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● Yunus says important for Bangladesh to see China as good friend

NATION

● BJP will be in power at Centre for at least 30 years: Amit Shah

● Maha govt committed to fulfil all poll promises, says Shinde

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Myanmar's earthquake death toll jumps to 1,644



BANGKOK, March 29: Myanmar's ruling military said Saturday on state television that the confirmed death toll from a devastating 7.7 magnitude earthquake rose to 1,644, as more bodies were pulled from the rubble of the scores of buildings that collapsed when it struck near the country's second-largest city.

The new total is a sharp rise compared to the 1,002 total announced just hours earlier, underlining the difficulty of confirming casualties over a widespread region and the likelihood that the numbers will continue to grow from Friday's quake. The number of injured increased to 3,408, while the missing figure rose to 139.

Rescue efforts are underway especially in the major

stricken cities of Mandalay, the country's No. 2 city, and Naypyitaw, the capital. But even though teams and equipment have been flown in from other nations, they are hindered by the airports in those cities being damaged and apparently unfit to land planes.

Myanmar, also known as Burma, is in the throes of a prolonged civil war, which is already responsible for a humanitarian crisis. It makes movement around the country both difficult and dangerous, complicating relief efforts and raising fears that the death toll could still rise precipitously.

The earthquake struck midday Friday with an epicentre not far from Mandalay, followed by several aftershocks, including one measuring 6.4. It sent buildings in many areas toppling to the ground, buckled roads, caused bridges to collapse and burst a dam.

In Naypyidaw, crews worked Saturday to repair damaged roads, while electricity, phone and internet services remained down for most of the city. The earthquake brought down many buildings, including multiple units that housed government civil servants, but that section of the city was blocked off by authorities on Saturday.

More damage in Thailand

In neighbouring Thailand, the quake rocked the greater Bangkok area, home to around 17 million people, and other parts of the country.

Bangkok city authorities said the number of confirmed dead was now 10, nine at the site of the collapsed high-rise under construction near the capital's popular Chatuchak market, while 78 people were still unaccounted for. Rescue efforts were continuing in the hope of finding additional survivors. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council polls: CM campaigns at Dudhnoi

Himanta bats for unity among tribal, linguistic communities



DUDHNOI (ASSAM), March 29: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma maintained on Saturday that the various tribal and linguistic communities of the state have to remain united, else the illegal Bangladeshi immigrants "won't allow

them to survive". He claimed that no one can defeat the BJP till the people remain together. Sarma was speaking at an election rally in Goalpara district's Dudhnoi, ahead of the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council

(RHAC) polls on April 2.

The BJP is contesting the election jointly with the Rabha Hasong Joutha Mancha (RHJM), with the alliance seeking to retain power in the council. Asserting that the BJP has (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Yogi govt bans meat sales near religious sites

LUCKNOW, March 29: Ahead of the commencement of the nine-day Chaitra Navratri festival on Sunday, the Uttar Pradesh government has directed the closure of illegal slaughterhouses and a ban on the sale of meat within 500 metres of religious places.

Special restrictions will be imposed for Ram Navami on April 6, when animal slaughter and the sale of meat will be completely banned.

Principal Secretary of the Urban Development Department Amrit Abhijat has directed all the District Magistrates, Police Commissioners and Municipal Commissioners to immediately close the slaughterhouses and enforce the ban on meat sale near religious places, the UP government said in a statement on Saturday. Citing the orders issued in 2014 and (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

KAAC supports Binita Chetry with ₹5 lakh for Britain's Got Talent finale

HT Correspondent

KHERONI, March 29: In a gesture of pride and encouragement, the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) on Saturday extended financial support to local talent Binita Chetry, who has secured a coveted spot in the finals of Britain's Got Talent in London.

Dr Tuliram Ronghang, chief executive member (CEM) of KAAC, presented a cheque of ₹5 lakh to Binita's guardian, Amar Chetry, in Diphu to assist with her journey to the competition's final round, scheduled for April 26, 2025.

The financial aid was provided under the Chief Minister's Scheme for Public Emergency, an initiative designed to offer urgent support in exceptional circumstances.

Speaking on the occasion, Ronghang emphasised that the grant not only recognises Binita's extraordinary achievement but also aims to alleviate logistical and preparatory costs as she represents Assam's Karbi Anglong region on a global stage.

Binita Chetry, a resident of Bokajan in Karbi Ang-



long, has garnered widespread acclaim for her performance on the renowned international talent show. Her success has sparked celebrations across the district, with community leaders hailing her as an inspiration for aspiring artists in the region. The event was attended by KAAC executive members, members of the Autonomous Council (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Prez rule imposed in Manipur at appropriate time; situation getting normal, says Shah

NEW DELHI, March 29: Union Home Minister Amit Shah has said the situation in Manipur is now relatively peaceful and the government is holding discussions with the Meitei and the Kuki communities, who are also talking among themselves, for establishing lasting peace.

He also said the President's rule was imposed in Manipur at an appropriate time to restore normalcy in the state.

"Now situation is relatively peaceful. Normal life has resumed. The Home Ministry has held separate meetings with both the communities. Both the communities have also talked to each other. Gradually things are moving in positive direction. There is no reason for worry now," he said at Times Now Summit, 2025, on Friday night.

The home minister said this is not the first time the state is witnessing ethnic violence. It has endured such strife in the past, and even for longer durations like

three to four years, he said.

Asked whether there was a delay in the imposition of the central rule in Manipur, Shah said it was easier to comment sitting afar.

"Unless both the communities accept it, President's rule would not have been successful. When there was an appropriate time, we have imposed it," he said.

More than 260 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in ethnic violence between Imphal Valley-based majority Meiteis and adjoining hills-based Kuki-Zo tribals since May 2023.

The violence started after a 'Tribal Solidarity March' was organised in the hill districts to protest against the Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status.

There have been many efforts from the central government to bring the warring communities to negotiating table. (PTI)

Sonowal lays foundation stone for new Bhawan of Kendriya Vidyalaya in Dibrugarh



HT Correspondent
DIBRUGARH, March 29: The Union Minister of Ports, Shipping & Waterways, Sarbananda Sonowal laid the foundation stone

for a new Bhawan of Kendriya Vidyalaya here on Saturday in Dibrugarh.

The initiative, which has remained a concern for the people,

will be constructed at an investment of ₹38 crore.

Speaking on the occasion, Sonowal said that Kendriya Vidyalaya has been a cornerstone of education, shaping generations with excellence.

"With the foundation of this new Bhawan, inspired by PM Narendra Modi ji's vision of 'Viksit Bharat,' we reaffirm our commitment to nurturing young minds and empowering the future of Assam and the nation. This new infrastructure will bolster the school's capability, providing world-class facilities for holistic learning environment for all students, teachers as well as the parents. As India strides towards an 'Atmanirbhar Bharat,' institutions like Kendriya Vidyalaya continues to inspire, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

18 Naxals killed, four security personnel injured in twin encounters in Chhattisgarh

SUKMA/BIJAPUR, March 29: Security forces gunned down 18 Naxals, including 11 women, in twin encounters in Chhattisgarh's Sukma and Bijapur districts in the Bastar region on Saturday, recording a major success in the mission to eradicate Naxalism before March 31, 2026.

The encounters occurred on the eve of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's scheduled visit to Chhattisgarh. Four jawans were injured as security teams inflicted major damage on Naxals, killing 17 cadres, including a high-ranking Maoist, identified as Kuldhami Jagdish, carrying a reward of ₹25 lakh on his head, in Sukma, police said.

He was wanted in more than a dozen deadly Naxal incidents, including the 2013 Jhiram Valley attack that left several Congress leaders dead.

Another encounter was reported from the neighbouring Bijapur district where one Naxal was killed, a police officer said.

Among the four injured security personnel, three belong to the District Reserve Guard (DRG), a unit of the state police, while the fourth is from the Central



Reserve Police Force (CRPF), they said.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah hailed the Sukma encounter, saying those carrying weapons and resorting to violence cannot bring change but peace and development can.

"Another strike on Naxalism! Our security agencies have neutralised 16 Naxalites and recovered a massive cache of automatic weapons in an operation in Sukma," he wrote on 'X'. The home minister said under the leadership of Prime Minister, the government is resolved to eradicate (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

BJP's 'cronyism' caused banking sector crisis: Rahul

NEW DELHI, March 29: Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi on Saturday said the BJP government's "cronyism" and "regulatory mismanagement" has pushed India's banking sector into a crisis, which in turn hurts junior employees who have to "endure stress and toxic work conditions".

Accusing the BJP government of writing off ₹16 lakh crore for its "billionaire friends", Gandhi said the government's "economic mismanagement" has a human cost that affects thousands of honest working professionals.

In a post on X, Gandhi shared a video of his meeting with a delegation of ex-ICICI bank who he said have suffered due to the "mismanagement", saying the Congress would fight (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

ISRO achieves breakthrough in Semicryogenic engine development for LVM3

'The test proceeded as predicted and all the engine parameters were as expected'

BENGALURU, March 29: ISRO has announced significant progress in the design and development of a Semicryogenic engine or Liquid Oxygen / Kerosene engine (LOX / Kerosene) that will power the Semicryogenic booster stage of the Launch Vehicle Mark-3 (LVM3).

The first major breakthrough in the semicryogenic engine development programme was achieved on March 28, when the first successful hot test of Engine Power Head Test Article (PHTA), was carried out at ISRO Propulsion Complex, Mahendragiri, Tamil Nadu, it said.

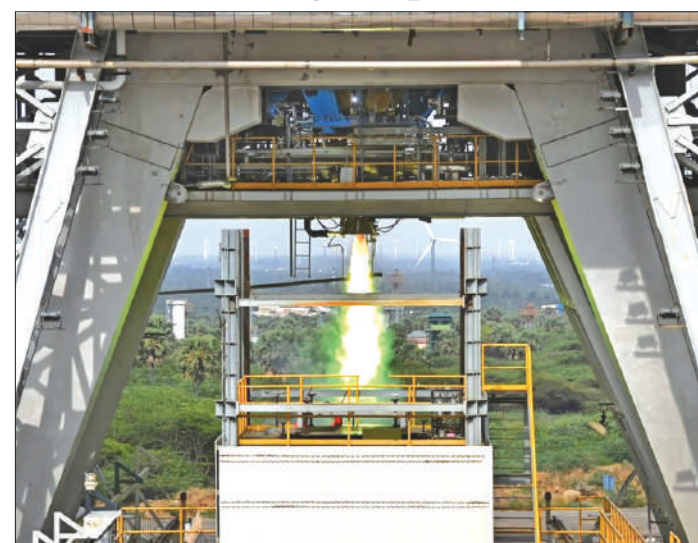
Highlighting that the Friday's test demonstrated the smooth ignition and boost strap mode operation of the engine for a test duration of 2.5 seconds, the space agency said the objective of the test was to validate the integrated performance of the critical subsystems such as the pre-burner, turbo pumps, start system and control

components by carrying out a hot-firing for a short-duration of 2.5 seconds.

