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UNION HOME MINISTER ATTACKS CONGRESS

Modi restored peace, developed infra in NE: Shah

DERGAON, March 15: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Saturday alleged that the Congress did not allow peace to prevail in Assam, but PM Narendra Modi restored it, developed infrastructure and ensured employment for the youth of the northeastern state.

Shah was speaking after inaugurating the first phase of the re-vamped Lachit Barphukan Police Academy at Dergaon in Golaghat district. He also laid the foundation for the second phase.

"Over 10,000 youths have laid down arms and joined the mainstream in Assam, with peace returning to the state during the last 10 years. Assam, which was known for agitation, violence and insurgency, now has the most modern semiconductor industry. An amount of ₹ 27,000 crore is being invested here for a semiconductor unit, which is going to change the future of Assam," he asserted.

Shah also said while investment proposals of over ₹ 5 lakh crore have been received in the recently concluded Advantage Assam 2.0 business summit, infrastructure projects worth another ₹ 3 lakh crore will be implemented in the



state by the central government.

"These projects worth ₹ 8 crore lakh will create such an environment that youths from across the country will come here for jobs," the home minister said.

Under the Narendra Modi-led government, the Bodo Peace Accord in 2020, Karbi Accord in 2021, Adivasi Peace Accord in 2022 and the peace pact with the ULFA in 2023 were signed, he said.

Agreements to settle border dis-

putes with Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh have also been signed, Shah said.

Slamming the previous Congress governments, Shah alleged that there was no peace and infrastructure development, and no grants given to Assam, which witnessed agitation and violence.

Recalling his visit to Assam during his student days, he said, "I had faced lathicharge. It was during the government of Hiteswar Saikia (of the Congress). I have spent seven

days in jail in Assam."

Claiming that the situation in the state has undergone a sea-change under the BJP-led governments in the past few years, he said, "The saffron party had promised peace to the people and we have delivered it."

He said the increase in conviction rate "from 5 per cent to 25 per cent in the last three years" is indicative of the improved situation, adding that the figure will cross the national average soon.

"Policing in Assam was earlier for fighting terrorists, but now it is people-centric," Shah said.

The home minister also said the fact that over 2,000 police personnel from Goa and Manipur have been trained in Assam in recent times proves the restoration of peace in this northeastern state.

He maintained that the Lachit Barphukan Police Academy will be the top police training centre in the country in the next five years.

"The way in which this academy has been visualised, I am sure it will be the number one such facility in the country over the next five years," Shah said. Lauding the naming of (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Assam Cong spokesperson arrested for social media post



GUWAHATI / NORTH LAKHIMPUR, March 15: Assam Congress Spokesperson Reetam Singh was on Saturday arrested for a social media post enquiring about the status of cases registered against three senior BJP leaders, including a former state chief and two serving MLAs.

He was arrested from his home in Guwahati by a team of Lakhimpur district police with assistance from the Guwahati Police.

Lakhimpur Superintendent of Police Mihirjit Gayan told PTI that Singh was arrested after a complaint by the wife of BJP MLA Manab Deka for a post on X two days ago.

"We have arrested him under relevant sections of law. He is being brought to Lakhimpur now," he added.

Singh made a post on X on March 13 with a news report about three individuals being convicted by a court for a rape case in the

Dhemaji district in 2021.

"These culprits got the punishment they deserved. But what @BJP4Assam r@pe accused Ministers and MLAs like Manab Deka, Ex Party President Bhabesh Kalita, ex Minister Rajen Gohain? Is the law equal for all?" the Congress leader had asked in his post.

Kalita, who was the BJP Assam president till January this year, is an MLA with Deka, while Gohain was the Union Minister of State for Railways during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's first term.

During the arrest of the Congress leader, a lot of drama unfolded at the apartment of the accused in the Ulubari area, with Singh initially claiming that no warrant or notice was served on him.

Hours later, deputy leader of Congress in Lok Sabha Gaurav Gogoi reached Singh's house and alleged that his colleague was dragged by police on a day when Union home minister Amit Shah was in the state. "A team of Lakhimpur (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

BJP slams quota for Muslim contractors in Karnataka, questions Rahul's visits to Vietnam

NEW DELHI, March 15: The BJP on Saturday slammed the Karnataka government's decision to reserve four per cent of government contracts for Muslims as unconstitutional, alleging that it is part of the Congress' appeasement politics and will weaken the national unity.

Addressing a press conference, BJP leader and former Union minister Ravi Shankar Prasad also asked Congress leader Rahul Gandhi to explain his "extraordinary fondness" for Vietnam, claiming the leader of opposition in Lok Sabha is spending more time in that country than his constituency.

Gandhi is said to be in Vietnam during Holi after spending time there during the New Year as well, he claimed.

"The frequency of his visit to that country is very curious," Prasad said.

He accused Gandhi of seeking to



lead the Congress in the competitive communal and vote bank politics among opposition parties, claiming that he is behind the Karnataka government's decision for quota for Muslim contractors.

Such a decision may seem small but developments like these add up to have serious national implications, Prasad said, wondering if

there is any limit to such competitive appeasement politics and if separate queues for Muslims in buying cinema and train tickets will come next. The former law minister claimed that such decisions also weaken the voice for those Muslims who are against such politics and stand for the country's (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

HT BRIEFS

Woman missing

BOKAJAN: A 22-year-old married woman, Christina Rongpharpi, went missing from her home at Borlai Hanse village in Bokajan, Karbi Anglong, leaving behind her 3-year-old son. The husband, Agustin Terang, gave details to the media at his home, saying that she went out of the home in the morning and was going to the market. Terang said that he has already informed his in-laws. However, he has not filed a missing person report with the police. He requested his wife that wherever she might be, she could come home and stay as before. Terang requested that anyone having any information about her contact the numbers 6003451774/6026509320.

Youth injured

JORHAT: A youth was severely injured and admitted to JMCH after he was attacked by a group of youths at JPR road area here on Saturday, amidst Holi celebrations. According to a source, the victim identified as Dip Bora, 30, of Fancy Ali locality here, was reportedly assaulted with a bottle and as soon as people rushed to his aid, the attackers fled. Police arrested a youth identified as Shasanka Bhushan Choudhary, 24, of Dohabora chook, who allegedly admitted his crime. A few others have also been picked up by the police for questioning.

Assamese composer Lakshyahira Das dies at 94

GUWAHATI, March 15: Eminent Assamese composer Lakshyahira Das died on Saturday due to age-related ailments, her family said.

Das, 94, is survived by three sons.

A retired professor of Education in the erstwhile Cotton College, she was the first female artist to receive All India Radio's approval as a lyricist, composer and singer in 1948 while she was still in college.

She has composed over 2,000 songs and written lyrics till recently for many prominent singers. She has also lent her voice to many songs over the years.

Das has also authored over 50

books, including those of poetry, children's stories, short stories, translations, and Education.

She was the recipient of several awards by the state government and other socio-cultural organisations.

Das was also a member of the Sahitya Akademi, Authors Guild of India, Poetry Society of India, and Asam Sahitya Sabha, among others.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said she will be remembered for her invaluable contribution to enriching the state's cultural and literary landscape. "She worked tirelessly for the empowerment of women and (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Cong flagging threats to economy: Jairam Ramesh

NEW DELHI, March 15: The Congress on Saturday said it has flagged a decade-long real income stagnation, a consumption boom entirely driven by the expansion of credit and deepening inequality as the three threats to the economy, and wondered what will it take for Prime Minister Narendra Modi to hear them.

Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh cited the remarks of chief investment officer of Marcellus Investments, Saurabh Mukherjee, to press his argument. "In a podcast interview, Chief Investment Officer of (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Amit Shah inaugurates Lachit Barphukan Police Academy in Dergaon

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, March 15: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Saturday inaugurated the Lachit Barphukan Police Academy in Dergaon of Golaghat district, said an official statement.

The police academy, inaugurated in the presence of Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, has been constructed with advanced training infrastructure and modern technological facilities.

Additionally, the Union Home Minister laid the foundation stone for the construction of the academy's residential complex.

Speaking on the occasion, Sarma remarked that, for the first time in 400 years since the birth of Lachit Barphukan, the Assam state

government has established an institution dedicated to his legacy.

Sarma further expressed his gratitude on behalf of the people of Assam, and thanked the Union home minister for his guidance in the realisation of this endeavour.

"During the 400th birth anniversary celebrations of the brave general in New Delhi, the Union Home Minister had proposed translating his biography into multiple Indian languages and later visited Assam to inaugurate these translated works," Sarma recalled.

Describing state Police as a distinguished institution of the state, Sarma stated that the Assam Police Academy in Dergaon has been instrumental in training officers and personnel, contributing to the de-

velopment of a strong police force.

"₹167 crore have been allocated for the construction of the Academy's main building and a police museum, and in the next phase, approximately ₹400 crore would be invested in residential facilities for police personnel and trainees," he added.

He further announced further plans for a large-scale sports infrastructure within the campus, similar to the one in Sarusajai, Guwahati, a CBSE school, a nursing academy, and a skill development centre to benefit both the Assam Police and the local community.

"The state government is also considering establishing a police medical college within the campus in (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

BJP announces six candidates for RHAC elections

HT Correspondent
JORHAT, March 15: Assam BJP president Dilip Saikia, who is also the MP from Darrang-Udalguri, announced the names of six candidates for the upcoming Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council (RHAC) elections, scheduled to take place on April 2.

Addressing the media at the Jorhat Circuit House on Friday, Saikia highlighted that three of the six candidates were women.

Saikia further stated that the BJP would contest the RHAC elections under the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) banner, sharing seats with the Rabha Hasong Joutho Sangrami Mancha.

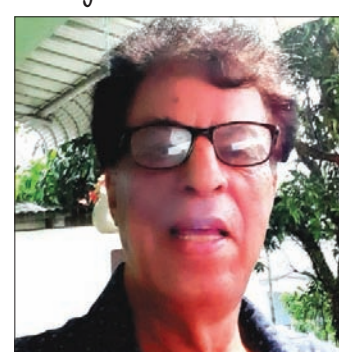
"The Mancha will contest 29 constituencies, while the BJP will

field candidates in six of the 36 constituencies. The Assam Gana Parishad (AGP) might contest in one constituency, though this had not been confirmed yet," he added.

The six BJP candidates announced are Suchitra Nath for 15-Agia, Bhairab Kachari for 2-Kothakuthi (ST), Premajuli Rabha for 20-Jayramkuchi (ST, women), Meghali Rabha for 22-Bondapara (ST), Ajit Rabha for 30-Bamunigaon (ST), and Kamalashwar Rabha for 35-Shilpota (ST).

It is worth mentioning that 20 of the constituencies in the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council are in Goalpara district, while the remaining 16 are in Kamrup. Later, Saikia urged (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Ex Akashvani director conferred with Moghai Oja Award 2025



HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, March 15: The Moghai Oja Kalakhetra has conferred the Ganashilpi Moghai Oja Award 2025 on Syed Sadulla, the former director of Akashvani Dibrugarh Centre and a noted artist, said an official statement on Saturday.

As per the statement, the award will be conferred on Sadulla on April 19 during Bohagi Utsav celebrations.

"The announcement came on the occasion of the people's artist Moghai Oja's 45th death anniversary," the statement quoted Kalakhetra's president Ratul Chandra Bora and chief secretary Nilomoni Bora as saying.

Both the president and the chief secretary said that the Akashvani Dibrugarh Centre in 1977 conducted an interview of the people's artist and recorded a musical rendition through which the memories of the artist have been made eternal.

In 1977, Sadulla was serving as the Programme Director at the Dibrugarh Centre of Akashvani. In the later years, he recorded songs and composed essays on Oja's life, thereby immortalising his works.

The statement further mentioned that in the 1970s, when Oja was hospitalised at AMCH before his death, Sadulla conducted an interview (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

CEC meeting on voter ID card issue a face-saving measure, says TMC

NEW DELHI, March 15: Trinamool Congress on Saturday said the meeting convened by the Chief Election Commissioner to discuss voter identity card and Aadhaar seeding is a "face-saving measure".

With allegations of voter ID number duplication and fudging of electoral roll data, chief election commissioner Gyanesh Kumar has convened a meeting with the Union home secretary, the legislative secretary, and chief executive officer of the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) on March 18, to discuss the linking of Electoral Photo Identity Card (EPIC) with Aadhaar.

Sagarika Ghose, deputy leader of Trinamool Congress (TMC) in Rajya Sabha, said the statements issued by the poll panel earlier over the duplicate EPIC numbers and this meeting being called now,

are "face-saving measures".

She added that the TMC will keep a strict vigil till the next state elections.

"First, three statements. Now this meeting. This is just a face-saving measure. We will keep a hawk-eye vigil till the elections," Ghose said.

On March 11, a 10-member TMC delegation had met the full Election Commission bench over the duplicate EPIC numbers.

In a memorandum to the Election Commission, the TMC had also said there have been "credible allegations of Aadhaar cards being cloned and the use of these cloned Aadhaar cards to facilitate fake voter registrations."

Pointing out that the Election Commission has not clearly stated on its Form 6B that seeding Aadhaar with EPIC is an entirely voluntary (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

'We are home to followers of virtually every major religion in the world' Religious discrimination affects followers of all faiths: India

UNITED NATIONS, March 15: India has said it stands united with the UN members in condemning incidents of religious intolerance against Muslims, as it underlined the need to recognise that religious discrimination is a broader challenge affecting followers of all faiths.

"India is a land of diversity and pluralism. We are home to followers of virtually every major religion in the world and India has been the birthplace of four world religions namely Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism. With over 200 million of its citizens practising Islam, India is home to one of the largest Muslim populations in the world," India's Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador P



Harish said on Friday.

Addressing the informal meeting of the plenary in the UN General Assembly to commemorate the International Day to Combat Islamophobia, Harish said that fostering a

world free from religious discrimination, hatred and violence has been a way of life for India since time immemorial.

"We stand united with the UN membership in condemning inci-

dents of religious intolerance against Muslims. However, it is also imperative to recognise that religious discrimination is a broader challenge that affects followers of all faiths," the Indian envoy said.

"We strongly believe that the path to meaningful progress lies in acknowledging that religio-phobia in its various forms threatens the fabric of our diverse, global society," he added.

Harish began his statement Friday by conveying greetings on the holy month of Ramadan as well as Holi wishes as the festival of colours was celebrated across India and around the world.

India voiced concern over the disturbing rise in violence targeting places of (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Two electronics clusters worth ₹1,112 cr to be set up in TN: Vaishnaw



NEW DELHI, March 15: Union Minister for Electronics and Information Technology Ashwini Vaishnaw on Saturday said two electronics manufacturing clusters worth ₹1,112 crore, will be set up in Tamil Nadu.

Speaking at the inauguration of Zetwerk Electronics' seventh manufacturing facility in Sriperumbudur, about 55 kms from here, Vaishnaw highlighted that the electronics in-

dustry has become the country's second largest export sector, surpassing several traditional industries in the past decade.

The new facility, part of a ₹1,000 crore investment, will produce electronic components for various sectors, including consumer durables and IT hardware, and will serve both domestic and international markets in the future.

After unveiling the plaque to mark the inauguration of the Zetwerk electronics plant, Vaishnaw emphasised how the electronics industry had rapidly grown, overtaking several long-standing export industries in the last 10 years.

Zetwerk Electronics co-founder, Rahul Sharma noted that the new plant is the company's seventh in India and is part of a ₹1,000 crore investment. The Sriperumbudur facility, located in a key industrial zone, is expected to employ approximately 1,500 people.

In an effort to give fillip to electronics manufacturing, Vaishnaw said the government will invest ₹1,112 crore to establish two electronics manufacturing clusters in Tamil Nadu.

"One facility will come up in Pillaipakkam (Kancheepuram) and the other at Manalur (Thiruvallur district). They will be large electronics manufacturing clusters and these two will give a big growth to Tamil Nadu and to the country," he said in his brief address.

The Union Minister also thanked state governments, including Tamil Nadu, for their support in boosting India's electronic exports and acknowledged their efforts in realising Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of transforming the domestic electronics market into a \$500 billion industry.

Vaishnaw, who is also the Union Railways Minister, took a dig at the previous UPA regime saying the budget allocation for Tamil Nadu railways was 'miniscule' whereas it was ₹6,636 crore to the state. (PTI)

NFR to run more Holi special train between Naharlagun and Charlapalli

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 15: The Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) has decided to run an additional Holi special train between Naharlagun and Charlapalli to manage the surge in passenger demand during the festive season, said an official statement.

These trains will operate for three trips each, ensuring enhanced connectivity in the region and improved travel options for commuters. This train will run between March 15 till April 1, 2025.

Informing about the schedule, the statement said, special train no 07046 (Charlapalli– Naharlagun) will depart from Charlapalli at 0840 hours on of March 15, 22 and 29, 2025 on every Saturday to reach Naharlagun at 1600 on Monday.

Similarly, special train no 07047 (Naharlagun – Charlapalli) will depart from Naharlagun at 1300 hours on March 18 and 25 and April 1, 2025 on every Tuesday to reach Charlapalli at 2130 hours on Thursdays.

These trains will run via Hamuti Jn, Rangiya Jn, New Bongaigaon, New Coochbehar, New Jalpaiguri, Malda Town, Kharagpur Jn, Cuttack, Vizianagaram Jn, Vijayawada Jn, Nalgonda etc. railway stations.

The Holi special train will consist of 18 coaches, the statement said. There will be AC 2-Tier, AC 3-Tier and sleeper class coaches for ensuring passenger comfort and convenience.

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

Goyal hands over keys of new homes

MUMBAI, March 15: Union Minister Piyush Goyal on Friday handed over keys of new homes to 91 slum dwellers displaced by a road project in Borivali West in North Mumbai.

Speaking at the event, the Commerce and Industry Minister said, "Eligible slum dwellers should get homes in the same locality. Officials must work with integrity to expedite the slum rehabilitation process. No outsider should enter this area illegally, and no local resident should be unfairly displaced. Authorities must ensure this". (PTI)

LOST

We have lost our Kishan Vikash Patra (KVP) Post Office Certificates in between January to February, 2025 in Diphu town, P.O. & P.S., Diphu, district, Karbi Anglong, bearing the following certificate No. 70CD471890; 40BC467078; 40BC469467; 40BC471071 of Manik Mazumdar and 40BC471072; 40BC471069; 40BC471070; 40BC470174 and 40BC470173 of Subhobroto Mazumdar. Both are residents of Sitalabari, Diphu town, P.O. & P.S., Diphu, district Karbi Anglong.

Any person (s) finding the same may kindly contact at the mobile numbers given below. Mobile No. 88221-32755.

With Trump's zigzag actions on trade, March came in like a lion

WASHINGTON, March 15: A gobsmacked planet is wondering what's next from President Donald Trump on the tariff spree he's set in zigzag motion. In recent weeks, Trump has announced punishing tariffs against allies and adversaries alike, selectively paused and imposed them, doubled and then halved some, and warned late in the week that he'll tax European wine and spirits a stratospheric 200 per cent if the European Union doesn't drop a 50 per cent tariff on US whiskey.

His ultimate stated goal is clear: to revive American manufacturing and win compromises along the way. But people and nations whose fortunes rise and fall on trade are trying to divine a method to his machinations.

So far, he's spurred fears about slower growth and higher inflation that are dragging down the stock market and consumer confidence.

"His tariff policy is erratic, more erratic than April weather," Robert Halver, head of capital markets analysis at Germany's Baader Bank, said from the floor of the Frankfurt stock market. "So, there is no planning certainty at all."

The same goes for Exit 9 Wine and Liquor Warehouse in Clifton Park, New York, where owner Mark O'Callaghan is waiting to see if the prohibitive taxes



on European wine - over a third of his business - really happen.

He's mindful of Trump's seemingly whack-a-mole approach on which countries and goods to hit and how hard.

"It changes by the hour now, right?" O'Callaghan said. "You know, it's hard to navigate and manage, and everything changes so quickly."

In Canada, generations of political leaders took it as a point of pride that their country and the US share the "world's longest undefended border", as they liked to say. No more. (AP)

Indus Appstore partners with Xiaomi India

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 15: Indus Appstore, on Saturday announced a multi-year alliance with Xiaomi India, a global technology pioneer.

This collaboration underscores the shared commitment of Indus Appstore and Xiaomi India to foster a localised digital ecosystem tailored for Indian consumers.

By integrating Indus Appstore on all new Xiaomi smartphones in India and replacing GetApps on existing ones, the Indus Appstore aims to foster accessibility, app discovery, and a seamless user experience.

Speaking about the partnership, Priya M Narasimhan, chief business officer, Indus Appstore said, "Our partnership with Xiaomi India marks a significant mile-

stone towards our goal of building a horizontal app store for Indian Mobile Users and Developers. By combining Xiaomi India's reach with our localized app discovery platform, we're creating opportunities for developers while delivering a seamless, culturally-relevant experience to users. This partnership is just the beginning of our vision to transform how India discovers and experiences mobile apps."

Sudhin Mathur, chief operating officer, Xiaomi India, commented on the development, stating, "As India's digital ecosystem continues to grow, the demand for a locally driven app marketplace has never been more critical. At Xiaomi India, we have always championed 'Make for India'

innovations, and this partnership with Indus Appstore is a strategic step in that direction. By integrating Indus Appstore with our ecosystem, we aim to offer users a seamless and enriched app discovery experience, while also supporting Indian developers in reaching a wider audience. This partnership reflects both brands' unwavering commitment to fostering a robust and inclusive digital ecosystem in India, empowering users and developers alike."

This partnership will also help build a self-reliant, consumer-first digital infrastructure in the country by integrating a localised, feature-rich app marketplace, that will help drive innovation and accessibility for millions of users across the country.

China's Mixue and other brands win fans in Southeast Asia

HONG KONG, March 15: Chinese food and beverage brands are gaining ground across Southeast Asia, offering alternatives to big name American chains and expanding Beijing's commercial and cultural influence in neighboring economies.

The Chinese beverage giant Mixue Group has become the world's largest F&B chain by number of outlets, overtaking Starbucks and McDonald's.

The company, whose brand name Mixue Bingcheng means "Honey Snow Ice City," in Chinese, is capitalizing on the region-wide sweet tooth with affordable offerings of ice cream, coffee and bubble tea drinks.

"Even on social media like TikTok and others, there is a joke that any empty shophouse would soon turn into a Mixue store," Rahma Yuliana said, referring to a popular saying in Indonesia, where Mixue has more than 2,600 outlets.

The single mother, who runs an online business, takes her daughter for afterschool treats that won't drain her wallet, such as a cup of brown sugar milk tea that costs \$1.10, about one-third cheaper than similar offerings by rival Taiwanese tea chain Chatime. An ice

cream sells for as little as 50 cents, undercutting McDonald's.

As of September, Mixue Group had over 45,000 stores carrying its Mixue tea drinks, ice creams and Lucky Cup coffee products, more than the store numbers of Starbucks and McDonald's, industry analysts reported. About 40,000 of those are in China.

More broadly, by December, Chinese F&B brands had opened over 6,100 outlets in Southeast Asia, Singapore-headquartered research firm Momentum Works reported. India and Vietnam account for roughly two-thirds, while there are relatively more Chinese brands in Singapore and Malaysia, which have sizable Chinese-speaking populations.

Nearly all of Mixue's stores are franchises that the company supplies with ingredients for drinks like Creamy Mango Boba, Mango Oats Jasmine Tea and Coconut Jelly Milk Tea.

Apart from Mixue, other market stars include hotpot giant Haidilao, Fish With You sauerkraut fish restaurants, and well-known beverage brands such as Luckin Coffee, Heytea and Chagee.

Mixue's shares have doubled from their IPO price since their

March 3 trading debut in Hong Kong.

Momentum Works CEO Jianggan Li said Chinese businesses are actively seeking new growth in Southeast Asia after facing fierce competition in their home market.

The push by food and drink retailers has raised awareness that China has more to offer than just cheap electronics.

The companies are well-equipped, using automation to enhance their efficiency, and adept at online marketing, Li said. Big Western brands sometimes take a long time to find local partners and develop long-term plans. The Chinese F&B companies are "much more impatient," he said.

