pradesh Public Premises (Eviction of Unauthorized Occupants) Act, 2003.

Additionally, water resources minister Biyuram Wahge introduced the Arunachal Pradesh Flood Plain Zoning Bill, 2025, which aims to regulate floodplain zoning of rivers in the state and address related concerns. During the day, the Assembly paid tribute to former minister Medi Ram Dodum, who died on September 1 last year after a prolonged illness.

Leading the obituary reference on the inaugural day of the Budget session, Speaker Tesam Pongte expressed sorrow over Dodum's demise, describing him as a veteran leader and a great philanthropist.

"With his passing, the state has lost a dedicated public servant and a man who deeply touched many lives," Pongte said.

Born on August 5, 1955, Dodum's political journey began in 1984 when he contested the Doimukh-Sagalee Assembly seat as an independent candidate. Though unsuccessful, he remained committed to public service.

He joined the BJP in 1986 before switching to the Congress in 1988, where he served as party secretary. In 1995, he successfully contested from Bameng Assembly constituency and was appointed deputy minister of horticulture under the Gegong Apang ministry. (PTI)

32 more arms surrendered in 3 Manipur districts



IMPHAL, March 6: A day before the ending of the extended deadline on Thursday for voluntarily surrendering looted and illegally held weapons in strife-torn Manipur, 32 more arms and ammunition were handed over in Churachandpur, Imphal East and Kangpokpi districts, officials said.

The arms and ammunition were surrendered at Commando unit, Lamlai, Porompat and Heingang police stations and the 7th Manipur Rifles battalion unit in Imphal East district on Wednesday, they said.

People also voluntarily handed over weapons to the authorities at SP Churachandpur office and Saikul Police Station in Kangpokpi district, the officials said.

Manipur Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla had extended the deadline for the surrender of looted and illegal arms till 4 PM on March 6, following demands by people from both hill and valley areas for additional time.

The administration also assured that no punitive action would be

taken against those who surrender their weapons within this period, emphasising that "this is the last opportunity for everyone concerned to contribute to peace, communal harmony, the future of our youth, and the security of our society".

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

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

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)

The administration also assured that no punitive action would be

Two cadres of banned outfit arrested in Manipur

IMPHAL, March 6: Two members of the banned People's Liberation Army (PLA) were arrested from Manipur's Imphal East district for allegedly being involved in extortion, police said on Thursday.

They were apprehended from the Yourabung area on Wednesday, a senior officer said.

The two PLA members have been identified as Ngairangbam Ajit Singh (59) and Laishram Bijoy Singh (56). "They were involved in extortion of money from people, private firms, government officials, godowns in Mantripukhuri and other areas in Imphal," the officer added. (PTI)

Two day seminar on 'Arunachal Pradesh - India Centric Geospace' in Dinjan military station

HT Correspondent

DIBRUGARH, March 6: The Indian Army hosted a two-day seminar titled 'Arunachal Pradesh - India Centric Geospace' at Dinjan Military Station in eastern Assam's Dibrugarh district from March 5 to 6 2025. The seminar was graced by senior military officials, distinguished policymakers, and scholars. They provided valuable insights into the geopolitical, economic, and developmental aspects of the region.

"It's very important to understand our rivers and the system and equally important to understand what Chinese are doing. Chinese would do what they want to do. But we have to build our own capabilities and capacity on the rivers, but we have to do it in a scientific way and in a human centric approach. Our projects should be resilient and people friendly manner," said Dr Uttam Kumar Sinha, leading scholar and commentator on transboundary rivers, climate change and the Arctic.

"We have to build our capabilities and

capacities in a sustainable manner and people friendly in taking consideration while building dams. We should not be reactive what Chinese are doing because the dams are being built on the chinese side. We need to build infrastructure but infrastructure which are resilient and sustainable and bring state and people together," he added. Executive Director of NEEPCO Samiran Goswami said, "In 2023, a MoU has been signed with Arunachal Pradesh for executing of 13 hydel power project and NEEPCO will be executing five hydel project in the state with a total install capacity of 2626 mega watt."

The topics discussed in the two day seminar are: The ecological and economic impact of China's exploitation of Tibetan resources and its implications for India, the cultural and historical ties of Arunachal Pradesh with Northeast India and the Indian heartland and the developmental dynamics of Arunachal Pradesh, focusing on infrastructure and policy frameworks.

HALT CONTRACT NOTIFICATION

No. C-LMG-03-2025 Dated: 27-02-2025.

On behalf of President of India applications are invited from the intending persons who are eligible as per the criteria of the Railway Board's policy guideline for appointment of a halt contractor at **Kayasthagram, Samaguri, Phulaguri, Bazarughat, Kalachand, Wadrengrasia, Chargola, Jawaharnagar & SK Para** halt stations over Lumding Division, N. F. Railway.

Application Form may be obtained from the office of the Sr. Divisional Commercial Manager, Lumding, N. F. Railway, PIN- 782447 or downloaded from the website quoted below.

The cover containing application must be sealed and quoted with red ink on the top of the cover (Right hand corner) as "Application for the " Halt station.

The sealed cover may be dropped in the application box kept in the Office of Sr. Divisional Commercial Manager, N. F. Railway, Lumding, PIN- 782447 from **10.00 hrs. of 06-03-2025 to 15.00 hrs. of 08-04-2025** on all working days except Saturdays, Sundays and general holidays.

Application box will be opened on **08/04/2025 at 16.00 hrs.** in the Chamber of Assistant Commercial Manager, Lumding, N. F. Railway, PIN-782447.

Eligibility criteria, other terms and conditions and instructions, application format etc. may be downloaded from the website: www.nfr.indianrailways.gov.in

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Arunachal: Guv urges MLAs to drive state's growth, highlights budget vision

ITANAGAR, March 6: Arunachal Pradesh Governor Lt Gen (Retd) K T Parnaik on Thursday emphasised the crucial role of MLAs in bridging the government's vision with grassroots realities, and asserted that legislators must focus on the state's growth and inclusive development.

Addressing the legislators on the inaugural day of the budget session of the state assembly, the governor stated that the effective implemen-

tation of government schemes depends significantly on the efforts of lawmakers.

"As elected representatives, your deep understanding of local needs enables you to champion initiatives that enhance the quality of life of the people in the state," he said.

The governor underscored the importance of holistic development through investments in key sectors such as education, health, tourism, infrastructure and youth empowerment. (PTI)

Arunachal Cabinet approves 3 major policy to enhance horti, agri & tourism sectors

The policy will help to fund for sectoral development and promote convergence

HT Correspondent

ITANAGAR, March 6: Arunachal Pradesh government has approved three major policies to enhance the state's horticulture, agriculture and tourism sector.

The decision was taken during a cabinet meeting chaired Chief Minister Pema Khandu on Wednesday.

"The state cabinet has approved three important policy which include the Arunachal Pradesh Horticulture Policy 2025-35, the New Agriculture Policy - Arunachal Pradesh 2025-35, and the Arunachal Pradesh Tourism Policy 2025-30. These policies incorporate modern interventions, strategic roadmaps, and substantial budgetary support to drive growth," an official statement quoted Parliamentary Affairs & Education minister PD Sonu said.

He said that the policy will help to fund for sectoral development and promote convergence.

Sonu further said that the Kiwi Mission will get a boost as the state is the highest producer of Kiwi in India.

Commenting on the Spice Mission, the minister opined that the Arunachal Pradesh Spice Mission has tremendous scope of promotion and development.

"The Arunachal Medicinal & Aromatic Plants (MAP) will get another boost as this would harness the untapped potential



for large scale cultivation of AYUSH based industries in the state. At the same time it will help and empowered the women and young farmers of state and help in sustainable development and climate resilient horticulture," he added.

Besides this, the state government given its nod to New Agriculture Policy which introduces updated strategies with new concept and challenges to enhance productivity, promote mechanized farming, and ensure sustainability. It aims to expand agricultural land through land terracing and convert Jhum cultivation into permanent farming.

"The policy will help in extending irri-

gation facilities and promoting water harvesting and conservation," the minister said.

He further said that it will increase agricultural productivity by supplying certified seeds and planting materials, better extension services through KVKs, promoting multi cropping technique and adopting modern techniques.

"The Policy shall be for the period of 2025-35. While preparing the Policy, the officials have travelled to the districts for interaction with the district level Officers, KVKs, PRI members, farmers, SHGs & FPOs etc. The Directorate of Agriculture has also provided inputs and information for preparing the Policy document. The draft of the Policy document was forwarded to the stake holders and their opinions and suggestions obtained," he stated.

Lastly, while speaking The Arunachal Pradesh Tourism Policy 2025-30, the minister said that it focuses on holistic tourism development by enhancing infrastructure, connectivity, strengthening road networks, eco-friendly accommodations, and digital tourism platforms.

"It will be promoting Niche Tourism Segments - Eco-tourism, Adventure Tourism, Spiritual & Pilgrimage Circuits, Farm Tourism, and Wine Tourism," he said.

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'CPI(M) workers allegedly killed at the hands of RSS activists over the years in the state'

Donald Trump, Narendra Modi govt displaying 'far-right' characteristics: Prakash Karat

KOLLAM(KERALA), March 6: CPI(M) Politburo coordinator Prakash Karat on Thursday attacked the Narendra Modi-led government at the Centre and US President Donald Trump, accusing them both of displaying "far-right" characteristics.

Speaking on the first day of the four-day long state party conference held here, Karat termed Trump as an imperialist, whose focus was on establishing American hegemony in the world and expanding its territorial sovereignty, and the Modi government as a "Hindutva Corporate regime" which was displaying "neo-fascist" characteristics.

This is the last state conference of the party in the country ahead of its 24th CPI(M) congress scheduled from April 2 to 6 in Madurai, Tamil Nadu.

Karat further said that due to the close association with America, India was standing with the oppressors as it had exported arms to Israel and also supported it, during its war with Palestine.

Karat claimed that India also allied with the US to constitute the quadrilateral alliance or Quad, which also includes Japan and Australia, whose sole purpose was to act as a "security alliance against China".

He warned that as the US under Trump goes forward on its "more and more aggressive path", India, being allied with it, will be cut off and isolated from the developing nations.

"So, the path this government is taking and its external policies are a reflection of its character, which we in our political resolution have



termed as a Hindutva Corporate regime that is displaying neo-fascist characteristics," he contended. Karat also lashed out at the opposition Congress in Kerala for criticising the CPI(M) for using the term neo-fascist to describe the BJP and RSS.

The veteran CPI(M) leader alleged that the Congress was "distorting" the Left party's efforts to fight against the neo-fascist trends and accused it of playing "cheap politics".