"The test proceeded as predicted and all the engine parameters were as expected. With this breakthrough, ISRO is further planning a series of tests on the PHTA to further validate and finetune the performance before the realization of the fully integrated engine," it said.

Noting that the Liquid Propulsion Systems Centre (LPSC) of ISRO is developing the Semi-cryogenic propulsion Engine and Stage, ISRO said the stage (SC120) powered by the 2,000kN semi-cryogenic engine (SE2000) will replace the present core liquid stage (L110) of LVM3 for payload enhancement and power the booster stages of future launch vehicles.

Non-toxic and non-hazardous propellants (Liquid Oxygen and Kerosene) are employed in Semi



cryogenic propulsion and this will deliver higher performance compared to existing L110 stage.

Induction of the Semi-cryogenic propulsion system along with an

upgraded cryogenic stage in the LVM3 vehicle enhances its payload capability from 4 tonne to 5 tonne in Geosynchronous Transfer Orbit (GTO), it added.

According to ISRO, major subsystems of the SE-2000 engine include thrust chamber, pre-burner, turbo pump system, control components and start up system.

"...the complex engine hardware uses special materials to withstand the high temperature and oxidiser rich combustion. The hardware along with the space grade kerosene are realised in partnership with Indian industry. The development of this engine in these high thrust levels is highly challenging and this technology is available with only very few nations."

The realization of a test facility to qualify the engine and stage is equally complex and challenging, ISRO said.

The complex Semicryogenic Integrated Engine Test facility (SIET) was established at its Propulsion Research Complex (PRC), Mahendragiri for testing the engine and stage and was dedicated to (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

GU introduces online system for exam-related grievances

GUWAHATI, March 29: The Gauhati University has introduced a new system that will allow students to raise examination-related concerns digitally, eliminating the need for in-person visits to the Controller of Examinations' office, a notification said on Saturday.

The initiative was approved by vice-chancellor Nani Gopal Mahanta on Friday.

It is a bid to further streamline examination-related grievance redressal and add to ease of communication for thousands of students.

According to the notification, the university has set up dedicated email IDs to handle the grievances, with separate emails for undergraduate and postgraduate students.

However, to be considered valid, complaints must be endorsed by the principal of the respective affiliated college or the head of the university teaching department.

A scanned copy of the endorse-

ment must be attached to the email, as per the notification.

It said that routine examination-related grievances will be addressed by the university within 72 working hours, with students receiving email updates on the status of their complaints.

In cases requiring a student's physical presence, they will be informed accordingly. If a student is unable to attend in person, she or he may authorise a representative, preferably a legal guardian, to act on their behalf. To assist students in navigating the new system, a help desk will be operational daily from 2 pm to 5 pm.

With over 300 affiliated colleges under its jurisdiction, this digital initiative is expected to significantly ease administrative tasks for thousands of students across Assam, GU officials said.

This move will enhance transparency and efficiency in handling academic concerns, ensuring a structured and timely resolution, they added. (PTI)

India, US decide to hold sectoral talks under proposed trade pact in coming weeks

NEW DELHI, March 29: India and the US have decided to hold sectoral talks under the proposed bilateral trade agreement (BTA) in the coming weeks, the commerce ministry said on Saturday.

It was decided after the four-day negotiations of senior officers from India and the US. These negotiations ended on Saturday here.

"Sectoral expert-level engagements under the BTA will start virtually in the coming weeks and pave the path for an early negotiating round in person," the ministry said.

In order to realise the shared objective of promoting growth that ensures fairness, national security and job creation, both sides have through four days of discussions here broadly come to an understanding on the next steps towards a mutually beneficial, multi-sector BTA, with the goal to finalise its first tranche by fall 2025, it said.

During these discussions, the two sides held a productive exchange of views on deepening bilateral cooperation in priority areas, including increasing market access, reducing tariff and non-tariff barriers and deepening supply chain integration in a mutually beneficial manner, it added.

A team of US officials, headed by Assistant US Trade Representative for South and Central Asia Brendan Lynch, was here for the negotiations.

The meeting follows the visit of Commerce and Industries Minister Piyush Goyal to Washington from March 4-6 during which he met his US Trade Representative James Greer and Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick and subsequent video conferences between the two sides.

"The successful conclusion of the discussions reflects progress in efforts to expand India-US bilateral trade and investment relations to promote prosperity, security and innovation in both



the countries," the ministry said.

These steps are designed to unlock new opportunities for businesses, drive bilateral economic integration, and reinforce the economic partnership between the two trading partners.

"India and the US expressed satisfaction with the outcomes of the meeting and reaffirmed their dedication to ongoing collaboration. Both sides look forward to building on this milestone in the coming months to finalise the BTA, ensuring it aligns with the shared goals of prosperity, resilience, and mutual benefit," it added.

On Friday, US President Donald Trump described Prime Minister Narendra Modi as a "very smart man" and a "great friend of mine" while emphasising that tariff talks would "work out very well between India and our country".

The remarks assume significance since Trump has repeatedly criticised the alleged high tariffs charged by India and other countries on American goods. He has announced plans to impose reciprocal tariffs on its key trading partners, including India, on April 2.

"India is one of the highest tariffing nations in the world. It's brutal, it's

brutal. They're very smart. He (Modi) is a very smart man and a great friend of mine. We had very good talks. I think it's going to work out very well between India and our country," Trump said.

India and the US are aiming to conclude the first phase of the agreement by the fall of 2025 (September-October). They have also set a target to more than double bilateral trade to USD 500 billion by 2030 from the current over USD 190 billion.

While the US has demanded duty concessions in sectors like certain industrial goods, automobiles, wines, petrochemical products, dairy, agriculture items such as apples, tree nuts, and alfalfa hay; India may look at duty cuts for labour-intensive sectors like textiles.

Indian industry and exporters have asked the government to protect them against the USA's reciprocal tariffs. They have sought exemption from those tariffs as it would hurt them severely as the US is India's largest trading partner.

The US is pushing India to negotiate a large and grand bilateral trade agreement while seeking to open the agriculture sector for American busi-

nesses.

According to experts, India is unlikely to include dairy and agriculture in trade negotiations as it is a politically sensitive sector.

The US agri exports to India was USD 1.6 billion in 2024. Key exports include almonds (in shell -- USD 868 million); pistachios (USD 121 million), apples (USD 21 million), ethanol (ethyl alcohol USD 266 million).

In June 2023, India announced removal of retaliatory import duties on eight US products, including chickpeas, lentils, and apples, which were imposed in 2019 in response to America's measure to increase tariffs on certain steel and aluminium products.

In 2024, India's main exports to the US included drug formulations, biological (USD 8.1 billion), telecom instruments (USD 6.5 billion), precious and semi-precious stones (USD 5.3 billion), petroleum products (USD 4.1 billion), gold and other precious metal jewellery (USD 3.2 billion), ready-made garments of cotton including accessories (USD 2.8 billion), and products of iron and steel (USD 2.7 billion).

Imports included crude oil (USD 4.5 billion), petroleum products (USD 3.6 billion), coal, coke (USD 3.4 billion), cut and polished diamonds (USD 2.6 billion), electric machinery (USD 1.4 billion), aircraft, space crafts and parts (USD 1.3 billion), and gold (USD 1.3 billion). In 2023-24, the US was the largest trading partner of India with USD 119.71 billion bilateral trade in goods (USD 77.51 billion worth of exports, USD 42.19 billion of imports, with USD 35.31 billion trade surplus).

India has received USD 67.8 billion in foreign direct investments from America during April 2000 and September 2024. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

Myanmar's earthquake death

On Saturday, more heavy equipment was brought in to move the tons of rubble, but hope was fading among friends and family members of the missing that they would be found alive. "I was praying that they had survived but when I got here and saw the ruin — where could they be? In which corner? Are they still alive? I am still praying that all six are alive," said 45-year-old Naruemoi Thonglek, sobbing as she awaited news about her partner, who is from Myanmar, and five friends who worked at the site.

Waenphet Panta said she hadn't heard from her daughter Kanlayanee since a phone call about an hour before the quake. A friend told her Kanlayanee had been working high on the building on Friday. "I am praying my daughter is safe, that she has survived and that she's at the hospital," she said. Kanlayanee's father sitting beside her. Thai authorities said that the quake and aftershocks were felt in most of the country's provinces. Many places in the north reported damage to residential buildings, hospitals and temples, including in Chiang Mai, but the only casualties were reported in Bangkok.

Myanmar sits on a major fault line

Earthquakes are rare in Bangkok, but relatively common in Myanmar. The country sits on the Sagaing Fault, a major north-south fault that separates the India plate and the Sunda plate.

Brian Baptie, a seismologist with the British Geological Survey, said that the quake caused intense ground shaking in an area where most of the population lives in buildings constructed of timber and unreinforced brick masonry. "When you have a large earthquake in an area where there are over a million people, many of them living in vulnerable buildings, the consequences can often be disastrous," he said in a statement. (AP)

Himanta bats for unity among

established harmony among all communities in the state, the chief minister said, "We need unity, harmony, and if we are not together like one family, Bangladeshis (illegal immigrants) will snatch our land and property. They will not even let us survive."

"Since the BJP came into power, Bangladeshis (infiltrators) have crawled into their holes and have not come out as we are together," he added.

On ensuring constitutional rights for RHAC and other tribal bodies, Sarma said a tripartite meeting between the different organisations, Union Home Minister Amit Shah and the state government is being mooted.

The BJP leader hit out at the Congress, holding it responsible for the death of 24 people during the movement for an autonomous council for the Rabha community. "The Congress was in power then, and they killed 24 people. When Congress state president Bhupen Borah, other leaders come to ask for votes here, they should first apologise for these deaths," Sarma said.

He elaborated on the various welfare schemes and measures being undertaken by the government for various sections of people, including women and the youth.

Referring to a new scheme that will be rolled out next month, Sarma said that women self-help groups (SHGs) will receive Rs 10,000 this year under the programme. If the amount is spent productively, he assured the women-run SHGs of Rs 25,000 next year.

"With the money, get your own loom, rear chickens or bees, get into 'pitha' making business, go for pig farming. If pig farms are there, the foreigners won't come," he said, without specifying any community. Sarma assured of building a 'new Assam' where youth are educated and can transparently get employment. The RHAC has 40 seats, four of which are for nominated members. The total number of voters in the constituencies is 4,45,586, including 2,29,394 women and 11 others. The counting of votes will take place on April 4. (PTI)

Yogi govt bans meat sales

2017, the Yogi Adityanath government has clarified that illegal animal slaughter and sale of meat near religious places will be completely prohibited. To make this decision effective, district-level committees have been formed under the chairmanship of district magistrates. These will include officials from the police, Pollution Control Board, Animal Husbandry Department, Transport Department, Labour Department, Health Department and Food Safety Administration. (PTI)

KAAC supports Binita Chetry

(MAC), and local leaders, who collectively applauded Binita's dedication and the Council's swift action to support her aspirations.