In Thailand's capital Bangkok, Chinese entrepreneur Siya Han has invested over \$1.37 million in 12 Mixue stores and about 10 other outlets selling spicy broth bowls, sauerkraut fish and fried chicken steaks in about six years. Outlets in shopping malls take time to recover costs due to huge rent deposits, she said, but her other outlets typically break even within six months to a year, excluding their lease guarantees.

"If you open Chinese restaurants slowly, you can't survive," she said. (AP)

Contd. from Page 1...

Modi restored peace,

the academy after the legendary Ahom general, who had made the Mughals bite the dust in the Battle of Saraighat in 1671, Shah said Barphukan's valour was not limited to Assam alone, but it is being taken to every nook and corner of the country by the state government.

The Ahom warrior's biography has been translated in 23 Indian languages and made available at libraries in various places, while history books of eight states will have chapters on his life and valour, Shah added. (PTI)

Assam Cong spokesperson

police have come to Guwahati to take custody of Congress spokesperson @SinghReetam. When I went to his residence, I saw how he was brutally dragged away and was not allowed to speak to me," Gogoi said in a post on X. Referring to Shah's official visit to Lachit Barphukan Police Academy in Golaghat district, the MP asked if the Union Home Minister was aware of the "misuse of police" under chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma.

"Is Home Minister Amit Shah aware that BJP thugs have brutally beaten up two Assam constables in broad daylight a few days ago and yet they have not been arrested," he said.

The chief minister is allegedly forcing the state police to adopt illegal activities, which conflict with the law and the High Court, Gogoi claimed.

"The track record of police officers is being spoiled by the political motivations of Himanta Biswa Sarma. People are watching," he added.

Earlier, Singh shared a few photographs, on X, of a strong posse of policemen outside his home and claimed that they came to arrest him without warrant and notice. (PTI)

Assamese composer Lakshyahira Das

her works will inspire generations to come. My thoughts are with her family and countless admirers. Om Shanti," Sarma posted on X.

In a statement, Union Ports Minister Sarbananda Sonowal said, "I am deeply saddened to hear of the passing of the revered artist, educator, and distinguished writer, Dr Lakshyahira Das Baidou (elder sister), whose heartfelt voice mesmerised countless listeners, including myself.

"Baidou's invaluable contribution to Assam's cultural and educational fields will always be remembered. In this moment of grief, I extend my deepest condolences to her bereaved family and admirers, and I pray for the eternal peace of her departed soul." (PTI)

Cong flagging threats to

Marcellus Investments, the well-known Saurabh Mukherjee has identified three threats to the Indian economy which the Congress has been flagging for months," Ramesh said in a post on X.

He said Mukherjee has identified "a pernicious, decade long real income stagnation for the majority of India's working people" and a "consumption boom which is entirely driven by the expansion of credit and is therefore highly unsustainable". The Congress leader said that Mukherjee had also flagged deepening inequality, with the elites expanding their wealth at rapid rates while the middle classes stagnate.

"Every serious economic commentator and analyst has more or less endorsed these same views. What will it take for the Prime Minister to hear them?" Ramesh said.

Last week, the Congress had cited an IMF report to flag "tepid" private investment growth in India. The opposition party had said the way out of the current "economic slump" requires measures to boost consumption, enhancing policy predictability and rationalising trade policy.

The Congress has been attacking the government over its handling of the economy, claiming the issues of rising prices, decreasing private investment and stagnating wages were hitting the common people hard. (PTI)

BJP slams quota for Muslim

development. Prasad said several demands for separate treatment for Muslims during the independence movement had finally ended up in the country's division.

He said the Supreme Court has emphatically spoken against religion-based reservations and expressed confidence that the decision of the Congress government in Karnataka will be challenged in courts.

The Constitution makes provision for reservation on the ground of social and education backwardness, and Muslims too have benefited under it in different states, he said.

The Karnataka government has given its nod for amending the Karnataka Transparency in Public Procurement (KTTP) Act to provide four per cent reservation in government tenders to Muslim contractors. (PTI)

Ex Akashvani director conferred

beside his bed, using equipment from the Akashvani centre. Natives from Oja's hometown have not forgotten the efforts made by Sadulla to immortalise the former's life works, the statement further read.

BJP announces six

voters to participate in peaceful elections and support the NDA candidates to ensure the continued progress and development of the region. The Assam BJP chief also emphasised that both the Narendra Modi-led Government at the Centre and the Himanta Biswa Sarma-led Government in Assam are committed to the empowerment of women, alongside all-round development. He noted that both the central and state governments currently have women serving as Finance Ministers. Saikia also highlighted that under the BJP-led governments, Assam's per capita income has risen significantly, from ₹91,000 in 2016 to ₹1,61,000 today.

"This increase reflects the growing economy and the enhanced purchasing power of the people," he said.

In response to a query regarding the Bodoland Territorial Region elections, Saikia stated that the BJP plans to field candidates in 40 constituencies. However, he clarified that the party would not contest in the constituencies of Pramod Boro, the chief executive member of the Bodoland Territorial Council, and Hagrama Mohilary, as the chief minister had earlier announced that no BJP candidates would be fielded in their constituencies.

Amit Shah inaugurates Lachit

the future," he stated, Commenting on the law and order, the chief minister stated that Assam has made significant progress in law and order due to the state government's sustained efforts over the past four years.

"The number of registered criminal cases has declined from 1,21,609 in 2020 to 50,215 in 2024, reflecting a 60% reduction in crime. The number of pending cases has decreased from 1,54,280 in 2020 to 14,800 in 2024. The charge sheet filing rate has increased from 47% to 66%, while the conviction rate has risen from 5.5% to 25%," he noted.

He also stated a decline in cases of crimes against women, from 26,352 in 2020 to 5,000 in 2024.

The chief minister said that the recent improvement in law and order, along with a stable and peaceful environment, has brought notable changes to the lives of Assam's citizens. He noted that the state has secured investment proposals worth ₹5.23 crore during the recently concluded Advantage Assam 2.0 Summit, marking a significant step towards sustained development.

"Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the guidance of the Union Home Minister, Assam is advancing towards becoming a leading state in the country," he said.

It may be noted that the Government of Assam has undertaken a project worth ₹1,024 crore for the infrastructural development of the Lachit Barphukan Police Academy. Spanning a total area of 1,022 bighas, the first phase of this project has seen the construction of a five-storey building equipped with smart classrooms. This newly inaugurated facility, built at an approximate cost of ₹167 crore, includes an arms simulator, a library, a computer laboratory, a research laboratory, a conference hall, and administrative offices. Furthermore, a dedicated museum has been established alongside a modern parade ground.

In the second phase of the project, an estimated ₹425 crore have been allocated for the construction of residential facilities within the academy. As part of this phase, the project would include residential quarters for 240 families, a hostel for 312 officers and staff, and a residential hostel to accommodate 2,640 trainees.

The event was attended by the Union minister of Ports, Shipping, and Waterways, Sarbananda Sonowal; the union minister of State for External Affairs, Pabitra Margherita; minister of agriculture etc., Atul Bora; minister of Revenue and Disaster Management etc., Keshab Mahanta; minister of Finance etc., Ajanta Neog; minister of Water Resources etc., Pijush Hazarika; minister of Labour Welfare etc., Rupesh Gowala; MP Kamakhya Prasad Tasa; and MLAs Mrinal Saikia, Bhabendra Nath Bharali, and Biswajit Phukan.

CEC meeting on voter ID

process and not compulsory, the party had asked how the poll panel would ensure that the alleged cloning of Aadhaar numbers does not affect the EPIC and electoral registration of voters.

Meanwhile, several other opposition parties have also demanded a discussion on the EPIC number duplication, calling it a major issue for democracy.

According to a source, the opposition parties said they are flexible with the rule under which the discussion should be held, but stressed that Parliament should discuss the issue.

The duplication of voter ID card numbers in different states was raised by West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on February 27. The Election Commission, on March 2, issued a statement saying that identical EPIC numbers or series were allotted to some electors from different states and Union Territories due to a "decentralised and manual mechanism" being followed prior to shifting of the electoral roll database of all states to the ERONET (Electoral Roll Management) platform.

They asserted that while EPIC numbers of some voters "may be identical", the other details -- including demographic details, assembly constituency and polling booth -- are different.

In another statement, the Election Commission said that since the allotment of EPIC series to the states and UTs in 2000, some Electoral Registration Officers did not use the correct series. They said the allotment of duplicate numbers due to incorrect series could not have been detected as the states and UTs were independently managing the electoral roll databases.

The poll authority also said it has now decided to resolve this "long-pending issue" after detailed discussions within the technical teams and concerned state chief electoral officers in the next three months.

It has also directed its poll machinery in the states to hold regular meetings with political parties and resolve issues according to procedure. (PTI)

Religious discrimination affects

worship and religious communities. Harish said this can only be countered by sustained commitment and concrete action from all Member States to the principle of equal respect for all faiths.

"All countries must commit to equal treatment of all their citizens and not practice policies that promote religious discrimination. We must also ensure that the education system does not perpetuate stereotypes or encourage bigotry," Harish said. (PTI)

ABSU president Dipen Boro calls for full implementation of BTR Accord

Home Minister Amit Shah, CM Sarma gracing the open session

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, March 15: The president of the All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU), Dipen Boro has urged the government for the proper implementation of the BTR Accord 2020 (Bodo Peace Accord) during the ongoing 57th annual conference being held at the Bodofa Fwthar, Dotma in Kokrajhar district.

The ongoing conference of the students union on Saturday entered the third day which started on March 13 with four-day colourful programme scheduled.

On the second day of the event, on Friday ABSU president Dipen Boro hoisted union flag followed by floral tributes to Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma, former president of the ABSU and martyrs.

A march-past was presented by the student contingents, NCC members in the flag hoisting ceremony amidst presence of huge gathering of the delegates, observers and participants.

ABSU president Dipen Boro stated that the conference has received a good response as more than 6000 delegates and observers taking part in the event.

He has opined that the peoples from the area and students union is looking forward a properly implementation of the BTR accord clauses with letter and spirit of the historic BTR Peace Accord that was signed on January 27 in 2020.

He emphasised several key demands, including Amendment of Article 125 to provide more autonomy and powers to the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC), inclusion of more villages into the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) as



per the provisions of the BTR Accord, withdrawal of cases against former members of the National Democratic Front of Boroland (NDFB) and the release of NDFB leaders still imprisoned, granting of Scheduled Tribe (Hill) status to Bodo Kacharis of Karbi Anglong among other demands.

The ABSU has reiterated its commitment to ensuring the full realisation of the BTR Accord and urged both the state and central governments to act on their promises.

An interactive session with students at the Education & Youth Conclave on the theme "Empowering Youth for a Vibrant Bodoland Region and a Vikshit Bharat" was organised on Friday with Dipen Boro, president of the ABSU in the chair.

Assam Education Minister Ranaj Pegu, BTR chief executive member, Pramod Boro, former director of CBPO, Dr Sudhir Kumar, cabinet

minister, Urkhao Gwra Brahma, and several dignitaries were present in the event.

Addressing the gathering, Pegu acknowledged ABSU's significant role in shaping Assam's educational landscape.

He emphasized the need for collective efforts to create a progressive Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) and contribute to a Viksit Bharat (Developed India).

The minister underscored the importance of aligning education with industry demands, stating that "NEP 2020 highlights skill development, entrepreneurship, and career independence."

Fostering self-reliance among youth through job creation and entrepreneurial opportunities is crucial for a prosperous future."

CEM of Bodoland Territorial Region, Pramod Boro said that the language and education of the tribal peoples must have been uplifted in all aspects of the society.

He said that the government of BTR is rendering services towards the welfare and development of the citizens across the region.

On Saturday, a get-together of the former leaders and workers of the ABSU was held with ABSU president Dipen Boro in the chair.

Cabinet minister, Urkhao Gwra Brahma, CEM of BTR, Pramod Boro, Assam Assembly speaker, Biswajit Daimary, MPs Rungwra Narzary, Joyanta Basumatary, and several dignitaries were present in the event.

CEM of BTR, Pramod Boro said that the a get together of the former leaders and workers of the students union was organised on the oc-

casation that marked a grand participation across the state.

The event witnessed a good discussion and sharing of views on bringing healthy ushering of sustainable development among the community."

"I'm honored to address the distinguished gathering at the 57th Annual Conference of All Bodo Students Union in Dotma today. A peaceful and harmonious Bodoland is essential to realizing the vision of a Viksit Bharat. In this journey, ABSU continues to play a pivotal role by empowering youth, preserving our mother tongue, and upholding the ideals of Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma", CEM Boro said.

On Sunday, Union home minister, Amit Shah, chief minister, Himanta Biswa Sarma, CEM of Bodoland Territorial Region, Pramod Boro are gracing as chief guest, special guests on the concluding day of the conference.

Union Home Minister, Shish will be landed in a special Helicopter at Bodofa Fwthar, Dotma in Kokrajhar.

Necessary preparation and arrangements along with security deployments are so far made to accord warm welcome to Union home minister.

The district administration and police administration in Kokrajhar have deployed security vigil along the conference venue to meet a smooth and peaceful successful of the conference.

The open session of the ABSU's conference will be witnessed gathering of more than 1.5 lakh public from across the state.

CM Sarma inaugurates ₹11.14 crore project to preserve vaishnav heritage in Barpeta

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 15: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has launched a major infrastructural development initiative worth ₹11.14 crore aimed at preserving Vaishnav heritage in the Barpeta region.

The project focuses on the restoration and enhancement of Shri Shri Shankardev Thar at Patbaushi Satra and Shri Shri Dev Damodar Guru's Adi Dham.

Additionally, Sarma laid the foundation stone for another ₹7.32 crore project at Chinpara Bhithi Thar, a historically significant site where Mahapurush Srimanta Shankardev spent a year.

Patbaushi Satra holds immense cultural and historical significance, as it was established by Srimanta Shankardev, who lived there for 18 years.

The Satra served as a hub for his spiritual, literary, and artistic contributions, playing a crucial role in the propagation of Sattriya culture and Vaishnavism.

Along with Mahapurush Madhavdev, Damodardev, and Haridev, Shankardev used the Satra as a centre for disseminating the Vaishnav faith.

The newly inaugurated development project aims to enhance and preserve the Satra's structures, including the Namghar and Monikut, by constructing key facilities such as a Daul Ghar, Jagmohan Ghar, Math, Kalindi Aai Ghar, a museum, a Patkuwa, and a dining hall.

Additional infrastructure, including a dormitory, sanitation facilities, and drinking water provisions, will also be developed.

The project includes environmental improvements with paved pathways, benches, a lawn, and lighting installations.

Similarly, the development work at Shri Shri Dev Damodar Guru's Adi Dham will involve the renovation of the Namghar and Monikut, the construction of a Daul Ghar and Jagmohan Ghar, and the establishment of two entrance gates.

The project will upgrade guesthouses, build a community hall and a training centre, and create a museum and a rest area for women.

Infrastructure enhancements will also include sanitation and drinking water facilities, paved pathways, and a landscaped

lawn.

A 2-metre-wide foot overbridge will be constructed to improve connectivity between Shri Shri Shankardev Thar and Shri Shri Dev Damodar Guru's Adi Dham.

At Chinpara Bhithi Thar, the ₹7.32 crore project will focus on preserving its historical importance.

Spanning approximately 8 bighas and 1 lecha, the site will undergo renovation of the Kirtanghar and Monikut, along with the construction of essential amenities such as a main entrance, pathways, a Rang Ghar, Darshan Ghar, Daul Ghar, and Jagmohan Ghar.

The development will also include a dormitory, a dining hall, a women's rest area, a conference hall, security cabins, and sanitation facilities.

Landscaping elements such as paved walkways, benches, and gazebos will enhance the site's aesthetic appeal.

Addressing the media, Sarma emphasised the historical importance of Patbaushi, where Shankardev composed many of his literary works.

He noted that upon assuming office, he had committed to preserving the region's cultural heritage, and the newly inaugurated projects are a fulfillment of that promise.

The Chief Minister stated that the Assam Government has documented the locations where Shankardev lived and has planned a phased development approach for their conservation.

He highlighted completed projects at Bordowa and Gangmou Thar and announced a ₹50 crore development plan for Madhupur Satra.

During his visit, Sarma also paid his respects at the historic Barpeta Satra, participating in the ongoing four-day Doul Utsav celebrations. He attended a performance of Barpeta's traditional Holi geet and inaugurated the Srimanta Sankardev Museum at Sri Sri Sankardev Thar, Patbaushi Satra.

Several dignitaries accompanied the Chief Minister, including Ranjeet Kumar Dass, Minister of Panchayat and Rural Development; Chandra Mohan Patowary, Minister of Environment and Forests; Pabitra Margherita, Union Minister of State for External Affairs; MP Phani Bhushan Choudhury; MLA Phani Talukdar; and Sudarsan Thakur, Secretary of Srimanta Sankardev Kalakshetra.

ABSU's Annual Conference highlights academic excellence and Bodo identity

Ranaj Pegu emphasises on skill development and digitisation of language at ABSU's 57th Annual Conference

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, March 15: The third day of the 57th Annual Conference of the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) at Bodofa Fwthar, Dotma, Kokrajhar, was marked by insightful discussions, competitive events, and the commemoration of the organisation's legacy.

A key highlight of the day was the Confluence of Former ABSU Leaders, which paid tribute to the pioneers who played a pivotal role in shaping the organisation and the broader Bodo movement.

Surath Narzary, president of Bodo Sahitya Sabha and a founding member of ABSU, inaugurated "History of All Bodo Students Union and Bodoland Movement - 1967-1993" (Volume 1), a publication chronicling the journey of the movement.

Urkhao Gwra Brahma, cabinet minister, Assam, and former ABSU president, along with several other esteemed former leaders, graced the occasion.

Pramod Boro, chief executive member of BTR and former ABSU president, along with several other esteemed former leaders, graced the occasion.

Dipen Boro, president of ABSU, emphasised the need to create avenues for young minds to excel in diverse fields.

He stated, "The youth of our community hold immense potential in literature, sports, and the arts. It is our responsibility to provide the necessary resources, mentorship, and opportunities to help them thrive. Events like this not only celebrate talent but also encourage the next generation to take an active role in shaping policies, understanding history, and contributing to governance. A society flourishes when its youth are empowered to lead, innovate, and preserve the legacy passed down by their predecessors."

Urkhao Gwra Brahma, cabinet minister of Assam, spoke of the



importance of honouring past struggles while working toward a stronger future.

He stated, "The legacy of our leaders has always been one of perseverance and progress."

Their sacrifices have paved the way for our community to assert its identity and secure opportunities for growth. It is now the responsibility of the younger generation to take this forward to ensure a thriving future for Bodoland."

While the second day of the Conference commenced with the union flag hoisting by ABSU President Dipen Boro, symbolising unity and purpose.

Tributes were paid to Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma, Bodoland martyrs, and influential Bodo figures, acknowledging their enduring contributions.

The day progressed with debate and literary competitions, inaugurated by Indira Boro, HOD, Department of Bodo, Bodoland University. Students engaged in stimulating discussions, displaying critical thinking and articulate expression on socio-political issues, education policies, and cultural revolution.

A notable segment of the day was the felicitation ceremony, where eminent personalities, including Padmashri awardee Dr Anil Boro, Assam Gaurav awardee Barlangfa Narzary, and Sahitya

Akademii awardees, were honoured for their contributions to literature and academia.

Additionally, successful APSC Civil Service candidates from the Bodo community were recognised.

The Education and Youth Conclave, chaired by Dipen Boro, served as the central discourse platform, focussing on "Empowering Youth for a Vibrant Bodoland Region and a Vikshit Bharat."

Esteemed policymakers, academicians, and scientists, including Dr Ranaj Pegu, education minister of Assam, Pramod Boro, chief executive member, BTR, Dr Samujjal Kr Bhattacharya, chief adviser, All Assam Students Union, Dr Sudhir Kumar, former director, CBPO, ISRO, Bengaluru, and leading scholars, deliberated on NEP 2020, the role of regional languages in learning, and methods to bridge academic training with industry requirements.

The inauguration of the Bodoland Space & Science Exhibition provided attendees with an engaging experience in technological advancements and scientific exploration.

Addressing the conclave, Dipen Boro stressed the importance of forward-thinking leadership and evolving educational frameworks.

Ranaj Pegu, education minister of Assam, highlighted the transformative shift in education and skill development.

"We are in a transformative phase, making substantial strides toward Viksit Bharat. One of the most crucial shifts is the implementation of the NEP, which is reshaping our education system to align with future needs. We are also working towards integrating online and hybrid learning models to make education accessible to all. Alongside this, we are witnessing rapid technological advancements and actively working towards an industrial revolution in the region. Moreover, in today's age of generative AI digitisation of language is important. Skill development programmes must be prioritised."

Dharmendra Pradhan, minister of education, Government of India, who couldn't attend the event, conveyed his greetings and acknowledged ABSU's contributions since 1967 in championing education. He noted, "With nearly four lakh students in Bodoland medium education, the Ministry remains committed to its growth through Delhi University's Modern Indian Languages (MIL) Department, C-TET recognition, and inclusion in Kendriya and Navodaya Vidyalayas. Kendriya Vidyalayas now serve 25 districts of Assam, with new approvals in Morigaon and BTR districts, while 28 Navodaya Vidyalayas function across the state, including newly sanctioned ones in Charaideo, Majuli, Sonitpur, South Salmara-Mankachar, and West Karbi Anglong."

Pramod Boro, chief executive member of BTR, emphasised the evolving academic environment and the growing acceptance of the Bodo language.

"The growing acceptance of the Bodo language in school and university textbooks is a significant step toward preserving our identity and securing its rightful place. Our students are excelling academically and making their mark in diverse fields, filling us with immense pride," he said.

Sabha mourns the death of Padma Shri Lil Bahadur Chhetri



HT Correspondent

BISWANATH CHARIALI, March 15: Assam Sahitya Sabha (ANSS) mourns the death of Padma Shri, Sahitya Akademi award winning eminent litterateur Lil Bahadur Chhetri in a press release issued by Dr Chinta Mani Sharma, president and Tilak Sarma, secretary who breathed his last around 10 pm on March 13 at his Ulubari, Guwahati residence due to brief illness. He was 93, a retired professor of Arya Vidyapeeth College, Guwahati was born on March 1, 1933 at Guwahati. An eminent litterateur, Chhetri was well versed in different genres of literature such as novel, short story, drama etc. His globally acclaimed novels in Nepali language are 'Basein' (1953), 'Atripati' (1967), 'Brahmaputra Ko Chew Chaw' and 'Pratibimbaharu Bismriti Ka' (2004). He was awarded the Sahitya Akademy award for his novel 'Brahmaputra Ko Chew Chaw'.

His short story collections include 'Tin Dask Bish Abhiyakti' (1993), 'Lil Bahadur Ka Kathaharu' (1993) and 'Charityeka Biskun' (2013) etc. His collection of essays include 'Assam Nepali Bhasak Saro Garo' (1961), 'Purvanchal Bharatiya Nepali Katha-Sahitya Ra Patrikako Itibritta' (1997), 'Jhyauare Patry Ma Lagda' (1999), 'Purvottar Bharatiya Nepali Sahitya Ra Samaj Ko Eitihashik Digdarshan' (2000), 'Simal Ko Vuva' (2011) etc. His published dramas are 'Dobato' (1967), 'Maag' (1979), 'Shuru Ko Shuru' (1987). He was awarded with Padma Shri title in 2021 for his outstanding contributions in the field of literature and education. His demise has cast a pall of gloom not only in Assam but also in the world of Nepali literature. Organisations and individuals from different corners of the country and the world mourned the death of Padma Shri Lil Bahadur Chhetri.

Fish monger attacks KSA member

HT Bureau

DIPHU, March 15: In a shocking incident a fish monger Nazirul Haque attacked a member of Karbi Student Association (KSA) Sukursing Enghee with a cleaver used for cutting fish in Diphu fish market on Friday evening (Friday 14).

The incident that took place at around 7:45 pm last evening created sensation in the town. The KSA member Sukursing Enghee sustained injuries on his face. Witnesses said there was altercation on something between Enghee and Haque and in a fit of rage the fish monger Haque attacked Enghee with the cleaver. Enghee was immediately rushed Diphu Medical College and Hospital.