"We do not need a certificate from the Congress leadership here on how to fight the BJP and the RSS," he said.

He further said that the number of CPI(M) workers allegedly killed at the hands of RSS activists over the years in the state shows who was fighting the BJP in Kerala.

He said that CPI(M) used the neo-fascist term, for the first time in its draft political resolution, as it is not the same phenomenon as classical fascism seen in the past. "It is modified, has elements of

nate to the US, treats third world nations with contempt, was down-sizing government departments in America and was trying to isolate and curb China.

He said as these conflicts and contradictions increase, the world will be in for a period of great turmoil.

He also said that while the far-right groups were gaining strength around the world, the Left forces were also holding on in many regions, especially Latin America.

Karat said that soon the Left forces will get the opportunity to fight against the far right and neo-fascist forces and make political gains.

The 4-days long conference commenced in the morning with party central committee member A K Balan hoisting the party flag at Asramam Maidan here.

The party's state conference is being held in Kollam after a gap of 30 years with the last state meet taking place here in 1995.

Party Politburo member and Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan is set to present a policy document for the development of a New Kerala, which will be discussed during the conference, party sources said.

A total of 530 people will attend the state conference, including 486 delegates from various districts and 44 guests from outside the state.

Politburo members, including Brinda Karat, Subhashini Ali, B V Raghavulu, Ashok Dhawale, M A Baby and A Vijayaraghavan, will participate in the delegates' conference on all days, the sources added. (PTI)

RSS leader Joshi should be booked for treason: Uddhav on language row

MUMBAI, March 6: Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray on Thursday demanded that Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) leader Suresh Bhaiyaji Joshi be booked for treason, after a controversy erupted over the latter's remarks on Marathi language.

Talking to reporters in the Vidhan Bhavan complex here, the former Maharashtra chief minister also alleged that Joshi's remarks reflect the hidden agenda of the RSS and the BJP to divide Mumbai.

At an event in Ghatkopar area here on Wednesday, Joshi said, "Mumbai doesn't have a single language. Each part of Mumbai has a different language. Ghatkopar area's language is Gujarati. So if you are residing in Mumbai, it is not necessary that you have to learn Marathi."

After a strong criticism from the opposition over his remarks, Joshi on Thursday said Marathi is Mumbai's language and those coming from outside and speaking other languages should also understand it.

"Marathi is my native language and I take pride in it," he said, adding his remarks at the



Ghatkopar event were misconstrued.

Thackeray, while targeting Joshi, said, "They have not raised India Pakistan issue (for some time now) but it is 'batenge toh katenge'. It's not just a Marathi vs non-Marathi issue, but also Marathi vs non-Marathas and capture the state."

"Batenge toh katenge" (divided we fall) was the slogan raised by senior BJP leaders during the Maharashtra assembly polls last year.

Thackeray dared Joshi to make such statements in Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala, West Bengal and come back safely.

Just because "Marathi manooos" is welcoming, does not mean anyone can hit him, he added.

"The BJP has no regards for

Marathi manooos because it knows he is going to vote for them. This is a sadist mentality which has come to the fore. This is a ploy to break Mumbai," the Sena (UBT) leader claimed.

"He should be booked for treason. I had made a law (in capacity as CM) to make Marathi compulsory in the state. This (his remarks) is against the law," he said.

Thackeray said the government should either act against Joshi or accept the "sin", a reference to Joshi's remarks.

He also rejected the government's defence in the House over the issue.

Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis earlier said in the state assembly that Marathi is the language of Mumbai and Maharashtra and anyone who lives here should learn and speak it.

Thackeray said, "Mumbai is a metropolis. If (BJP) want to win it, then do it by doing good work, and not by spreading venom."

"If those in the BJP have love for their mother tongue, then they should condemn it (Joshi's remark)," he added. (PTI)

Central Indian states laggard on population control to gain in delimitation exercise: Manish Tewari

NEW DELHI, March 6: Only the states in central India would gain if the delimitation exercise is held on the principle of 'one vote, one value' as they have been laggards on population control, Congress leader Manish Tewari said and demanded the framing of a new formula for it. The Lok Sabha MP made the demand amid a row over the delimitation exercise with an all-party meeting in Tamil Nadu opposing the population-based delimitation of Parliamentary constituencies.

In a post on X, Tewari said if the delimitation exercise is done on the current principle of 'one vote, one value', then the southern and northern states would lose Lok Sabha seats and only the states in central India would gain.

"If delimitation is held on the current principles of one Citizen, one vote and one value, then not only the south even north India would also lose as the share of the northern states as a percentage share of the total strength of the Lok Sabha and even Rajya Sabha will go down further. "For example, the number of Lok Sabha seats of both Punjab and Haryana post delimitation would be 18. Currently, Punjab has 13 seats and Haryana 10. However, as proportion to the overall strength of the Lok Sabha, both states would lose further. In any case, they are marginalised and they would become even more inconsequential," Tewari said in his post while citing a media report. (PTI)

TMC to raise voter ID duplication issue in Parl's Budget Session: Derek O'Brien

NEW DELHI, March 6: The Trinamool Congress (TMC) will raise the issue of voter ID number duplication in the second half of Parliament's Budget Session that starts on Monday, party leader Derek O'Brien said.

He has also accused the government of suppressing dissent in Parliament.

In a blog post published on Thursday, O'Brien, TMC's parliamentary party leader in Rajya Sabha, said several opposition parties have conveyed that they want to take up a discussion on issues related to the home ministry first.

"The second part of the Budget Session of Parliament begins in a few days (March 10). The first part of the Session, last month, faced significant setbacks, marked by legislative inertia, procedural neglect and a weakening of institutional norms - trends that should concern every citizen," O'Brien said in the blogpost.

He said the issue of duplication of voter ID numbers will be raised on the floor of Parliament. The matter was taken up by TMC chief and West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee last week in the state.

The party leaders have said while the Election Commission of India (EC) has admitted the error, it is not accepting it. The TMC has also sought an in-depth probe into the matter.

O'Brien stressed that it is not a "minor clerical error".

"Another issue that is bound to play out on the floor of Parliament is the Election Commission of India's alleged involvement in voter ID duplication. This is not a minor clerical error, it is a serious matter having a bearing on free



and fair elections," he said.

He said the Electoral Photo Identity Card (EPIC) number is linked to voter details and a duplicate EPIC number will lead to denial of voting rights. The EC needs to disclose how many duplicate EPICs exist within the system and how they got assigned, he added.

"Why is the EC still unable to ensure unique EPIC numbers for every voter?" he said.

As the Upper House is set to discuss the working of four ministries - Home Affairs, Education, Railways, Health and Family Welfare - the TMC leader said he would be "pleasantly surprised" if all four ministries were discussed.

"Many parties in the opposition have conveyed their preference to take up the discussion in the Rajya Sabha on the Home Ministry before any other," he said.

He also said the essence of Parliament lies in its ability to legislate effectively but in the first three sessions of the 18th Lok Sabha, both Houses combined have

passed just four bills - the lowest in history. The Bharatiya Vayuyam Vidhyak, 2024, which repealed the Aircraft Act of 1934, is the only non-Budget bill to be passed, he added.

"When compared to the first three sessions of Parliament since 1950, this has been the lowest number of bills passed by both Houses in the history of Parliament. Unbelievable," he said.

He said Lok Sabha also passed the Supplementary Demand for Grants (SDGs) for which a discussion was not held in Rajya Sabha even though five hours had been allocated for the debate.

"Thus, ₹ 45,000 crore of additional public money was spent without even seeking suggestions from the Council of States."

The TMC leader also mentioned the redaction of dissent notes in the report of the Joint Parliamentary Committee examining the Waqf (Amendment) Bill and the absence of a Deputy Speaker in Lok Sabha. (PTI)

BJP backed candidates win two of three seats in MLC poll in Telangana



HYDERABAD, March 6: BJP-backed candidates have won two of the three MLC seats in Telangana for which election held on February 27. Ch Anji Reddy, supported by BJP, beat Narendra Reddy of Congress by a margin of over 5,000 votes in Medak-Nizamabad-Adilabad-Karimnagar Graduates' constituency of state's legislative council. The result of this seat was declared in the early hours of Thursday.

Elections were held for Medak-Nizamabad-Adilabad-Karimnagar Graduates' and Teachers' constituencies and the Warangal-Khammam-Nalgonda Teachers' constituency in preferential voting system, using ballots. Counting of votes began on Monday last.

Malka Komarath, supported by BJP, bagged the Medak-Nizamabad-Adilabad-Karimnagar Teachers' constituency and the independent candidate Sripal Reddy Pingili (backed by a teachers' union) won the Warangal-Khammam-Nalgonda Teachers' constituency. The results of the two Teachers' constituencies were declared late on Monday.

The counting was a time-consuming process as it involved segregation of valid and invalid votes, followed by preferential counting.

The victories in two of the three MLC seats came as a moral booster for BJP in the state.

The saffron party fielded candidates for all three seats, while the ruling Congress contested only the Graduates' constituency. The BRS stayed away from the election.

Union Ministers G Kishan Reddy, Bandi Sanjay Kumar and other BJP leaders campaigned extensively in the election.

Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy, state Congress president B Mahesh Kumar Goud and other senior party leaders canvassed in support of their party candidate.

Hailing the victory of BJP-backed candidates, Union Coal Minister and state BJP president G Kishan Reddy said the triumph is a victory of youth and teachers who have decisively rejected Congress for its failed governance and failure to address their concerns.

"Despite Congress fielding all its ministers, MLAs, MPs, and spending heavily, they could not retain the Karimnagar Graduate seat. This outcome sends a strong message to Congress, which came to power by making false promises to the people," Kishan Reddy said on X.

With elections spanning across 13 districts, 43 Assembly and six parliamentary constituencies and 270 mandals, the victory is significant and reflect the growing strength of BJP in Telangana. The party is emerging as a powerful force in the state, he said. (PTI)

Odisha govt to paint school buildings with orange shade, BJD cries saffronisation

BHUBANESWAR, March 6: The BJP government in Odisha has decided to paint all government school buildings with a shade of orange, prompting the opposition BJD to allege that it is part of the ruling party's attempt at saffronisation of education.

The BJD, on the other hand, asserted that the Biju Janata Dal, during its 24-year rule till June 2024, had painted school buildings green and student uniforms were green and white, similar to the party's colour code.

The Odisha State Education Programme Authority (OSEPA) has recently issued an instruction to all district collectors about painting school buildings with "Orange Tan-N" colour.

"The government has been pleased to approve the new colour code. In this context, it is requested to issue suitable instructions to concerned field functionaries for adoption of the approved colour code in all government schools, including PM SHRI schools, during construction, repair and renovation works," OSEPA state project director Ananya Das wrote to all collectors, who are the chairpersons of Samagra Shiksha in districts.