Amar Chetry, Binita's guardian, expressed gratitude for the support, stating that the funds would be pivotal in covering travel, training, and other essential expenses ahead of the 2025 finale.

Sonowal lays foundation stone

innovate, and equip our youth with the knowledge and skills to lead the nation into a brighter, more prosperous future," he added. The Union minister also thanked the Union Minister of Education, Dharmendra Pradhan for ensuring that the requisite funds are made available for the construction of the new bhawan. Adding further Sonowal said that the new building will further strengthen Kendriya Vidyalaya's role, aligning with the National Education Policy's vision of holistic and inclusive learning.

"We need to design the area in such a way that ample green space is saved, offering students an environment to learn from nature, fostering curiosity and creativity. Under the leadership of PM Narendra Modi ji, education is being transformed to empower the youth with knowledge, values, and sustainability. This initiative reflects our commitment to providing world-class education while nurturing a deep connection with the environment," he said.

Highlighting the role of education in fuelling growth, the Union minister said, "Education is the foundation of progress and Dibrugarh is blessed with a sound and bright environment of education. This environment must be honed to equip the youth with skills to drive innovation and economic growth. To match Guwahati's development, we must invest in quality education, modern infrastructure, and skill development. Strengthening institutions like Kendriya Vidyalaya will empower future generations to lead and transform our city's future."

Sonowal was accompanied by minister of Power Department, Skill, Employment and Entrepreneurship Department, Medical Education and Research Department and MLA (Dibrugarh), Prasanta Phukan; the Mayor of Dibrugarh Municipal Corporation, Dr Saikat Patra; the vice chairman of Assam Tourism Development Corporation (ATDC), Rituparna Baruah; the chairman, Assam Petro Chemicals Limited, Bikul Deka; the district commissioner of Dibrugarh, and the principal of KV Dibrugarh among others.

18 Naxals killed, four security

Naxalism before March 31, 2026. Ten days ago, security forces had gunned down 30 members of the banned CPI (Maoist) in two separate encounters in the Bijapur and Kanker districts in the Bastar region, which also includes Sukma. The gunfight broke out around 8 am in the forest under the Kerlapal police station area in Sukma district, where a joint team of security personnel was out on an anti-Naxalite operation, inspector general of police of Bastar Range Sundaraj P told PTI. The IG said personnel from the DRG and CRPF's 159th battalion were involved in the operation launched on Friday night based on inputs about the presence of Maoists in the forests of Gogunda, Nendum and Upampalli villages in the Kerlapal police station area, he said. (PTI)

BJP's 'cronyism' caused banking

for such working-class professionals and end "workplace harassment and exploitation". He also urged those who have faced similar "injustice" to write to him.

"The BJP government has written off Rs 16 lakh crore in loans for their billionaire friends. Cronyism, coupled with regulatory mismanagement has pushed India's banking sector into crisis. This burden is ultimately borne by junior employees, who endure stress and toxic work conditions," he said in his post. He said on behalf of 782 ex-ICICI Bank employees, a delegation met him in Parliament yesterday. "Their stories reveal a disturbing pattern -- workplace harassment, forced transfers, retaliation for exposing unethical lending to NPA violators, and terminations without due process. In two tragic cases, this led to suicide.

The BJP government's economic mismanagement has a human cost as it affects thousands of honest working professionals around the country, he said. "If you are a working professional who has faced similar injustice share your story with me at <https://rahulgandhi.in/awaazbharati>," he said.

The delegation of employees alleging unfair dismissal by the ICICI Bank met Gandhi on Friday and shared accounts of being "abruptly terminated" while on medical leave or for raising concerns about management practices. The delegation of employees alleging unfair dismissal by the bank met Gandhi at his office at the Parliament House Complex.

There was no immediate reaction from the private bank. They shared accounts of being abruptly terminated while on medical leave, during periods of sanctioned absence, or for raising concerns about management practices, the Congress said in a post on X. The employees highlighted that such practices are not isolated to ICICI Bank but reflect a broader trend across private sector banks, driven by mounting pressure to maximise profits, the party said. (PTI)

ISRO achieves breakthrough in

the nation by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on February 27 last year. Prior to the conduct of integrated engine level hot tests, it is planned to carry out performance evaluation tests of the intermediate configuration, designated as Power Head Test Article (PHTA), which comprises all the engine systems except the thrust chamber, it said. The hot test that was carried out on Friday, is the first of a series of tests planned to validate the design of the propellant feed system, including the low-pressure and high-pressure turbo-pumps, the pre-burner, start system and control components.

"All subsystems for the test were realized and had undergone rigorous qualification tests prior to integration to Power Head Test Article," the space agency said.

The ignition sequence for PHTA was derived from a series of hot tests in single element level, ISRO said. In order to ensure the smooth ignition process during the PHTA test, another test article, Pre-burner Ignition Test Article (PITA), was realized, which consists of the pre-burner along with its feed systems, start-systems, and related control components. A series of tests were successfully completed using the PITA and the optimum start sequence for the power head test article was derived, it said. (PTI)

Tata Neu HDFC Bank credit card crosses 2 million milestones

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 29: Tata Neu and HDFC Bank on Saturday announced a significant milestone after the duo surpassed 2 million issuances.

As per an official statement, this achievement underscores the card's remarkable success in delivering value and a seamless rewards ecosystem to customers across the country.

Since its launch in August 2022, the Tata Neu HDFC Bank Credit Card has made significant strides, loved by its users for offering the most simple and transparent rewards ecosystem in the Indian credit card market.

"With a significant share of new cards issued (over 13% net new cards issued in Q3 FY25-RBI), it has rapidly gained the trust and loyalty of customers across the country," it added.

Commenting on the same, Gaurav Hazrati, chief

business officer, Financial Services, Tata Digital said that at Tata Digital they are dedicated to revolutionising the credit card experience by making benefits more rewarding and transparent for our customers.

"Crossing 2 million Tata Neu HDFC Bank Credit Cards issued is a strong testament to the trust our customers place in NeuCard. We remain committed to continuously enhancing the NeuCard experience, delivering even greater value to our growing community of NeuCard holders," Hazrati added.

Every transaction with the Tata Neu HDFC Bank Credit Card unlocks a universe of rewards, including up to 10% savings, accelerated NeuCoin earnings, and exclusive privileges across travel, fashion, electronics, groceries, and more. The card's seamless, technology-driven experience, featuring digital onboarding, instant approvals, and contactless payments, caters to the modern digital lifestyle.

PhonePe launches new vehicle insurance for two-wheelers & four-wheelers

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 29: PhonePe has announced the launch of its "new vehicle" insurance offering for two-wheelers and four-wheelers, said an official statement on Saturday.

As per the statement, this launch aims to provide cost-effective online alternatives for all new vehicle buyers as compared to conventional dealership insurance plans. "In our commitment towards making insurance accessible and affordable for everyone, we are pleased to launch our latest "new vehicle" insurance

offering for all prospective two-wheeler and four-wheeler owners," said Vishal Gupta, CEO at PhonePe Insurance Broking Services.

He further said that this coverage aims to facilitate users in making informed decisions by comparing policy options and pricing via a seamless digital experience. "At PhonePe, our goal is to simplify insurance-buying and make the process transparent and hassle-free for users. With this launch, we hope to transform the way consumers purchase insurance for their new vehicles," he added.

FICCI FLO delegation meets Sarbananda

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 29: A delegation led by Joyshree Das Verma, national president of FICCI Ladies Organisation (FLO) for the year 2024-25, visited Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal on Saturday at his residence in New Delhi.

The delegation included past presidents Namita Gautam, Vinita Bimbhet, and Jayanti Dalmia, along with executive director Rashmi Sarita and additional director Ankurita Pathak.

During the meeting, Sonowal officially launched FLO's landmark publication, "Ports of Possibilities: Strengthening Women's Representation in Maritime India."

This pivotal study, commissioned by the Ministry of Ports, Shipping, and Waterways, outlines strategic interventions to enhance gender inclusivity in the maritime sector.

"It underscores the need for policy reforms, skill development, and leadership opportunities to empower women in this critical industry," an official statement said.

The delegation also presented FLO's Annual Report for the year, highlighting the organization's impactful initiatives and achievements.

The meeting reaffirmed FLO's commitment to driving gender diversity and fostering women's empowerment across industries.

German firm from chemical sector to invest \$1.5 bn in India: Piyush Goyal

NEW DELHI, March 29: Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal on Saturday said a German company from the chemical sector has decided to invest \$1.5 billion in India, and a state has identified land for the project.

Though the minister did not disclose the name of the company or the state, he said that the company's head is expected to meet the state's chief minister on Sunday.

The company will "have the allotment of land in his hand, and we will have a billion-and-a-half dollars of foreign direct investment coming into the country over the next 12 months", Goyal said at a session of the Union Internationale des Avocats (UIA) here.

The company is looking for a parcel of land, which is about 250 acres near a port.

Germany is the ninth largest investor in India. The country has received about \$15 billion foreign direct investment (FDI) during April 2000 and December 2024.

He said that more and more companies are looking at coming to India to explore business opportunities.

He added that the government has taken a series of measures to improve the business environment of the country by reducing compliance burden and decriminalising minor offences.

These measures, he said, are generating a new confidence among investors and the government is ready to



help them if any law is creating unnecessary hindrance or if they are facing unfair competition due to predatory pricing.

Talking on the arbitration, he said it is a mechanism that can cut down a lot of judicial delays, if both parties are sincere in their acceptance of arbitration results.

"Of course, sometimes there are concerns about the quality of arbitration, so often a matter of deep concern for us in government for two reasons, whether the government was able to present its case smart enough and well enough before the arbitrators and second, whether the arbitration truly carried justice or was over influenced by the influence of

large corporates or larger international thinking," he said. He asserted that there is a need to make arbitration more robust so that it can generate confidence in all the stakeholders.

There is also a need to "look at making arbitration and mediation much more popular in our working", he said, adding, "I do believe that if India continues to grow the way it is, and we continue to power on our manufacturing ecosystem, the way we are hoping to, we will obviously have disputes, we will obviously have areas of disagreement, and if we can keep the courts unclogged, our desire to become a global manufacturing hub will get a big boost". (PTI)

Strict security measures imposed for DME written test in Cachar

HT Correspondent
SILCHAR, March 29: In anticipation of the upcoming written examination for various non-technical posts under the Director of Medical Education (DME) the District Magistrate of Cachar, Mr. Dilul Yadav has issued a prohibitory order to ensure a fair and peaceful conduct of the examination. The written test, scheduled for March 30 has raised concerns regarding possible disturbances, unfair means, and unlawful interference at examination centers across the district.