The incident drew wide condemnation, including from KSA - Inglongpho, Karbi Employees Association and Assam Jatiyatadabi Yuva Chatra Parishad (AJYCP).

The Chief Executive Member (CEM) of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), Tuliram Ronghang has requested the SP of Karbi Anglong to act immediately book the culprit in taking action against him, and accordingly police swung into action.

Meanwhile, the culprit was arrested from Horilal, in Diphu. Following the incident Diphu market and its adjoining areas saw total shutdown of shops and business establishment.

This morning the CEM Ronghang visited DMC&H to assess Enghee's condition. Condemning the attack, the CEM said it is a "barbaric and senseless attack."

Meanwhile, the Taxation Department, KAAC has canceled the trading license of Haque.

BJP- East Karbi Anglong lauds state budget 2025-26

HT Bureau

DIPHU, March 15: BJP - East Karbi Anglong has welcomed the state budget, 2025-26 terming it as people oriented budget taking into consideration each and every districts of the state for all round development, and particularly Karbi Anglong.

"Karbi Anglong will immensely benefit from the budget as it has focused on road and communication and education development and economic upliftment," a statement read.

Mention may be made here that the state annual budget for 2025-26 fiscal year of ₹ 2.63 lakh crore was presented on Monday by finance minister Ajanta Neog.

In the budget, one Agriculture University, a Veterinary College and Sainik School have been proposed at Karbi Anglong.

"Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong including Dima Hasao districts have been proposed to be set up as Assam's clean energy hub by focusing on renewable sources of energy. This time Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) will be getting a state budget share of ₹ 621 crore, which is more than Dima Hasao and less



than BTR. The state government has also proposed to allocate ₹ 3, 076 crore to the HAD department for taking up development works in the three hill districts," the statement read.

Welcoming the state budget the BJP - East Karbi Anglong District Committee (EKADC) has interacted with the media persons at Atal Bihari Vajpayee Bhawan BJP-EKADC office here at on Friday, where the president, Roland Killing highlighted the key aspects of the budget, emphasising the government's commitment to infrastructure development, welfare schemes, and economic growth in Assam.

He elaborated on the provisions aimed at benefiting the people of Karbi Anglong, including allocations for road construction, education, and healthcare facilities. Killing said, "Our hon'ble Chief

Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has taken into consideration the needs of each and every district and the sentiments of all communities and tribes. Particularly, for Karbi Anglong has been given greater emphasis for the development of industries, road and communication and education. We also need to appreciate our Chief Executive Member of KAAC, Tuliram Ronghang, who has insisted to our hon'ble CM to include various proposals for the overall development of the district."

He also said the budget has highlighted ways of provincialising educational institutions, which is a positive sign towards improvement in the education sector. In Karbi Anglong alone there are 20 to 30 schools set-up prior to 2006, which were not provincialised. It is good news to these schools as it will receive provincialisation. For skill development of local educated unemployed youths and for setting up of skill development centre of ₹ 3000 crore will be allotted. The state government has also taken care of modernisation of Assam Hills Small Industries Development Corporation (AHISDC), he stated.

Himalayan griffon found in distressed condition near Gaurang river in Dhubri

HT Correspondent

DHUBRI, March 15: In a rare and concerning sighting, a Himalayan Griffon vulture was discovered in a distressed state near the banks of the River Gaurang in Salmara Part-VIII in Kawanbari area at Dhubri.

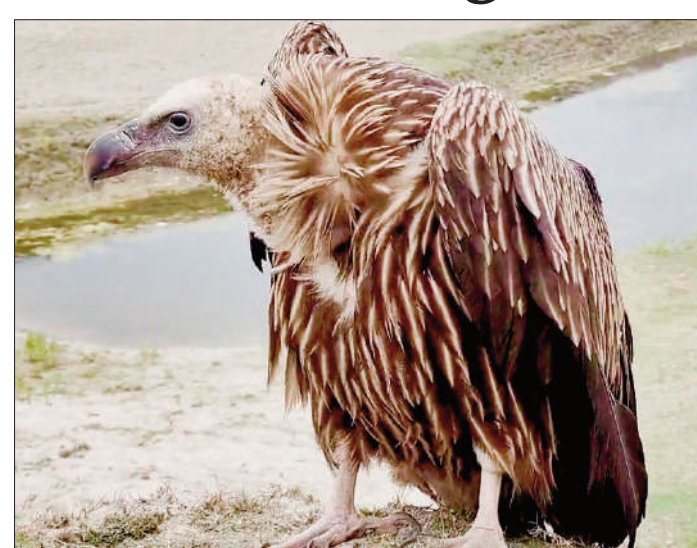
The appearance of this majestic scavenger, which has become increasingly rare in the region, has sparked concern among locals and conservationists alike.

According to eyewitnesses, the vulture was seen struggling to fly and appeared weak.

Some residents initially mistook it for an injured bird before realising it was a Himalayan Griffon, a species primarily found in high-altitude regions.

Worried about its condition, villagers informed local wildlife authorities, urging immediate intervention.

The Himalayan Griffon (Gyps himalayensis) is a vital part of the ecosystem, playing a crucial role in



natural waste disposal by feeding on carcasses.

However, its population has been declining due to habitat destruction, food scarcity, and expo-

sure to harmful substances like the veterinary drug diclofenac, which has been linked to vulture deaths across South Asia.

Speaking with Sofikur Rahman,

forest range officer Dhubri informed that the vulture has sent to Wildlife Transit Home in Charaikhola for further treatment.

Wildlife experts suspect that the bird's distress could be due to starvation, dehydration, or possible poisoning from contaminated food sources.

"This sighting is both significant and alarming. The vulture's weakened state indicates possible environmental challenges that need urgent attention," said incharge Dr Dauharo Bodo Wildlife Transit Home in Charaikhola, Kokrajhar. Meanwhile, locals have been advised to avoid disturbing the vulture.

The incident highlights the urgent need for vulture conservation efforts in the region.

Experts stress the importance of preserving natural habitats, ensuring safe food sources, and raising awareness about the role of these scavengers in maintaining ecological balance.

Editor's pick

India's fragile trade deal with the US

By: Kumardeep Banerjee

India is currently in a tight spot regarding its economic relations with the United States. In less than two months since the new US President took office, high-level Indian officials, led by the Prime Minister himself, have visited Washington, D.C. Last week, India's Commerce Minister was in Washington for discussions with the newly appointed US Trade Representative and Commerce Secretary. According to news reports, Piyush Goyal is expected to return to Washington towards the end of March. The reason? President Trump's simultaneous announcement, during Goyal's visit, of imposing reciprocal tariffs on all countries with high import duties, including India.

President Trump has consistently targeted India as a high-tariff nation since taking office. His public outbursts against various allies and friendly countries have become a near-constant spectacle, akin to a reality show streaming across the globe. Several world leaders who managed early meetings with Trump were relieved that they were spared the harsh treatment that the Ukrainian President faced in the Oval Office. Trump's confrontational style is now well known, and global leaders fear reputational damage from their bilateral conversations with him. He employs his blunt, undiplomatic rhetoric to put foreign leaders in a difficult position, compelling them to return with lucrative economic deals for the US. It was no surprise, then, that after meeting India's Commerce Minister, US Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick stated, "We would like to focus on a bilateral conversation just between India and the United States to bring down the tariff levels that India has, which protect some of its sectors." Following Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the US last month, discussions on a bilateral trade agreement have been actively initiated, with expectations of finalisation by the end of the year. Intense consultations are underway in Delhi, with all relevant ministries contributing their recommendations.

One of India's key priorities is retaining control over the agricultural sector, which has significant domestic political implications. The US is pushing for greater access to the Indian agriculture market, while India seeks reciprocity without jeopardising its small farmers. American farmers, who are generally more prosperous and own larger farmlands, rely on advanced machinery to boost crop output. However, the US Commerce Secretary made it clear that access to India's agriculture market remains a top priority. He stated, "Maybe certain products have quotas. Maybe certain products have limits... And then we do the same thing on the other side and craft an agreement that makes sense for both of us. The Indian agriculture market has to open up. It can't just stay closed."

Meanwhile, back in India, the government is considering reducing import duties on certain products, including electronics. India currently imposes nearly 16.5 per cent import duties on several ICT hardware products, while the US maintains rates well below 1 per cent. Many experts believe that lowering duties on electronics could benefit India by encouraging US companies to shift their supply chains to the country. However, there seems to be some confusion over the definition of "US-manufactured" and "Made in the US" when determining tariff reductions. At present, many US technology companies do not manufacture in the US but operate their largest factories in China or Southeast Asia.

President Trump, meanwhile, is pressuring American companies to relocate their manufacturing bases back to the US, threatening consequences if they fail to do so. This move could further complicate the already fragile global supply chain. India is closely monitoring these developments and must remain agile in its decision-making.

Conclusion

India and the United States have shared a complex yet evolving economic relationship, marked by cooperation and contention. Over the years, India has worked towards strengthening trade ties with the US, which remains one of its largest trading partners. However, friction has persisted over issues such as tariffs, market access, and trade imbalances. With the new US administration taking a firm stance on protectionist policies, India faces increasing pressure to lower its trade barriers and open its markets to American goods, particularly in agriculture and technology. President Trump's aggressive trade policies, including reciprocal tariffs and demands for reduced Indian duties on US imports, have added new challenges to negotiations.

As India navigates these complex trade dynamics, it must strike a balance between fostering economic cooperation with the US and protecting its domestic industries, especially agriculture and manufacturing. While a bilateral trade deal could provide long-term benefits, hasty concessions could threaten small businesses and farmers. At the same time, global supply chain shifts present opportunities for India to attract investments from US firms. With careful negotiations and strategic decision-making, India can work towards a trade agreement that ensures mutual benefit while safeguarding its economic interests. The coming months will be crucial in shaping the future of India-US economic relations. (Courtesy: The Pioneer)

Trump's tariff hike on steel and aluminium will have little impact on Chinese industry

Long before Donald John Trump became President of the US for the first time in 2016, he invited the sobriquet maverick for the unconventional way he conducted his business and politics. The world is having a full taste of that in his second term as President Trump has proposed a tariff structure, which the US administration is in the process of implementing causing acute resentment among all US trade partners, including its traditional close allies. Imports of steel along with the base metal aluminium are coming for highly punishing tariff barrier with the US to charge 25% import duty irrespective of the origin of the two metals.

As a result of the change, steel tariff undergoes a substantial increase from the earlier 2.95%. A paper by the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a Washington based think tank, tells US imports of steel and aluminium last year valued at an estimated \$61bn had a share of 1.8% of total goods imports, raising doubts, if not concern about the move. But what did provoke Trump to do to steel and aluminium imports that would set off global outrage? The President does not hide his disappointment that the country will be using imports to meet close to 30% of domestic steel requirements, similar to the situation obtaining in 2018. This is happening in spite of adequate capacity available within the US. What is not acceptable to Trump is as steel imports remain at an elevated level, "the domestic industry's performance has been depressed, resulting in capacity utilization rates persistently lower than the 80 percent target level."

Trump, on his own admission, is driven by the conviction that in the pursuit of 'make America great again' (MAGA), he will do whatever is needed, irrespective of reactions of trade partners. The US is traditionally a major producer of steel and innovator of steel related technologies. Germany based data aggregator Statista figures show that the US steel industry had had a roller coaster ride in production since 2006 when the output was a high 98.2m tonnes. But because of the impact of coronavirus and the accompanying general economic downturn, production sank to 72.7m tonnes in 2020.

More recently in 2024, the US steel output slid 2.4% from the previous year's 81.4m tonnes to 79.5m tonnes. Whatever the understanding of Trump, the process of globalization of the steel industry continues with groups in China, India and the European Union (EU) continuing to make cross-border investments in steel and supporting infrastructure. In line with that exercise, the Japan-



ese Nippon Steel made a \$14.9bn bid for US Steel in December 2023, promising at the same time billions of dollars of investment to replace the ageing infrastructure of the Pittsburgh headquartered storied steelmaker. President Biden blocked the Nippon bid mainly to placate the trade unions fearing job losses. But that did not deter Nippon from pursuing a different kind of arrangement for US Steel.

During the Japanese prime minister Shigeru Ishiba's recent visit to Washington, a new deal on US Steel was proposed that instead of Nippon Steel seeking majority ownership of US Steel, it would "invest heavily" in Pennsylvania-based steelmaker. While the agreement on Nippon investment and involvement in management of operations of US Steel remains to be finalized, the Japanese company has let it be known that whatever be finally the shape of the agreement it would be "in line" with Trump's focus on manufacturing, job creation and promoting investment in the US. The new Japanese prime minister who like his predecessor Fumio Kishida wants to be on friendliest possible terms with the US will likely ensure that Nippon Steel works with US Steel the way Trump wants.

Experts are not able to fathom as to why Trump is acting unilaterally on steel tariff instead of attempting to take allies such as the EU, the UK and Japan on board. His target may be the non-market China, which is found to be primarily responsible for the woes

of the global steel industry. But as it turned out, Trump is putting the 25% duty on steel originating in any part of the world with no concession given to friendly countries. The impost is in addition to any existing tariffs. What the US President is doing with steel and also aluminium, making their imports dearer gives an idea of how radically the US trade policy is being overhauled to create a fortress out of America.

Even while a Trump objective is to force steel producing countries to desist from giving indefensible subsidies to steelmakers in various forms, resulting in building of surplus capacity and production, the fact remains China is not a steel exporter of significance to the US. The US steel imports were up 3.4% in 2024 to 26.5m tonnes from 25.6m tonnes in 2023. But because of the many trade barriers encountered since 2018, China could export only 508,000 tonnes of steel to the US last year or less than 2% of total American steel imports. The six major steel exporting countries to the US in 2024 were: Canada (6.39m tonnes), Brazil (3.49m tonnes), Mexico (2.85m tonnes), South Korea (1.53m tonnes), Germany (1.18m tonnes) and Japan (944,000 tonnes).

But 2024 was the year when Chinese steel exports at 110.72m tonnes, up 22.7% from 90.3m tonnes in 2023 turned out to be the highest since 2015. What was the net impact of highly subsidized Chinese steel exports? As such exports undercut producers in the rest of the world, steel

prices remained low eroding producer margin. Expectedly, the torrent of Chinese supplies in an already surplus market inflamed global trade tensions with the EU, India and Japan, among others becoming blunt critics of Beijing seeking a solution to domestic excess supply by flooding the world market with its steel. South Korea and Vietnam had to seek protection for its steelmakers by putting anti-dumping duties on some Chinese steel products.

The point, however, remains that Trump action of slapping a steep duty will barely affect China since it has such little presence in US steel imports. But what is keeping steel prices low affecting industry profitability in free as well as non-market economies is the presence of oversized surplus capacity. WSA says the estimated world crude steel capacity of 2.432bn tonnes in 2023 exceeded global steel output by 543m tonnes. Furthermore, global steel excess capacity is projected to reach around 630m tonnes by 2026, more than the total steel production in all OECD countries.

The pitfall of Presidential tariff order in the form of retaliation by all affected countries could have been avoided had Trump administration made a joint move with its allies, including the EU to restrain non-market economies, particularly China from subsidizing the steel industry. In fact, a multilateral attempt was made back in 2018 by the EU and the US under the Global Arrangement on Sustainable Steel umbrella to build a tariff structure that would act as a disincentive for non-market economies to produce carbon-intensive and subsidized steel and aluminium. But negotiations did not make headway as the EU favoured a carbon border adjustment mechanism while the US stuck to its own tariff policy.

As the new US duty will have little, if any impact on voluminous Chinese export of steel, countries across the continents enraged by the American move have threatened reciprocal actions. No doubt, in the new acrimonious trade environment, several steel and aluminium exporting countries will have commercial disputes that will end up at World Trade Organisation (WTO) for resolution. But President Trump is convinced that his move will not only support about 80,000 jobs in the steel industry but it will also help in capacity revival and therefore, create new jobs. He, however, seems to be oblivious of the fact that such stiff tariff will be hurtful for steel downstream industries where employment is in excess of 12m will have to brace for price rises of products using steel. (IPA Service)

US Intel Chief Tulsi Gabbard's coming meeting with Narendra Modi has crucial importance

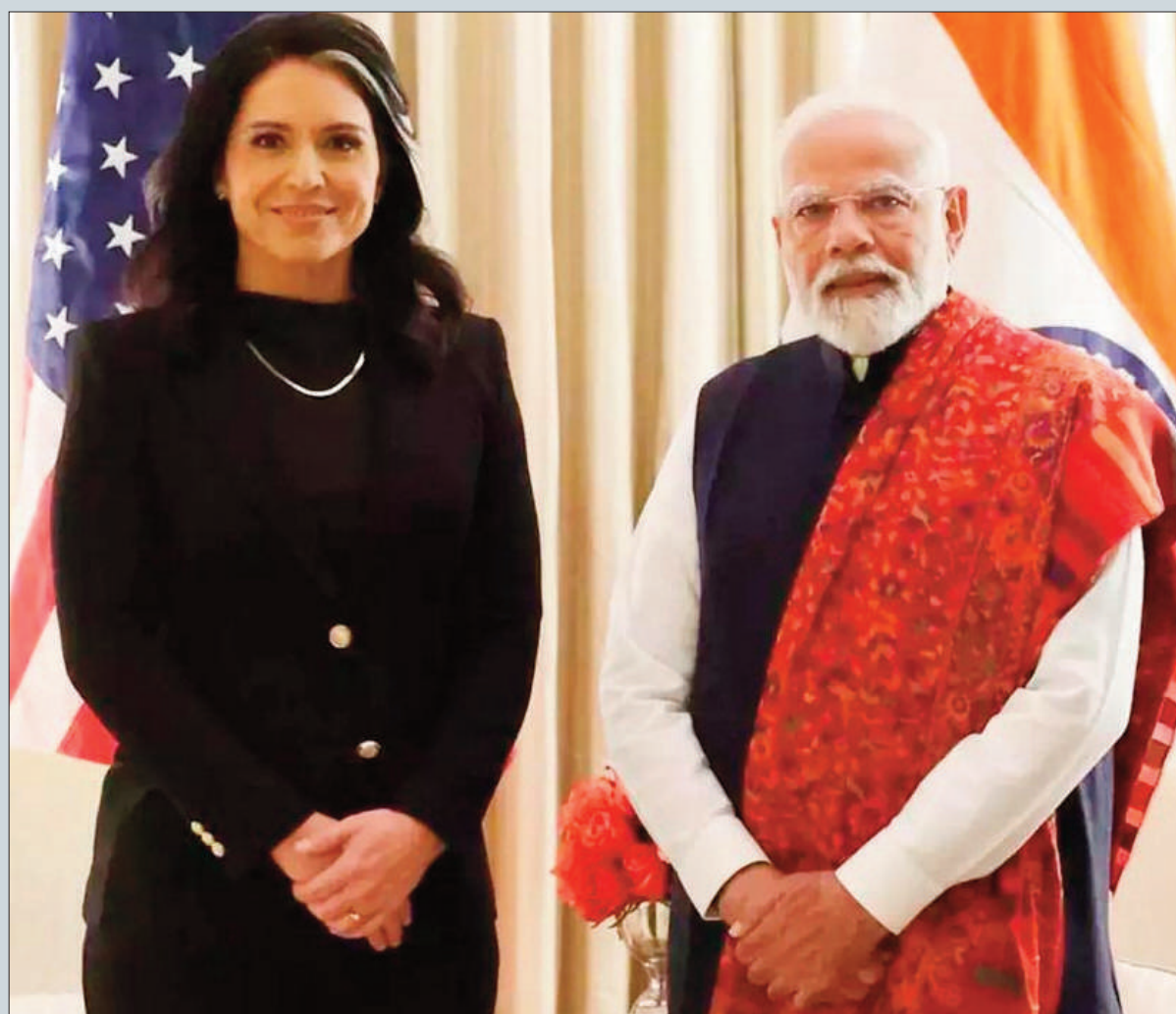
By: Nitva Chakraborty

United States of America's Director of National Intelligence (DNI) Tulsi Gabbard will be visiting India early next week in the concluding part of his tour of the Asia Pacific nations including Japan and Thailand. This will be the first visit to India of such a high ranking official of the Trump 2.0 administration to India since Trump took over the presidency on January 20 this year. Gabbard's talks with the Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi will have special significance in the context of the present developments in Bangladesh.

Gabbard is a Hindu by religion and follows the Vaishnavite rites. Though she was a democrat congress member from Howai for four terms, her switchover to Trump camp after 2021 brought her close to the BJP-RSS more and Narendra Modi at a personal level. BJP's overseas body in USA had close relations with Gabbard even in her Democratic Party days. Ram Madhav, the senior RSS leader in charge of overseas BJP in USA was the link between Gabbard and BJP.

Gabbard looks after the work of CIA which does Intel work in foreign countries including India and Bangladesh. In the course of bilateral talks, Prime Minister Modi will have a detailed review of the situation in Bangladesh on the basis of the inputs provide by Gabbard. It can be mentioned that at the news conference in Washington during Indian PM's visit to the White House on February 13 for a bilateral meeting with the newly elected president, Trump mentioned that as far as Bangladesh was concerned, PM Modi would look at it thereby indicating that he would go by the assessment of the Indian side on the Bangladesh situation.

That way Indian Prime Minister has a big advantage in dealing with situation in Bangladesh in his own way with tacit Trump government support and supporting Intel from a friendly Intel chief Tulsi Gabbard. Trump personally does not like the Bangladesh interim head Dr. Muhammad Yunus whom he



earlier called a lackey of Hillary Clinton. Trump's South Asian advisers are monitoring the developments in Bangladesh. They are not making any diplomatic moves as centrally, Trump administration is too much preoccupied with Ukraine and Europe issues now. South Asia is no priority at the present stage.

Bangladesh interim regime as also the political parties are also waiting with anxiety at the coming meeting of Modi with Gabbard. CIA had a long history of organising regime change from behind. In Bangladesh, lot of po-

litical analysts and informed people alleged that CIA was proactive among a section of organisers of the July-August 2024 movement which led to the fall of the Sheikh Hasina government and fleeing of the Prime Minister to India on August 5, 2024. A general assessment is that the students movement was spontaneous and widespread but the pace was facilitated faster through CIA funds since the Biden government was against the Hasina regime.

CIA's actions are always done through its handlers-they may be army generals or bureaucrats in high places

or even the political leaders. The CIA never comes in the front. But they still play their role when asked by the political bosses in the White House. There is a worry in a political section of Bangladesh whether the CIA under Trump and Tulsi Gabbard will play any role once again if the political situation in Bangladesh deteriorates further.

Right now, more than seven months after Dr. Muhammad Yunus took over as the interim head of Bangladesh government on August 8, the split within the movement which led to the ouster of Sheikh Hasina and installation of

Yunus regime as an interim measure, has only widened. BNP, the major political party which is supporting the interim regime, has fallen out with Dr. Yunus. The BNP chairperson Begum Zia is expected to be back in April this year from her treatment in London. After that, BNP will be launching massive movement for the holding of elections.

The main body of the anti-discriminatory movement founded a new party last month National Citizens Party (NCP) led by the prominent face of the anti-Hasina movement Nahid Islam. This new party has taken a position against the BNP and will be fighting the national elections on the basis of its own strength and symbol. The Jammāt Islami groups have been strengthened but a good section of the younger elements have joined the new party which has got some fringe left elements also. BNP and the old leadership of Jammāt have cordial relations but new young leaders of Jammāt are fighting BNP.

As of now, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has spurned all moves by the Bangladesh interim head Dr. Yunus to have a bilateral meeting with him. Bangladesh interim head tried to meet Modi in New York during last September's UN general assembly session, but the Indian prime minister avoided him by rescheduling his programme. Bangladesh has used the Hasina extradition issue as a weapon against India in international fora. Officially, Bangladesh has demanded extradition of Hasina from India so that she could be put to trial in Dhaka. India has not responded at all. Dr. Yunus will be meeting the UN secretary general in Dhaka and is expected to mention the extradition issue and also the atrocities during Sheikh Hasina regime.