This order would be in supersession of all previous instructions related to the colour code of school buildings, she said.

Responding to the development, senior BJD leader Prasanna Acharya said it is "sheer politics and condemnable".

"It is a peculiar psychology. I don't understand why this government is making such bogus decisions. What is the purpose? Can you change the education system by changing the colours? Can you infuse more energy among the children by changing the colour?" he asked. (PTI)

Three-language policy in NEP is good for whole country, says Union Minister Kiren Rijju

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, March 6: Union Minister Kiren Rijju on Thursday said the three-language formula in the New Education Policy (NEP) is good for the whole country.

Responding to a query regarding the ongoing serious debate on the three-language policy in the NEP, especially from the southern states, he said that there are some miscommunications or some people deliberately "trying to play politics".

"The three-language policy in the national education policy is good for the whole country," the Union Minister for Parliamentary Affairs and Minority Affairs told reporters here.

Rijju was in Thiruvananthapuram to attend the regional review meeting and training workshop on the Pradhan Mantri Jan Vikas Karyakram (PMJKV) for the states and union territories of the Southern Region.

"Today, honourable Prime Minister Narendra Modi Ji is the Prime Minister of India, but Hindi is not his mother tongue; his mother tongue is Gujarati. Our Home Min-



ister Amit Shah ji his mother tongue is Gujarati. The Education Minister, Dharmendra Pradhan, has Odia as his mother tongue and my mother tongue is Arunachali, but we are

working as a team with the interest of our country foremost," Rijju said.

So, let us not divide the country on the basis of religion or language, he added.

"We are all Indians; let us work together and Prime Minister Modi ji has continuously said that every region, every community, and everybody in India is equal, and everybody will be given equal treatment for protection and equal preference, so let us not divide the country on the basis of caste, creed, religion or community or state or region."

His statement came amidst strong opposition from the Tamil Nadu government against NEP 2020, which raised concerns over the "three-language formula" and accused the Centre of "attempting to impose Hindi".

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin reiterated his firm stance, stating that he would not agree to implement the NEP even if the Centre offered ₹ 10,000 crore in funding.

In contrast, as per media reports, Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu voiced strong support for the Centre, advocating for the learning of not just three but multiple languages. (PTI)

UP govt failed to use funds for welfare of underprivileged: Mayawati

LUCKNOW, March 6: BSP supremo Mayawati on Thursday launched a scathing attack on the Uttar Pradesh government, accusing it of "failing" to use funds for welfare of the underprivileged.

Speaking at a select press conference in Lucknow, Mayawati accused the Yogi Adityanath-led government of "failing" to provide basic amenities such as education, healthcare, roads, electricity, and water, despite the state being touted as the "growth engine" of the country.

"The poor condition of these essential services is no secret. The Uttar Pradesh government, like the Centre, has no shortage of funds, but its failure to use them for the welfare of the underprivileged is deeply concerning," she said.

Mayawati also accused the BJP

of following the same governance model as the Congress, saying that regional parties ruling other states are adopting a similar approach.

"The BJP, like the Congress, has made crucial welfare schemes ineffective. The Babasheh Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar Gramin Samagra Vikas Yojna (comprehensive village development scheme), which was started by our government to uplift rural families, has been rendered inactive by successive Congress, SP, and now BJP governments," she alleged.

"The government's economic policies and budgetary claims largely benefit a handful of wealthy capitalists. Instead of making the rich richer, the government should focus on eradicating poverty, unemployment, and backwardness among the nearly 125 crore common citizens of this country." (PTI)

RSS leader touches raw nerve with Marathi comments

'If you love and respect your own language, you do the same to other languages'

MUMBAI, March 6: Senior Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) leader Suresh Bhaiyyaji Joshi's remarks that a "person coming to Mumbai may not necessarily learn Marathi" sparked a huge controversy in Maharashtra and invited strong condemnation from the Opposition on Thursday.

Even as Joshi sought to put a lid on the raging row by saying his remarks, made at an event in Mumbai's Ghatkopar on Wednesday, were misconstrued, and that Marathi is the language of Mumbai and Maharashtra, the opposition Shiv Sena (UBT) demanded that he be booked for treason.

Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis quickly stepped in to douse the fire and declared in the assembly that Marathi is the language of Mumbai and Maharashtra, and anyone who lives in the state should learn and speak it.

The RSS functionary's controversial remarks came at a time when the BJP-led Centre and the DMK-headed government in Tamil Nadu are locked in a bitter war of words over the three-language formula under the National Education Policy (NEP).

Fadnavis's statement came after Shiv Sena (UBT) MLA Bhaskar Jadhav said the BJP-led Mahayuti government should clarify its stand on Joshi's comments.

The CM said, "I haven't heard what Bhaiyyaji said, but the language of Mumbai and Maharashtra is Marathi. Everyone should learn Marathi and should speak the language." Fadnavis affirmed his government respects other languages as well. "If you love and respect your own language, you do the same to other languages. I am sure Bhaiyyaji will agree with me," Fadnavis said.

Leaders of the opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) staged a protest in Mumbai against Joshi's remarks, and shouted slogans asserting Marathi is the language of the metropol.

Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray, a bitter critic of the BJP, demanded that the RSS leader be booked for treason over his remarks on Marathi.

Speaking in the legislative council, Revenue Minister Chandrashekar Bawankule of the BJP said the Maharashtra government's policy on Marathi is clear



- those living in the state should know and learn the language.

The government policy is clear that whoever lives in Maharashtra should know Marathi and learn it.

There is no compromise on the Marathi language, Bawankule said. A day after his remarks triggered a controversy, Joshi said Marathi is my native language and I take pride in it. Marathi is Maharashtra language and Mumbai's language. There are no two opinions about it. People speaking many languages live in harmony in

Mumbai." It is expected that those coming from outside and speaking other languages should also understand Marathi, Joshi said.

"Mumbai doesn't have a single language. Each part of Mumbai has a different language. Ghatkopar area's language is Gujarati. So if you are residing in Mumbai, it is not necessary that you have to learn Marathi," Joshi had said at the event on Wednesday. In a clarification on Thursday, the RSS leader said his remarks were misconstrued.

Congress MLC Bhai Jagtap said in the council that it was distressing that a responsible person from the RSS had made such remarks. "Our resolve is to safeguard the Marathi language, Jagtap said.

NCP (SP) legislator Shashikant Shinde sought to know if Joshi's remarks were a ploy to break Mumbai from Maharashtra and if anyone was encouraging it.

Earlier in the day, Shiv Sena (UBT) Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Raut claimed Joshi's remark amounted to treason and Maharashtra's insult.

Can he go and speak like this in Kolkata, Lucknow, Chennai, Ludhiana, Patna, or Bengaluru, Trivandrum or Hyderabad? Raut asked.

Talking to reporters in the Vidhan Bhavan complex, Uddhav Thackeray alleged that Joshi's remarks reflect the hidden agenda of the RSS and the BJP to divide Mumbai. Thackeray dared Joshi to make such statements in Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala, West Bengal and come back safely.

Just because the "Marathi mannos" is welcoming, does not mean anyone can hit him, he added. (PTI)

Haryana: Budget session from today likely to be stormy

CHANDIGARH, March 6: The three-week long budget session of Haryana assembly will begin here on Friday and the budget will be presented on March 17.

The session is likely to be stormy as the opposition Congress said it will raise a host of issues, including unemployment, paper leak, rising debt, law and order and farmers' plight.

In the meeting of the Business Advisory Committee of the Assembly, which was presided over by Speaker Harvinder Kalyan and in which Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini and some opposition leaders also remained present, recommended the duration of the House sittings.

Speaking to reporters here on Thursday evening after a meeting of the BAC and an all-party meeting which was convened by the Speaker ahead of the session, Saini said the session will begin with the Governor's Address. Saini said the budget session will begin on March 7 and continue till March 28. The budget estimates for 2025-26 will be presented on March 17 by Saini, who also holds the Finance portfolio.

Earlier, according to the tentative schedule of the budget session, it was to be held from March 7 to 25 with budget presentation on March 13. Replying to a question, Saini said some important bills will also be brought during the budget session.

In the all-party meeting, all the parties were unanimous about the state government's move to have a new building of Haryana Vidhan Sabha built here.

According to a statement, at present, there is space available for only 90 MLAs to sit in the present House of Haryana Legislative Assembly. In such a situation, it is not possible to conduct the proceedings of the House in view of the increase in the number of assembly constituencies in the state due to the delimitation to be held in the near future, it was felt.

Speaking to reporters here after the BAC meeting, Congress leader and former Haryana chief minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda said his party will raise various issues during the session including "paper leak, unemployment, law and order corruption, illegal mining, rising debt, farmers issue". On Thursday evening, Haryana Congress chief Uday Bhan held a meeting of party MLAs ahead of the assembly session beginning Friday. Speaking to reporters later,

Uday Bhan said the Saini government has failed on various fronts.

Bhan claimed that the government made tall promises at the time of October assembly elections including giving Rs 2,100 to women under 'Lado Lakshmi Yojana' and procure paddy at Rs 3,100 per quintal, but nothing has been done yet. Indian National Lok Dal has said the party will prominently raise various issues related to public interest during the budget session.

Meanwhile, with the Assembly session beginning Friday, the Congress party is yet to name the Congress Legislative Party (CLP) leader.

After BJP rode to power for a third consecutive term in Haryana in last year's Assembly polls, the Congress MLAs have attended three sittings of the Assembly without a Leader of Opposition.

Ruling BJP also took potshots at this, with Minister Anil Vij saying, "there is internal conflict in the Congress. Many Congress MLAs want Bhupinder Hooda to be Leader of Opposition, but Congress high command does not want him. This is the reason the matter is stuck".

Meanwhile, during the budget session, the government is going to bring a fresh version of the bill on the regulation of travel agents.

CM Saini had recently said the travel agents involved in sending the state youth abroad through illegal routes are being identified and strict action will be taken against them.

Saini had also said the government has made full planning to implement the 'Lado Lakshmi Yojana'.

Ahead of the October 2024 Haryana polls, the BJP had promised Rs 2,100 to women as monthly financial assistance for the women under this scheme if the party returned to power.

The Budget Session is coming up and we will be making the provision of its budget, Saini said.

Meanwhile, ahead of the presentation of the budget, Saini, in recent weeks, held pre-budget consultations with diverse groups to gather valuable suggestions. He also sought suggestions from ruling and opposition MLAs.