With a view to maintaining peace and preventing any untoward incidents, the District Magistrate has invoked Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023, to impose stringent restrictions around the examination venues. These measures aim to prevent unauthorized access, undue crowding, and any activities that might compromise the sanctity of the examination process.

The order explicitly restricts the entry of unauthorized persons and unnecessary gatherings within a 100-meter radius of examination centers. Additionally, parking and movement of vehicles within this radius will be strictly prohibited, with exceptions made only for authorized personnel, emergency services, and law enforcement officers deployed for duty. These steps are intended to prevent congestion and maintain order around the examination centers.

Furthermore, the directive prohibits any attempts to aid candidates through unfair means, including the use of mobile

phones, calculators, Bluetooth devices, or Wi-Fi-enabled gadgets inside the examination premises. Only the center in-charge and authorized personnel on duty will be permitted to use communication devices within the centers. Supervisory staff alone will be responsible for guiding candidates to their designated seats, ensuring an organized and unbiased process.

In an effort to uphold a disturbance-free environment, the use of loud music or sound systems in and around the examination centers has also been banned. Additionally, food stalls and shops will not be allowed to operate within a 100-meter radius to prevent unnecessary crowding and distractions for examinees.

Given the gravity of the situation, this order has been issued ex-parte, meaning it is legally binding with immediate effect. Any violations of the stipulated regulations will invite strict legal action under relevant provisions of the law. The District Magistrate's order underscores the administration's commitment to conducting the examination in a smooth and transparent manner, ensuring that candidates can undertake their test without external disruptions or malpractices.

This decisive action by the district authorities highlights the importance of maintaining law and order during crucial examinations and reflects their dedication to upholding the integrity of the recruitment process. The administration has urged the public to comply with the directives and contribute to the fair execution of the examination.

Gaonbura killed

HT Correspondent
BOKAJAN, March 29: A sarkari gaonbura was killed in a road accident on NH 39, Bokajan, on March 28. The accident occurred when the Sarkari gaonbura, Riso Hanse (65) was riding a bicycle on his way home on NH 39 when a bus (AS 05 C 0225) coming from Golaghat hit him from the rear.

He was taken to Hanjanglangso Medical Sub Center, from where the doctor referred him to Dimapur. While on the way to Dimapur, Hanse died. The police took stock of the accident and forwarded the body for post-mortem report to Diphu Medical College & Hospital on Saturday.

Man kills brother

HT Correspondent
KHERONI, March 29: A brother killed his younger brother in an inebriated brawl in the village of Boratikhola, West Karbi Anglong, last night. Reports said that the two brothers argued over drinking alcohol. In a fit of rage, the elder brother, identified as Ram Vilas Rajbhar, killed his younger brother Hareram Rajbhar (30) with his bare hands. The incident was kept under wraps for the whole night. In the morning, villagers got wind of it and informed the police. Police from Kheroni police station visited the village and apprehended Ram Vilas Rajbhar; further investigation is ongoing.

Python rescued

HT Correspondent
DEMOW, March 29: A Python was rescued in Garbhanga near Demow on Saturday morning. According to the information received, the Python was staying on a branch of a tree in Atul Bharrali's residence in Garbhanga near Demow and saw it on Saturday morning. After knowing about it people came to see the Python and informed the forest department immediately. Thereafter, forest officials rescued the Python and took it to Sivasagar Range, informed an official.

Bodoland Model of Peace – Transformation of Bodoland and a Vision for the Future

1st Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma Memorial Lecture on March 31

HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, March 29: The Government of Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR), in collaboration with the Department of Education will host the first Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma Memorial Lecture on March 31 at KBR Auditorium, Cotton University.

The event will commemorate the birth anniversary of Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma, observed as Students' Day (Chatra Divas) across educational institutions in Assam. The theme of the lecture, "Bodoland Model of Peace – Transformation of Bodoland and a Vision for the Future," will set the stage for discussions on progress and development in the region.

State Education Minister Ranjo

Dumper seized

HT Correspondent
BOKAJAN, March 29: An excavator and a dumper truck were seized by the forest officials of Bokajan Forest Range, Eastern Divisional Range.

The excavator (NL 01 G 0223) and dumper (NK 01 Q 9509) were cutting earth for making bricks, but they were doing so at an undesignated place. The seized machineries were kept in the compound of the Bokajan Forest Range Office. The matter has been intimated to the office of DFO, Diphu.

It has come to light that illegal earth cutting frequently takes place in the area. Bokajan Forest Range Officer, Serlyn Beypi, said that the carrying of earth and sand should be stopped as soon as evening comes.



Pegu will attend as the chief guest and deliver the keynote address.

The memorial lecture will be presented by BTC Chief Pramod

Boro, focusing on the theme of the programme. Ramesh Chandra Deka, Vice Chancellor of Cotton University, will serve as the guest of honour and will moderate an interactive session following the lecture.

The programme will also feature a welcome address by Narayan Konwar, Secretary of the Department of Education, Government of Assam, a video screening on the life and contributions of Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma, and a cultural performance by artists from Bodoland.

This event aims to honour the legacy of Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma while fostering discussions on the transformation and future of Bodoland.

National seminar on linguistics and culture begins in New Delhi

HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, March 29: A two-day national seminar on Linguistic & Cultural Issues of Local Communities of Bodoland began on Saturday in New Delhi.

The event was organised jointly by Bodo Sahitya Sabha (BSS), ABSU, Bodo Study Centre in association with government of Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) being held at the Bodo Study Centre of Gandhi Hindustani Sahitya Sabha.

Pramod Boro, the chief executive member of Bodoland Territorial Region inaugurated the event amidst presence of literary leaders, writers, intellectuals and students union leaders representing different communities across the Bodoland region.

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

It may be mentioned here that the historic Bodo Peace Accord signed on the January 27 in 2020 under the guidance of Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi, and in the august presence of Home Minister of India Amit Shah has already ushered in a new era of hope, peace, all-round development and progress in Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) in the state of Assam.

The Bodoland Model of Peace has also gathered regional and national acclaim within the past five years. The Bodoland Territorial Re-



gion, one of the ten Sixth Schedule Councils of India (North East), was previously known for its volatile environment- conflicts, violence, killings and rapes for over four-decades since the 1980s. For the first time, the region has seen peace, security and harmonious co-existence in the post-Independence period.

Recently, the Pramod Boro-led BTR Government launched the BTR Community Vision Documents. The respective community vision documents are participatorily developed aspirations of the diverse communities living in the

Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR).

As part of the flagship Bodoland Happiness Mission, this initiative reflected the Council Government's steadfast commitment to fostering sustainable peace, promoting healing and addressing the enduring scars of over four decades of conflict and violence. It captures the diverse aspirations of the communities residing in BTR and seeks to align the government's efforts with their needs, ensuring that every voice is heard and represented in the journey towards peace and development.

Preservation and expansion of rural libraries stressed



HT Correspondent
SIVASAGAR, March 29: Swahid Maniram Dewan College (SMD) Library in collaboration with the Swahid Kusal Konwar Pathagar (Library) of Charing Baruwati Gaon, organised a programme on Rural Library Preservation and Expansion at Kusal Konwar Pathagar on Friday.

The awareness meeting was moderated by Jyotika Borthakur, Librarian, SMD College, and the convenor of the programme. In his inaugural speech the principal, SMD College Bidyananda Borkakoty emphasized on the use of rural libraries by the local people especially the student community.

Rabi Kumar Jha, Associate Professor, SMD College, explained the role of libraries in building an intellectual society since ancient times.

Dhruvajyoti Sharma passes away

HT Correspondent
MANGALDAI, March 29: Dhruvajyoti Sharma (53), a well-known educator, speaker, social worker, and compassionate individual, passed away on Saturday.

Sharma was afflicted with liver disease lately. Notably, Sharma, the son of the late educationist Siddheshwar Sharma, led an affluent life. He earned a master's degree in history from Pune University after graduating from Cotton College. He started out as a lecturer at Dhanhi College and later served as part-time Assistant Professor at Mangaldai College for 12 years in the hope of regularizing his job. But unfortunately he had to leave the college without fulfilling his wish. Before his demise he was serving as the principal of Brilliant Academy, a leading private sector educational institution in Mangaldai. He was admitted to the hospital in Mangaldai, Guwahati, AIG Hyderabad and Chennai but died on fate. Sharma served as the president of the Management Committee of Dhanhi Girls Vidyapeeth High School and the local Durga Puja celebration committee.

Dhanhi Girls' Vidyapeeth, Brilliant Academy, Dhanhi College, Mangaldai College, Legislator of Mangaldai LAC Basanta Das, Social Worker and Teacher Hitesh Hazarika, and numerous others in Mangaldai have expressed their condolences for his untimely death. In addition to his numerous relatives, he is survived by his mother, wife, and son.

Two-day seminar on feminism

HT Correspondent
JORHAT, March 29: Chancellor of the Nagaland University Samudra Gupta Kashyap inaugurated a two-day national seminar on 'Feminism: Indian and Western-Exploring Intersections, Parallels, and Divergences' at the Jorhat College (Amalgamated) recently. The seminar, sponsored by the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), has been organised by the department of Philosophy in collaboration with the Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) of the college.

A Jorhat College faculty informed that Kashyap, who is a noted journalist, former Information Commissioner of Assam, and an author, in his address, noted that feminism should be brought out of the academia and should address key issues. He also traced feminist thoughts in the writ-

ings of Srimanta Sankardeva and Sri Madhavdeva. The keynote speech was delivered by Dr Samiksha Gohain, Assistant professor, Department of Philosophy, Cotton State University. In her speech, Dr Gohain traced the trajectory of the growth of feminism in India and the West and highlighted the interfaces between the two.

Earlier, the inaugural session presided over by the college principal Dr Soumitra Puzari, who delivered the welcome address, while college governing body president Dr Paran Baruah, a retired Chief Scientist of CSIR-NEIST, Jorhat, lighted the ceremonial lamp.

Dr Ranjit Bhattacharyya, head, department of philosophy, stated the objective of the programme and Uddipona Borah, an Assistant Professor, department of Philosophy, offered the vote of thanks at the inaugural session.

Workshop held at Biswanath College

HT Correspondent
BISWANATH CHARIALI, March 29: A workshop on Ribbon Flower Making, Hoop Art, and Dream-Catcher Making was organized on Saturday under the aegis of the Add-On Course on Entrepreneurship Development, Department of Economics, Biswanath College. The workshop was inaugurated by Dr Chintia Mani Sharma, Principal of Biswanath College.

In his inaugural speech, Dr Sharma praised the department's initiative to motivate students through such creative activities. He emphasized that creativity and innovative thinking can lead to success, citing the example of Aakash Jyoti Gogoi, who became a successful entrepreneur and job provider through continuous efforts and innovation.