For India, the most disquieting aspect of present Bangladesh developments is the big entry of Pakistan now in every aspect of its former enemy country covering education, economy and more importantly in military. In the last three months, Pakistan and Bangladesh have exchanged visits of army delegations. The Indian officials

were alarmed to witness the visit of Pakistan intelligence chief to Dhaka and their talks with Bangladesh officials on Intel sharing. Pak army officers have been invited to train a section of Bangladesh forces.

At the same time, there are murmurs that Bangladesh army's top leadership is split between pro Pakistani and nationalist elements. The rejuvenated pro Islamic officers want to remove the present chief of staff General Waqaruz Zaman, who is related to Hasina and is known as a Bangladeshi nationalist disavowing any spread of Pak influence over army. General Zaman few days ago met the interim head Dr. Yunus and complained about the deterioration of law and order and sought more powers for army.

Bangladesh has a long history of coups by army generals. So, the present turmoil and the spat between the nationalists and pro Pak islamists in the army have set a fertile ground of all sorts of rumour. All foreign agencies are in touch with their handlers including the CIA, RAW and the Chinese agency. Indian Prime Minister during his meeting is expected to get a detailed appraisal by the CIA of the latest positioning in Bangladesh. This info will be of help to the Indian PM in formulating the strategy in dealing with Bangladesh.

Indian Prime Minister is expected to attend the BIMSTEC meeting in Bangkok from April 2 to 4 this year. Bangladesh interim head Dr. Yunus will be attending also. Dr. Yunus is desperately looking at his meeting with Narendra Modi though officially Indian side has not confirmed that such a meeting will be taking place. But unofficial sources indicate that there is possibility of such a meeting. If that happens, that will be the first meeting between two heads after the ouster of Sheikh Hasina and taking over by Dr. Yunus. Indian side will then be advantageously placed based on the Intel provided by Gabbard. It will be seen how far both leaders can go to iron out their present differences to arrive at a common ground for improving bilateral relations. (IPA Service)

Spreading happiness as a Career

By: **Ranjan K Baruah**

All of us want to be happy always and no one wants to live in distress or sorrows. But the fact is that happiness is sometimes rare as we are more focused with our goals and targets. It is happy to be happy and also spreads happiness amongst others. Everyday must be a day of happiness and we must enjoy every moment of our life.

There is no doubt that happiness is a fundamental human goal. The United Nations General Assembly recognizes this goal and calls for "a more inclusive, equitable and balanced approach to economic growth that promotes the happiness and well-being of all peoples."

Governments and international organizations should invest in conditions that support happiness by upholding human rights and incorporating well-being and environmental dimensions into pol-

icy frameworks, such as the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. The effectiveness of governments in upholding peace and social order, as well as in the fields of taxation, legal institutions and delivery of public services, strongly correlates with average life satisfaction.

The United Nations invites each person of any age, plus every classroom, business and government to join in celebration of the International Day of Happiness. The World Happiness Report 2025 will be launched on Thursday, 20 March with a series of events, live-streamed from around the world, to celebrate the International Day of Happiness. This year's edition will once again feature a ranking of countries by their average levels of life satisfaction. This will be followed by six chapters looking at 'caring and sharing' from different angles.

The General Assembly of the United Nations in its resolution

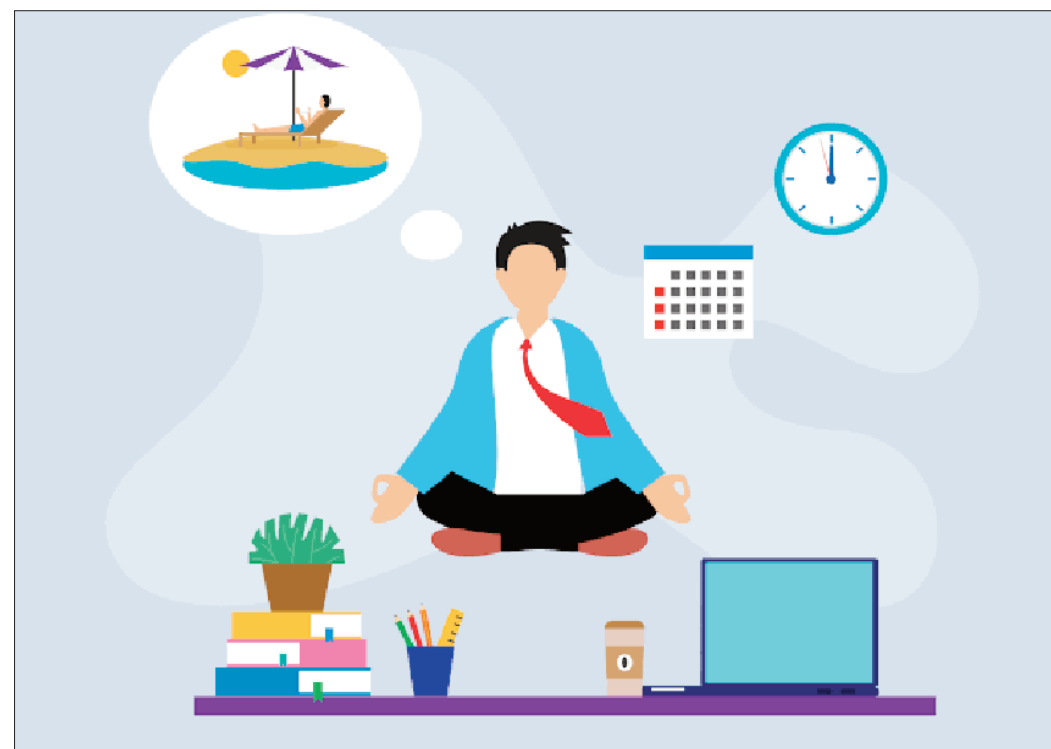
66/281 of 12 July 2012 proclaimed 20 March the International Day of Happiness, recognizing the relevance of happiness and well-being as universal goals and aspirations in the lives of human beings around the world and the importance of their recognition in public policy objectives. It also recognized the need for a more inclusive, equitable and balanced approach to economic growth that promotes sustainable development, poverty eradication, happiness and the well-being of all peoples.

To be happy in our profession it is important to choose our careers according to our passions. Only salary is not an indicator of happiness. There are fields and careers that also bring happiness amongst others and we may choose those careers too which includes health professionals like physiotherapy and others, teaching, event planning, nursing, etc. Dental hygienists play a cru-

cial role in maintaining oral health and often find satisfaction in contributing to people's well-being. Nurses play a crucial role in patient care and often derive great satisfaction from helping others. Psychologists' help people understand and overcome mental health challenges, offering a chance to make a real difference in people's lives.

Working as a standup comedian or playing the role of a clown sometimes helps many to be happy as many people get a chance to smile. Singers and musicians also bring joy and happiness. But to choose it as a career one can be a happiness coach for which s/he must be committed to work with the people in different situations.

A happiness coach or life coach helps individuals develop fulfillment, happiness, and joy by identifying areas of dissatisfaction and working with them to create lasting positive impacts. There are courses to be a happiness or wellness coach. We have



seen an increase in demand for happiness coaches and this will increase as urban and city lifestyle is indirectly affecting

our lives in negative ways. *(The write is a Career Mentor and Skill Trainer and currently the Advisor, Skill Employment and*

Entrepreneurship Department of Bodoland Territorial Council and can be reached at bkranjan@gmail.com or 8473943734)

Assam Veterinary Recruitment 2025 – 445 Veterinary Field Assistant Posts

Last Date: 18/03/2025

Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Department, Assam has released an employment notification for the recruitment of 445 Veterinary Field Assistant (VFA) vacancy under the Directorate of A.H. & Vety, Deptt. Assam, Guwahati-3. Interested and eligible candidates may apply.

Name of post: Veterinary Field Assistant (VFA)
No of posts: 445 posts
Category-wise vacancy:

UR: 258 posts
OBC/ MOBC: 100 posts
STP: 41 posts
SC: 32 posts
STH: 14 posts

Scale of Pay: Pay Band of ₹ 14,000/- 70,000/- + Grade Pay of ₹ 6,200/- plus other allowances as admissible from time to time.

Eligibility Criteria of Assam Veterinary Recruitment

Age Limit: A Candidate should not be less than 18 years as on 01/01/2022 and more than 40 years of age as on 01/01/2025 as per Govt. Office Memorandum No. ABP/6/2016/51 dated 2nd September, 2020.

Age Relaxation: Permissible relaxations in upper age limit for different categories are as under:

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

Educational Qualification: Candidate need to pass HSSLC (Science) with Biology as a subject and also shall have to pass the examination in elementary knowledge Veterinary Science (One Year Training Course) from the recognized "School of Veterinary Science & Animal Husbandry" established by the Govt. of Assam at Ghungoor, Silchar.

Physical Standard: A Candidate for Direct recruitment to the cadre of Veterinary Field Assistant under Rule 3 (d) shall be of sound health both mentally and physically and free from any organic defects of body infirmly likely to interfere with efficient performance of his duties and require to undergo medical examination before appointment to the service.

How to Apply for Assam Veterinary Recruitment ?

I. The intending candidates may apply in standard form as per part IX of the Assam Gazette for application along with testimonials and a self-addressed envelope affixing stamp of Rs. 5/- for communication. The duly filled in Application should be addressed to the Director, Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Department, Assam, Chenikuthi, Guwahati-781003 and be submitted physically in the Drop Box during office hours on or before 18th March, 2025 (5.00 PM) at the Directorate or by Registered Post.

II. Applicants must affix 1 (One) copy of recent photograph on the space provided in the application form firmly with good quality glue/adhesive and also should enclose another copy along with the application. The Photograph must be signed prominently.

III. Since the practice of furnishing attested copies of Certificates/marks sheets etc. by competent authority has been discontinued by the Govt., the applicant shall furnish copies of Certificates/mark sheets etc. declared by himself/herself as certified to be true copy of the Original along with the application.

Important Dates of Assam Veterinary Department Recruitment 2025
Starting date of submission of application: 3rd March 2025
Last date of submission of application: 18th March 2025 (5.00 PM)

Schoolnet India Recruitment – Project Manager - EdTech Post

Last Date: 20/03/2025

Schoolnet India Limited has released an employment notification for the recruitment of a Project Manager - EdTech post. Interested and eligible candidates may apply online.

Name of post: Project Manager - EdTech

No of posts: 1

Pay: Negotiable

Age Limit: NA

Educational Qualification & Experience: Candidates must have a master's degree in any discipline and a minimum of 4-5 years of experience in the Academic or EdTech sector.

Application fee if any: No

How to Apply for Schoolnet India Recruitment ?

Interested and eligible candidates may apply and send email to hr.schoolnet.lent@gmail.com .

Last date of submission of application: Before 20th March, 2025.

About Schoolnet India Limited

Started in 1997, Schoolnet is India's first and one of the leading Ed-Tech service providers with a track record of two decades for providing digital and digitally-enabled services to K-12 schools.

The Education initiatives of Schoolnet involve leveraging technology to improve teaching-learning in schools through establishment of connected classrooms, computer labs, school curriculum mapped digital content, app based personalized learning solutions and training of teachers using technology. Our Employability initiatives are Technical & Vocation Education and Training (TVET) programmes implemented through our subsidiary Learnet Skills Limited (Learnet), which is a joint venture with a Government of India owned institution – National Skills Development Corporation (NSDC). Given this, we are looking for an enthusiastic, dedicated and committed professional who can develop and lead the projects.

UPSC CAPF Recruitment 2025 – 357 Assistant Commandant Posts

Last Date: 25/03/2025

Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) has released an employment notification to conduct Central Armed Police Forces (Assistant Commandant) Exam 2025 for 357 vacancy. Interested and eligible candidates may apply online.

Name of post: Assistant Commandant (Group A)
No of posts: 357 posts

Organization wise vacancy:

BSF: 24
CRPF: 204
CISF: 92
ITBP: 04
SSB: 33

Eligibility Criteria of UPSC CAPF Recruitment

Nationality: No person who is not a citizen of India shall, except with the consent of the Central Government signified in writing be appointed or employed under these Rules. Provided that nothing contained in these rules shall debar the appointment, enrollment or employment of a subject of Nepal or Bhutan under these Rules.

Sex: Both Male and Female candidates are eligible for appointment to the post of Assistant Commandants.

Age Limit: A candidate must have attained the age of 20 years and must not have attained the age of 25 years on 1st August, 2025, i.e. he/she must have been born not earlier than 2nd August, 2000 and not later than 1st August, 2005.

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

SC/ ST: 5 years
OBC: 3 years
Civilian Central Government Servant: 5 years

Educational Qualification: A candidate must hold a Bachelor's degree of a University incorporated by an Act of the Central or State Legislature in India or other educational institutions established by an Act of Parliament or declared to be deemed as a University under Section-3 of the University Grants Commission Act, 1956 or possess an equivalent qualification.

Physical Standards: Candidates must meet the prescribed Physical and Medical Standards for admission to Central Armed Police Forces (Assistant Commandants), Examination, 2025 specified in official Notification.

Application Fee:

UR/ OBC: ₹ 200/-
Female/ SC/ST/ Persons with Benchmark Disability: Nil
Payment Mode: Visa/ Master/ RuPay Credit/ Debit Card or by using Internet Banking of SBI.

Important Dates of UPSC CAPF Vacancy 2025

Starting date of online application submission: 5th March, 2025
Last date of online application submission: 25th March, 2025

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

Last date: 31/03/2025

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

Name of post: Assistant Teacher (LP) & Assistant Teacher (UP)
No of posts: 4500 posts

Lower Primary: 2900 posts
Upper Primary: 1600 posts

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

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

Helpline No & Email: To be updated

Eligibility Criteria for DEE LP UP Teacher Recruitment

Nationality: Candidates must be a Permanent Resident of Assam .

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

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

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

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

Medium of Instruction: Either the Language-I or the Language-II of both ATET and CTET candidates shall match the medium of instruction of the school, wherein the candidate wishes to apply

ATET/ CTET Qualification: The candidates who have passed ATET/ CTET for

Lower Primary / Upper Primary will be eligible for applying.

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

Assistant Teacher (LP)

Qualification:

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

Assistant Teacher (UP)

Qualification:

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

Science Teacher (UP)

Qualification:

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

Hindi Teacher (UP)

Qualification:

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

How to Apply for DEE Assam Teacher Recruitment ?

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

Scroll down, go to Important Web-Links section .

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

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

At the end, submit the form.

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

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

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

Passport Size Photograph.
HSLC Admit Card.
HSSLC Mark-sheet and Certificate.
Graduation Mark-sheet and Certificate.
Any other Mark-sheet and Certificate of higher education.
DEIE/ BED Marksheet (1st Year & 2nd Year) and Certificate.
Caste Certificate (in case of SC/ ST(P)/ST(H)/OBC/MOBC).
Document in support of Permanent Resident of Assam.
Certificate and Mark sheet of ATET/CTET for UPS.

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

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

Important Dates of DEE TET Teacher Recruitment 2025

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

Samagra Shiksha Recruitment 2025 – 2 Lower Division Assistant (LDA) Posts

Last Date: 26/03/2025

Samagra Shiksha, Assam (SSA) has released an employment notification for the recruitment of 2 Lower Division Assistant (LDA) Posts under Samagra Shiksha, Assam (SSA) on contractual basis. Interested and eligible candidates may apply online.

Name of post: Lower Division Assistant (LDA)

No of posts: 02

Pay: ₹ 14000- 49000 + G.P. ₹ 7400/-

Age Limit: The candidate should not be less than 18 years of age and not more than 62 years of age as on 01-01-2025.

Educational Qualification: Graduate in any discipline with minimum 01 year diploma in computer application from Government Recognized Institute in office productivity software tools such as Word processor, Excel, Internet, Email from Government Recognized Institute.

Experience: Minimum 03 years working experience in any Govt. Undertaking/ Private Organization/PSU in office file handling works.

Important Dates of Samagra Shiksha Vacancy 2025

Starting date for online application submission: 12th March 2025

Last date for online application submission: 26th March 2025

‘PEACE THROUGH STRENGTH’

Head of Islamic State in Iraq, Syria killed, Iraqi Prime Minister says

BAGHDAD, March 15: The head of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria has been killed in Iraq in an operation by members of the Iraqi national intelligence service along with US-led coalition forces, the Iraqi prime minister announced Friday.

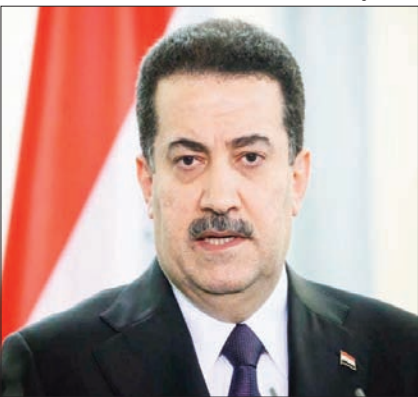
“The Iraqis continue their impressive victories over the forces of darkness and terrorism,” Prime Minister Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani said in a statement posted on X, formerly known as Twitter.

Abdallah Maki Mosleh al-Rifai, or “Abu Khadija,” was “deputy caliph” of the militant group and as “one of the most dangerous terrorists in Iraq and the world,” the statement said.

On his Truth Social platform Friday night, U.S. President Donald Trump said: “Today the fugitive leader of ISIS in Iraq was killed. He was relentlessly hunted down by our intrepid warfighters” in coordination with the Iraqi government and the Kurdish regional government.

“PEACE THROUGH STRENGTH!” Trump posted.

A security official said the operation was carried out by an airstrike in Anbar province, in western Iraq. A second official said the operation took place Thursday night but that al-Rifai’s death was confirmed Friday. They



spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to comment publicly.

The announcement came on the same day as the first visit by Syria’s top diplomat to Iraq, during which the two countries pledged to work together to combat IS.

Iraqi Foreign Minister Fouad Hussein said at a news conference that “there are common challenges facing Syrian and Iraqi society, and especially the terrorists of IS.” He said the officials had spoken “in detail about the movements of ISIS, whether on the Syrian-Iraqi border, inside Syria or inside Iraq” dur-

ing the visit.

Hussein referred to an operations room formed by Syria, Iraq, Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon at a recent meeting in Amman to confront IS, and said it would soon begin work.

The relationship between Iraq and Syria is somewhat fraught after the fall of former Syrian President Bashar Assad. Al-Sudani came to power with the support of a coalition of Iran-backed factions, and Tehran was a major backer of Assad. The current interim president of Syria, Ahmad al-Sharaa, was previously known as Abu Mohammed al-Golani and fought as an al-Qaida militant in Iraq after the U.S. invasion of 2003, and later fought against Assad’s government in Syria.

But Syrian interim Foreign Minister Asaad Hassan al-Shibani focused on the historic ties between the two countries.

“Throughout history, Baghdad and Damascus have been the capitals of the Arab and Islamic world, sharing knowledge, culture and economy,” he said.

Strengthening the partnership between the two countries “will not only benefit our peoples, but will also contribute to the stability of the region, making us less dependent on external powers and better able to determine our own destiny,” he said.

The operation and the visit come at a time when Iraqi officials are anxious about an IS resurgence in the wake of the fall of Assad in Syria.

While Syria’s new rulers - led by the Islamist former insurgent group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham - have pursued IS cells since taking power, some fear a breakdown in overall security that could allow the group to stage a resurgence.

The US and Iraq announced an agreement last year to wind down the military mission in Iraq of an American-led coalition fighting the Islamic State group by September 2025, with U.S. forces departing some bases where they have stationed troops during a two-decade-long military presence in the country.

When the agreement was reached to end the coalition’s mission in Iraq, Iraqi political leaders said the threat of IS was under control and they no longer needed Washington’s help to beat back the remaining cells.

But the fall of Assad in December led some to reassess that stance, including members of the Coordination Framework, a coalition of mainly Shiite, Iran-allied political parties that brought current Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani to power in late 2022. (AP)

Guterres, Yunus discuss country’s domestic issues, Rohingya situation



UNITED NATIONS, March 15: UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has discussed with Bangladesh’s Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus the country’s domestic issues and the Rohingya situation and expressed solidarity with Dhaka’s reform and transition process. Guterres is in Bangladesh on a “Ramadan Solidarity” visit from March 13-16.

Guterres travelled to Cox’s Bazaar on a mission of solidarity with the Rohingya refugees and with the Bangladeshi people who have hosted them.

He expressed appreciation for the close cooperation between the UN and Bangladesh, including its contributions to peacekeeping.

“The Secretary-General and the Chief Adviser discussed the situation of the Rohingya and Bangladesh’s domestic issues. The Secretary-General expressed his solidarity with Bangladesh’s reform and transition process,” a readout of the meeting between Guterres and Yunus provided by the office of the Secretary-General’s spokesperson said on Friday. The Secretary-General is back in Dhaka after having spent the day in Cox’s Bazaar, part of his Ramadan solidarity visit with Rohingya refugees and their Bangladeshi host communities.

Stephane Dujarric, Spokesman for the Secretary-General, told reporters at the daily press briefing that Guterres had the chance to meet with refugees, many of them young men and women, who told him about their experiences and their concerns.

He spoke to children who were grateful to be able to go to school in the camps, but also they said how much they missed their homes in Myanmar. Guterres also met young people who still have hope to return to their homeland but are also worried about the impending funding cuts which would dramatically reduce their monthly food rations (from USD 12.50 to USD 6 per month).

The Secretary-General assured every one of the people he met that he would do everything he could to stop the funding cuts, and he apologized to them because the United Nations and the international community have not been able to stop the conflict in Myanmar, Dujarric said. Guterres shared an Iftar with about 60,000 refugees and told them that it was a symbol of his deep respect for their religion and their culture.

He also said that “we are facing a deep humanitarian crisis with the announced funding cuts, and he lamented that, as a result, many people will suffer, and some people might even die.”

“My voice” Guterres said “will not end until the international community understands that they have the obligation to invest now in the Rohingya refugees.”

Yunus was also present at the Iftar, and they met separately for a bilateral discussion.

Guterres was last in Cox’s Bazar in 2018 and noted that the “challenges are great on so many levels.”

“This is the holy month of Ramadan, the month of solidarity. It would be unacceptable that in the month of solidarity, the international community would reduce the support for the Rohingyas in Bangladesh. We will do everything not to make it happen.”

During the visit, the Secretary-General met with Bangladesh Foreign Adviser Md Towhid Hossain and High Representative to the Chief Adviser of Bangladesh on Rohingya Issues and Priority Affairs Khalilur Rahman.

The Secretary-General and the Foreign Adviser discussed Bangladesh’s ongoing transition and reform efforts. The Secretary-General and the High Representative discussed the situation in Rakhine state and the upcoming high-level conference on Rohingya and other minorities in Myanmar. (PTI)

Starmer tells global leaders to 'keep pressure' on Putin over ceasefire in Ukraine

LONDON, March 15: UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer has told global leaders to “keep the pressure” on Russian President Vladimir Putin to back a ceasefire in Ukraine.

In his opening remarks on Saturday to a virtual gathering of what he has termed the “coalition of the willing”, Starmer said Putin will “sooner or later” have to “come to the table”.

Unlike the first summit on March 2, the meeting of what Starmer has termed the “coalition of the willing” is being conducted virtually.

The call is expected to delve into how countries can help Ukraine militarily and financially as well as gauging support for any future possible peacekeeping mission in the event Putin backs a cessation of hostilities.

“My feeling is that sooner or later he’s going to have to come to the table and engage in serious discussion, but — this is a big but for us this morning in our meeting — we can’t sit back and simply wait for that to happen,” Starmer told leaders while sitting in front of a screen in an office in 10, Downing Street.

“I think that means strengthening Ukraine so they can defend themselves, and strengthening, obviously, in terms of military capability, in terms of funding, in terms of the provision of further support from all of us to Ukraine.”

Around 25 countries are expected to be involved in the call, including European partners, and Ukraine. Leaders from Australia, Canada and New Zealand, as well as officials from NATO and the European Union’s executive, are also set to take part. The United States is not represented at the meeting.

Saturday’s meeting takes place in the wake of a US proposal for a 30-day ceasefire in Ukraine, which Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has backed.