Saini had on Tuesday said that the state budget for 2025-26 will be growth-oriented, with a special focus on sectors such as agriculture, education, health, sports, infrastructure, and women empowerment. (PTI)

NDMC issues 30-day notice to property tax defaulters

NEW DELHI, March 6: The New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) has issued showcause notices to 380 property tax defaulters, warning of strict action, including attachment and account freezing, if their dues remain unpaid. With the financial year 2024-25 nearing close, the NDMC has intensified its tax recovery efforts, identifying 3,200 taxpayers who have defaulted for three consecutive years, the civic body said in a statement.

The defaulters have been warned of coercive measures if payments are not made within the stipulated time.

"Under NDMC regulations, a 30-day show-cause notice is issued to 380 defaulters, followed by additional reminders. If there is no response or payment, the Council may take action, including property attachment, sealing, or account freezing," said the statement issued on Thursday.

The NDMC, which oversees approximately 15,600 properties, aims to collect Rs 1,150 crore in property tax this year. As of mid-February, Rs 807 crore had been collected. The NDMC also announced that the tax collection centre at its headquarters in Palika Kendra and three counters in Gole Market, RK Puram and Sansad Marg will remain open on Saturdays and Sundays in March (except any gazetted holiday) beyond normal working days due to the ease of taxpayers.

The NDMC has attached 13

properties in Connaught Place and sealed some shops and restaurants over the last three days for the non-payment of property taxes.

Meanwhile, the New Delhi Traders Association (NDTA) expressed concerns over what it calls were excessive tax demands and business closures. It has urged the civic body to streamline tax collection and ensure ease of doing business.

One NDTA member pointed out alleged disparities in tax structures. "Businesses in MCD areas pay almost 20 times less tax than those under NDMC's jurisdiction. We demand 'one city, one tax' for a level playing field," he said. With both the New Delhi MP Bansuri Swaraj and local MLA Parvesh Sahib Singh from the BJP, traders are hopeful their concerns will be addressed.

"Now, we have BJP representatives at all levels. A 'single engine' government is in the NDMC, and we expect our issues to be resolved soon," an NDTA officer-bearer said. The traders body has approached both the MP and the MLA and they have assured that a new law is under process to remove ambiguities in the tax system, the NDTA officer-bearer added. "The prime minister has consistently emphasised ease of doing business. We hope that more streamline taxation system will be there in the NDMC area," another NDTA representative said. (PTI)

Importance of criminal law shouldn't be undermined: CJI

NEW DELHI, March 6: Chief Justice of India Sanjiv Khanna on Thursday said the importance of criminal laws in society should not be undermined and hoped young lawyers would join criminal litigation as a first choice.

CJI Khanna was speaking at the launch of "Ratanlal & Dhirajlal's Law of Crimes: A comprehensive commentary on Bhartiya Nyaya Sanhita 2023" edited by former Chief Justice of India U U Lalit.

The event was organised in the Delhi High Court's auditorium in the presence of the former CJI, Minister of State (independent charge) Law and Justice Arjun Ram Meghwal, attorney general R Venkataramani and other judges of the Supreme Court and the high court.

CJI Khanna said when it comes to dealing with arrests and detentions, criminal law directly impacts individual liberty, social harmony and the fundamental balance between state power and personal liberty.

"When I look at law students, new entrants, many of them do not want to take up criminal practice. The fact of the matter is, most of the litigation in district courts is criminal litigation. We should not therefore ignore the importance of criminal law and I hope and trust that many youngsters including lawyers will gradually join criminal law as the first choice and rather than a second or compulsion," he said.

CJI Khanna said the legal system has embraced an evidence based approach in criminal law and criminal jurisprudence in future would not rely upon untested assertions about behaviour and social dynamics. "It will increasingly rely upon data. Data exists, data speaks. Analytical tools exist. What we need to do is let evidence drive the criminal law forward," he shared.

Lalit spoke on the "levels of screening" that the book went through before it was "okayed" and said, "This is my first attempt but may not strictly be the last one. (PTI)

TMC demands unique ID for voter cards, accuses BJP of manipulating electoral rolls

KOLKATA, March 6: A delegation of the ruling Trinamool Congress met the chief electoral officer (CEO) of West Bengal on Thursday, demanding that 'unique ID' be introduced on voter cards to prevent the induction of fake voters in the electoral rolls.

Earlier in the day, TMC leaders held a meeting with district functionaries to review findings of a door-to-door scrutiny of electoral rolls, alleging that the BJP has been manipulating the voters' list ahead of next year's assembly elections, with the meeting focusing on addressing detected irregularities and finalising the party's strategy to counter the issue.

The TMC delegation that called on the CEO was led by the party's state president Subrata Bakshi and included state ministers Firhad Hakim, Arup Biswas, Chandrima Bhattacharya, and Rajya Sabha MP Ritabrata Banerjee.

After submitting the memorandum, Firhad Hakim said, "The BJP is trying to turn the elections in West Bengal into a farce. It is unacceptable for the same EPIC (Electorals Photo Identity Card) number to exist across different states. Just as Aadhaar and passports have unique identification numbers, voter cards too must have a unique ID."

Hakim added that this marks the beginning of a new movement under Mamata Banerjee's leadership for voter card reform, similar to her 1993 demand for photo identification in elections.

He accused the BJP of manipulating voter lists to gain power in Delhi and Maharashtra by adding fake voters.

Citing data from the Delhi assembly polls of 2020

and 2025, Hakim claimed that the number of voters increased abnormally in a short span, similar to the voter surge in West Bengal from the 2024 Lok Sabha elections to date.

"The growth in voters in Delhi over five years was almost identical to the rise in West Bengal in just seven months. This is unnatural," he remarked.

Hakim also emphasised the need for physical verification of voter names added online and urged the Election Commission to ensure that electors from other states do not cast their votes in West Bengal.

Last week, West Bengal Chief Minister and TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee accused the BJP of inserting "outsider" voters into the electoral rolls with alleged backing from the Election Commission. She claimed that the BJP had used similar tactics in Haryana, Maharashtra, and Delhi in previous elections.

Following that, TMC state president Subrata Bakshi issued directives to district-level leaders to conduct a thorough verification of voter lists.

The verification process was completed within 10 days, and district presidents and chairpersons reported their findings during Thursday's meeting.

A special committee, formed by Mamata Banerjee to oversee the matter, includes senior leaders such as Abhishek Banerjee, Derek O'Brien, Sudip Bandyopadhyay, and others.

At a rally in Durgapur on Wednesday, TMC MP Kirti Azad alleged that the BJP had used the Election Commission to manipulate electoral processes in other states. (PTI)

UP: Oppn demands probe into boatman's ₹30 crore earnings at Maha Kumbh

PRAYAGRAJ/LUCKNOW, March 6: A day after the Uttar Pradesh government said boatman Pintu Mahara earned Rs 30 crore during the Maha Kumbh, the opposition including the Samajwadi Party demanded an investigation into the claims and also alleged that the boatman had a criminal background.

In a post on X, Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav said, "The truth of this news should be investigated. If a family has really earned Rs 30 crore in the Maha Kumbh alone, then tell how much GST was received. 'Paatal Khoji' should first find out and then glorify."

"First signed an MoU with a thug, now praised the name of the accused in the House with closed eyes. Now open your eyes. Due to all these reasons, the morale of criminals is high in the BJP government," the former chief minister said. Yadav also shared a news clip alleging that Mahara had a criminal background.

UP Congress chief Ajay Rai also questioned how one family could amass such wealth by ferrying devotees during the 45-day Maha Kumbh.

"Even if you forget the criminal record for a moment, the question to be asked is if GST and other taxes were paid on the income which was revealed in the UP assembly by the CM? Moreover, if

the income details provided in the assembly are correct, doesn't it show that the devotees were fleeced because such a profit couldn't have been made on government prescribed rate," Rai told PTI.

Meanwhile, Vaibhav Singh, Station House Officer of Naini police station in Prayagraj, confirmed to PTI that Pintu Mahara does have a criminal record.

"Pintu Mahara has a history sheet at the Naini police station and was released from jail two years ago in connection with a case," the SHO said.

Police sources said Mahara's family has been involved in illegal activities, including ransom, extortion, and illegal liquor production for years. Many members of the family have a criminal history, they said.

The UP government on Wednesday claimed that Mahara earned Rs 30 crore over the 45 days of the Maha Kumbh.

"Pintu's life took a dramatic turn with one bold decision. Anticipating a massive influx of devotees, he expanded his fleet from 60 to 130 boats ahead of the Maha Kumbh," the government had said in a statement.

The statement followed Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's remarks in the state assembly, where he responded to opposition criticism of the Maha Kumbh. (PTI)

'Without fail': SC fast-tracks decisions on execution pleas by civil courts

NEW DELHI, March 6: The Supreme Court on Thursday asked all high courts to direct civil courts in their jurisdiction to decide the execution petitions within six months, failing which presiding officers would be held liable. A bench of Justices J B Pardiwala and Pankaj Mithal further ordered the high courts to summon the data from the district judiciary over the pendency of such execution petitions.

The execution petitions, the bench said, filed for execution of decrees in civil disputes were pending for three-four years. "If the execution petitions remain pending for three-four years, it defeats the very purpose of decree," Justice Pardiwala said. The verdict came in a 1980 civil dispute from Tamil Nadu.

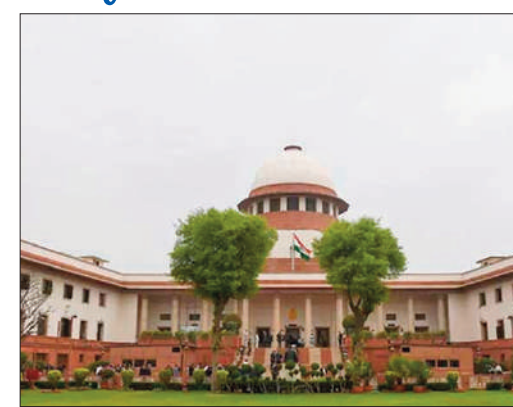
"We direct all the high courts across the country to call for the necessary information from their respective district judiciary as regards pendency of the execution petitions," the bench said.

The court directed that after collecting the data, the high courts should issue an administrative order or a circular to the respective district judiciary asking the execution petitions to be decided and disposed of within six months without fail. "Otherwise the presiding officer concerned would be answerable to the high court on its administrative side," it added.

The verdict said once the relevant data was collected by the high courts, it should be forwarded to the registry of the top court with individual reports.

The registry was directed to convey the order to all high courts and the matter was posted after seven months for compliance. The top court noted in its verdict in 2021 and subsequently in 2022 it directed the execution proceedings to be completed within six months from the date of filing but the directions were yet to be followed. It pointed out a "long and inordinate" delay on the part of the executing courts in the country in deciding such petitions.