Karabi Gogoi, Head of the Department, informed the attendees



that there would be three workshops under this Add-On Course on Entrepreneurship Development. She introduced the resource persons for the workshop, Henashree Das and Prachi Saikia, two former students of the department who have been utilizing their free time to engage in and promote productive activities. During the workshop, the resource persons guided the partici-

pants through various techniques of flower making. The event saw the participation of faculty members, including Ashomi Kalita, Minakshi Gohain, Dr Nabanita Sharma, and Antareepa Bora.

Approximately 60 participants enthusiastically took part in the workshop, learning to create different types of flowers. The workshop successfully fostered creativity and practical skills among the attendees.

Singpho community gets new King of Bisa Gaon

Ceremony witnessed the presence of several distinguished personalities from the Bisa lineage



HT Correspondent
MARGHERITA, March 29: Bisa Gam Singpho has been crowned as the new King of Bisa Gaon, Ledo, Margherita, following the traditions of the Singpho community.

The historic event took place on Friday evening in Bisa village in Ledo a heritage-rich settlement under Margherita Co-District.

The coronation followed the demise of the former king Bisa Nong Singpho who passed away on January 15 this year leaving the throne vacant.

Singpho was a revered figure not only in Margherita but across

Assam and Arunachal Pradesh as recognizing his significant contributions the state government accorded him state honors during his last rites.

According to Singpho customs, the eldest son inherits the throne after a king's passing as honouring this tradition, the community organized a special coronation ceremony, where Bisa Gam Singpho was formally appointed as the new ruler.

The ceremony witnessed the presence of several distinguished personalities from the Bisa lineage, including Sengram Lebram, President of the Singpho Na-

tional Council, renowned litterateur and veteran journalist of Margherita Jagat Changmai, Kha Lamai from Arunachal Pradesh, community elders Bisa Utang Singpho, Bisa Mung Khang Gam Singpho, Bisa La Ja Singpho, Bisa Mai Nong Singpho, and Bisa Bom Tang Singpho.

Following the coronation King Bisa Gam Singpho pledged to work towards the holistic development of the Singpho community in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh while fostering harmonious relations with other ethnic groups in the region.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) : The looming threat to our future

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

The emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has been heralded as one of the most significant breakthroughs in technological history. Its potential to transform industries, enhance efficiencies, and solve complex global problems has been widely embraced. AI, in its many forms—from machine learning algorithms that process vast datasets to autonomous systems that can drive cars or diagnose diseases—offers unprecedented possibilities. However, with the rapid development of AI comes the unavoidable realization that its very integration into society could pose far-reaching negative consequences that are not yet fully understood or addressed. The promise of AI is accompanied by risks that, if left unchecked, could alter the fabric of human existence in irreparable ways. As we stand on the cusp of a technological revolution, we must critically examine the darker implications of AI, not only for economic systems but for privacy, governance, human relationships, and the fundamental nature of life itself.

At the forefront of the conversation about AI's negative impact is the threat it poses to the global economy. The most immediate concern is the displacement of workers across industries. For centuries, technological progress has replaced manual labor with machinery, and AI is set to extend this trend beyond the blue-collar workforce, impacting white-collar professionals as well. As AI systems become increasingly capable of handling cognitive tasks such as data analysis, legal research, medical diagnostics, and even creative work, millions of jobs could be lost or drastically altered. Automation in industries like manufacturing and retail is already eliminating positions that were once deemed secure, and this wave of change will only accelerate as AI becomes more integrated into sectors like finance, healthcare, and logistics.

The displacement of jobs is not only an economic issue but a social one. For many, work is more than just a source of income; it provides a sense of identity and purpose. As AI replaces human workers, the poten-

tial for widespread unemployment looms large, leading to increased inequality and social unrest. Although there are arguments that AI will create new types of jobs, the challenge remains in how society will transition to this new labor market. Many of the jobs that AI will create, such as those in AI development, data science, and engineering, require specialized skills that a large portion of the displaced workforce may not possess. The resulting economic divide could lead to a scenario where a small elite who control and understand AI systems thrive, while the majority of the population struggles to find meaningful employment. This concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a few could exacerbate existing inequalities, leading to increased tension and possibly social upheaval.

Beyond the economic sphere, AI has the potential to reshape society's understanding of privacy and autonomy. As AI systems thrive on data, they require vast amounts of personal information to function effectively. Every click, purchase, search query, and social media interaction provides valuable data points that feed into AI algorithms, allowing them to make increasingly accurate predictions about human behavior. In this environment, privacy is becoming an increasingly scarce commodity. Companies and governments alike are leveraging AI to monitor individuals, predict their actions, and even manipulate their behaviors. Social media platforms, powered by AI algorithms, track users' interactions to deliver personalized content, advertisements, and recommendations, often steering their thoughts, political opinions, and purchasing decisions without their conscious awareness.

The erosion of privacy becomes even more troubling when coupled with the rise of AI-driven surveillance technologies. Facial recognition systems, for example, are being deployed in public spaces around the world, tracking individuals' movements and activities. In authoritarian regimes, these technologies are being used to suppress dissent and control populations, with AI surveillance systems playing a central role in monitoring political activists and en-



forcing compliance with government mandates. Even in democratic societies, the use of AI for mass surveillance poses a threat to civil liberties. As governments justify increased surveillance in the name of national security, individuals may find themselves living under constant watch, with their movements, communications, and even facial expressions recorded and analyzed by AI systems.

The implications for freedom of expression are equally concerning. AI algorithms are already being used to moderate content on social media platforms, determining what information is seen or suppressed. While these systems are designed to filter out harmful content such as hate speech or misinformation, they also raise the question of who controls the flow of information in the digital age. As AI systems gain more control over what content is prioritized, there is a risk that they will reinforce echo chambers, stifling diverse viewpoints and creating a more polarized society. The question of bias in AI becomes especially pertinent here, as these algorithms often reflect the prejudices and assumptions of the engineers who design them, leading to discriminatory outcomes.

Bias in AI is not just a problem in content moderation but in every sector where AI is deployed. AI systems, particularly those based on machine learning, are trained on historical data that often reflect the biases of the societies from which they are drawn. As a result, AI can perpetuate and even amplify existing inequalities. For instance, in the criminal jus-

tice system, predictive policing algorithms are used to forecast where crimes are likely to occur, but these systems have been found to disproportionately target minority communities based on biased historical crime data. Similarly, hiring algorithms that use AI to screen job applicants have been shown to favor certain demographic groups over others, entrenching racial and gender biases. The danger of these biased algorithms lies in their perceived objectivity. Because AI is seen as a neutral, data-driven tool, its decisions are often accepted without question, even when they lead to unjust outcomes.

This leads to another pressing concern: the lack of transparency and accountability in AI systems. Many AI algorithms operate as "black boxes," meaning their decision-making processes are opaque even to the engineers who designed them. As AI systems are increasingly integrated into decision-making processes that affect people's lives—whether in hiring, lending, or law enforcement—it becomes more difficult for individuals to challenge or understand the decisions that are made about them. This opacity raises profound ethical questions about accountability and fairness. If an AI system denies someone a loan or falsely flags them as a criminal suspect, who is responsible for that mistake? The individual affected by such decisions may have no recourse, particularly when AI algorithms are protected as proprietary technology, shielded from scrutiny.

The rise of autonomous systems

powered by AI introduces even more complex ethical dilemmas. Autonomous weapons, or "killer robots," represent a new frontier in warfare, where machines are given the power to make life-and-death decisions without human intervention. The development of these systems has raised concerns among ethicists, military strategists, and human rights organizations alike. The idea of machines deciding who lives and who dies, without human judgment or empathy, is deeply troubling. Moreover, the use of AI in warfare could spark a new arms race, with nations competing to develop the most advanced autonomous weapons systems. This escalation could have catastrophic consequences, as autonomous weapons systems, unlike human soldiers, may not be able to make nuanced decisions in the fog of war, leading to unintended casualties and the potential for widespread devastation.

In addition to these tangible threats, AI also poses a more subtle but equally significant challenge to human identity and creativity. AI systems are increasingly being used to generate art, music, literature, and other forms of creative expression. While these AI-generated works can be impressive, they lack the emotional depth and intent that make human creativity so powerful. Art, in its many forms, is an expression of human experience, emotion, and individuality. As AI takes on a larger role in the creation of art, there is a risk that human creativity will be sidelined, and culture will become homogenized, driven by algorithms rather than human ingenuity. This raises important questions about the role of AI in shaping cultural and creative industries, and whether we risk losing touch with the very qualities that make us human.

Furthermore, as AI systems become more integrated into social interaction, there is a growing concern about the future of human relationships. AI-powered virtual assistants, social robots, and chatbots are already being used in roles traditionally filled by humans, from customer service to companionship. While these technologies can provide valuable services, they cannot replicate the empathy, understanding, and

emotional connection that define human relationships. As people increasingly turn to machines for social interaction, there is a danger that human relationships will be devalued and eroded. In areas like elder care, where AI robots are being used to provide companionship for the elderly, important ethical questions arise about the appropriateness of replacing human caregivers with machines that cannot truly understand or care for their patients.

Finally, the concentration of AI power in the hands of a few large tech companies presents a serious threat to democracy and global governance. The tech giants that control the development and deployment of AI hold immense influence over the global economy, public discourse, and even political processes. This concentration of power threatens to create a world where a small number of corporations dictate the direction of AI development, prioritizing profit and corporate interests over the public good. Moreover, as AI becomes increasingly entangled with political systems, there is a risk that it will be used to manipulate public opinion, undermine democratic institutions, and reinforce authoritarian regimes.

In conclusion, while Artificial Intelligence offers tremendous opportunities, its negative impacts on our future cannot be ignored. From the displacement of workers and economic inequality to the erosion of privacy, human rights, and autonomy, the risks associated with AI are profound and far-reaching. As we continue to develop and integrate AI into our societies, we must remain vigilant and proactive in addressing these challenges. The decisions we make today about how AI is used, governed, and regulated will determine whether it serves as a tool for human advancement or becomes a force for societal decay. To safeguard our future, we must approach AI with caution, ensuring that its development is guided by ethical principles that prioritize human well-being, equality, and justice. If we fail to do so, the very fabric of our societies—and our humanity—could be at risk. *(The writer is the Editor-in-Chief of the Assamese E-magazine SAM-PROTIK. He can be reached at himangshur1989@gmail.com)*

India's cultural tapestry: Teaching children the value of diversity

By: M.R.Lalu

India is not just a country; it is a civilization, a cultural manifestation of generations that have survived through millennia. It has countless stories to tell of how it endured ruthless invasions and aggressions. It also has innumerable tales of its people who struggled to free themselves from the horrors of these invasions. Millions of lives were lost in the fight to ensure the nation's survival, all while it continued to endure and uphold its diversity. India is still recognized as a land that has withstood the test of time. While many ancient civilizations crumbled and collapsed, India survived, largely through the strength of its cultural traditions. Indians from time immemorial nurtured and cherished these perennial values, even as waves of foreign and aggressive ideas sought to shatter our collective existence. From the Vedic period to modern India, the nation has witnessed remarkable progress in almost all fields. India made great strides in philosophy, science, mathematics, art, and literature. In each of these fields, India left an indelible impact. The world community, though slow to recognize it, has gradually acknowledged this contribution.