Like the last meeting of the “coalition of the willing”, there is no representative from the United States, which has shifted its approach on the war since the return of President Donald Trump to the White House. (AP)

Senate approves funding bill hours before shutdown deadline, sending to Trump for signature

WASHINGTON, March 15: The Senate passed a six-month spending bill on Friday hours before a government shutdown, overcoming sharp Democratic opposition to the measure and sending it to President Donald Trump to be signed into law.

The essentially party-line vote, 54-46, reflected gnawing Democratic angst over how to confront the Trump administration as its Department of Government Efficiency fires federal workers and dismantles operations. Democrats argued over whether to fight even risking a shutdown and fumed that Republicans drafted a measure that included little of their input, shortchanging health care, housing and other priorities.

But in the end, enough of the Democratic senators decided a government shutdown would be even worse, and backed Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer’s strategy to allow the bill to come forward.

“A shutdown will allow DOGE to shift into overdrive,” Schumer said. “Donald Trump and Elon Musk would be free to destroy vital government services at a much faster rate.”

Democrats were confronted with two painful options: allowing passage of a bill they believe gives President Trump vast discretion on spending decisions or voting no and letting a funding lapse ensue. All told, 10 Democrats voted to break



the party’s filibuster. On final passage, two Democrats supported the bill, and one Republican, Sen. Rand Paul of Kentucky, opposed it.

Schumer gave members of his caucus days to vent their frustration about the options before them, but abruptly switched course and made clear on the eve of voting that he would not allow a government shutdown. His move outraged many in the party who want to fight the Trump agenda, but gave senators room to side with Republicans and allow the continuing resolution, often described as a CR, to advance.

Democrats from all corners looked to pressure senators to kill the bill. House members wrote letters, posted on social media and held press conferences in the hours before the vote. “The American people sent Democrats to Congress to fight against Republican dysfunction and chaos,” said a letter from 66 House Democrats to Schumer.

House Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries and his team dashed back to the Capitol urging senators to block the bill and negotiate a true compromise with Republicans. Speaker Emerita Nancy Pelosi called the bill “unacceptable”.

Some Democrats also argued that Republicans would take the blame for a shutdown, given they controlled all the levers of power in Congress and the White House.

“If you refuse to put forward an offer that includes any Democratic input and you do not get Democratic votes, that is on Republicans,” said Sen. Patty Murray, the top Democrat on the Senate Appropriations Committee.

In contrast, Schumer picked up one unexpected nod of support -- from Trump himself, who just a day earlier was gearing up to blame De-

mocrats for any shutdown.

“Congratulations to Chuck Schumer for doing the right thing - Took guts’ and courage!” the president posted on his social media account.

Congress has been unable to pass the annual appropriations bills designed to fund the government, so they have resorted to passing short-term extensions instead. The legislation before the Senate is the third such continuing resolution for the current fiscal year, now nearly half over.

The legislation would fund the federal government through the end of September. It would trim non-defence spending by about USD 13 billion from the previous year and increase defence spending by about USD 6 billion, which are marginal changes when talking about a top-line spending level of nearly USD 1.7 trillion.

The Republican-led House passed the spending bill on Tuesday and then adjourned. The move left senators with a decision to either take it or leave it. And while Democrats pushed for a vote on a fourth short-term extension, GOP leadership made clear that option was a non-starter.

Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-SD, and others made the case that any blame for a shutdown would fall squarely on Democrats. And House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., said Republicans stood together to get the job done. (AP)

Trump recorrects himself in Russia-Ukraine war

WEST PALM BEACH (US), March 15: President Donald Trump said Friday that he was “being a little bit sarcastic” when he repeatedly claimed as a candidate that he would have the Russia-Ukraine war solved within 24 hours - and even before he even took office.

Trump was asked about the vow he repeatedly made on the campaign trail during an interview for the “Full Measure” television programme as his administration is still trying to broker a solution 54 days into his second term.

“Well, I was being a little bit sarcastic when I said that,” Trump said in a clip released ahead of the episode airing Sunday. “What I really mean is I’d like to get it settled and, I’ll, I think, I think I’ll be successful.”

It was a rare admission from Trump, who has a long record of making exaggerated claims.

Trump said at a CNN town hall in May 2023, “They’re dying, Russians and Ukrainians. I want them to stop dying. And I’ll have that done - I’ll have that done in 24 hours.”

“That is a war that’s dying to be settled. I will get it settled before I even become president,” Trump said during his September debate with then-Vice President Kamala Harris. “If I win, when I’m president-elect, and what I’ll do is I’ll speak to one, I’ll speak to the other. I’ll get them together.” (AP)

‘Filled with arrogance’: China lashes out at G7 over statements on maritime security

TAIPEI (TAIWAN), March 15: China has lashed out at accusations it is endangering maritime safety made by top diplomats from the Group of 7 industrialised democracies in a joint statement, saying the G7 members are “filled with arrogance, prejudice and malicious intentions.” Even for China’s generally overheated diplomatic language, the statement issued Saturday was unusually vitriolic, although it did not threaten any retaliation.

In the Friday statement that sparked the Chinese response, the G7 said, “We condemn China’s illicit, provocative, coercive and dangerous actions that seek unilaterally to alter the status quo in such a way as to risk undermining the stability of regions, including through land reclamations, and building of outposts, as well as their use for military purpose.”

“We reaffirm that our basic policies on Taiwan remain unchanged and emphasize the importance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait as indispensable to international



security and prosperity,” the statement said, referring to the crucial waterway separating China from the self-governing island republic it claims as its own territory.

In the response issued through its embassy in Canada, where the two-day G7 meeting was held in La Malbaie, Quebec, China said the statement “repeated the same old rhetoric, ignored facts and China’s solemn position, grossly interfered in China’s internal affairs, and

blatantly smeared China.”

“The statements are filled with arrogance, prejudice and malicious intentions to suppress and attack China. China strongly deplores and opposes this and has lodged solemn representations with the Canadian side,” the statement said. China claims virtually the entire South China Sea, through which passes around \$5 trillion in global trade. It has dismissed and occasionally clashed with other countries that claim parts of the sea, especially the Philippines, a US treaty partner.

China is not a member of the G7 but closely follows all comments and references to its international status made by international organizations or in foreign countries, responding to criticism with caustic language.

China has firmly rejected a UN-affiliated court’s ruling that invalidated most of its claims to the South China Sea and says its claim to Taiwan is non-negotiable, even if China has to use force against the island. (AP)

Threat of tornadoes moves to US South after big storm unleashes winds, fans wildfires

OKLAHOMA CITY, March 15: The threat of tornadoes moved east into the Mississippi Valley and Deep South on Saturday, a day after a massive storm system moving across the country unleashed winds that damaged buildings, whipped up dust storms that caused deadly crashes and fanned more than 100 wildfires in several central states.

Multiple tornadoes were reported in Missouri on Friday, just some of the extreme weather that was forecast to affect an area home to more than 100 million people.

Winds gusting up to 80 mph (130 kph) were predicted from the Canadian border to Texas, threatening blizzard conditions in colder northern areas and wildfire risk in warmer, drier areas to the south.

The National Weather Service issued multiple tornado and severe thunderstorm warnings early Saturday morning for areas in Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, Tennessee, Illinois, Indiana and Texas.

Three people were killed Friday in car crashes during a dust storm in Amarillo County in the Texas Panhandle, according to Sgt. Cindy Barkley of the state’s department of public safety. One pileup involved an estimated 38 cars.

“It’s the worst I’ve ever seen,” Barkley said, calling the near-zero visibility a nightmare. “We couldn’t tell that they



were all together until the dust kind of settled.”

Evacuations were ordered in some Oklahoma communities as more than 130 fires were reported across the state. The State Patrol said winds were so strong that they toppled several tractor-trailers.

“This is terrible out here,” said Charles Daniel, a truck driver hauling a 48-foot (14.6-metre) trailer along Interstate 40 in western Oklahoma. “There’s a lot of sand and dirt in the air. I’m not pushing it over

55 mph. I’m scared it will blow over if I do.”

Forecasters said the severe storm threat would continue into the weekend with a high chance of tornadoes and damaging winds Saturday in Mississippi and Alabama.

Heavy rain could bring flash flooding to some parts of the East Coast on Sunday. Experts say it’s not unusual to see such weather extremes in March.

“What’s unique about this one is its

large size and intensity,” said Bill Bunting of the National Weather Service’s Storm Prediction Centre in Norman, Oklahoma. “And so what that is doing is producing really substantial impacts over a very large area.” The weather service said at least five tornadoes were reported in Missouri on Friday, including one in the Saint Louis area.

Several buildings were damaged in the storm, including a strip mall in Rolla, Missouri, where a tornado was reported Friday afternoon.

The Storm Prediction Centre said fast-moving storms could spawn twisters and hail as large as baseballs, but the greatest threat would come from straight-line winds near or exceeding hurricane force, with gusts of 100 mph (160 kph) possible.

“Potentially violent” tornadoes were expected Saturday in parts of the central Gulf Coast and Deep South into the Tennessee Valley, according to the National Weather Service.

The Storm Prediction Centre said parts of Mississippi including Jackson and Hattiesburg and areas of Alabama including Birmingham and Tuscaloosa would be at a high risk. Severe storms and tornadoes were also possible across eastern Louisiana, western Georgia, central Tennessee and the western Florida Panhandle.

Wildfires in the Southern Plains threat-

ened to spread rapidly amid warm, dry weather and strong winds, and evacuations were ordered Friday for some communities in Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Missouri and New Mexico.

A blaze in Roberts County, Texas, northeast of Amarillo, quickly blew up from less than a square mile (about 2 square kilometers) to an estimated 32.8 square miles (85 square kilometers), the Texas A&M University Forest Service said on X. Crews stopped its advance by Friday evening.

About 60 miles (90 kilometers) to the south, another fire grew to about 3.9 square miles (10 square kilometers) before its advance was halted in the afternoon.

The Oklahoma Department of Emergency Management activated its emergency operations center due to several fast-moving fires that prompted evacuations of the town of Leedey in the western part of the state and in a rural area east of Norman.

Firefighters had been prepositioned in certain areas, which helps authorities jump on blazes early, said Andy James, Oklahoma Forestry Services fire management chief.

Firefighting aircraft were also deployed in some parts of Oklahoma and Texas but were generally unable to fly due to low visibility from smoke and dust, he added.

Friday evening, the National Weather Service said a “complex of extremely dangerous fires” was located northeast of Oklahoma City, near Stillwater, and urged some people in the city of about 50,000 to evacuate. Officials issued mandatory evacuation orders via social media that included homes, hotels and a Walmart.

Officials urged people in some areas of central Missouri’s Camden County to evacuate due to wildfires, and the State Highway Patrol warned via social media that they were nearing homes and businesses.

Roughly 120 miles (190 kilometers) of Interstate 70 in western Kansas were temporarily shut down due to blowing dust and limited visibility.

High winds also knocked out power to more than 216,000 homes and businesses in Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas and Missouri, according to the website power-outage.us.

The National Weather Service issued blizzard warnings for parts of far western Minnesota and far eastern South Dakota starting early Saturday. Snow accumulations of 3 to 6 inches (7.6 to 15.2 centimeters) were expected, with up to a foot (30 centimeters) possible.

Winds gusting to 60 mph (97 kph) were expected to cause whiteout conditions. (AP)

Announced ₹ 2,500 crore road project on NH-502 A (Package 1 & 3) in Mizoram

PM ensured unprecedented peace in Northeast: Shah



AIZAWL, March 15: Union home minister Amit Shah on Saturday said along with the development of the Northeast, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has ensured unprecedented peace in the region.

Shah, who arrived here on a two-day visit, attended a function marking the relocation of Assam Rifles establishments from Aizawl to a designated camp at Zokhawsang, about 15 km east of the state capital.

Speaking on the occasion, Shah said, "The Modi government has been making

massive efforts to strengthen, develop and unite the entire Northeast over the past 10 years."

"The Modi government has been working relentlessly for the Northeast to establish new dimensions of development in every sector—from tourism to technology, sports to space, agriculture to entrepreneurship," Shah said.

The Home Minister said, "Before Modi became Prime Minister in 2014, the Northeast had been visited by former PMs only 21 times. After Modi became the PM, he has visited the region 78 times."

"Along with development in every sector, Modi has ensured unprecedented peace in the Northeast," he added.

Citing the relocation of the Assam Rifles bases to Zokhawsang, Shah said, "This is a milestone for the development of Mizoram as well as a symbol of the Centre's responsibility towards the Mizo people."

He explained that the demand for relocating the paramilitary force's bases from Aizawl to Zokhawsang had been raised for around 35 years due to the topography and congestion in Aizawl.

"The demand, which has been there for around 35 years, is now set to be fulfilled due to the important decision of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. It is not just an administrative decision, but a testament to the Centre's responsibility towards the Mizo people. This is the commitment of the central government for the development of Mizoram," Shah said.

Since 1890, when the first Assam Rifles base was established in the state, Shah said, "This will be known as the most significant decision for the progress of Aizawl."

Shah also announced that a ₹ 2,500 crore road project on NH-502 A (Package 1 & 3) in Mizoram will soon begin.

He added, "NH-6 between Aizawl and Kolasib, which is the primary lifeline of the state linking Assam, will be widened to four lanes at a cost of ₹ 1,742 crore."

"The Centre has provided ₹ 5,000 crore to Mizoram for road projects in the past 10 years," he added.

The Home Minister also assured the people of Mizoram that the BJP-led central government is committed to a developed and peaceful Mizoram. (PTI)

Tripura CM appointed high level task force convener for NE investment promotion



HT Correspondent
AGARTALA, March 15: For the investment promotion in North East Region, the Ministry of development of North East region has formed a high level Task Force making Tripura chief minister Manik Saha as the Convener.

During the 72nd Plenary of North Eastern Council held on 21st December 2024 at Agartala, Tripura, it was decided to constitute a High-Level Task Force on Investment Promotion in NE involving CMs of North Eastern States.

Accordingly, it has been decided to constitute a High-Level Task Force in which Saha appointed as convener, Jyotiraditya Scindia, Union Minister of MDoNER, Conrad Sangma, chief minister of

Meghalaya, Neiphiu Rio, chief minister of Nagaland and Prem Singh Tamang chief minister of Sikkim appointed as Members of the Task Force.

Task Force will submit its reports to NEC in six months' time as per the Terms of Reference of the Task Force, which, inter-alia, includes:

"Assess the existing investment ecosystem, including policies, incentives, and infrastructure in NE. Develop a strategic roadmap to position NE as a preferred investment destination for priority sectors such as agriculture, tourism, logistics, IT, and renewable energy. Highlight high-potential sectors and regions within NE to create focused investment clusters for promotion of sectoral hubs such as agro-processing zones, tourism circuits, IT parks, and renewable energy corridors etc. Develop strategies to attract both domestic and international investments in the priority sectors, with emphasis on public-private partnerships (PPPs)", the notification of MDoNER said.

It said that the task force will recommend policy reforms to streamline approvals, enhance ease of doing business, and address investor concerns.

NHIDCL urged for highway underpasses in Mungiakami elephant corridor

AGARTALA, March 15: The Tripura government has urged the NHIDCL, which is upgrading NH 8, to construct two-three underpasses for the safe movement of jumbos in the Mungiakami elephant corridor in Khowai district, a senior official said on Saturday.

The National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited (NHIDCL) is upgrading the highway's Chakmaghat-Teliamura section.

"We have requested the NHIDCL to construct two-three underpasses in the Mungiakami elephant corridor to ensure free and safe movement of elephants," Principal Chief Conservator of Forest RK Samal told PTI.

He said the death of a full-grown male elephant in Mungiakami after being hit by a train on December 31 was a serious setback to the conservation efforts.

"The herd had a total of 20 elephants, and only two of them were full-grown males. With the death of one of them, there will be an impact on the population of jumbos," he added.

Samal said the Forest Department has requested the Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) to limit the speed of trains in the elephant corridor.

"We have also urged NFR to construct underpasses and overbridges to avoid accidents in the corridor. We have requested them to fence both sides of the tracks, but there has been no positive response yet," he added. (PTI)

Militant arrested from Manipur's Kakching

IMPHAL, March 15: The Manipur Police have arrested a cadre of a banned outfit from Kakching district, officials said on Saturday.

The member of the outlawed People's Liberation Army was apprehended from Langmeidong Mangang Leikai in Kakching on Friday, they said.

In another operation at Dampi ridge in Churachandpur district, security forces recovered arms and ammunition, including a rifle, a single-barrel gun and two IEDs, the officials said.

"Intelligence-based combing operations are being carried out in the hill and valley districts to recover all the looted/snatched/illegal weapons in the state," a police officer said. (PTI)

GOC 3 Corps flags off second leg of 'Shaurya Yatra' in Nagaland

KOHIMA, March 15: The second leg of the 3,900 km 'Shaurya Yatra' bike rally from Arunachal Pradesh to Gujarat was flagged off at Ranapahar military station in Dimapur district of Nagaland on Saturday.

After a grand flag-off from Vijaynagar, Arunachal Pradesh, the 15-day 'Shaurya Yatra' bike rally was ceremonially flagged off by the General Officer Commanding, 3 Corps, Lt Gen Abhijit S Pendharkar at Ranapahar, stated a press release from the Assam Rifles.

As part of the day's events, the rally participants interacted with a retired subedar major of the Assam Rifles, who shared inspiring stories of bravery and dedication.

The rally has travelled through two states (Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland) covering 550 km and now set course for Guwahati, continuing its journey to reach Rann of Kutch in Gujarat on March 23.

Altogether 12 bike riding enthusiasts from Indian Army, Assam Rifles and locals from Arunachal Pradesh taking part in the rally interacted with ex-servicemen and thanked them for their service and their continued contribution to nation building. (PTI)

Nagaland delegation highlights state's tourism, investment potentials in Australia

HT Correspondent
DIMAPUR, March 15: A delegation of Nagaland highlighted the state's tourism and investment potentials in Australia's 65th Adelaide Fringe Festival. As part of the official delegation from India to the festival, Abu Metha, adviser to Nagaland CM and chairman of Investment and Development Authority of Nagaland and Theja Meru, chairman, Task Force for Music and Arts (TaFMA), attended the festival on Friday on the invitation of the Fringe Festival and Honey Pot networking and spotlight events.

The Adelaide Fringe Festival is the world's second largest arts festival which is held for 30 days in the capital city of South Australia.

During the festival, Metha met with the leadership of the festival and different parts of the world and held discussions on possible collaborations, partnerships and mutual agreements in tourism and investment in Nagaland.

During the several meetings and deliberations with multiple leaders and delegations, Metha highlighted Nagaland as a tourist destination. He said the present status of the Hornbill Festival in the state as a renowned cultural and arts festival has been built over the past 25 years.

He emphasised that Nagaland's festivals and their culmination at the yearly Hornbill Festival play a pivotal role in bolstering the economy while enriching the rich cultural landscape of the state and India.

Metha also underscored the emerging potentials of Nagaland as an investment destination which is aligned with India's Act East Policy, dwelling on the state's geographical advantage as a gateway between the Indian Subcontinent and the ASEAN, with the added assets of rich human capital and a vibrant young population.

Overloaded trucks uncontrolled movement damage bridges in North Sikkim: BRO

GANGTOK, March 15: As many as four bridges in North Sikkim have either collapsed or got severely damaged in North Sikkim in the past two months due to the movement of overloaded trucks on those bridges, an official release by Project Swastik said on Saturday.

Project Swastik is undertaken by the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) to enhance infrastructure and connectivity in the border regions of Sikkim, particularly in North Sikkim.

"Due to uncontrolled movement of overloaded trucks, four vital bridges in North Sikkim have been severely damaged or collapsed in recent months," it said.

According to the statement, on January 4, a 200-foot-long bailey bridge connecting Lachung to Katao collapsed due to the uncontrolled movement of trucks.

Another 180-foot-long bailey bridge constructed over the Teesta River at Sanklang collapsed on February 11.

On February 20, an old vintage Pheechu bridge constructed on Dikchu-Sanklang road collapsed, while on March 15, a 320-foot Bailey suspension bridge at Phidang got severely damaged due to the



movement of uncontrolled overloaded trucks.

After the collapse of the 180-foot bailey bridge at Sanklang, North Sikkim was connected via the Dikchu-Sanklang-Tung axis through the Phidang bridge.

However, due to severe damage suffered by the Phidang bridge, connectivity to North Sikkim got disconnected again.

Sensing the gravity of the situation, Project Swastik mobilised its technical team to repair the Phidang Bridge at the earliest. Normal traffic

is likely to be restored in a couple of days, the statement said.

Project Swastik urged the district administration to strictly enforce restrictions on the movement of goods vehicles to prevent further damage.

It said that the road infrastructure should last longer by ensuring the regulated movement of heavy vehicles as the breakdown in connectivity disrupts both the logistic supply lines of the Army and the movement of civilians in North Sikkim.

NPCC launches membership drive to bring 'change' in Nagaland

HT Correspondent
DIMAPUR, March 15: Stepping up efforts to strengthen its movement for 'change' and 'justice' after the win in the 2024 parliamentary elections to the lone Lok Sabha seat in the state, the Nagaland Pradesh Congress Committee (NPCC) on Saturday launched its membership drive at Congress Bhavan Dimapur on Saturday.

The drive in the state will conclude on March 22.

Addressing the programme as the chief guest, NPCC working president and former Rajya Sabha MP C Apok Jamir said the launch of the membership drive is not for numbers but it is a movement to make aware the citizens of the state to rise up to the challenges that they are facing today.

"Today we are confronted with a lot of forces which are trying to destroy the very tenet of the Constitution," he said, adding the only party that can confront these challenges is the Indian National Congress which stood for the rights of the people since the freedom struggle.

Without naming the BJP, Jamir said some forces are trying to change and destroy the Naga way of life and belief.

He stressed that it is the bounden duty of every citizen to take a stand against these "anti-constitutional traits" of the government.

Referring to newspapers, Jamir said there is a lack of transparency and development activities in the state.

"As a party, it is our bounden duty to highlight these so that we become deterrent to the activities of the present government in the state," he said.

Saying that it is the power of the people which can bring change, Jamir said the people of Nagaland showed the power of the people in the last parliamentary election by electing the Congress candidate.

In his address, Dimapur District Congress Committee president Hutoho Chishi said, "If you want to save democracy and your future, joining the Congress Party is the only option."

World Consumer Rights day observed



HT Correspondent
ITANAGAR, March 15: The World Consumer Rights Day-2025 along with Consumer Awareness Program was held at Community Hall, Borum, Yupia Papum Pare district on Saturday. The programme was participated by General Public, Panchayat Body, School Management Committee Members, Students, Teaching Staffs and Officials from various departments.

District Consumer Protection Officer (DCPO)-cum-Assistant Controller Legal Metrology & Consumer Affairs, ICR & Papum Pare Distt Debia Tana in a statement said that the programme was organised for creating awareness among the consumers.

District Consumer Dispute Redressal Commission, Yupia, DMA, Mibi Basar explained and elaborated about the consumer awareness programme and need of awareness on various consumers items. She explained details about the online or virtual Consumer Complaint proceedings and how to access web portal e-Daakhil to lodge Consumer Complaint to seek redressal through the Consumer Commission/Court, said Debia. Borum Tarajuli/Nyorch, Yupia

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Women of Khonoma village organise first-ever Garlic Festival in Nagaland
Stands as a symbol of women's leadership and community resilience

HT Correspondent
DIMAPUR, March 15: Marking a historic milestone, Khonoma village in Kohima district organised the first-ever Chimerie (garlic) festival in Nagaland on Friday.

Interestingly, the Khonoma Women Union hosted the festival, which was sponsored by the women resource development department and cosponsored by the horticulture and agriculture departments.

The festival was organised not just for agricultural progress but also to prove the vital role the women play in leading rural development. It also stands as a symbol of women's leadership and community resilience, with garlic cultivation now a growing source of economic empowerment for the village.

Nagaland rural development minister Metsübo Jamir, who graced the event as the special guest, called the festival a proud moment for Nagaland.

Citing his own experience as a part-time farmer, Jamir highlighted the importance of



processing and preserving agricultural produce, announcing that the rural development department would set up a small processing unit in Khonoma.

Praising the active involvement of the village's self-help groups (SHGs), he described their participation as a reflection of Khonoma's unity and resilience.