The civil dispute before the bench concerned a sale agreement of June 30, 1980 entered by Tamil Nadu



resident Ayyavoo Udayar over a piece of land. After the dispute arose over title of the land, Udayar filed a civil suit for specific performance against the defendants in 1986 with respect to an agreement to sell.

In 2004, the decree-holder filed a petition to direct the defendants to execute the sale deed and deliver the possession of the property. It was, however, dismissed.

This was challenged by way of a revision petition, which was allowed in 2006 but the sale deed was again not executed. In 2008, an order of delivery of possession was passed but not executed.

The top court held that the high court "committed an egregious error" in passing the order.

"We must now ensure that the appellants are able to reap the fruits of the decree. We are also of the view that the rejection by the high court of the amendments to the execution petition filed by the appellants, was erroneous and deserves to be set aside."

The executing court should now proceed to ensure that vacant and peaceful possession of the suit property was handed over to the appellants in their capacity as decree holders and if necessary, with the aid of police, within two months "without fail". (PTI)

Registration for Ayushman Bharat to start after March 8: Delhi health minister

NEW DELHI, March 6: Delhi Health Minister Pankaj Singh announced on Thursday that the registration process for the Ayushman Bharat scheme will begin after March 8, marking a significant step toward expanding healthcare access in the national capital.

Speaking at a press conference, Singh said that the Delhi government would soon sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Centre to implement the scheme. He also assured that fundamental changes in the city's healthcare system would be visible within 100 days.

The minister emphasised the strict monitoring of hospital bed allotments and EWS quotas, with two nodal officers appointed to ensure transparency. He assured that no government hospital in Delhi would face a shortage of medicines.

Focusing on economically weaker sections (EWS), he said that all hospitals must provide treatment in accordance with government-mandated standards. He also instructed the health department to discourage excessive local purchasing of medicines and to promote affordable healthcare schemes like the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY). Officials were asked to submit a report on medicines procured from local companies in previous years.

Additionally, Singh directed that each government hospital have a dedicated medical director or superintendent, ensuring that no official holds additional responsibilities for multiple hospitals.

Emphasising safety, he ordered a comprehensive audit of all government hospitals and ongoing healthcare projects in Delhi.



Criticising the previous AAP-led government, Singh claimed that nearly 2,500 Mohalla Clinics existed only on paper, with rent expenses being misused. "An order has been passed to shut down such clinics to curb corruption," he said.

Singh also highlighted that around 20 per cent of childbirths in Delhi occur outside hospitals, a statistic the government aims to improve by promoting institutional deliveries.

The minister further said that mobile dental vans would soon be deployed to the outskirts of the city to provide medical services to underserved populations. In the initial phase, 10 mobile units will be deployed, with plans to expand the initiative across the city.

Meanwhile, Singh directed the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) to ensure that

nursing homes and private health centres meet all safety and operational standards before obtaining registration.

"Anyone found guilty of wrongdoing will not be spared," the minister warned, adding, "We will make government hospitals better than private ones."

Additionally, to improve transparency and efficiency, he announced that future meetings with hospital directors would be conducted via video conferencing, with necessary technical support from the IT department.

The meeting was attended by medical directors and superintendents of all government hospitals, along with senior officials from the Public Works Department (PWD), Food Safety, and the Health and Family Welfare departments. (PTI)

Felt like a massive responsibility: Actor Taaruk Raina on playing lead role in 'The Waking of a Nation'

MUMBAI, March 6: Taaruk Raina went through multiple auditions before securing the lead role in Ram Madhvan's upcoming series "The Waking of a Nation" and the actor says he felt extreme stress and anxiety about playing the character.

Set during colonial rule, the historical thriller series delves into the conspiracy and events leading up to the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre and Hunter Commission's investigation into the tragedy.

Raina, best known for starring in Netflix show "Mismatched", essays the role of a lawyer on a mission to uncover the truth behind the massacre.

"I was trying hard to get this part when I did the auditions. But I got scared once I got it. There was a part of me which felt it looked like a dream too big," Raina told PTI in an interview.

However, the actor truly felt the weight of responsibility once he began working on the project.

"It was a completely different process to what any of us are used to, so you felt a certain amount of self-doubt. It felt like a massive responsibility, and it's a new thing for me as well. This is me trying my hardest. So, I did get increasingly scared, stressed and nervous about things," he said.

The 30-year-old actor, who has played supporting roles in Rishi Kapoor-starrer film "Sharmaji Namkeen" and

OTT show "The Broken News", said things got better after he opened up to Madhvan. "It involved multiple nervous breakdowns. One fine day, when I couldn't handle it, I was like, 'I need help.' So, I went to him and said, 'Sir, I am terrified. I don't know how I am going to handle this.' Then he told me that he is scared. That day I got better at handling (the pressure)."

Seeing himself featured on the poster of the show felt surreal, Raina said.

"I've never experienced this, and I've not processed it fully. I'm satisfied. This is very new to me, I feel incredibly lucky. There are some days where I still don't believe what (Ram) saw in me."

"I hope that I've done everything in my power to do justice to it. I don't know if I have or not, but I hope that I have at least tried my hardest," the actor said.

Joining Raina in "The Waking of a Nation" are actors Nikita Dutta, Sahil Mehta,

and Hari Singh, who help Raina's character solve the mystery.

Dutta is enthusiastic about the opportunity and said her role provided a platform to explore uncharted territory as an artiste.

"I don't feel like I've had that opportunity where I get to give it my all towards the character and put myself out there to do something, which is completely out of my comfort zone, said the actor, known for starring in movies

such as "Kabir Singh", "The Big Bull" and "Dange".

"(It) is a huge opportunity for me to be visible in a way that the audience has never seen me before. I feel immensely proud to be a part of such a story, which comes from so much honesty and detailed research work," she said.

Produced by Ram Madhvan and his wife Madhvan, "The Waking of a Nation" is set to premiere on March 7 on Sony LIV. (PTI)



'DEMON SLAYER: KIMETSU NO YAIBA - INFINITY CASTLE' TO RELEASE IN INDIA IN SEPTEMBER



NEW DELHI, March 6: Japanese animated dark fantasy film "Demon Slayer: Kimetsu no Yaiba - Infinity Castle" will be released in Indian theatres on September 12, anime platform Crunchyroll and Sony Pictures Entertainment have announced.

Directed by Haruo Sotozaki, "Demon Slayer: Kimetsu no Yaiba" is based on the manga series by Gotoge Koyoharu published under Shueisha's Jump Comics unit since 2018. It consists of 23 volumes and has sold over 150 million copies.

"Infinity Castle" is the first film in a trilogy that represents the final arc and culmination of the hugely popular award-winning anime shonen series. The franchise is known for its riveting sword fights, charming characters and comical scenes.

In India, the film will be released in Japanese with English subtitles, as well as dubbed in Hindi and English, a press release said.

The story follows Tan-

jiro Kamado, a boy whose family is killed by a demon. He joins the Demon Slayer Corps to turn his younger sister Nezuko back into a human after she is transformed into a demon.

"Demon Slayer: Kimetsu no Yaiba" first premiered in April 2019 with the "Tanjiro Kamado, Unwavering Resolve Arc", followed by the feature film "Mugen Train" in October 2020.

The story continued with the "Mugen Train Arc" and "Entertainment District Arc", airing between 2021 and 2022.

In 2023, the "Swordsmith Village Arc" debuted on Crunchyroll, following the theatrical release of "Demon Slayer: Kimetsu no Yaiba - To the Swordsmith Village".

The series continued in 2024 with the "Hashira Training Arc", which premiered after the release of "Demon Slayer: Kimetsu no Yaiba - To Hashira Training" in theatres.

The animation is produced by ufotable. (PTI)

R Madhvan-Nayanthara's film 'Test' to release on Netflix in April

MUMBAI, March 6: Actors R Madhvan and Nayanthara-starrer "Test" is set to premiere on April 4 on Netflix, the streamer announced Thursday. The cricket drama, which also features Siddharth and Meera Jasmine, marks the directorial debut of producer S Sashikanth, the founder of banner YNOT Studios.

Set against the backdrop of high-stakes cricket, it's an emotional rollercoaster that puts the lives of a national-level cricketer (Siddharth), a genius scientist (Madhvan) and a passionate teacher (Nayanthara) on a collision course and forces them to make choices that test their ambition, sacrifice and courage.

Sashikanth said he is grateful to Netflix for helping him bring his vision of "Test" to life. "Having nurtured stories as a producer for years, stepping into the director's chair for 'Test' was both exhilarating and deeply personal. This film is about resilience, the weight of choices, and how life itself is the greatest test of all."

"Bringing together three powerhouse performers — R. Madhvan, Nayanthara, and Siddharth — for the first time made this journey even more special," the director said in a statement. Monika Shergill, Vice-President, Content, Netflix India, said she is excited about the streamer's first Tamil original feature film.

"It's a deeply compelling drama thriller that tests the moral thresholds of its three protagonists played by the powerhouse talents R. Madhvan, Nayanthara and Siddharth. Director S Sashikanth brings a fresh and assured directorial voice and deftly tells a story that will keep you hooked till the last minute. We are incredibly excited to bring 'Test' to our audiences across India and the world," Shergill said.

"Test" is produced by Sashikanth alongside Chakravarthy Ramachandra. (PTI)



2nd Cinevesture International Film Festival to be held from March 20-23

CHANDIGARH, March 6: The second edition of the Cinevesture International Film Festival (CIFF) will be held in Chandigarh from March 20 to 23, the organisers announced on Thursday. Building upon the success of the inaugural edition, which was held in March 2024, the festival will introduce CineV-CHD, an enhanced film market aimed at connecting filmmakers, investors, and distributors for Indian films in India and abroad. The market event, which includes programmes like Projects Market for Feature Films and Series, ProofPoint, CinEVault, InTheWorks Lab and Producer-Investor Workshop, will be held alongside the main film gala, a press release stated.

The festival organisers also announced that they have partnered with the Indian Film Festival of Los Angeles (IFFLA) to launch CineV-IFFLA, a platform connecting South Asian filmmakers with Hollywood producers.

"The collaboration will feature curated South Asian stories during IFFLA Industry Days, alongside selected North American projects. Industry Days, which takes place during the an-

nual festival, is a pivotal forum that connects South Asian filmmakers with Hollywood producers, offering opportunities such as pitch competitions, panels, masterclasses, industry roundtables and networking events," they said.