Our children must understand that they belong to a land that gave the world the concept of zero and taught its importance in mathematical calculations. They should know that Sanskrit, the most ancient language, is the mother of many languages and that the best spiritual wisdom available in the world is inscribed in Sanskrit. They should also understand the significance of Yoga and Ayurveda, systems that India dedicated to humanity. After centuries of relentless practice and propagation, both Yoga and Ayurveda have gained worldwide recognition as the best wellness systems. I strongly believe that our children must realize the immense impact of all things uniquely Indian, so that they may grow with a sense of pride and belonging.

India's progress in the fields of philosophy, mathematics, literature, and science has been tremendous. From the Vedic period to modern India, it has produced remarkable individuals who are revered as great role models worldwide. The country's spiritual wisdom is so profound that it believes truth can be manifested in multiple forms. This was an isolated thought that India held across centuries, and over time, the world has come to embrace this vision. From the Vedic sages to Mahatma Gandhi, generations of extraordinary individuals have championed this vision for the welfare of humanity, forming the foundation of India's inclusiveness.

India is known for its ancient texts, such as the Vedas and Upanishads, and its epics, the Ramayana and Mahabharata,

which have reinvigorated the spiritual essence of people across the globe. These texts, with their philosophical depth and practical applications, remain among the most admired in the world. The characters they depict and the events they describe through literary brilliance continue to inspire people even today. Undoubtedly, they have played a pivotal role in the civilizational reawakening of India, helping its people uphold the best practices for the welfare of all.

India's culture is vast and diverse, and the personalities who have upheld its greatness through the generations have left an indelible impact. Spanning spirituality, philosophy, politics, and literature, there have been many individuals whose dedication, intelligence, and service to society have preserved India's diversity. As a land of numerous beautiful languages and dialects, festivals, and traditions, India showcases its vast cultural tapestry, which exemplifies its diverse heritage. This diversity can be seen even in small neighbouring villages, where festivals, festivities, dress codes, and cuisines vary. This uniquely diverse atmosphere places India among the most livable countries, which is a major reason why it attracts millions of people from other nations. For instance, the Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj is a recent example. Its social inclusivity, organizational brilliance, and spiritual ambience transformed this massive gathering into a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Most importantly, what separates India from the rest of the world is its cultural continuity. A country that has joyfully accommodated Western religions and faiths, India has also given birth to four major Indic religions. Its spiritual wisdom has consistently embraced other belief systems without exclusion.

India's rivers, mountains, panoramic landscapes, and its abundant flora and fauna—all that India has and produces—stand out as uniquely remarkable. Politically, we have remained a fiercely patriotic people, consistently fighting for our independent existence. This struggle spanned centuries, from the days of the Mughals to the more recent British invasion. Throughout our battle to reclaim our presence and prestige, India lost a significant portion of its civilizational symbols and treasures. We lost many of our magnificent temples and beautiful languages. We lost entire generations to alien belief systems through conversions and persecutions. We also lost vast amounts of literature and books, many of which were either burned, buried, or stolen forever, taking with them their eternal values. There was great resistance from the people who came before us. Their fight for self-respect continued until we reclaimed it from foreign hands just a few decades ago. Our children must also understand that the freedom we

often celebrate was won through immense pain caused by the division of this country. The landscape, which had remained culturally united from the Himalayas to the Indian Ocean, was carved into separate parts along religious lines, giving rise to the enduring impact of intolerance.

Though every Indian state has its own unique customs, food, attire, music, and dance forms, these differences do not disrupt its existence as a strong nation. Our future generations should also be aware that we had great musicians, philosophers, scientists, and physicians. Ancient scholars like Aryabhata, Charaka, and Sushruta were pioneers in mathematics, medicine, and surgery. Over time, India has evolved into a vibrant democracy, with the world's largest population mobilizing its democratic principles. Yet again, its principal contribution in the area of spiritual knowledge deserves great recognition. India has always spread the messages of peace, harmony, and self-realization. While many countries pursued territorial expansion through brutality toward their neighbors, India remained a friend to all. We have undoubtedly been the propagators of the pursuit of supreme knowledge that the world began to delve deeper. Preaching peaceful coexistence, Buddha chose to be born in India. Lord Krishna imparted his supreme knowledge of Karma, transforming the battlefield into a space for realization. The Bhagavad Gita, a gem of philosophy, addresses the most complex issues of life. The holy text has earned the status of a stress-buster and a treasure of solutions. Indic religions, in particular, brought to people the essence and pathways to enlightenment. Despite the challenges faced over time—through destructive wars, natural calamities, and economic slowdowns—India has survived and continued to progress rapidly, almost becoming one of the most powerful global players.

The idea of India cannot be conceived solely as an independent democratic system. It is, indeed, its civilizational unity as well. It is the diversity that evolves into its colossal unity, and the idea of India also stems from its past struggles and victories. As I mentioned, it is its ethnicity, culture, religion, language, and territory itself that Veer Savarkar defined as the fatherland and holy land of millions of people. Children should, of course, be taught that India represents the patriotic essence for which we live and are ready to die. This is the lesson we decisively learned from those brave hearts, whose blood sanctified the land further giving it the aroma of independence. We are a diverse nation, and our cultural ancestry, along with the constitutionally guaranteed freedom, should become the invisible thread that binds us together forever. *(The author is a freelance journalist based in Kerala. He can be reached at mrlalu@30gmail.com)*

Cinema in 2025: A year of transformation, innovation, and soft power diplomacy

By: Dipak Kurmi

Every year, the international film festival circuit reinvents itself, bringing fresh perspectives, innovative storytelling, and cinematic craftsmanship to audiences across the globe. Each festival curates a unique experience, setting new benchmarks in content, programming, outreach, and presentation. The year 2025 is no exception, with major film festivals embracing the evolving landscape of cinema while grappling with the complexities of tradition and technology. From the Berlinale's dynamic jury to the grandeur of Cannes, the restoration of cinematic classics at Venice, and India's strategic foray into the global entertainment industry, 2025 is shaping up to be a landmark year in the cinematic world.

The Berlinale 2025 has already set the tone for the year, offering a glimpse into the new formats, styles, and narratives that will dominate global screens. Presiding over the jury is the esteemed American filmmaker Todd Haynes, known for his originality, thematic focus, and innovative cinematic techniques. Alongside him, a diverse panel comprising filmmakers, costume designers, film critics, and actors ensures that the awards reflect a broad spectrum of perspectives. One of the biggest challenges for the jury, and for many festivals in 2025, is the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in filmmaking. As AI-driven narratives and production techniques gain traction, the jury must decide how to balance imagination, tradition, and technological advancements while preserving the essence of cinematic storytelling.

As the season progresses, the Cannes Film Festival 2025, set to run from May 13 to May 25, promises an exciting blend of legacy and forward-thinking innovation. Renowned French actor Juliette Binoche has been named the President of the Jury, bringing both nostalgia and experience to the role. Reflecting on her long association with Cannes, Binoche remarked, "In 1985, I walked up the steps for the first time with the enthusiasm and uncertainty of a young actress. I never imagined that, 40 years later, I would return as the President of the Jury." With accolades spanning the Cannes, Venice, and Berlin film festivals, along with a BAFTA and an Oscar, Binoche's presence underscores the festival's continued commitment to artistic excellence. Cannes 2025 is expected to be a melting pot of mainstream and experimental films, with AI-driven narratives poised to make a significant impact.

Meanwhile, the 82nd Venice Inter-

national Film Festival, scheduled from August 27 to September 6, is introducing a dedicated section on the restoration of cinematic classics. This initiative acknowledges the importance of preserving film history while exploring the future of the medium. Venice remains a unique experience where audiences do not merely watch films but immerse themselves in an atmosphere of living art and culture. As with Berlinale and Cannes, the Venice jury faces the challenge of evaluating films that push the boundaries of traditional storytelling. The fundamental question remains: will they favor classic narrative structures, or will AI-assisted filmmaking and experimental techniques receive greater recognition? The deliberations in Venice will serve as a barometer for how AI is integrated into the festival landscape moving forward.

The increasing role of AI in filmmaking has sparked intense debates across festival circuits. Should AI-generated content be evaluated on par with traditionally crafted films? Some festivals are contemplating the introduction of new categories specifically for AI-assisted storytelling. The evolving interplay between human creativity and technological innovation is pushing the boundaries of cinematic authenticity, making jury deliberations more complex than ever before. As AI tools become more sophisticated, filmmakers and festival jurors alike must define the parameters of artistic merit in an era where machines contribute to the creative process.

Beyond the established giants of cinema, India is making a strategic move to cement its position in the global entertainment industry with the inaugural World Audio Visual & Entertainment Summit (WAVES) 2025. Scheduled to take place in Mumbai from May 1 to 5, this ambitious initiative aims to bring together the global media and entertainment (M&E) industry with a focus on fostering collaborations, business opportunities, and cross-cultural dialogue. Spearheaded by the Indian government, WAVES 2025 is designed to highlight India's creative excellence, encourage co-productions, and promote film tourism. By attracting international investments and sharing best practices, the summit aspires to position India as a global media powerhouse.

The four-day event will be structured around four key pillars: Broadcasting and Entertainment, AVGC-XR (Animation, Visual Effects, Gaming, Comics, and Extended Reality), Digital Media, and Films. This multi-dimensional approach aims to create unprecedented collaborations among

key stakeholders from business-to-business (B2B), business-to-consumer (B2C), and business-to-government (B2G) verticals. WAVES 2025 is expected to facilitate new ideas, investments, and partnerships, establishing India as a premier destination for media production and international content creation.

India's film festival landscape will further evolve with the 56th International Film Festival of India (IFFI) later in the year. Drawing inspiration from global festivals like Berlinale and Venice, IFFI must focus on curating a diverse international jury while adapting to contemporary trends. Introducing categories that recognize AI-generated content would align IFFI with the global shift in cinematic production. Additionally, IFFI 2025 presents a strategic opportunity to strengthen India's position as a premier filming destination. By leveraging the country's scenic and culturally rich locations, the festival can attract global filmmakers through promotional campaigns and India's e-visa facility for film professionals.

Film festivals have long transcended their role as mere showcases of cinematic excellence; they have become instruments of soft power diplomacy. For countries like India, participating in such festivals extends beyond screenings and accolades—it is about leveraging the global film industry to strengthen diplomatic ties and foster cultural exchange. Networking sessions with international delegates, industry collaborations, and policy dialogues at festivals like WAVES 2025 and IFFI 2025 can amplify India's influence on the global cinematic stage. As the festival circuit of 2025 unfolds, the global film community finds itself at a crossroads. The challenge for festival juries lies in striking a balance between tradition and innovation, between human artistry and technological advancements, and between local narratives and global storytelling paradigms. With the rise of AI in filmmaking, the evolving role of film festivals as diplomatic tools, and India's ambitious plans to dominate the entertainment landscape, 2025 is set to be a transformative year for cinema.