He further exhorted the youth to pursue entrepreneurial training and skill development, adding that the department would provide a Tata Mobile vehicle to support the transportation of farmers' produce.

"Anything you do, make it sustainable," Jamir urged.

In his address, Zhothisa Dawhuo, com-

missioner and secretary, women resource development department, said the festival marked the success of the 'one village, one product programme', with Khonoma village focusing on garlic cultivation. He said it was a step toward economic growth and self-reliance.

Dawhuo commended the 30 women farmers who received seed money to expand their garlic farms, acknowledging their critical role in agriculture and community building.

"The dedication of Khonoma farmers, the support of the village council, and the community's enthusiasm reflect the true spirit of unity and progress," he said adding that Khonoma will soon become a model for agricultural excellence.

In her vote of thanks, Kekhrieno Mor, member, Nagaland State Commission for Women, underscored the event's significance, calling it a powerful example of not just women's development, but women-led development.

INDIA bloc formed for Lok Sabha polls, need broader platform of secular opposition parties: Karat

NEW DELHI, March 15: The opposition INDIA bloc was formed for the Lok Sabha elections and not state polls, senior CPI(M) leader Prakash Karat has said and called for a broader platform of secular opposition parties.

He also said the alliance should be looked at with a broader perspective so that it would not be stifled solely by electoral politics.

The Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) of opposition parties came together ahead of the Lok Sabha elections to counter the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance at the Centre.

In an interview with PTI, Karat - the CPI(M) interim coordinator -- also said there had been no discussions of the alliance at the national level after the Lok Sabha elections and added the constituent parties had their own equations in the states. "It is a fact that the formation of the INDIA bloc and the cooperation between its constituents in certain states, if not all, definitely led to the BJP losing its majority in the Lok Sabha..." Karat said.

"Subsequently, assembly elections have taken place and I think the biggest setback for the opposition has been Maharashtra, where the Maha Vikas Aghadi did very well in the Lok Sabha polls and the BJP alliance was reduced to a mi-



nority. But the reverse happened in the assembly election," he added.

The veteran CPI(M) leader also said they had not been able to come to any conclusion as the opposition alliance did very well in Jharkhand.

"We are not yet able to come to any conclusion because the situation in states differ in a very big way. For instance, in Jharkhand, the alliance -- in which most of them are constituents of the INDIA bloc -- was able to defeat the BJP," Karat told PTI.

"The general impression after these assembly elections is that the BJP recovered ground in these polls. But I think it should not be directly linked to the fortunes of the INDIA bloc because the INDIA bloc was primarily set up to face the Lok Sabha elections," he said.

The Left leader said there had not been any discussions on how the alliance would proceed in the post-Lok Sabha phase and added there was a need for a broader opposition platform or unity among the secular opposition parties.

"I don't think any discussion or thought has been put into how to proceed with the post-Lok Sabha phase. There is a need for a broad opposition platform or unity of the secular opposition parties. But it (INDIA bloc) was not meant for specific state elections at that time. So, how you proceed with a broad opposition unity or platform in the coming days, I think, needs to be looked at by all the constituents, discussed and then some shape given to it," he said.

Karat pointed out that alliances were already in place in states such as Bihar and Tamil Nadu. On the contrary, one couldn't expect the CPI(M) to come together with the TMC in West Bengal and no one could have expected AAP and the Congress to join hands in Delhi.

"The real challenge is, post the Lok Sabha elections, will this be only an electoral platform? If it's only for elections, then election to election. The character of the INDIA bloc for assembly elections is going to be very complex," he said.

"Many constituents of the INDIA bloc cannot work together in assembly elections... So, I think the opposition unity platform should not be linked purely to the electoral field. Thought has to go in because it came together as we were all opposed to the Modi government and the BJP," he said.

Today, the Narendra Modi government still exists or is in its third term and the BJP is there as a ruling party, Karat said. "If the opposition parties are still concerned about the defence of democracy, of secularism, of federalism, there are broad parameters on which the secular opposition parties, I think, can find common ground."

"It should be looked at from that basis, then you can think of forward movement," he added. (PTI)

Bid to bring Rowlatt Act to suppress oppn: Sule on anti-urban naxalism bill; seeks review

MUMBAI, March 15: NCP (SP) MP Supriya Sule has equated the proposed law against urban naxalism in Maharashtra with the colonial Rowlatt Act, which she alleged might be misused against individuals or organisations critical of the government, effectively creating a police raj.

Sule demanded that the government review the draft of the bill and ensure that Constitutional values are not violated.

The 'Maharashtra Special Public Security Bill, 2024' bill, which will become the first law to tackle naxalism in the state, proposes to give several powers to the government and the police machinery in combating unlawful activities. All offences registered under this Act will be cognisable and non-bailable.

While re-introducing the bill during the winter session of the state legislature last December, Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis had said the law was aimed at closing down the dens of urban Naxals, stressing that the proposed legislation was not against suppressing genuine dissenting voices.

Sule on Saturday claimed the bill would undermine the fundamental rights of citizens.

"Through this bill, the rights of common people to speak against the government will be taken away. In a truly healthy democracy, dis-



senting opinions are respected.

"The principle of democracy also values opposition voices, as they ensure that those in power remain accountable and respect public opinion," the NCP (Sharadchandra Pawar) working president stated on X.

Sule said the definition of "illegal acts" seems to grant unlimited powers to government agencies in the proposed law.

"This effectively gives the government a license to establish a Police Raj, which could be misused against individuals, institutions, or organisations that express constructive opposition democratically," the Baramati MP alleged.

She said the bill undermines the

very concept of "We, the People of India".

Sule said the bill would bestow unchecked powers on the administration which could be misused to harass individuals out of sheer vindictiveness.

"Criticising government policies and decisions, peacefully protesting, or organising marches could all be deemed illegal acts. This bill disregards the principles of ideological diversity and directly infringes upon citizens' Constitutional rights," she alleged.

Sule claimed the bill grants the government the power to interfere in certain judicial processes, "posing a direct threat to judicial independence". (PTI)

TN govt announces spl package for paddy growers, international exposure visit for farmers

CHENNAI, March 15: Tamil Nadu government will implement a special package to increase the paddy area and food grain production during Kar, Kuruvai and Sornavari seasons, in 29 non-Cauvery Delta districts at an outlay of ₹ 102 crore, Agriculture Minister MRK Panneerselvam informed the Assembly on Saturday. These cultivation seasons begin in the months of May-June, June-July, and April-May respectively for 120 days long paddy crops.

The package includes a subsidy for machine planting and quality certified seeds to farmers. A similar package will be provided to farmers in the Delta districts to increase the area and food grain production during Kuruvai and a sum of ₹ 58 crore will be allocated for the purpose, he said.

Paddy is cultivated on 18 lakh acres in the Cauvery delta districts and 34 lakh acres in non-delta districts in the state.

Making a slew of announcements while presenting the Agriculture Budget for 2025-26 in the Assembly, the fifth after the DMK stormed to power in 2021, Panneerselvam said the government would arrange an international exposure visit for paddy farmers.

"To help farmers learn the latest technologies and implement the same in their fields, 100 progressive farmers will be taken for an exposure visit to Japan, China and Vietnam for which ₹ 2 crore will be allocated," the Minister said.

The government would unveil the Tamil Nadu Agroforestry Policy to promote the growing of valuable trees such as Sandal, Red Sanders, Mahogany and Rosewood and to simplify the procedures related to registration, felling, transportation and marketing of timber and to achieve a greener Tamil Nadu.

"Trees improve crop productivity by aiding in rainfall and enhance soil health by shedding biomass. Therefore, agroforestry is encouraged to provide addi-



tional income to farmers through the cultivation of high-value trees," Panneerselvam said in his Budget speech that lasted for a little over one-and-a-half hours.

Also, 1,000 Chief Minister's Farmers Service Centres will be established at an estimated cost of ₹ 10-20 lakh, with a 30 per cent subsidy amounting to ₹ 3-6 lakh per centre. ₹ 42 crore from the State Budget will be earmarked for this scheme.

These centres will serve as hubs for agricultural support, offering essential inputs such as seeds, fertilisers and other farming necessities besides offering expert guidance on enhancing crop productivity, pest and disease management, etc.

Malaivazh Uzhavar Munnetra Thittam (The hill farmers development scheme) will be implemented this year at ₹ 22.80 crore for the welfare of 63,000 hill farmers in 20 districts. The scheme covers minor millet cultivation, distribution of inputs, area expansion in vegetable crops, farm machinery, value addition, Micro Irrigation and Integrated Farming System, and steps to provide Kisan credit cards. Maize production will be enhanced in an area of 1.87 lakh acres at ₹ 40.27 crore under Union and State funds. Organic farming will be encouraged in 37 districts at an outlay of ₹ 12 crore.

Crop Insurance Scheme will be implemented to protect farmers from income loss, he said and added this scheme will be implemented during 2025-26 for ₹ 841 crore to cover 35 lakh acres. (PTI)

Sharad Pawar urges PM Modi to install statues of Maratha Empire warriors in Delhi

NEW DELHI, March 15: NCP-SP chief Sharad Pawar has urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to permit installing three horse-mounted statues of Peshwa Bajirao I, Mahadji Shinde and Malharao Holkar at the Talkatora Stadium here. The area around Talkatora Stadium holds immense importance in the military campaigns launched by the Maratha Empire against the Mughals in the 18th century.

Pawar said a Pune-based NGO had planned to install busts of Bajirao, Shinde and Holkar at the Talkatora Stadium, but litterateurs and historians have weighed in favour of equestrian statues of the three warriors.

"However, many literary figures and well-wishers have voiced the sentiment that full-sized equestrian statues would be a more fitting tribute to their valour and contribution," he said in a letter to Modi.

Pawar said as Talkatora Stadium falls under the jurisdiction of the New Delhi Municipal Corporation (NDMC), he was seeking the prime minister's intervention in directing the Government of Delhi and NDMC to grant the necessary permissions for installing full-sized equestrian statues. The Talkatora Stadium was also the venue of the 98th Marathi Sahitya Sammelan which was inaugurated by the prime minister. "Organised by Sarhad Pune and Akhil Bharatiya Marathi Sahitya Mahamandal, this literary festival was elevated to historic significance under your esteemed leadership," he said. (PTI)

Former Cong MLA shot at in Himachal's Bilaspur accuses BJP of supporting attackers

SHIMLA, March 15: A day after former Congress MLA Bamber Thakur was shot at by unidentified assailants, he has accused the local BJP legislature of supporting drug smugglers who attacked him.

Thakur was attacked by four bike-borne assailants at his residence in Himachal Pradesh's Bilaspur on Friday afternoon. He was sitting in the courtyard of his wife's government accommodation when the attackers fired 12 rounds, police said earlier. He and his personal security officer were injured in the incident and rushed to a hospital. Thakur suffered a bullet injury in his leg.

Talking to the reporters, Thakur who is undergoing treatment in Indira Gandhi Medical College (IGMC) Shimla said "If Trilok Jamwal would not support, such incidents would not take place. If I could be attacked at home during the Congress regime, I would surely be killed in the BJP tenure and the Chief Minister needs to be serious".

"I had organised a rally against the drugs (Chitta - adulterated heroin) smugglers and demanded that their properties be attached and Chitta smugglers have attacked me", he said. He alleged that the local BJP MLA from Bilaspur (sadar) assembly constituency Trilok Jamwal and the BJP are protecting the attackers.

"My son was also attacked two days before the last elections," he said and alleged that the accused has political protection. Such anti-social elements should be strictly dealt with, he demanded. "I was being followed



for the past 2-3 months and had applied for a gun license but the file is still pending," he said.

Condemning the incident, Jamwal said, "If former Congress MLA is not safe in Congress regime what would happen to the common people and demanded an impartial enquiry into the incident". He threatened to call for Bilaspur bandh on Monday if the accused were not arrested by Sunday evening.

The BJP also took out a rally in protest of the attack in Bilaspur on Saturday. Jamwal said that the gang war is ongoing in Bilaspur and action will be taken against them and the Chitta mafia. (PTI)

Kashi Ram continues to guide us in fight for social justice: Rahul

NEW DELHI, March 15: The Congress on Saturday paid rich tributes to Bahujan Samaj Party founder late Kashi Ram on his 91st birth anniversary, with senior leader Rahul Gandhi saying his struggle for the rights of Dalits, deprived and exploited "will continue to guide us" at every step in the fight for social justice.

"Respectful tributes to the great social reformer, Honourable Kashi Ram Ji, on his birth anniversary. His struggle for the rights of Dalits, deprived and exploited will continue to guide us at every step in this fight for social justice," Rahul Gandhi said in a post on X.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge also paid tributes to the late Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) leader.

"We pay our humble tributes on

the birth anniversary of great social reformer, Manyawar Kashi Ram Ji, who contributed significantly in connecting the Dalit, deprived, exploited and backward classes of the society with the mainstream of Indian politics," Kharge posted on X.

"He left an indelible mark as a pioneer of equality and social justice," he added.

Born in Punjab's Rupnagar on March 15, 1934, Kashi Ram worked for the upliftment and political mobilisation of people belonging to backward classes.

He founded the All India Backward and Minorities Communities Employees Federation (BAMCEF) in 1971, the Dalit Shoshit Samaj Sangharsh Samiti in 1981, before forming the BSP in 1984.

Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra also hailed

Kashi Ram and lauded his contributions to the fight for the rights of the Dalits and the deprived.

"Respectful tributes to the strong voice for the rights of Dalits, deprived, exploited and backward classes, pioneer of social justice and Bahujan leader, Honourable Kashi Ram Ji, on his birth anniversary," Priyanka Gandhi said in a post in Hindi on X.

"Honourable Kashi Ram Ji gave new heights to social justice and constitutional values through his thoughts and social movements. His thoughts will continue to inspire generations," she added.

Kashi Ram was elected to the Lok Sabha from Etawah in Uttar Pradesh in 1991 and from Hoshiarpur in Punjab in 1996. He also served as a Rajya Sabha member from 1998 to 2004. (PTI)

BJP slams quota for Muslim contractors in Karnataka as unconstitutional

NEW DELHI, March 15: The BJP on Saturday slammed the Karnataka government's decision to reserve four per cent of government contracts for Muslims as unconstitutional, alleging that it is part of the Congress' appeasement politics and weakens the national unity.

Addressing a press conference, BJP leader and former Union minister Ravi Shankar Prasad accused Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi of seeking to lead the Congress in the competitive vote bank politics among opposition parties.

He claimed that Gandhi is behind the Karnataka government's decision for quota for Muslim contractors as Chief Minister Siddaramaiah does not have courage or political capital to take the decision.

The announcement of separate quota in government contracts for Muslims has given a new dimension to the communal and vote bank politics, he said.

Such a decision, the former law minister said, may seem small but developments like these add up to have serious national implications.

Prasad asked if there is any limit to such competitive appeasement politics and if separate queues for Muslims in buying cinema and train tickets will come next.

He said such a decision also weakens the voice for those Muslims who are against such politics and stand for the country's development.

Prasad said several demands, including separate voting, for exclusive treatment for Muslims during the independence movement had finally ended up in the country's division.

He said the Supreme Court has emphatically spoken against religion-based reservations and expressed confidence that the decision of the Congress government in Karnataka will be challenged in courts.

Asking if Gandhi understands the Constitution, he said other



Congress-run states may also follow the example of Karnataka. The BJP will oppose it, he added.

The Constitution makes provision for reservation on the ground of social and education backwardness, and Muslims too have benefited under it in different states, he said.

The state government has given

its nod for amending the Karnataka Transparency in Public Procurement (KTPP) Act to provide four per cent reservation in government tenders to Muslim contractors.

Prasad alleged that the Congress is setting new benchmark in competitive votebank and Muslim appeasement politics, adding that this is dangerous for the country.

Religion-based reservation is impermissible under the Constitution, he said, adding that Pakistan's founder M A Jinnah might have gone but left behind those who practise his politics.

"A large number of Muslims in the country now do not like such politics," he said.

The BJP, Prasad said, respects Muslim figures like Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and former president A P J Abdul Kalam among others, and noted that the Narendra Modi government had named one of the islands in the Andaman and Nicobar region after Param Vir Chakra awardee Abdul Hamid.

Further advancing appeasement politics is against national unity, he said. Noting that Congress leaders these days carry pictures of Bhim Rao Ambedkar to take aims at the BJP, Prasad cited Ambedkar's criticism of first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru for speaking up for Muslims but not about welfare of Scheduled Castes to hit back. (PTI)

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Nominations, recommendations for Padma awards 2026 begin

NEW DELHI, March 15: The nominations and recommendations for the Padma awards 2026, which will be given to distinguished people for their exceptional achievements and service, began on Saturday.

The last date for nominations and recommendations for next year's Padma awards to be announced on the eve of Republic Day 2026 is July 31, 2025, according to an official statement.

The nominations and recommendations for Padma awards will only be received online on the Rashtriya Puraskar Portal (<https://awards.gov.in>).

The Padma awards -- namely Padma Vibhushan, Padma Bhushan and Padma Shri -- are amongst the highest civilian awards of the country.

Instituted in 1954, these awards are announced on the eve of the Republic Day every year.

The awards seek to recognise 'work of distinction' and is given for distinguished and exceptional achievements and service in all fields and disciplines such as Art, Literature and Education, Sports, Medicine, Social Work, Science and Engineering, Public Affairs, Civil Service, Trade and Industry etc. All persons without distinction of race, occupation, position or sex are eligible for these awards, the statement said.

The government servants, including those working with PSUs, except doctors and scientists, are not eligible for the Padma awards.

Ever since the Narendra Modi government came to power in 2014, it has started honouring the "unsung heroes" by awarding them with the Padma awards, thus transforming the Padma awards into "People's Padma", officials said. All citizens are, therefore, requested to make nominations and recommendations, including self-nomination. Concerted efforts may be made to identify talented persons whose excellence and achievements really deserve to be recognised from amongst women, weaker sections of the society, SCs & STs, divyang persons and who are doing selfless service to the society, the statement said.

The nominations and recommendations should contain all relevant details specified in the format available on the above said portal, including a citation in narrative form (maximum 800 words), clearly bringing out the distinguished and exceptional achievements or service of the person recommended in her or his respective field and discipline.

The details in this regard are also available under the heading 'Awards and Medals' on the website of the Ministry of Home Affairs (<https://mha.gov.in>) and on the Padma Awards Portal. (<https://padmaawards.gov.in>) (PTI)

Policeman dies after being assaulted by villagers in Bihar's Munger, 6 held

MUNGER (BIHAR), March 15: An assistant sub-inspector died after he was assaulted by a group of people in Bihar's Munger district, and six persons have been arrested in connection with the attack, a senior police officer said on Saturday.

The deceased has been identified as ASI Santosh Kumar Singh, who was posted at Mufassil police station in Munger. He was also "attached" with the emergency number '112'.

In a similar episode on Wednesday night, an ASI died after a scuffle between police personnel and a group of people in Araria district.

The latest incident took place in the Nandlalpur village under the jurisdiction of Mufassil police station on Friday evening.

"This happened when the ASI along with other officers, had gone to Nandlalpur village to investigate a case of scuffle around 8.30 pm on Friday. He was attacked with a sharp weapon on his head by some people involved in the scuffle during the investigation. They were in an inebriated state.

"The ASI suffered severe injuries and was immediately taken to the



nearest government hospital, and later shifted to Patna for better treatment," DGP Vinay Kumar told PTI.

Singh succumbed to injuries during treatment at a Patna hospital in the early hours of Saturday, he said.

"A case was registered and six persons have been arrested so far. The body has been sent for post-mortem examination... When one of the arrested accused was being taken to identify other suspects, he tried to escape from custody after snatching a police weapon. He fired at policemen, but was captured by

the security personnel, who opened fire in self-defence.

"The accused suffered an injury in his leg, and is undergoing treatment at a government hospital and his condition is stable," the DGP said.

A manhunt has been launched to nab the other accused.

Commenting on recent attacks on policemen in different parts of Bihar, Kumar said all police stations have been directed to assess the situation before conducting raids in various cases.

Whitewashing of Sambhal's Shahi Jama Masjid outer wall likely to begin today



SAMBHAL (UP), March 15: The whitewashing of the outer wall of the Shahi Jama Masjid in Uttar Pradesh's Sambhal is likely to begin on Sunday, a mosque official said.

Secretary of Shahi Jama Masjid Masood Farooqui on Saturday said an Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) team came to the mosque around noon and held a discussion about how much labour and material is required.

"We are trying to start it today, otherwise it will begin tomorrow," he said. The Allahabad High Court on March 12 directed the ASI to undertake and complete the whitewashing at the mosque within one week.

Following the High Court order,

an ASI team carried out measurements and assessments on March 13. After this the Shahi Jama Masjid's president Zafar Ali had said that the painting work will begin at the mosque after Holi.

Farooqui said, "These people (ASI) are saying that they will start from tomorrow. We have told them that the High Court has given seven days, out of which three days have passed."

Three people have come here as a part of the ASI team, he said. "The ASI has brought labourers and we will also arrange for some locally."

The whitewashing pertains only to the outer wall of Shahi Jama Masjid, Advocate Hari Shankar Jain, representing the Hindu side,

said. After hearing counsels for the parties, Justice Rohit Ranjan Agarwal also directed the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) to install lights on the outer portion of the mosque.

Earlier on Monday, the Allahabad High Court had directed the counsel appearing for the ASI to come up with specific averments as to what prejudice would be whitewashing the outer walls of the mosque cause.

SFA Naqvi, counsel for the masjid committee, had submitted that "ASI till date, has not disclosed in its affidavit that it is denying the whitewashing, extra lighting and installation of decorative lights outside the disputed structure."

He had also placed reliance upon the coloured photographs of the exterior portion of the disputed site showing the need of whitewashing.

Giving information about the colours used in painting the Shahi Jama Masjid, Zafar Ali said that "we use green, white and golden colour. We have always used it and we will still do the same."

Sambhal has been tense after riots broke out on November 24 last year following a survey of the Shahi Jama Masjid, a Mughal-era mosque here. Four people were killed and several including police personnel were injured in the clashes. (PTI)

SC to hear on Monday PIL for declaring present process of appointment of CAG unconstitutional



NEW DELHI, March 15: The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear on March 17 an NGO's plea seeking that the current practice of appointment of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India solely by the executive and the prime minister be declared violative of the Constitution.

The PIL, filed by the Centre for Public Interest Litigation, also sought direction of the court mandating that the CAG shall be appointed by the President in consultation with an independent and neutral selection committee comprising of the prime minister, the Leader of the Opposition (LoP) and the Chief Justice of India and in a transparent manner.

It said that the direction for appointment of CAG should be similar to the appointment of other bodies including Information Commissions and the Central Vigilance Commission.

The PIL will be taken up for hearing on Monday by a bench of justices Surya Kant and N Kottiswar Singh.

The plea filed through advocate Prashant Bhushan contended that the present mode of appointment of the CAG, which is done solely by the executive i.e. by the prime minister who handpicks any individual and recommends his name to the President for appointment, is unconstitutional as it is violative of Article 14 and several basic features of the Constitution.

"The appointment of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India solely by the executive and the Prime Minister of India undermines the independence of the office of the CAG, suffers from grave conflict of interest and thereby is detrimental to good governance and democracy in India. It is also manifestly arbitrary, detrimental to institutional integrity and violates several basic features of the constitution," the plea said.

It said the CAG is uniquely placed in Part V of the Constitution as one of the five institutions of the Union and a collective reading of

Articles 148-151 of the Constitution along with the various provisions of the Comptroller and Auditor General's (Duties, Powers and Conditions of Service) Act, 1971 would show that the Constitution has equated the position of the CAG to that of a sitting judge of this court.

It added the current process of appointment of the CAG is by way of an unwritten convention which is alien to the law.

"Neither does Article 148(1) nor does the 1971 Act envisage a procedure which is currently being followed where the executive, and specially the Prime Minister, appoints the CAG. If this were to be so, it would obviously and naturally run contrary to the entire scheme of Chapter V (Articles 148-151) of the Constitution of India and the 1971 Act," the PIL further said.

"By the very nature of his job, the CAG is supposed to promote transparency," the PIL said, adding that if he is to discharge his duties dispassionately without fear or favour, his appointment process cannot be opaque or arbitrary.