In its first edition, the Cinevesture International Film Festival showcased over 67 titles, including world cinema, Indian feature films, classics as well as shorts films. It was attended by stars like Richa Chadha, Ali Fazal, Roshan Mathew, Gulshan Devaiah, Varun Grover, Rasika Duggal, Rashmeet Kaur, Hansal Mehta, Shekhar Kapur, Sudhir Mishra, and Tahira Kashyap Khurrana. (PTI)

Our industry has potential to make all kinds of films, not just tentpoles: Reema Kagti



NEW DELHI, March 6: "Superboys of Malegaon" director Reema Kagti believes both the industry and the audiences have the potential to celebrate different kind of movies, not just tentpole cinema with big stars.

Kagti's film, which documents the real-life story of Malegaon-based filmmaker Nasir Shaikh, released in theatres last week.

The filmmaker, known for her critically-acclaimed movies such as "Honeymoon Travel Pvt Ltd", "Talaash" and streaming show "Dahaad", hopes that people go out in theatres to watch the so-called "underrated" films and not wait for them to release on OTT.

"There is an anxiety to films that don't have big actors or stars or bankable people but what I see on social media all the time is people saying, 'Why don't we give new actors and writers a chance?'"

"And frankly, a lot of people have put good work out there, which doesn't get seen in theatres. And then it comes out on OTT and everybody starts calling it an underrated gem. But actually you have underrated it as an audience because you can't be calling the next person out for not going in when you yourself haven't seen it," Kagti told PTI in an interview.

The director, who also runs production house Tiger Baby with filmmaker-friend Zoya Akhtar, admitted that the industry did not do well last year but believes that it is just part of the cycle.

"There is a lot of talent, dreams and producers. So I don't think one bad year in that sense should

be looked at as the end... I believe that our industry has the potential to make a range of films because that's the mark of a thriving industry. And our audience also has the potential for different kinds of films, not just big tentpoles," she said.

"Superboys of Malegaon", written by lyricist-writer Varun Grover, dramatises Shaikh's career, which began with him making spoofs of films like "Sholay" and "Superman" for the audience in his home town.

Kagti, who was also born in a small town in Assam, could see many parallels between her and Shaikh's journey as movie buffs who loved Salim-Javed (Salim Khan-Javed Akhtar)'s cinema, Bruce Lee, Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton.

"We both are film buffs... In Nasir's story and experiences, there's deep love for films and the magic of cinema. The other similarity between Nasir and me that I think is that we were both products of piracy," she added.

While Kagti travelled all the way to Mumbai to pursue her movie dreams, Shaikh gave birth to a thriving 'do-it-yourself' kind of filmmaking that's still popular in Malegaon.

Kagti wanted to capture the many

inspiring elements of Shaikh's journey in "Superboys of Malegaon".

"We came from a very admiring point of view. We were not there to judge his filmmaking. We were there to kind of celebrate how in a real small town in India, this film buff just got up and made films just for the love of making a film and inadvertently gave rise to an entire video film industry."

"Nasir initially made his films only to release in his parlour, but because it became so popular, they sort of started following what happens in Bombay when a film does really well -- other theatres start asking for it. That gave Nasir confidence to make more films and a whole lot of other people in Malegaon are still making films. But now it's moved to YouTube."

There is already a critically-acclaimed documentary "Supermen of Malegaon" by Faiza Ahmed Khan on Shaikh's life. Kagti, Zoya and Farhan Akhtar, who has also backed the film with Excel Entertainment, said they are fans of the documentary and have paid a tribute to it in their movie but their attempt was to go beyond and create a feature film.

"We wanted to get into the making

of Nasir as a director, his friends, the community that made films for themselves. And to kind of explore themes like 'why is art important? Who decides what is art?' The importance of people being represented and things like that."

"Which is why Varun said he would like to go to Malegaon and start on a fresh page. Though we had all seen the documentary, he went and started from scratch again in terms of all the research and met people in Nasir's life. And luckily for us, Nasir is a huge archivist of his own life. So there was a lot of material that Varun had."

The film also gave Kagti a chance to explore themes like friendship, dreams and how the concerns that Nasir and his group were dealing with reflected the larger world. "We realised that the way Nasir made his films, it was a smaller version of what goes on in a bigger filmmaking hub like maybe Mumbai or any other place. The film also has layers of friendship, an underdog story which can inspire anybody to have a dream. It has a universal message and speaks to a wider audience than just filmmakers." (PTI)

Have consistent selection policy, grievance redressal system for athletes: Ministry tells NSFs

NEW DELHI, March 6: In a bid to ensure accountability and consistency, the sports ministry has made it mandatory for national federations to standardise their selection policies, notify athletes of trials at least 15 days in advance and institute a grievance redressal system to bring down litigation caused by feelings of injustice. The instructions on selection matters come after sports minister Mansukh Mandaviya made it clear to the national federations that he wants them to avoid legal showdowns with athletes as has been seen in wrestling, shooting and some winter sports events in recent times.

The circular, which is in PTI's possession, has been sent to the Indian Olympic Association, the Sports Authority of India (SAI) and the National Sports Federations (NSFs).

The new directives make it mandatory for NSFs to upload selection policies on their respective websites and amend them only if there is a three-month window before a competition. It has also been made compulsory to video-graph selection trials.

"Video recordings of the selection trials shall be forwarded to SAI along with the duly signed minutes of selection committee, while sending proposals for financial assistance," it stated in the

five-page document which also makes it mandatory for NSFs to inform the ministry before every trial. The ministry has asked NSFs to publicise the selection criteria for showpieces such as the Olympics, Paralympics, Asian Games, Para Asian Games and Commonwealth Games at least two years in advance.

This has been a long-standing demand in a sport like shooting where renowned pistol coach Jaspal Rana saying that policies which are not standardised negatively impact athletes.

Inclusion of athletes, coaches, support staff and officials in the long list of these mega-events cannot be done without intimat-

ing the Ministry and "giving the rationale and basis for names proposed".

"Details of long list will be submitted to Ministry/SAI at least 30 days before the last date for making entries in the long list."

For other international events where it being a part of the national camp would be a pre-requisite for athletes, the ministry has directed that the NSFs notify them of the requirements at least three months before the commencement of training.

In case an athlete still feels hard-done by the system, the NSFs have been directed to create a Grievance Redressal Committee or Appeal Committee to de-

cide within seven days of a complaint. "... (the committee) shall invariably include Sportspersons of Outstanding Merit who must have retired from active sports for at least four years," it has directed.

"No member of Selection Committee shall be part of the Grievance redressal

Committee. Such proceedings will be summary in nature following principles of natural justice. If the NSF has formed a Dispute Resolution Commission (DRC), then second appeal shall be made before the DRC."

The power to constitute the selection panel was earlier vested with the federation but the latest directive hands it over solely to

the NSF president.

"Composition of the selection committee shall be decided by the President of the NSF," it states.

While steering clear of making it mandatory that could lead to accusations of government interference, the ministry has given a long list of what should be an ideal selection committee.

According to the directive, the panel should "ideally" be headed by High Performance Director/Chief Coach/Foreign Coach/former international player (preferably Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna Awardee/Arjuna Awardee). "Selection Committee may include, among others, coach(es), SOM, ex-international

player(s), member(s) of Executive Committee (not more than two on rotation basis) nominated by the President of NSF." The earlier guidelines made observers from the ministry and SAI a party to the selection process by requiring them to sign the minutes. The new directives state that such officials would report their findings to SAI and ministry and not be a part of the proceedings.

"If the Ministry/SAI is not satisfied with the selection of athletes recommended by the NSF on the grounds of fairness and transparency, the Ministry reserves the right to approve the participation at no cost to the Government," it adds. (PTI)

Mumbai City FC aim ISL playoff berth against Kerala Blasters



KOCHI, March 6: Needing a point to qualify for the playoffs, visiting Mumbai City FC take on Kerala Blasters FC in their Indian Super League match here on Friday.

The Islanders need just a point

to ensure a top-six finish as they are tied on 33 points with the sixth-placed Odisha FC.

The Juggernauts have finished their league run, whereas Mumbai City FC still have two matches in hand.

Kerala Blasters FC are out of that contention, placed ninth with 25 points from 22 encounters.

Mumbai City FC had beaten Kerala Blasters FC by 4-2 in the reverse fixture back in Novem-

ber, and are eyeing their 24th league double in ISL history -- levelling FC Goa for doing so the most number of times in the competition.

Kerala Blasters FC have given away 36 goals this season,

matching their highest tally in a single ISL campaign (2020-21). They have also let in 34 goals against Mumbai City FC, with only FC Goa (50) netting more past them.

Despite their defensive issues, Kerala Blasters FC have found the back of the net 31 times this season.

They have only improved this tally in two previous campaigns, 2021-22 (37 goals) and 2023-24 (33 goals), showing that they will want to blend defensive organisation with similar offensive consistency in the remaining games.

The Islanders are unbeaten in their last eight away games (W4 D4) and have a chance to equal their longest such streak on the road (9 games from October 2022 to February 2023).

Mumbai City FC average 14.5 shots per game, the third highest in ISL 2024-25 (behind North-East United FC -- 16.2 and Mohun Bagan Super Giant -- 15.5).

However, their shot conversion rate stands at just 8.5 per cent, the third lowest this season, which reflects in them being the fourth-least scoring (27) team in the competition.

The two sides have played 21 games, with Mumbai City FC winning on 10 instances and Kerala Blasters FC emerging victorious five times. Six games have produced draws. (PTI)

Prague Masters: Aravindh crushes Giri to surge ahead



PRAGUE, March 6: Grandmaster Aravindh Chithambaram crashed through the defenses of super-solid Anish Giri to jump to sole lead after the end of the seventh round of Prague Masters chess tournament now underway here. It was Aravindh all the way while R Praggnanandhaa played out a draw with pre-event rating favourite Wei Yi of China. Aravindh took his tally to five points out of a possible seven and now enjoys a half point lead over Praggnanandhaa who needs to catch up.

With just two rounds to come, Sam Shankland of United States defeated Quang Leim Le of Vietnam. Interestingly, both Quang Leim and Giri had drawn the first six games and the axe fell on them at the same time.

In the other decisive game 16-years old Gurel Ediz of Turkey scored over local Nguyen Thai Dai Van to reach a fifty percent score while David Navara of Czech Republic played out a draw with Vincent Keymer of Germany.

Aravindh on five and Pragg on 4.5 are now followed by Wei Yi, Ediz, Keymer and Shankland on 3.5 points each and these four are a half point adrift of the trio of Giri, Navara and Le.Dai Van is alone at the bottom now with 2.5 points in his kitty. The battle lines are drawn between the two Indians only. Aravindh is a cool customer in normal positions with a deep eye for tactical complexities and a rare chance against Giri provided him to dismantle the king side and enter record books.