The coming months will determine how the film industry navigates these changes, ensuring that storytelling continues to evolve while retaining the magic that makes cinema an enduring global phenomenon. As cinephiles and industry professionals watch closely, the decisions made at these festivals will shape the trajectory of filmmaking for years to come. *(The writer can be reached at dipakkurmigmail@gmail.com)*

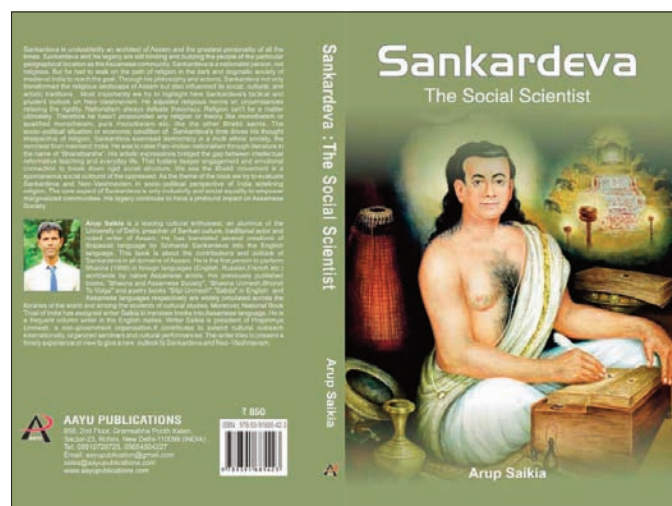
BOOK REVIEW

Sankardeva: The Social Scientist

By: Samiran Bhuyan

International Bhaona artist Arup Saikia recently published a book namely, Sankardeva: The Social Scientist. This isn't about biography of Sankardeva or about the history of Assam. It's about the philosophical deeds and views of Sankardeva. It's elaborately described regarding the socio-political scenario during the times of Sankardeva. Being Bhaona artist, author Arup Saikia includes many events and aspects in the book from Saikia's personal experience. The discourse on Sankardeva in English language is very less generally. So writer Arup Saikia decided to publish the book from the national capital, New Delhi. So that the people across the states have a chance for the glimpse of the book. The main targeted readers are non Assamese Indian and foreigners. Sankardeva is undoubtedly an architect of Assam and the greatest personality of all the times. Sankardeva and his legacy are still binding and building the people of the particular geographical location. Sankardeva is a nationalist person, not religious. But he had to walk on the path of religion in the dark and dogmatic society of medieval India to reach the goal.

Through his philosophy and actions, Sankardeva not only transformed the religious landscape of Assam but also influenced its social, cultural, and artistic traditions. Most importantly Bhaona artist Arup Saikia tries to highlight here Sankardeva's tactical and prudent outlook on Neo-Vaishnavism. The culture and literature of Sankardeva is a living tradition. Arup Saikia's views on various matters are based on historical facts and research works around the world. It's like comparative study of the



renowned philosophers and preachers across the globe. Here we present an excerpt from the book to go into the depth of the matter. "The people of other religious spectrum feels infringement of their religious egoism to recognise Sankardeva as architect of Assam. Therefore the greatest social luminary of Assam, Srimanta Sankardeva, not in centrally and spontaneously enlightened position. The genuine socio-political research has to be done with socio-cultural touch."

The book delves into the liberalism of Neo-Vaishnavite that adjusted religious norms on circumstances relaxing the rigidity. Nationalism always defeats theocracy. Religion can't be a matter ultimately.

Therefore Sankardeva hasn't propounded any religion or theory like monotheism or qualified monotheism, pure monotheism etc like the other Bhakti saints. The socio-political situation or economic condition of Sankardeva's time drives his thought irrespective of religion. Sankardeva exercised democracy in a multi ethnic society, the remotest from mainland India. He was to raise Pan-Indian nationalism through literature in the name of "Bharatbarsha". The book,

Sankardeva: The Social Scientist, clearly describes socio-scientific expressions that bridged the gap between intellectual reformatory teaching and everyday life. The motive is to foster deeper engagement and emotional connection to break down rigid social structure. The writer sees the Bhakti movement is a spontaneous social outburst of the oppressed. As the theme of the book we can try to evaluate Sankardeva and Neo-Vaishnavism in socio-political perspective of India sidelining religion. The core aspect of Sankardeva is only inclusivity and social equality to empower marginalized communities. Besides philosophy, the book covers Vaishnavite and medieval economy of Assamese monasteries (Satras). The reality of society is vividly narrated in Sankardeva, The Social Scientist.

His legacy continues to have a profound impact on Assamese Society forever.

The book has 180 pages. The ISBN is 978-93-91685-42-3, published by AAYU publications, Price ₹ 850 only (Hard Bound). The proper cataloguing is done throughout the libraries of the world. *(The author is a writer, cultural activist and motivational speaker. He can be reached at samiranbhuyan977@gmail.com)*

'MUKU'

By: Rabin Prasad Kalita

Keeping a dog and taking good care of it as if it is a member of one's own family is not everyone's cup of tea. One cannot believe how loyal and obedient these animals can be! If someone adopts it and raises it as if it were his child, then it can even sacrifice its life for its master.

Dogs have a strong sense of smell; due to their hereditary trait, they do not forget anyone, even after many years. It understands the intention behind the person coming to one's house and changes its behaviour accordingly. A new owner learns something or the other about its characteristics every day. This animal is so intelligent that it expresses its happiness and joy by wagging its tail. Similarly, they understand someone's feelings; if someone is sad they also become sad; if someone is happy, then its happiness can also be seen by its activity. Their playfulness fills the void of loneliness by engaging everyone from children to the elderly. The prehistoric relationship between dog and man shares an extraordinary emotional bond with their owner and family even today and will continue to do so in the future.

Nowadays, some people have been seen keeping it just to show off, wearing the new cloak of wealth. They have nothing to do with its emotions. By placing food in front of them, they keep them locked inside the house from morning till evening, until they return from their hectic work. Feeling lonely, this emotional animal skips its food and even waits for its owner to return safely. As soon as it sees its owner coming, it goes crazy with joy and starts running here and there wagging its tail. And being more ecstatic, it starts eating the same stale food in front of its owner.

These animals also need someone to spend their time with. Being a regular victim of such loneliness, it slowly embraces depression and falls ill. And then, instead of treating this loyal animal, the same owner takes it away from his home and leaves it tied to an electric pole or a tree to die. It has also been observed that some people come on posting to far-off places and somehow keep a dog with them to maintain their status, but when they leave from there, they are also treated in the same way as if they are some useless objects.

Here is one such lively but sad story of a cute young male dog. Perhaps when he was a little bit healthy, his white and black curly hair and fluffy tail would have surely attracted the attention of every dog lover. But at this time, consid-



ering his age, he was not as healthy as he should have been. He was sleeping with his head on the ground near a small roadside tea stall. During their daily walk, both Sneha and Harish saw him sleeping like that and stopped near him for a while. Sneha tried to get his attention by calling him Muku (named him lovingly). But despite not wanting to, he looked at her once from the corner of his eyes and then ignored her again.

Seeing him sleeping there sadly, both of them thought that maybe he had run away from home for some reason, and as soon as the owner would come to know about it, he would immediately find him and take him away. Saying this, both of them started walking again.

After a couple of days, a little distance away from that tea stall to the left, Muku was again seen sleeping on a pile of used coal thrown out from a blacksmith's shop. This time both of them saw Muku very skinny and sick. Sneha felt like finding out some information about it. When Sneha asked some people passing by about Muku, one of them told her that he too had seen this stranger roaming around in the same area for a few days.

A boy working at a nearby tea stall said that Muku spends the entire day sitting here and there or sleeping. In the evening, when the momo seller comes, he feels pity on seeing this sick dog and gives him two to three momos to eat, but he can barely eat one or two momos and then goes for sleeping again.

On reaching home from the walk, Sneha, who loves dogs very much, started getting worried thinking about Muku. His sorrow and suffering caused her immense pain in her heart. So, she brings some food from home and tries to feed him, but he eats only one or two bites in the same sitting posture. After that, he again puts his head on the ground and does not even look at the remaining food.

After being abandoned by his master, Muku stopped eating anything and only spent his time sleeping hither and thither,

thinking that his master would come soon and take him back again. He had no interest in taking food or anything, even if it cost him his life.

She tried her every possible way to find Muku's owner. Meanwhile, someone told her through hearsay that Muku's owner was a tenant of the same area who had recently gone on posting to some other place keeping Muku abandoned there. Sneha was also suspecting something similar.

Seeing his deteriorating health, Sneha tried to contact a dog caretaker NGO located some distance away. All the information about Muku was given to the coordinator of the NGO, and his photo was also sent through WhatsApp so that someone could take him away and also get his illness treated. But even after two-three days, there was no response from their side.

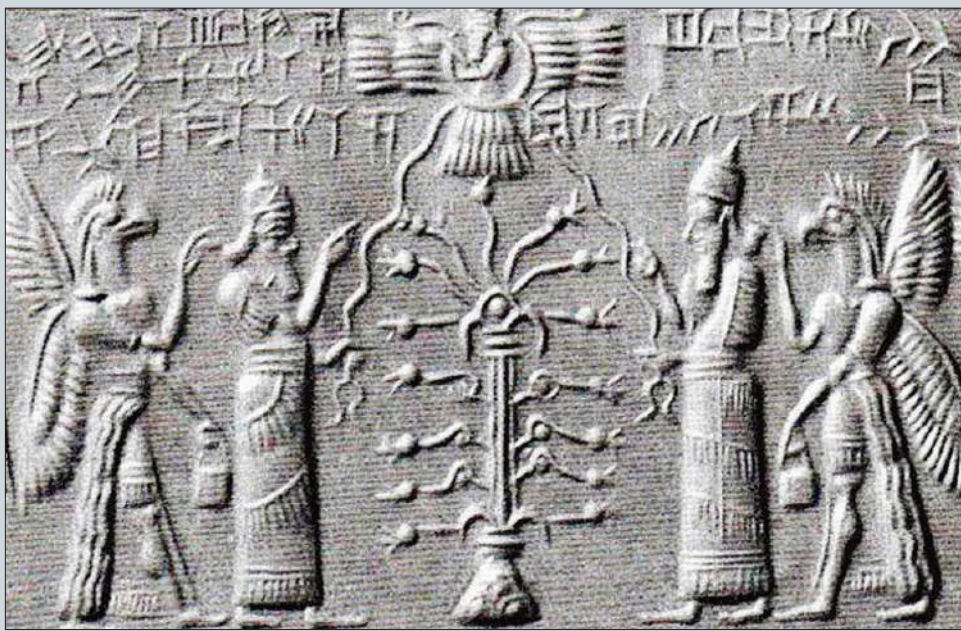
Sneha became worried seeing Muku's physical condition getting weaker day by day; she used to visit him one or two times a day with some food on the pretext of seeing him.