It added that the CAG acts as a watchdog over government accounts and expenditure and he plays an important role in ensuring transparency and financial accountability in the functioning of the central and state governments as well as Panchayati Raj institutions.

The NGO said the reports of the CAG are not just used for public debates, but are also an essential source of information for several parliamentary committees, for instance the Public Accounts Committee (PAC), which then uses them to scrutinise government expenditures and debate them in Parliament leading to policy making, delivery of essential services to the public, drafting appropriate and necessary legislations, and so on.

"It is for this reason that the appointment process of the CAG should be fair, transparent and non-arbitrary. Unfortunately, despite the Constitution's best intent to keep the office of the CAG independent from any executive interference, it is increasingly witnessing political interference, thereby compromising the very purpose for which the high office was established," it added.

The PIL alleged several instances of political and executive interference with the functioning of CAG. (PTI)

NCRTC to introduce co-working spaces at Ghaziabad Namo Bharat station

NEW DELHI, March 15: The National Capital Region Transport Corporation is set to launch Metro-Desk, a co-working space at the Ghaziabad Namo Bharat Station, an official statement said on Saturday.

This initiative aims to transform transit spaces into business-friendly hubs, marking a first-of-its-kind coworking model within the Namo Bharat network, the statement read.

Designed to cater to professionals, entrepreneurs and small businesses in Ghaziabad and nearby areas, the workspace will be located in the station's concourse area, it stated.

It will feature 42 open workstations, 11 private cabins, and two meeting rooms, accommodating up to 42 individuals and 11 companies at a time, it read.

It also mentioned that the facility will offer high-speed internet, plug-and-play workstations, and modern amenities to ensure seamless productivity.

Ghaziabad Namo Bharat Station, positioned at Meerut Tiraha Mor, sits at the crossroads of the Ghaziabad-Meerut route and benefits from its proximity to Shahid Sthal Delhi Metro Station, it stated. (PTI)

NDLS stampede: Two out of five transferred officials get posting in NR Headquarter

NEW DELHI, March 15: Two of the five railway officials shunted out after the tragic stampede that killed 18 passengers at the New Delhi Railway Station have been given fresh postings in the Northern Railway Headquarter. The officials said these positions are considered "punishment postings" as they do not have any significant authority over rail operations.

The rail administration had following the tragedy shunted out five officials on March 4, 2025 in four separate orders. Mahesh Yadav, who was removed from the post of station director, has been reassigned as Deputy Chief Operation Manager (Dy COM) for Freight Operations Information System (FOIS) at the Northern Railway Headquarter in New Delhi.

According to a notice issued by the Northern Railway (NR) on March 12, 2025, the post of Senior Divisional Operation Manager for Goods (Sr DOM G) of Delhi Division was transferred to NR Headquarter and redesignated as Dy COM (FOIS) NR.

Anand Mohan, the second official shunted out from the position of Senior Divisional Commercial Manager (Sr DCM) for passenger services (PS) in the Delhi Division, has been posted as Deputy Chief Operation Manager of Coaching (Dy COM Chg).

The other two officials -- Divisional Railway Manager (DRM) Sukhwinder Singh and Additional Divisional Railway Manager (ADRM) Vikram Singh Rana



-- are yet to get fresh postings.

The fifth official Mahesh Chand Saini, who was posted as Assistant Security Commissioner of Railway Protection Force at the New Delhi Railway Station, was sent to Kota soon after his transfer order.

Railway sources said that a high-level inquiry is underway to fix the accountability of those whose negligence led to the tragedy.

"Officials guilty of negligence will not be let off with mere transfers. Strict actions follow once the report is submitted to the higher authorities," a senior railway official said. The stampede broke out in the evening of February 15 as a huge rush of passengers gathered at the railway station to catch their train to Prayagraj in Uttar Pradesh to attend the Maha Kumbh Mela. (PTI)

Authorities demolish 'illegal' houses of accused involved in Ahmedabad mob violence

AHMEDABAD, March 15: Authorities on Saturday demolished "illegally constructed" houses of six out of 14 accused arrested for attacking commuters and rioting in Ahmedabad, police said.

Fourteen persons, one of them a minor, were apprehended after a mob attacked some passersby with sticks and swords, leaving three injured and as many vehicles damaged, inspector SB Chaudhari of Ramol police station said.

He said the houses of six of the arrested accused were found to be constructed illegally and were being demolished in the Amraiwadi and Khokhar localities of the city.

The Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation was demolishing the illegal structures amid heavy police presence, the official said.

"The AMC is taking action to remove these illegal constructions. Around 700-800 police personnel are deployed at these sites, and senior police officers have also visited the sites," a police official said.

Family members of the accused created a ruckus, but the police brought them under control and prevented them from hindering the demolition work.

A mob of 20 men armed with sticks, swords and knives created terror by vandalising vehicles and beating up people in the Vastral locality of the city on Thursday night.

The police had registered a first information report (FIR) based on a complaint by one Alap Soni, who narrated the ordeal and said how his family outing to celebrate his



parents' marriage anniversary turned into a nightmare after some anti-social elements welding sticks, swords and knives attacked them.

According to the FIR, one of the accused attacked and stabbed the complainant on the back of his neck and his left hand, and another man similarly stabbed his cousin. They also damaged their vehicle and other vehicles parked on the roadside before escaping.

The accused have been booked under various sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) pertaining to attempt to murder, unlawful assembly, rioting, wrongful restraint, etc.

Purported videos of police publicly flogging some of these accused also surfaced.

Asked about these videos, Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), Zone-5, Baldev Desai, said he had no knowledge about this.

Gujarat Director General of Police (DGP) Vikas Sahay held a video conference with the police commissioners and superintendents of police and instructed them to prepare a list of "anti-social elements" living in each police station area within the next 100 hours and take strict punitive action against them, an official statement said. (PTI)

DYFI flags at temple festival in Kerala: TDB orders vigilance probe

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, March 15: Travancore Devaswom Board president P S Prasanth on Saturday said a vigilance probe has been ordered into the alleged display of Democratic Youth Federation of India (DYFI) flags and the performance of songs glorifying the CPI(M) at a recent temple festival in Kollam district.

The Congress-led UDF criticised the incident at the temple and accused the ruling party of being "a shameful party" attempting to create space for the BJP in the state.

Leader of Opposition in the state assembly V D Satheesan, in a statement, said during the temple festival at Kadakkal temple in Kollam, symbols of the Left party, along with the names of CPI(M) and DYFI, were displayed in a background video while a singer performed a song about former CPI(M) member Pushpan.

"Does this person have no other place to sing? Why are the devotees being asked if they know Pushpan? This is a shameful party. Is their goal to create conflict there and make room for the BJP... The problem is that the arrogance of power has gone to their heads," Satheesan contended. (PTI)

State police Protocol Officer was used in gold smuggling: DRI to the court

BENGALURU, March 15: The Directorate of Revenue Intelligence has stated in the court that the Karnataka Police Protocol Officer was used in the gold smuggling racket involving actress Ranya Rao.

In its argument against giving bail to Ranya, the central agency told the Special Court for Economic Offences that the accused had travelled to Dubai 27 times since January this year.

Ranya is the stepdaughter of DGP rank officer K Ramachandra Rao, the Managing Director of the Karnataka State Police Housing and Infrastructure Development Corporation.

"The investigation till date has unearthed the sophisticated methodology used in smuggling the gold, usage of State Police Protocol Officer to bypass security, Hawala Transaction to transfer the funds from India to Dubai to purchase gold, involvement of larger syndicate," the DRI contended.

After these arguments, the court declined bail to Ranya on Friday.

Judge Vishwanath C Gowdar, who presided over the Special Court for Economic Offences, took note of DRI's contentions.



"In the case on hand, the accused No 1 (Ranya) possessing Resident Identity Card of UAE and having history of traveled to Dubai on 27 occasions since January 2025, is another factor which does not incline the court to extend discretionary relief of granting bail to accused," the Court said while rejecting her bail petition.

The DRI also said the investigation was

under progress to examine international links.

It stated that Ranya had not cooperated during the investigation in the custody.

"It is also specifically contended that the alleged offence is cognizable, non-bailable, and punishable with imprisonment up to seven years," the court observed in its order copy.

The DRI pointed out that the offence committed in this case has serious ramifications affecting the fabric of Indian economy and security. The Court said, "The remand applications placed on record at this stage of proceedings, disclose the conspiracy hatched by the accused No1 (Ranya) by colluding with State Police Protocol Officer".

"The arguments of the complainant Agency as to the usage of Hawala transaction for transfer of money from India to Dubai and also the International links being forthcoming as per the preliminary investigation is also a factor which inclines this court to hold the accused."

The Judge also said that the accused is capable to manipulate and tamper the evidences as well as witnesses, which consequently hampers the very trial in the case on hand.

"The apprehension of the complainant as to the accused No.1 will throttle the witnesses and flee away from the process of court cannot be ruled out at this juncture," the court observed. It further stated that prima facie at this juncture, the allegations against Ranya are very much forthcoming and the concealment of the gold by her in the form of gold bars while traveling is very much transpiring her intention.

Gold bars worth ₹ 12.56 crore were seized from Ranya at Kempegowda International Airport here on March 3 upon her arrival from Dubai, following which searches were conducted at her residence and officials said that gold jewellery worth ₹ 2.06 crore and ₹ 2.67 crore in cash were also recovered.

Besides DRI, the Enforcement Directorate as well as the CBI are also probing the matter simultaneously.

In addition, the Karnataka government on March 10 appointed Additional Chief Secretary Gaurav Gupta to probe the role of Ramachandra Rao, if any, in the alleged gold smuggling activity of his step daughter Ranya. (PTI)

‘AASHIYAN’ BY GINI IS FOR ANYONE WHO’S EVER SAID ‘HOME IS A PERSON, NOT A PLACE’



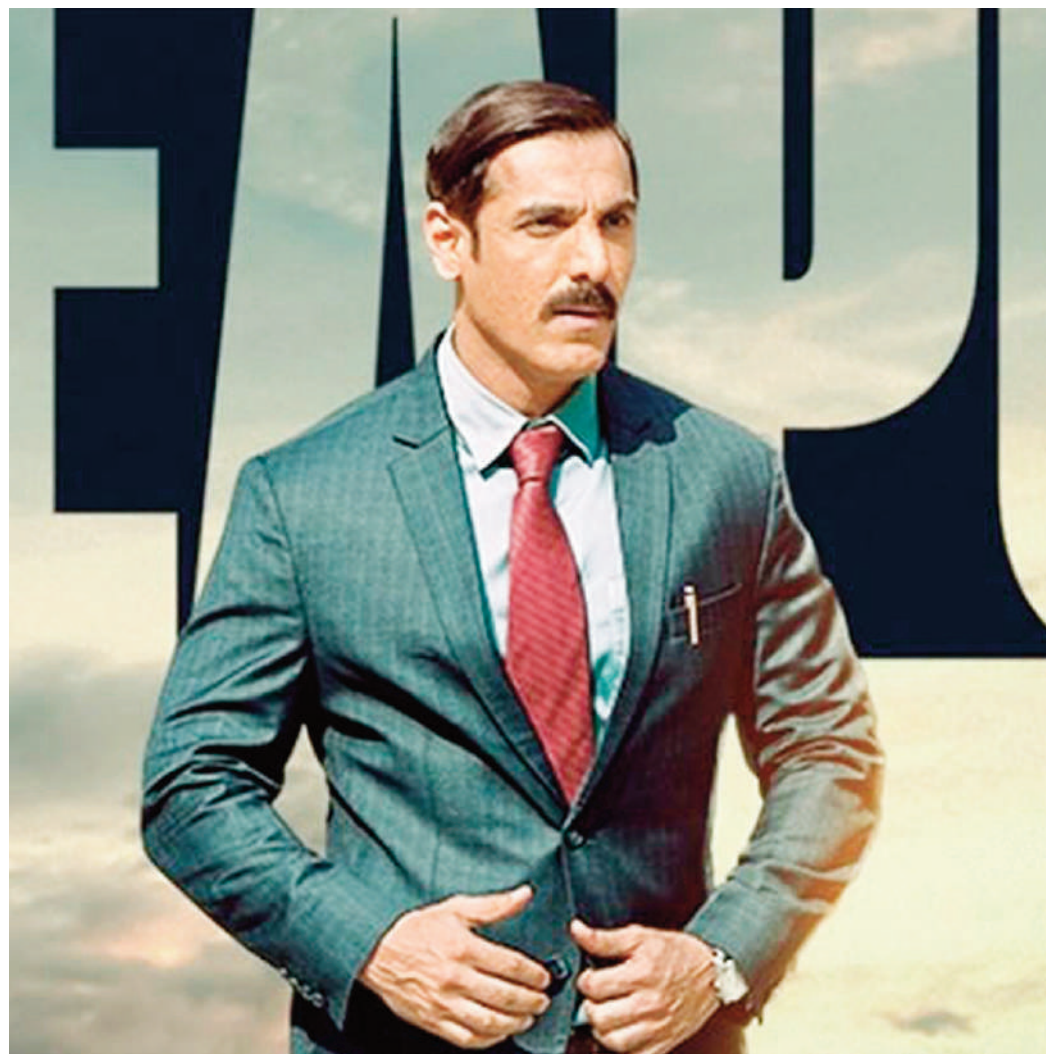
HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 15: A new wave of indie storytelling is here, and Gini is at its heart – a 19-year-old singer-song writer whose lyrics read like poetry, and her melodies feel like home. Having steadily carved a space for herself with poignant narratives and a tight-knit community on digital platforms, gini is one of the most exciting young artists in the country. Her new song Aashiyon beautifully encapsulates the feeling of making someone your home.

Fresh off an India Tour (The Cozy Tour), where she played intimate shows for her super fans, Gini's audience has grown organically. She is now gearing up to perform at colleges across the country. With Aashiyon, she explores a more upbeat, bossa vibe in its purest form—a tribute to the late-night conversations, quiet reassurances, and unspoken understanding that make life's chaos feel a little softer. This song is written, sung and performed by Gini, co-composed with Raghav Meattle and Bharath Rajeevan. Bharath Rajeevan's production along with Dan Thomas on drums, and Bharath on guitars compliment the song and make it whole. Mixed and mastered to perfection by Abhishek Ghatak, 'Aashiyon' is your new go-to tune for when you need to feel at home, away from home. Speaking about the song, Gini shares, "Aashiyon is more than just a song to me... it's a collection of all the emotions I've felt in the time that I've spent trying to find a home away from home. It's a song of gratitude and an expression of love for all the people that make you feel at home. I hope you can express your love for the people who make you feel that way through this song. I'm very grateful for my team and their bringing magic to the song, and to everyone who's been supporting me thank you! Your love means the world, and I can't wait to share more with you."

Whether it's a best friend who just gets you, a love that feels like a safe haven, or the quiet comfort of family, 'Aashiyon' is a reminder that home is not always a place. We look forward to seeing what gini has in store for us in the future, for now hit play, close your eyes, and let this track wrap around you like a comforting embrace.

John Abraham's 'The Diplomat' earns ₹ 4.03 crore on day one at domestic box office



NEW DELHI, March 15: Actor John Abraham-starrer "The Diplomat" has collected over ₹ 4.03 crore net on its opening day, the makers announced on Saturday.

Directed by Shivam Nair and written by Ritesh Shah, the film released in theatres on Friday.

Production banner T-Series shared the day one collection of the movie on its X handle along with the poster of the film.

"A strategy that strikes gold. 4.03 crore NBOC," read the text on the poster.

The Diplomat is inspired by real events and features Abraham as diplomat JP Singh, who steps in to rescue an Indian woman named Uzma, played by Sadia Khateeb, from Pakistan.

The Diplomat is produced by Abraham's JA Entertainment along with T-Series, Vipul D Shah, Ashwin Varde, Rajesh Bahl of Wakao Films, Sameer Dixit and Jatish Varma of Fortune Pictures and Rakesh Dang of Seeta Films. (PTI)

Assamese composer Lakshyahira Das dies at 94

GUWAHATI, March 15: Eminent Assamese composer Lakshyahira Das died on Saturday due to age-related ailments, her family said.

Das, 94, is survived by three sons.

A retired professor of Education in the erstwhile Cotton College, she was the first female artist to receive All India Radio's approval as a lyricist, composer and singer in 1948 while she was still in college.

She has composed over 2,000 songs and written lyrics till recently for many prominent singers. She has also lent her voice to many songs over the years.

Das has also authored over 50 books, including those of poetry, children's stories, short stories, translations, and Education.

She was the recipient of several awards by the state government and other socio-cultural organisations.

Das was also a member of the Sahitya Akademi, Authors Guild of India, Poetry Society of India, and Assam Sahitya Sabha, among others.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said she will be remembered for her invaluable contribution to enriching the state's cultural and literary landscape.

"She worked tirelessly for the empowerment of women and her works will inspire generations to come. My thoughts are with her family and countless admirers. Om Shanti," Sarma posted on X.

In a statement, Union Ports Minister Sarbananda Sonowal said, "I am deeply saddened to hear of the passing of the revered artist, educator, and distinguished writer, Dr Lakshyahira Das Baideu (elder sister), whose heartfelt voice mesmerised countless listeners, including myself."

"Baideu's invaluable contribution to Assam's cultural and educational fields will always be remembered. In this moment of grief, I extend my deepest condolences to her bereaved family and admirers, and I pray for the eternal peace of her departed soul." (PTI)

Javed Akhtar praises Pakistani singer Moazzam Ali Khan: Will be thankful if he sings for us



NEW DELHI, March 15: Veteran scriptwriter and lyricist Javed Akhtar has expressed his admiration for Pakistani singer Moazzam Ali Khan and invited him to sing a few songs for him.

Akhtar recently came across a video of Khan's performance, which has captivated many on social media, with some noting his vocal resemblance to the late ghazal singer Jagjit Singh.

In a post on X on Friday, Akhtar said he was impressed by Khan singing Hemant Kumar's popular song "Yeh Nayan Dare Dare" from the movie 1964 movie "Kohraa".

"Just now I watched a gentleman Muazzam saheb on youtube singing 'yeh nain deray deray'. Could he please contact me. I will be thankful if he sings a few songs for us (sic)," the 80-year-old lyricist wrote.

Khan often shares his singing videos on various social media platforms and has over 150,000 followers on his Instagram. According to his social media profile, he is also an actor and a voice-over artist.

His rendition of "Yeh Nain Dare Dare" has amassed over 65,000 views on YouTube and two thousand likes. He has 37,000 subscribers on the video sharing platform. (PTI)

Shot for 'Paatal Lok' season 2, 'Baksho Bondi' back to back: actor Tillotama Shome

NEW DELHI, March 15: Actor Tillotama Shome says she shot for her latest film "Baksho Bondi" three days after she finished work on the second season of "Paatal Lok", both projects in which she played women who weren't "decorative" pieces.

While the latest chapter of "Paatal Lok" saw the actor essay the role of SP Meghna Barua, a no-nonsense Nagamese-speaking cop, "Baksho Bondi" stars her as a Bengali woman named Maya, who works multiple jobs to support her family in a dusty Kolkata suburb.

"Paatal Lok" season two premiered on Prime Video in January and "Baksho Bondi" premiered last month at the 75th Berlin International Film Festival under the newly-introduced section Perspectives. "I shot for 'Baksho Bondi' three days after I wrapped 'Paatal Lok' (season two). So, I carried all the wishes of the team of 'Paatal Lok' with me to 'Baksho Bondi'," Shome told PTI in an interview.

It was almost by "osmosis" that the

team of "Paatal Lok" felt the film was as important as their own project, she said.

"Everybody on the set knew that I had to go to shoot for 'Baksho Bondi' after 'Paatal Lok'. It's very special for me. I shot for them back-to-back and they came out the way they did. "(They are) both projects in which women are not decorative and actually have something to say and do. I'm so glad to be living this phase of my life," the 45-year-old added. "Baksho Bondi", titled "Shadowbox" in English, follows Maya, who along with her teenage son, tries to keep their family together when her husband, a retired soldier suffering from PTSD, goes missing in the middle of the night under suspicious circumstances.

The Bengali film is co-directed by debutants Tanushree Das and Saumyananda Sahi, who has also penned the screenplay.

Asked what made her trust the first-time filmmakers, Shome said the script spoke volumes about who the

people behind the script might be. "You can have wonderful scripts written by extremely dysfunctional people and I really was hoping against hope that that was not the case. "I was happy to be proven right. And for that illusion in my heart to survive... This work affected me so deeply because the people were going to play an important part in my life." The actor, also known for "Monsoon Wedding", "Qissa", "Sir", "Lust Stories 2", and "Delhi Crime 2", said in her very first meeting with the filmmakers, she realised that it would be a privilege for her to collaborate with them.

"In our 40s, friendships are very intentional and meetings are not just chances. For me, being able to commemorate a friendship like this with a film like this was truly extraordinary," she added.

Shome has received rave reviews and critical acclaim for "Baksho Bondi", which explores themes of class, privilege, family dynamics, and mental health.

The actor said people belonging to

a certain higher economic and social strata need to keep a constant check on their privilege.

"... We need to be open and comfortable enough when someone points it out about us. We are all capable of this cruelty, the nicest of us. We have been a victim of this kind of cruelty or a perpetrator. It hits us because we are part of the gang of those well intentioned people with caste and class privileges."

Shome, who is yet to sign her next gig, said being part of wonderful projects has been a fulfilling experience which has also "spoiled" her in a way. "I find it very hard to say yes to anything I've read so far. Few things I've read which excite me are going to take time, no surprises there. I should just accept it instead of fighting and suffering because of it I must accept the fact that the things that I like take time and they exist. That's the silver lining, that's what keeps me going in these periods of wait which an actor's life is often about," she added. (PTI)



With Chhetri returning from retirement, India aim to beat Maldives, Bangladesh with clean sheets

SHILLONG, March 15: It will be easier said than done but senior defender Sandesh Jhingan on Saturday said that the Indian football team's target is to beat Maldives and Bangladesh without conceding any goal in the upcoming international matches here.

India host Maldives in an international friendly on March 19, before taking on a tricky Bangladesh on March 25 in their opening match of the 2027 AFC Asian Cup qualifying third round match.

Both the matches will be held at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium here as the Meghalaya capital is hosting its first

international games. The match against Maldives on March 19 will also mark the return of talismanic Sunil Chhetri from international retirement. "Our main aim is to get the result in the Bangladesh match, as that would give us a good start in the Asian Cup Qualifiers, and I think the 10-day training ahead of that, along with the friendly against Maldives will greatly help us prepare for it," Jhingan said.

"Our target is two clean sheet victories," the 31-year-old was quoted as saying in an AIFF release.

The 40-year-old Chhetri had

earlier hung his boots in June 2024 after a glorious international career after making his India debut in 2005.

But he showed he is still a force to reckon with as has been seen in the 2024-25 ISL which has turned out to be Chhetri's most prolific season. He has scored 12 goals from 24 matches to be the second highest scorer overall and highest among Indians.

Head coach Manolo Marquez re-iterated the reasons behind why he coaxed Chhetri to return to wearing India jersey once again.

"Because it was a special situation, I spoke with the AIFF



and Bengaluru FC before I called him. I spoke with Sunil and explained to him what I wanted from him," Marquez said. "It doesn't matter if he's 40. The national team needs players who are in good form," the Spaniard said.

India are placed in Group C of the 2027 Asian Cup qualifying third round along with Bangladesh, Hong Kong and Singapore, and only the top team qualifies for the continental showpiece.

It's not going to be easy to top the group, and Marquez must be referring to that when he said "special situation".

"Sunil is the Indian top-

scorer in the ISL, with practically double goals than the next player, who is Brison. After that are Subhasish, Irfan, Manvir... all of them are here with us in the national team.

"We need players who score goals. In my four matches so far, we have only scored two goals - one of them from a set-piece. At this moment, the most important thing is to get results. Nothing else matters."

The Indian squad held a 45-minute gym session on Saturday morning and had their first on-pitch training at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium, the match venue, later in the evening. (PTI)

Gokulam Kerala hand defending champions Odisha FC 3-1 defeat

BHUBANESWAR, March 15: Gokulam Kerala remained in the hunt for the Indian Women's League 2024-25 title as they beat defending champions Odisha FC 3-1 at the Kalinga Stadium here on Saturday. The Malabarians led 2-0 at the break.