There are as many as five Indi-

ans in top 15 live world rankings and Viswanathan Anand stands at number 15. Aravindh at 14, entered the top fifteen for the first time ever. It was a Queen's gambit declined wherein Giri overestimated his chances and pushed his king side pawns in trying to secure a space advantage. Aravindh came up with a shocker on his 24th turn when he put his knight in front of a pawn and it was a one-way tide thereon. Black's attack was soon impossible to handle and Aravindh won in 39 moves.

Praggnanandhaa started with the English opening against Wei Yi and the game took shape in a Tarasch defense wherein the Chinese was under some pressure but never really out of the game.

The Indian won a pawn to reach a rook and pawns endgame and despite having a passed pawn deep outside the position was technically drawn. The game lasted 61 moves.

In the challengers' section, Jonas Buhl Bjerre added to the woes of lone Indian Divya Deshmukh who remained at the last spot on 1.5 points from seven games.

The lead in this section is shared by Bjerre and Nodirbek Yakubov of Uzbekistan on 5.5 points each. Results round 6: Quang Leim Le (Vic, 3) lost to Sam Shankland (Usa, 2.5); R Praggnanandhaa (Ind, 4.5) drew with Wei Yi (Chn, 3.5); Anish Giri (Ned, 3) lost to Aravindh Chithambaram (Ind, 5); Gurel Ediz (Tur, 3.5) beat Nguyen Thai Dai Van (Cze, 2.5); David Navara (Cze, 3) drew with Vincent Keymer (Ger, 3.5). (PTI)

My job is to promote golf and not think about litigation: IGU president

NEW DELHI, March 6: Indian Golf Union president Brijender Singh is not bothered about the litigation filed in the Delhi High Court by rival faction led by Harish Shetty, saying his group enjoys the support of the Sports Ministry and the international body, and his job is to promote the sport.

Due to infighting and fallout between Singh and former secretary-general Shetty, the IGU had two separate elections in December. While the ministry and the International Golf Federation

gave recognition to the Singh faction, the Indian Olympic Association (IOA) backed Shetty's group. The IOA was also rapped by the ministry and IGF for interfering in the IGU elections.

Unhappy with the decision, the Shetty group then filed a litigation against the other group in the Delhi High Court. The first hearing of the case took place in March 3 with the next hearing scheduled for March 27.

"If I start wondering and working towards what is happening it doesn't help

because ultimately the court is going to give the order. As of now, the court is telling us 'you are the right people, go ahead and do your job' and so we are doing our job."

"If tomorrow court tells me 'you are not the right people, somebody else is', I will step aside," said Singh during an event to share details on the Hero Indian Open, schedule to commence on March 27.

"My responsibility as the president of the incumbent council is to do an

honest job and promote the game, and I am doing that. I am fulfilling all my responsibilities as a president because that is the mandate I have got from the ministry, International Golf Federation and even the court. So I am not too worried."

Meanwhile, the IGU, in collaboration with golf management firm K&A Golf, will host Super 6, a new initiative to promote the game at the grassroots level, on March 24 at the DLF Golf and Country Club in Gurugram. (PTI)

Australian tennis great Fred Stolle has died at age 86

MELBOURNE, March 6: Fred Stolle, a winner of two Grand Slam singles titles and 17 major doubles trophies, has died, Tennis Australia said Thursday. He was 86.

Stolle was an "iconic figure" in tennis as a player and later as a commentator for Australia's Nine Network and U.S. broadcasters, Tennis Australia CEO Craig Tiley said. Tiley did not provide a cause of death.

The 1.91-meter (6-foot-3) Stolle was part of Australia's successful era in the 1960s as tennis progressed from an amateur to professional sport.

Nicknamed "Fiery Fred" or "Fiery" for short, he lost the first five Grand Slam singles finals he reached — four of them to fellow Australian Roy Emerson. He also fell in consecutive Wimbledon finals in 1963, 1964 and 1965. He broke through on his least favorite surface, on clay at the 1965 French Championships, beating Tony Roche in the final.

"I lost a bunch of those to Emmo but against anybody else

I felt comfortable," Stolle told the Tennis Channel. "The French was not the one I was supposed to win, but it was exciting for me." At the 1966 U.S. Championships in Forest Hills, he beat John Newcombe in another all-Australian final, becoming only the second unseeded champion. Newcombe was also unseeded. Stolle beat three seeds to reach the final. Afterward, he held the No. 1 ranking and turned pro.

He won 10 men's doubles titles at Grand Slams from 1962-69, four each with Bob Hewitt and Emerson and two with Ken Rosewall. He's one of the few to win all four doubles majors.

Stolle also won seven mixed doubles majors, his partners including Margaret Court, Lesley Turner Bowrey and Ann Haydon Jones.

He won the Davis Cup in 1964, 1965 and 1966. His most notable win was in 1964 in Cleveland where, with Australia 2-1 down, he beat American Dennis Ralston 7-5, 6-3, 3-6, 9-11, 6-4. (AP)

Cricket in the UAE: How Emirates' dream stalled even as Afghanistan soar

DUBAI, March 6: "The winter never felt so warm." Khurram Khan still feels the excitement coursing through his veins while remembering United Arab Emirates' stunning 3-1 ODI series win over Afghanistan in December 2014.

Khurram had played a big hand in that triumph, scoring 270 runs from three matches at an average of 270, including a hundred and two fifties.

Subsequently, they played in the 2015 World Cup but returned home with six defeats in as many matches, but things were looking up.

There was talent and a pathway, but a decade down the road the UAE have not made any other appearances in a global event.

This despite the UAE having some top-notch cricketing facilities including the ICC Academy. The Afghans are now a force to reckon with in white ball formats, but what went wrong with their fellow aspir-

ants? "It's not a great picture to be honest. What I see here is the lack of quality in domestic cricket. This has happened for the last 6-7 years. I've seen it going down gradually," Khurram told PTI.

The former UAE captain, who is now the head coach of Sharjah Cricket Academy, one of the oldest cricket training centres in the Emirates, said the absence of proper domestic 50-over tournaments are hampering his nation's progress.

"There was only one tournament for a long while and the (Emirates Cricket) Board has started another one — D50. But earlier we had 6-7 50-over tournaments here. That's what's hurting the team," he said.

Khurram said the lack of sufficient tournaments also affected the temperament of upcoming players.

"The boys lack this temperament, technique because they don't play many longer-version



matches. If you play shorter versions, you always start hitting from the first moment. There needs to be some planning and a vision which I think currently

is missing," he added. Gopal Jasapara, a veteran coach who runs the G-Force Cricket Academy here, agreed with Khurram.

"We are more into quantity than quality and it can give the false picture of growth sometimes. Quality is there, but the youngsters are viewing sports as a way to get a job. Basically, the mindset has changed."

"There are some 60 or 70 cricket grounds in the UAE, you know, privately owned. They just want to keep their ground busy. They organise a lot of tournaments in the evenings for young boys, and they take into the game without so much skills," said Jasapara.

On the other hand, Afghanistan, who were once based in the UAE for training because of the turmoil back home, are now a top white ball team.

Their players such as Rashid Khan are among the most sought-after players in the T20 leagues across the world. Khurram explained what set the Afghan cricket apart despite still not having a consistent home base. (PTI)

Gujarat Giants take on dominant Delhi Capitals with eye on WPL playoffs

LUCKNOW, March 6: With two consecutive wins firming up their bid for a spot in the Women's Premier League playoffs, Gujarat Giants will look to carry forward the momentum in their top-of-the-table clash against Delhi Capitals here on Friday.

Gujarat Giants were languishing at the bottom of the WPL points table but two big wins — by six wickets over Royal Challengers Bengaluru and by 81 runs against UP Warriorz — have propelled them to the second position in the five-team points table.

On Friday, the second-ranked Giants, with six points in as many games, will have the perfect opportunity to put their recent ascent to test against a formidable Delhi Capitals, who sit atop the table with 10 points.

Delhi Capitals, who have already booked a place in the playoffs, would be keen to record a win and take their tally to 12 points and, in the process, also better their net run rate to seal their spot in the final.

It seems like things are falling in place at last for the Giants, who showed determination against all odds to beat RCB in a low-scoring thriller, with skipper Ashleigh Gardner (58 not out) and Phoebe Litchfield (30 not out) taking the side over the line.

The Giants then demolished UP Warriorz by 81 runs in their previous outing, riding on Beth Mooney's stunning 96 not out and a collective show from their bowlers to restricted the opponents to a mere 105 in pur-



suit of 187.

The huge win not only lifted the Giants from the last spot but also improved their NRR to 0.357 from -0.450, better than the third-placed Mumbai Indians (0.166) with whom they are tied on six points.

Additionally, with MI having three more games left, the Giants will be keen to keep their fate in their hands and not depend on the outcomes of other games.

Giants' pacers, in particular, exploited the new ball and conditions to good effect,

blowing away UP Warriorz's batting after Mooney missed recording the first-ever ton by any player in this WPL.

Their recent performances would surely fuel their fire but the Giants will have to be wary of the all-round strength of the Delhi Capitals, who too would be keen for a win, for it would help them finish at the top and qualify directly for the final.

Currently, Delhi Capitals hold the top spot with 10 points from seven matches. They are in pole position to finish first, which would

ensure direct entry into the title round.

The teams finishing second and third will face off in the Eliminator next week.

Meg Lanning has blown hot and cold this season but still remains dangerous, while India batter Shafali Verma (260 runs) has lit up the tournament with her aggressive stroke-play. Jess Jonassen has made all-round contributions for Delhi with 128 runs and joint second-highest nine wickets.

DC's new-ball pair of Marizanne Kapp and Shikha Pandey poses a threat to the Giants' batters, who would look to build their innings around an in-form Mooney and India's Harleen Deol.

Teams:

Delhi Capitals: Meg Lanning (c), Jemimah Rodrigues, Shafali Verma, Sneha Deepthi, Alice Caspey, Annabel Sutherland, Arundhati Reddy, Jess Jonassen, Marizanne Kapp, Minnu Mani, Nallapureddy Shree Charani, Niki Prasad, Radha Yadav, Shikha Pandey, Nandini Kashyap (wk), Sarah Bryce (wk), Taniyaa Bhatia (wk), Titas Sadhu.

Gujarat Giants: Ashleigh Gardner (c), Beth Mooney (wk), Bharti Fulmali, Laura Wolvaardt, Phoebe Litchfield, Simran Shaikh, Danielle Gibson, Dayalan Hemalatha, Deandra Dottin, Harleen Deol, Sayali Satghare, Tanuja Kanwer, Kashvee Gautam, Mannat Kashyap, Meghna Singh, Prakashika Naik, Priya Mishra, Shabnam Shakil.

Match starts at 7:30PM IST. (PTI)

Shubhankar to lead India's challenge at Hero Indian Open



NEW DELHI, March 6: Two-time winner on the DP World Tour, Shubhankar Sharma and last year's runner-up Veer Ahlawat will lead a strong Indian field in the 2005 edition of the Hero Indian Open golf tournament to be held at the DLF Golf and Country Club, Gurugram from March 27 to 30.

The other Indians confirmed so far in the 138-player field are Shiv Kapur and Manu Gandas, among others.

Another highlight is Indian teen prodigy Kartik Singh, who has been in form and finished in the top-10 in his last three international amateur events (twice in South Africa and once in Australia).

Ahlawat won the Indian Order of Merit and is now competing at the DP World Tour.

Local golfer Gandas also played in the DP World Tour in 2023.

Defending champion, Keita Nakajima of Japan will lead the international challenge at the USD 2.25 million tournament.

Joining the 24-year-old Nakajima will be Germany's Marcel Siem, who clinched the championship in 2023, ending a 10-year title drought.

Among other notable names from abroad are Jacques Kruyswijk, Johannes Veerman, Julien Guerrier, Angel Hidalgo, Frederic Lacroix, David Ravetto, Ewen Ferguson, and Guido

Migliozzi among others.

The Hero Indian Open 2025 is part of the Asian Swing, that features the Singapore Classic, China Open, and Hainan Classic.

Co-sanctioned by the Indian Golf Union (IGU), the tournament offers the Indian Tour winner a full card for the following year on the DP World Tour.

"The Hero Indian Open is one of Asia's most prestigious golf tournaments and has played a crucial role in the development of Indian golf, having been instrumental in showcasing India's golfing talent at a global level," IGU president Brijinder Singh said.

"Hero Indian Open serves as an inspiration as well as a stepping stone for Indian golfers aiming to make it big on the world stage."

DP World Tour's Chief Tournament and Operations Officer Ben Cowen added: "We are very excited to return to India for the 58th edition of the historic Hero Indian Open. The Hero Indian Open, India's national open has gone from strength to strength."

"I would also like to thank the IGU for their hard work in continuing to develop golf in India."

With an aim to promote golf, there will be a gaming zone during the event where anyone can try their hand and get a first-hand idea about the sport. There will also be coaches to guide kids and budding golfers. (PTI)

It wasn't ideal situation: Miller on CT semifinal scheduling

LAHORE, March 6: South African batter David Miller has questioned the scheduling of the second Champions Trophy semifinal that his side lost to New Zealand in Lahore.

South Africa had to get an early morning flight to Dubai the night after playing their final group game in Karachi. With the tournament being played in a hybrid model, both Australia and South Africa were camped in Dubai waiting for the result of the group game between India and New Zealand.

As Group B toppers, South Africa had to take the flight back to Pakistan to play their semifinal as the last-four clash involving India was to be staged in Dubai.

After scoring a hundred in a losing cause, Miller termed the scheduling not ideal.

"It's only an hour-and-40-minute flight, but the fact that we had to do that. It's early morning, it's after a game, and we had to fly. Then we got to Dubai at 4pm."

"And at 7.30 in the morning we had to come back. It doesn't make it nice. It's not like we flew five



hours, and we had enough time to recover and recuperate. But it was not an ideal situation still," Miller was quoted as saying by ESPN-cricinfo.

Miller's comments come after his teammate Rassie van der Dussen had referred to India's advantage of playing all their games

at one venue.

Though he wants New Zealand to win the final against India, Miller expects it to be a tight affair.

"They're both incredibly good teams. India have shown the world how really good they are. They've been playing some good cricket for a number of years now and they've got some seriously good players. It's going to be a great game," said Miller.

South Africa had lost last year's T20 World Cup final to India and on Wednesday they once again failed in a knockout game.

"There were really good contributions, a couple of fifties up front. We had a really good foundation. Unfortunately, in the middle, we lost a couple of wickets too many," he said of the steep run chase against New Zealand.

"At the end of the day, it's a team effort. Everyone's trying out there to do their best. It would have been nice to have a rematch against India. But life is not fair sometimes. Anyone has to work really hard to achieve trophies." (PTI)

Bangladesh's Mushfiqur Rahim retires from ODIs

DHAKA, March 6: Veteran Bangladesh wicket-keeper batter Mushfiqur Rahim has retired from ODI cricket with immediate effect.

The 37-year-old was part of Bangladesh's squad that exited the Champions Trophy from the group stage.

He made the announcement on social media.

"I am announcing my retirement from the ODI format as of today. Alhamdulillah (Thank God) for everything. While our achievements may have been limited on a global level, one thing is certain: whenever I stepped onto the field for my country, I gave more than 100% with dedication and honesty," Rahim wrote on his official Facebook page.

"The last few weeks have been very challenging for me, and I have come to realize that this is my destiny. Lastly, I would like to deeply thank my family, friends and my fans for whom I have played cricket for the last 19 years," he added.

Rahim made his ODI debut almost 20 years ago and ended up representing the country in 274 ODIs, aggregating 7795 runs at an average of 36.42. Only Tamim Iqbal (8357 runs) has scored more ODI runs than him for Bangladesh.

He has also played 94 Tests and 102 T20s. In the team's disappointing Champions Trophy campaign, Rahim failed to score against India before making just two runs against New Zealand. (PTI)

300 women boxers to compete in national championship

NEW DELHI, March 6: As many as 300 pugilists will compete for glory at the 8th Elite Women's National Boxing Championship in Greater Noida from March 21-27.

Organised in association with the UP Boxing Association, the tournament returns to the venue that hosted its last edition in 2023.

Held under the World Boxing and Boxing Federation of India (BFI) competition guidelines, the championship is open to boxers born between January 1, 1984, and December 31, 2005.



Each state unit can field a maximum of 10 boxers, with entries by numbers closing on March 10 and final name confirmation due by March 15.

The action officially begins on March 20 with the arrivals, draw, and technical meeting. The opening rounds will take place from March 21 to 24, followed by the quarter-finals on March 25 and the semi-finals on March 26, leading up to the finals on March 27.

The tournament will follow a three-round format, with each bout consisting of three-minute rounds with a one-minute rest period. The ten-point scoring system will be in place, and all matches will adhere to World Boxing Technical & Competition Rules.

Boxers will also be required to undergo a daily weigh-in throughout the competition.

Beyond the 300 competing boxers, the championship will also bring together over 100 coaches and support staff, along with 60 technical officials, ensuring a top-tier spectacle.

Defending champions Railway Sports Promotion Board (RSPB) will be looking to retain their title after a dominant performance in the previous edition, where they clinched five gold medals, one silver, and two bronzes.

RSPB nudged Haryana by eight points, the latter finishing second with seven medals, including three golds, three silvers, and a bronze. (PTI)

LAHORE, March 6: New Zealand batting mainstay Kane Williamson reckons India have "real clarity" on how they want to operate in Dubai, having played all their Champions Trophy games at the same venue but his team will also be reasonably well-prepared for the tournament finale due to its limited past familiarity with conditions.

Williamson did not specifically say that India had an advantage of playing at one venue, choosing to compare it to New Zealand's understanding of conditions in Lahore, where they beat South Africa on Wednesday to set up a final clash against the Rohit Sharma-led side in Dubai on Sunday.

New Zealand had played two games in Lahore during the preceding tri-series involving Pakistan and South Africa.

"I suppose having played there on a number of occasions; there's real clarity in how they want to operate," said Williamson when asked if India go into the final with an advantage of knowing the conditions.

"A little bit like our opportunity here, having played a number of times at this venue as well and I think that's part and parcel in cricket," he added.

Having scored a hundred in the



semifinal, Williamson is high on confidence and looking forward to the final.

"It is what it is (India play all games in Dubai). Our focus is the next match, the location of that match, the opposition, they're all factors. Obviously, we played India once there," he said.

"The conditions are different,

so it's important that we try and take away some of those positives and be nice and clear in how we're trying to operate come two or three-days' time in the final," he said referring to New Zealand's loss to India in the group stage.

Both Williamson and Rachin Ravindra struck hundreds to fas-



ion New Zealand's emphatic win. Williamson called Ravindra, who has score two hundreds in three games, a special talent.

"It's a final, so it's exciting. If we go back to Rachin, an incredibly special talent. It's always great to bat with him. He goes out and he puts the team first and he plays with that freedom."

Will need to adapt on unknown Dubai pitch: Ravindra



LAHORE, March 6: Dashing New Zealand opener Rachin Ravindra feels adapting to the conditions will be key to succeed on an "unknown" Dubai surface in the Champions Trophy final against India on Sunday.

Except the group match against India in Dubai, New Zealand have played all their games in Pakistan. The Kiwis had also played two games in Lahore during the preceding tri-series involving Pakistan and South Africa.

India, on the other, have played all their matches in Dubai and are familiar with the conditions.

"We don't quite know what the Dubai pitch is. We saw in our (group) game against India the ball turning but the other day didn't turn so much. We found ourselves adapting and playing according to situations, which we will need to do on Sunday again."

"We will see in the next couple of days and hopefully it's a good cricket wicket," said Ravindra after an emphatic 50-run win over South Africa in the semifinal here on Wednesday.

Ravindra scored only six against India in the group, falling to Hardik Pandya while going for an upper cut, but the left-hander hopes for a better outing in the final.

"You get out pretty much every time you bat. Hopefully I can bat for a longer period of time and continue to play well for my team," he said.

He is also aware about the expectations from the side in any big ICC event.

"Whenever you approach a tournament, you expect hopefully to be among the top four teams and lucky enough we have been consistently good over a period of time."

"We are happy with our preparation, coming here early, we can see we are cooking reasonably well. Trust and ability around the group is great."

Ravindra (108) smashed his second century of the tournament on Wednesday and together with Kane Williamson (102) starred in New Zealand's win.

Senior middle-order batter Daryl Mitchell, who made 49 off 37 balls in the semifinal, said the loss to India in the group stage is a thing of the past not and the final will be a new day.

"The final is a new day and really excited to stuck into that challenge and adapt to whatever conditions and surfaces we get on the day and find ways to win moments throughout that game."

"Hopefully, we can put some pressure on them and walk away with white jacket," he said.

Mitchell is not interested in poking his nose in the talks surrounding an unfair advantage to India because of playing all their matches at one venue.

"Just really happy with winning the game today and moving onto the final, it's an exciting opportunity," Mitchell said.

"That's the nature of international cricket. We do a lot of travelling and we are used to that. It's not for me to decide how the tournament should be planned. I am just excited to be in an ICC final and looking forward to play in a few days time." (PTI)

India have real clarity on how they want to operate in Dubai: Williamson