Fazila Ikwaput (42', 59') increased her goals tally to 15, scoring two against Odisha, while Juggernauts' striker Pyari Xaxa (32') scored an own goal. Substitute Neha (50') scored for the hosts.

After starting off the season with two draws, Gokulam Kerala have pulled themselves up marvellously, winning six matches on the trot, and are currently placed at the top of the table with 20 points from eight matches.

While East Bengal are two points behind them, they have played a match less. Odisha, on the other hand, are third, with 11 points from eight outings.

The Malabarians were at their hosts' throats from the start, and goalkeeper Shreya Hooda had to pull off a couple of fine saves to keep her side level in the opening exchanges.

She, however, got injured closer to the half-hour mark, and had to be replaced by Anshika, who's first duty was to pull off a save at full stretch off



a Fazila free-kick from close range. Gokulam had a lucky break a few minutes later, though, as R Darshinidevi's corner from the right hit Pyari's shin and went in from inside the six-yard box.

Darshinidevi played another crucial role minutes before the half-time whistle, when she threaded a through ball into the path of Fazila, who, with just Anshika to beat, coolly slotted it into the bottom corner.

The Ugandan striker could have scored yet another in the first half, when in injury time, she entered the box from the left, and had her shot blocked by the Odisha custodian.

The change of ends brought

some much-needed tempo to the game for Odisha, as they began to pose some questions to the Gokulam back-line. Their efforts finally paid off just five minutes after the restart, though they might have been somewhat fortunate about it.

Neha, after beating her marker on the left flank, sent in a cross that looped over the goalkeeper and crept in at the far post.

The hosts had urgency, and it showed with their actions on the pitch. Minutes after the goal, Jennifer Yeboah, receiving a pass from Kashmina, flicked it between the lines to Pyari, but the latter's effort was thwarted by Gokulam goalkeeper Payal Basude.

All of Odisha's momentum was lost just before the hour mark, however, when Anshika spilled what seemed like a regulation ball right into the path of Fazila, who duly obliged, scoring her 15th goal of the season.

Odisha just could not cope with Gokulam Kerala's waves of attacks, and Fazila could have added two more to her name with a couple of close chances in the second-half injury time.

However, the Malabarians remained content with the three points that they earned in Bhubaneswar. (PTI)

Harmanpreet, Savita win men's and women's HI Player of the Year awards



NEW DELHI, March 15: India captain Harmanpreet Singh and senior goalkeeper Savita Punia on Saturday won the Hockey India Balbir Singh Senior Player of the Year award in the men's and women's categories respectively.

Harmanpreet led India to their second consecutive bronze medal at the 2024 Paris Olympics. He was also a part of the Tokyo Games bronze medal-winning side.

Savita was a member of the Indian team that came agonisingly close to winning a bronze in the Tokyo Olympics. The team had lost the third-place match to Great Britain.

It was double celebration for Savita as she also won the Hockey India Baljit Singh Goalkeeper of the Year award for 2024.

"I am really honoured to receive the awards but it wouldn't have been possible without my team-mates. I am really grateful for the recognition and it will continue to motivate me towards my game," Savita said in a video message.

This was the third time that Savita won the award.

"This award means a lot, it is a motivation for youngsters to work hard towards their goals and achieve success in life. It's really a special day for all of us," Harmanpreet said.

The seventh Hockey India Annual Awards were held to commemorate 100 years of Indian hockey and also to celebrate the country's World Cup win in 1975 in Kuala Lumpur.

The 1975 Men's World Cup-winning team was conferred with the Hockey India Major Dhyan Chand Lifetime Achievement award.

Abhishek won the Forward of the Year award while Hardik Singh was named Midfielder of the Year.

The Best Defender of the Year award went to Amit Rohidas.

Araijeet Singh Hundal won the Jugraj Singh player of the year (Men's Under-21), while Deepika bagged the Player of the Year award in the women's Under-21 category.

The gala event was attended by former sports minister Kiren Rijiju, Hockey India president Dilip Tirkey, HI secretary general Bhola Nath Singh, among others. (PTI)

Lewis Hamilton 8th in qualifying in Ferrari debut as Norris takes pole for F1 race in Australia

MELBOURNE, Australia, March 15: McLaren locked up the front row in Melbourne for Sunday's Australian Grand Prix, having dominated its rivals, including Red Bull, Mercedes, and Ferrari — whose drivers, Charles Leclerc and Lewis Hamilton, will start from seventh and eighth on the grid.

Lando Norris set a searing final qualifying lap to secure pole position, his first at Melbourne's Albert Park, and milestone 10th overall, in front of his teammate Oscar Piastri, and a record Saturday crowd of 136,347 at Albert Park.

"Not a bad way to start the year, thanks everyone," Norris said on his team radio shortly after the qualifying session ended ahead of Sunday's opening race of the Formula 1 season.

Hamilton was circumspect about his qualifying finish.

"It isn't quite where we wanted to be but overall I'm satisfied with the progress we have made over the past two days," Hamilton said. "We didn't expect to be eight- or nine-tenths (of a second) behind pole but given this is a weekend of firsts for me, I didn't underestimate how steep the learning curve would be."

Norris went into Q3 on the back foot after his first lap was deleted for a track limit infringement at turn four, where he put all four wheels off the track. But he delivered when it mattered with his one run.

"It's a tough one, because you want to take a lot of risks, especially on this track," Norris said. "It's a track where you've got to commit and you've got to know you know what your target is and once you've turned in, you're kind

of hoping for the best in a lot of cases.

"Obviously I took too many of my first (Q3) lap and got track limits, so I was in a difficult position with knowing how much risk I wanted to take, but I put it together well."

And the Brit is confident he can maintain that form in the race.

"I think we were decent in Bahrain, and I think we're going to be pretty good here," Norris said. "We were pretty good here last year and that was with a much worse car, so we're going in with one target clearly, which is to have two cars at the top."

Piastri was not unhappy to be second, having maximised his lap, which enabled McLaren to lock out the front row for the second straight race, following 2024's season-ending Abu Dhabi Grand Prix. But the Australian hasn't given up on becoming the first Australian to win his home F1 Grand Prix.

"It would be really special to be able to achieve that," Piastri said. "But, I'm not setting my sights too firmly on that, we've got a lot of work to do (first) to try to maximize the race tomorrow — we (also) have to see what the weather does first."

Day-long rain is in the forecast on Sunday.

Red Bull's Max Verstappen qualified third, shrugging off pre-season pace concerns for the team about its RB21 car. But he downplayed his chances of challenging the McLarens in the 58-lap race on a day when his new teammate Liam Lawson qualified well down in 18th, following a scrappy Q1 lap that questioned the team's decision to replace Mexican Sergio Pérez for 2025. (AP)

Being an Olympic champion will be magnificent: Kohli on cricket in LA 2028

BENGALURU, March 15: Ace batter Virat Kohli was thrilled by the inclusion of cricket in Los Angeles Olympics 2028, and said the Indian Premier League has played a massive role in giving the sport a place in the global sporting extravaganza.

Cricket will return to the hallowed arena of Olympics for the first time since the 1900 Games in Paris.

"To be Olympic champion would be an absolutely magnificent feeling. The IPL has definitely played a massive role in that as well. Now, it has gotten us to a stage where it's part of the Olympics. It's a great opportunity for some of our guys," Kohli said in the RCB Innovation Lab talk show here on Saturday, moderated by former England cricketer Isa Guha.

"The athletes will be able to taste it. First of its kind. And I'm sure we'll be somewhere close to that medal. Both men and women play side by side as well," he added. By 2028, it is unlikely that Kohli, by then around 40, would be playing the game but he gave a thought of playing in the Olympics, but only in jest.

"For the Olympics, I don't know, maybe, if we are playing for the gold medal. I just might sneak in for one game, get a medal and come back home. But I think it's a great thing for the sport, overall," Kohli said amidst peels of laughter.

Kohli also said the Women's Premier League has brought in a remarkable transformation in the women's cricket landscape in the country.

"Oh yeah, the perception has changed massively. I think all the other sports have had individuals coming up and doing amazing



things.

"And they've been appreciated all over the nation because of their achievements."

"But I think what the Indian women's cricket team has done over the last few years, they are the ones who were the catalyst to kind of put the attention onto them," he said.

Kohli said the success of WPL has also increased the standards of women's cricket in the country. "I literally saw it happening in a time span of 6-7 years. The way they started playing. You could see that belief and then people started engaging in that a lot more. And the standard of the games as well. It just feels like 2-3 levels higher than what it used to be."

"Just the power hitting, just the skill levels and everything. This is what happens. You take a sport or even a part of a sport to that level of competition. In two seasons you see a completely different women's game today. It's going to keep growing because you can't just cater to looking at

men," he said.

Kohli conceded that he has gone a bit "overboard" with his emotional on-field reactions.

"I do have tendencies to kind of go overboard. I've never shied away from that. For a lot of people, it might not have been something that they're able to process. But for me, it always comes from the right place."

"My competitiveness has not gone down. You can still be aggressive in your mind, but you don't necessarily need to express it out there every now and then out of frustration, which I have."

Kohli, however, said he could have shown more restraint on some of those occasions.

"I mean, in the recent past as well, which is not a great thing, to be honest, I don't feel great about those things myself. You may think that there's some people who criticise you for that. But actually, I think there's a fair few more people who actually enjoy watching you do that," he added. (PTI)

F1 hometown driver Piastri fastest in final practice ahead of Australian GP qualifying

MELBOURNE, March 15: McLaren's hometown hero Oscar Piastri led a super-competitive final practice session Saturday for Sunday's Formula 1 Australian Grand Prix with the Australian just 39 one-thousandths of a second ahead of Mercedes' George Russell.

The Melbourne-born Piastri traded top times with Russell and Red Bull's reigning world champion Max Verstappen, who was third-fastest. Verstappen was the benchmark for the first 22 minutes of the session.

Ferrari finished down the order, with second practice's top man Charles Leclerc fourth, almost three-tenths off the pace, while his teammate Lewis Hamilton was eighth.

Russell's Mercedes teammate Andrea Kimi Antonelli closed out the top five, ahead of both Williams drivers, which again showed stunning pace, with defending Australian champion Carlos Sainz sixth ahead of his teammate Alex Albon.

Haas rookie Oliver Bearman halted final practice just four

minutes into the session, with the Brit bringing out the red flags after he lost control of the car at turn 11 and buried the car in the gravel. Red Bull new recruit Liam Lawson also failed to set a lap, with the team stating the issue on his car was a "power unit or power unit system problem on the air side."

Qualifying was scheduled for later Saturday.

It was the second on-track incident for the 19-year old Bearman this weekend, with the Haas driver going into the wall at the exit of the turn 9/10 chicane during opening practice on Friday. That forced him to sit out the second session with his car stuck in the pits needing repairs.

Australia is Bearman's fourth F1 weekend after strong stand-out performances last year, including for Ferrari in Saudi Arabia, and Azerbaijan and Brazil for Haas. In Baku last year, the Brit became the first driver to have scored points for two different teams in his first two races. (AP)

Rohit could continue as Test captain but final decision by BCCI during mid-IPL



NEW DELHI, March 15: The Champions Trophy triumph has added to the aura of Rohit Sharma and it won't be a surprise if he continues as Test captain and travels to England as leader of the pack even as the selectors are yet to make a decision on the tour, starting June 20.

Rohit was under pressure to perform in Dubai, especially after a 1-3 series defeat in Australia accentuated his own poor form.

The triumphant run in Dubai has certainly given the skipper breathing space and elbow room.

But the question remains if the national selection committee will consider success in ODI format while deciding on more challenging Tests format, where the returns have been modest, of late.

The team suffered six hard-to-digest defeats, in the last WTC cycle.

The new cycle for India will begin with the England series, where the first Test will be played at Leeds.

"Technically, Rohit remains the

Test captain. He voluntarily benched himself from the last Test in Sydney where he explained that a team can't carry on with multiple out of form batters.

"After Australia Tests, India haven't played any Tests and hence there has been no change in Test captaincy. Also Rohit never said he doesn't want to play Tests," a BCCI source told PTI on conditions of anonymity.

However he added that the national selection committee hasn't yet decided on the England series.

"The selection committee gets a break during IPL. Obviously with all matches televised, they always don't need to travel unless they have some specific strategy or they want to watch a particular player from up close," the source added.

"So once IPL starts, the blueprint for England series will be drawn at some point. But (coach) Gautam Gambhir's viewpoint will have a lot of weightage," he added. (PTI)

Indian Super League announces dates for 2024-25 season playoffs



MUMBAI, March 15: The Indian Super League (ISL) on Saturday announced the dates for the 2024-25 playoffs with two-legged semifinals scheduled between April 2-7 and the final to be played on April 12.

The league stage concluded on March 12.

The Knockouts will be played on March 29 and 30, and the semifinals will be held on April 2, 3, 6 and 7.

Mohun Bagan SG created history by clinching the League Shield for the second season in a row, becoming the first team in the competition to do so.

Along with Mohun Bagan SG, FC Goa (2nd), Bengaluru FC (3rd), NorthEast United FC (4th), Jamshedpur FC (5th) and Mumbai City FC (6th) all confirmed their spots in the playoffs.

In the playoffs, the teams ranked third to sixth will battle it out in two single-legged knockout matches to determine the opponents for Mohun Bagan SG and FC Goa, who made it

directly to the semi-finals.

The semi-finals will be played in a home and away format with the winners over the two legs playing the final on April 12 at the home of the higher-ranked team in the league table.

Playoffs schedule:

29th March: Knockout 1 – Bengaluru FC (home) vs Mumbai City FC

30th March: Knockout 2 – NorthEast United FC (home) vs Jamshedpur FC

2nd April: Semi-final 1 (First leg) – Winner of Knockout 1 (home) vs FC Goa

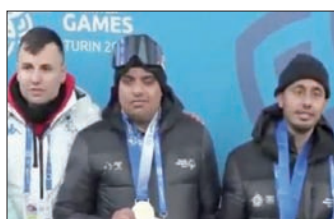
3rd April: Semi-final 2 (First leg) – Winner of Knockout 2 (home) vs Mohun Bagan SG

6th April: Semi-final 1 (Second leg) – FC Goa (home) vs Winner of Knockout 1

7th April: Semi-final 2 (Second leg) – Mohun Bagan SG (home) vs Winner of Knockout 2

12th April: Final – Winner of Semi-final 1 vs Winner of Semi-final 2. (PTI)

Indian athletes continue to shine in Special Olympics Winter Games



NEW DELHI, March 15: India's impressive run at the Special Olympics Winter Games continued with the athletes adding as many as 15 more medals to the country's tally in Turin, Italy.

India's total medal count has now risen to 24, building on the nine medals secured in the earlier events.

In alpine skiing, Deepak Thakur and Giridhar displayed exceptional skills to clinch gold medals in the Intermediate Super G M04 and M05 categories respectively, while Abhishek Kumar secured a silver in the Novice Super G M01 category.

Radha Devi also delivered a stellar performance, earning a silver medal in the Intermediate Super G F03 event.

Adding to India's success on the ice, Ziara Porter showcased impressive speed and determination to claim silver medals in 111M F1 event and 222M F2 event of short track speed skating, while Tanshu won a bronze in the 777M M2 category and a silver in 500M M3 category.

India's presence in cross country skiing was also felt as Akriti put in a commendable effort to secure a bronze medal in the 50M Classical Technique Final F03.

India's snowshoeing athletes also delivered some stellar performances, further boosting the medal count.

Vasu Tiwari secured a gold medal in the 50M Race M03 event, while Jahangir and Tanya won silver medals in the 50M Race M04 and F02 categories respectively.

Shalini Chauhan added to the tally with a bronze in the 50M Race F03 category. In the 200M Race, Anil Kumar emerged victorious with a gold medal in the MP 12 division, while Harleen Kaur clinched silver in the F12 division. (PTI)

Nitish Kumar Reddy set to join SRH after clearing fitness test

BENGALURU, March 15: All-rounder Nitish Kumar Reddy is all set to join Sunrisers Hyderabad after recuperating from a side strain that kept him on the sidelines since January.

PTI has learned that Nitish successfully completed all the fitness test routines, including the yo-yo test, at the BCCI Centre of Excellence here, and the physios have given him a go-ahead.

The 21-year-old Andhra cricketer's last appearance for India was during the first T20I against England at the Eden Gardens on January 22, but he did not bat or bowl in that match.

Nitish trained at nets ahead of the second T20I at Chennai, but was ruled out of that match and five-match series with a side strain.

Nitish was retained by the Hyderabad outfit for Rs 6 crore ahead of last year's players' auction after he made 303 runs for them from 13 matches at a strike-rate of 143.

He also impressed during India's tour to Australia, making some valuable contributions including a gutsy 114 in the fourth Test at Melbourne.

Nitish will join the SRH squad soon as they will open their IPL 2025 campaign on March 23 against Rajasthan Royals at Hyderabad. (PTI)



Azteca Stadium has changed its name ahead of its third men's World Cup next year

MEXICO CITY, March 15: The Azteca Stadium has been re-named Banorte Stadium before it hosts its third men's World Cup next year.

Latin America's largest soccer stadium — 87,500 seats — has taken the name of one of Mexico's leading banks, stadium owner Ollamani said on Friday.

Naming rights to the stadium were part of Banorte's deal to loan 2.1 billion pesos (\$105 million) to be repaid over 12 years, according to Ollamani's filing with the Mexican Stock Exchange.

"With them (Banorte), we will modernize this iconic stadium, respecting its essence and architectural designs recognized for decades," Emilio Azcárraga Jean, the owner of Ollamani, said. "It will be the most important venue to showcase Mexico to the world."

Azteca Stadium has been closed for renovations since last May. Azcárraga Jean recently said he expected the work to be completed before the end of this year.

Neither Ollamani nor Azcárraga Jean has released specific details about renovations to the stadium that was built in 1966.

Originally, a major renovation was planned, including a shopping center and hotel, but residents of the Santa Úrsula neighborhood, south of the capital, opposed them.

Images recently shared by Ollamani show work done on the pitch and the lower seating area.

Azteca was the first stadium to host two World Cup finals, won by Pele's Brazil in 1970 and Diego Maradona's Argentina in 1986.

Mexico is sharing the 2026 World Cup with the United States and Canada, and Banorte Stadium is scheduled to stage five matches, including one each in the round of 32 and round of 16. (AP)

Rookie Avani and Pranavi make cut at Australian Women's Classic

COFFS HARBOUR, March 15: (PTI) Rookie Avani Prashanth and Pranavi Urs made the cut at the weather-hit Australian Women's Classic while the more experienced Diksha Dagar fell short. Avani, playing her maiden season added even par 70 to her first round of 72 and was 2-over for 36 holes, lying Tied-40th.

Pranavi Urs (73-71) made the cut on the line as Top-60 and ties will play the final round. Pranavi is Tied-60th. Diksha Dagar, a two-time LET winner, carded 74-73 and missed the cut which fell at 4-over.

Sarah Kemp, who injured herself seriously in a freak golf cart accident and broke her tibia and fibula eight months ago, made a sensational comeback with a 62 (-8) and moved into a 2-shot lead with one round to go.

Avani bogeyed twice on the front nine on the third and the ninth but staged a good comeback on the back nine with birdies on the 11th and 17th.

Pranavi, winner of her home Tour's Hero Order of Merit, had three birdies against four bogeys.

The 39-year-old, Kemp, who



was out of action since August, is back from surgery and rallied with a round that had one bogey and nine birdies. Starting the day four shots behind the first day trio of leaders, Kemp bogeyed the par-4 second, but then played fantastic with nine birdies in 17 holes to move 10-under par for the tournament.

In a tie for second on eight-under par sit Belgium's Manon De Roey (69-63) and Wales' Darcey Harry (64-68). The former had a fantastic day at the office holing

several long putts en route to a round of 63 (-7).

One shot back from the duo in a tie for fourth are Sweden's Moa Folke and Thailand's Cholcheva Wongras. At just 17-years-old, the latter is proving to be one of the stories of the week in Coffs Harbour.

Austria's Emma Spitz, England's Cara Gainer and Ireland's Lauren Walsh share sixth spot on six-under par.

After 36 holes 76 players made the cut which fell at four-over-par.

Handbook of Cricket Psychology launched, a book deals with pressure points in sport

BENGALURU, March 15: Former first-class cricketer Krishnaraj Srinath on Friday slipped into the role of an author with the release of Handbook of Cricket Psychology, which he co-authored with psychologist MN Viswanath.

The book is an attempt to delve deep into the ability of athletes to tackle pressure situations and emotional turmoil which in turn can enhance their performance.

Former India skipper and coach Anil Kumble penned the foreword of the book.

Srinath, who played for Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, appeared in 24 first-class matches and made 1169 runs at an average of 34.38 with three hundreds and five fifties.

After his playing days, Srinath has dabbled with umpiring and coaching before entering the world of letters. The book release function was attended by several eminent names such as former India opener WV Raman, ex-India pacers Dooda Ganesh and S Arvind along with Karnataka stars like VS Thilak Naidu, K Sudhakar Rao, RX Muradhar, Mithun Beerala and Raghunath Beerala. (PTI)

Don't get nervous, I'm not making any announcements: Kohli rubbishes retirement rumours

BENGALURU, March 15: Champion batter Virat Kohli on Saturday emphatically said he is not mulling retirement at the moment as he has been enjoying the game, and the "competitive streak" inside him is very much intact.

Kohli displayed the old spark while playing an important hand in India's recent Champions Trophy victory in Dubai, after which skipper Rohit Sharma too dismissed the retirement talks surrounding him.

"Don't get nervous. I'm not making any announcements. As of now everything is fine. I still love playing the game," Kohli said during a talk session at the RCB Innovation Lab.

Kohli said he no longer aspires to achieve milestones, but he is playing cricket for the "pure joy" of it.

"It's pretty much come down to just the pure joy, enjoyment, competitive streak, and love for the game. And as long as that is there I will continue to play. As I said today I am not playing for any achievement," he said.

Kohli said that innate "competitive streak" makes it tougher for a sportsman to find the right time to move away from the game.

"You know the competitive streak

doesn't allow you to find the answer (for the retirement question). I had a very interesting conversation about this with Rahul Dravid. He said you always have to stay in touch with yourself.

"Figure out where you are placed in your life and the answer is not that easy. You might be going through a lean phase and you feel like this is it. But it might not be. But then when it is time my competitive streak would not allow me to accept it. Maybe one more month.

"Maybe six more months. So I think it's a fine balance. At this point of time in my life I feel pretty happy," he explained.

But Kohli admitted that the advancing age has made the whole process of staying at the top of his game a bit more tough.

"I want to be able to have all my energy in place. Now, it takes much more effort as people who have played the game for a long period of time understand. You can't do so many things in your mid to late 30s that you can in your mid-20s. I'm at a bit of a different place in my life as well.

"I think for me it's a natural progression. I'm sure all these young guys will hopefully get to that place. But now, the energy that's coming out of me feels very peaceful and calm," he said.



The 36-year-old said he has adjusted mentally to the batting failures, which have become an increasingly regular part of his game in the last few years.

Kohli cited his ordinary run against Australia in an away series as a case in

point, as he went downhill after making a hundred in the first Test at Perth.

"If you ask me the intensity of how disappointed I've been... for me the most recent Australia tour would be the one that's most fresh. So, it might feel the most intense to me. But I can't look at it that way. I might not have an Australia tour again in me in four years' time.

"I don't have the chance to correct it. So you have to make peace with whatever's happened in your life. Like in 2014 (against England) I still had the chance to go in 2018 and do what I did. It might not have been the case." Kohli said the key to keeping away from pressure will be to shut himself out of the outside noises.

"Once you start thinking of the disappointment from the outside, then you start burdening yourself way more. That's something that I've surely experienced in Australia as well. Because I got a good score in the first Test. I thought, right, let's go.

"There's going to be another big series for me. It didn't turn out that way. How do you cope up with this? For me, it's just about acceptance. This is what happened. I'm going to be honest with myself," he noted. (PTI)