The next day morning, when Sneha went for walk with her hubby, Muku was not seen in the entire area. After searching around, when Muku was nowhere to be found, she got a little apprehensive and started asking her husband Harish what could have happened to him. How would he be? Is he safe, etc.?

The same thought kept on troubling Sneha again and again. Whosoever she asked about Muku, she got the reply that no one knew anything of his whereabouts. Sometimes, she thought that maybe Muku had gone somewhere in search of his master, but then she also thought that he did not have that physical strength to go anywhere! Even after many days passed, there was no trace of Muku.

At this time, Sneha is praying to God only for one thing: that wherever he is, he should remain safe! *(The author can be reached at rabin1966@gmail.com / 8638815722)*

The Anunnaki: The mysterious chapter



By: SATYABRAT BORAH

The Anunnaki was an mysterious group of deities from ancient Mesopotamian mythology. The details of The Anunnaki is mentioned primarily in the mythologies of the Sumerians, Akkadians, Babylonians and Assyrians. These gods and goddesses were considered powerful beings and played a central role in the creation of humanity and the shaping of early civilization. Beyond their historical and mythological significance, the Anunnaki have become the subject of numerous modern theories. Many of which propose that they were more than just gods. They were extraterrestrial visitors who influenced human development. This article tries to search the fascinating origins of the Anunnaki, their place in ancient mythology, and the speculative modern interpretations that continue to fuel debates about their true nature.

The term "Anunnaki" translates roughly to "those of royal blood" or "princely offspring." In the Sumerian mythology the Anunnaki were believed to be gods descended from the supreme deity, Anu was the god of the heavens. According to Sumerian texts Anu ruled the sky and his children the Anunnaki were responsible for the Earth and its inhabitants.

The Anunnaki were not a singular entity. They are collective of deities. Each associated with various aspects of nature, creation and the cosmos. In ancient texts, they are depicted as playing a pivotal role in the formation of the world. They were the reason behind the establishment of human civilization and the organization of society. The key figures among the Anunnaki include Enki (the god of water, wisdom, and creation), Enlil (the god of wind and earth) and Inanna (the goddess of love, war, and fertility).

According to Sumerian creation story, they are credited with creating humanity. Humans were created by the gods to serve as laborers, freeing the gods from menial work. This story

parallels other creation myths. But the unique role of the Anunnaki as creators of humanity has led to intriguing speculation about their origins and purpose.

The Anunnaki also feature prominently in the Epic of Gilgamesh which is one of the oldest known pieces of literature. In this ancient tale, the hero-king Gilgamesh encounters gods and goddesses, including the Anunnaki, during his quest for immortality. The Anunnaki are depicted as cosmic judges who control the fate of humanity and the natural world. In the epic, they preside over the afterlife and are responsible for assigning destinies to mortals.

The Anunnaki's role as judges of human fate is significant. It indicates their power and authority in Mesopotamian belief. They were considered intermediaries between humans and the higher gods. They influenced everything from life and death to natural events like floods and droughts.

In the 20th century, the Anunnaki story became more popular. And the credit goes to authors like Zecharia Sitchin. In his book "The 12th Planet" he suggested that the Anunnaki were not just mythological gods but real beings from another planet who visited Earth in antiquity.

According to Sitchin's theory the Anunnaki came from a distant planet called Nibiru. Nibiru has an elongated orbit that brings it near Earth every 3,600 years. He narrated that these extraterrestrial beings came to Earth in search of resources, particularly gold, which they needed to repair the atmosphere of their home planet. The Anunnaki created humanity by genetically engineering early hominids to serve as their labor force, mining gold and performing other tasks for their alien overlords.

Sitchin's theories gained a large followers. Especially those who are interested in alternative archaeology and ancient astronaut ideas. Supporters of this theory believe that evidence of the Anunnaki's presence can be found in ancient Sumerian texts, carvings and architecture.

They argue that many of the gods' abilities described in myth such as flying chariots, advanced knowledge, and immense power etc suggest that these beings were technologically advanced extraterrestrials rather than mere deities.

Though the ancient astronaut theory has gained popularity in certain circles, it has been widely criticized by mainstream archaeologists and historians. Some scholars argue that Sitchin's interpretations of Sumerian texts are flawed and based on inaccurate translations. Many of the claims about Nibiru and the Anunnaki's extraterrestrial origins are seen as speculative at best. These claims have no scientific or historical evidence.

According to some critics the ancient civilizations frequently used mythological language to describe natural phenomena and human experiences. The stories of gods are mere metaphorical descriptions rather than literal accounts of extraterrestrial intervention.

Still the stories surrounding the Anunnaki continue to captivate the imagination of people around the world. They may be seen as gods, extraterrestrial visitors or simply mythological constructs. The Anunnaki represent a fascinating chapter in both ancient history and modern interpretations of the past.

Apart from their presence in historical and speculative literature, the Anunnaki have made their way into modern pop culture. They are frequently mentioned in science fiction, conspiracy theories, and even video games. The idea of ancient gods as advanced alien beings has become a main theme in fictional works. And all these contributed to the ongoing fascination with humanity's mysterious origins.

"Ancient Aliens" a popular TV show have further popularized the idea of the Anunnaki. The show depicted the Anunnaki as extraterrestrials who influenced early human civilizations.

The Anunnaki have left a lasting impact on human thought. They symbolize the intersection of science, religion and speculative history. They offers a framework for exploring questions about the origins of civilization, the nature of gods and the possibility of extraterrestrial life.

These gods reflect the fears, hopes and beliefs of the Sumerians and their descendants. It offers insights into how ancient peoples understood the universe and their place within it.

For those who believes in ancient astronaut theory, the Anunnaki represent a tantalizing possibility that humanity's development was shaped by advanced beings from beyond the stars. This theory is very controversial but continues to provoke thought and inspire inquiry into humanity's origins and its connection to the cosmos.

The Anunnaki chapter occupies a unique space in human history, mythology and modern speculation. They may be seen as gods, extraterrestrial beings or mythological constructs. But their story continues to captivate and mystify. The mysteries surrounding the Anunnaki will likely persist, inviting further inquiry and imagination into their true nature and role in the history of humanity.

Not every hand you shake is a friend

By: Aubaid Ahmad Akhoun

"When the night is darkest, you will see who truly shines." Life has a way of revealing the truth when we least expect it. We often count the people around us, mistaking their presence for genuine companionship. But when storms rage and the tides of fate turn, we realize who truly stands with us—not just in our moments of triumph but in the silence of our struggles.

This is the story of Ali—or perhaps, it is the story of all of us.

The Celebration of Friendship

Ali was a man of warmth, known for his open heart and generous nature. His home was always welcoming, a haven for friends, family, and even acquaintances. He believed in the beauty of togetherness, in the laughter shared over a cup of tea, in the support exchanged in both joy and sorrow.

One day, fortune smiled upon him—he received a long-awaited promotion at work. It was a moment of pride, a reward for years of dedication and effort. To celebrate, he planned a grand gathering, inviting everyone he knew. His house buzzed with excitement. Laughter echoed in the halls, praises showered upon him, and friendships seemed stronger than ever.

That night, Ali felt like the richest man alive not because of his promotion, but because of the people surrounding him. He believed he had built relationships that would last a lifetime.

The Test of Time

But life, as it often does, had another lesson in store. Just a week later, disaster struck. A major financial setback left Ali struggling, his dreams shaken. The same phone that once rang with congratulatory messages now remained silent. He reached out to those who had raised their glasses in his honor, hoping for even a word of support.

Most never responded. Some offered sympathy, but from a distance. Others vanished altogether. The vibrant crowd from his celebration had dissolved into shadows.

And yet, there were a few—just a handful—who stood by him. Those who had never sought the limelight, who had not attended the celebration, who had never asked for anything in return. They extended their hands without hesitation, not offering mere words but unwavering support.

That night, as Ali sat among these true friends, a realization dawned upon him.

The Reality of Friendship

"Museebat mein jo kaam aaye wahi sachcha yaar hota hai,"

"The one who stands by you in trouble is the true friend,"

The one who only comforts with words is merely an expression."

This couplet holds a mirror to reality. Friendship is not about grand declarations or elaborate gestures; it is about standing firm when the ground beneath you crumbles. In times of ease, everyone calls themselves a friend, but true loyalty is revealed in hardship.

Those who merely offer words without action are like fleeting clouds—visible for a moment but of no real help. A true friend is the one who holds your hand when the world turns its back.

A Lesson for a Lifetime

Ali's experience is not unique—it is the silent truth many of us come to realize. Life isn't about the number of people who celebrate with you; it is about the ones who remain after the applause fades. It is easy to be a friend in sunshine, but the true test lies in standing together in the storm.

Those who walk beside you when the path is rough, when there is nothing to gain, are the ones who truly care. Ali's journey serves as a powerful reminder: True friends are not those who fill your space with noise, but those who stay in the silence of your hardships. They are not the ones who appear in moments of victory but the ones who refuse to leave in moments of loss.

The next time you count your friends, do not count them in moments of joy—count them in times of despair. The brightest stars are not seen in daylight but shine the most in the darkest of nights.

Hafeez Hosharpuri, a renowned poet and one of the most prominent voices in Urdu poetry, aptly captured this reality in a single couplet:

"Dosti aam hai lekin ae dost,

Dost milta hai badi mushkil se."

"Friendship is common, but oh my friend,

A true friend is found with great difficulty."

True friendship is a rarity. While the world is filled with people who call themselves friends, finding someone who remains steadfast, loyal, and selfless in times of need is a treasure beyond measure. A crowd can surround you in happiness, but only a rare soul will walk with you in sorrow.

Tailpiece

Perhaps, as you read this, you are reminded of someone in your life—someone who stayed when they had every reason to leave, someone who offered their shoulder when the world turned cold.

If you have such a person, cherish them. And if you do not, then remember this: become the friend you wish to have. For in a world where friendship is common, true friends are indeed found with great difficulty.

Seemab Akbarabadi, another brilliant poet, encapsulates this sentiment in his thought-provoking couplet:

"Kahani meri roadaad-e-jahan maloom hoti hai,

Jo sunta hai usi ki daastan maloom hoti hai."

"My story seems like the tale of the world,

To the listener, it feels like their own story."

This verse beautifully reflects how our experiences of friendship and betrayal often resonate universally. We see our own reflections in the stories of others, for the emotions they evoke are deeply human. Ali's story is not just his own; it is the silent cry of many hearts that have learned the true measure of friendship. *(The author is a distinguished Educational Columnist, Motivational Speaker, and Associate Editor of the weekly educational publication Education Quill. He can be reached at akhoun.aubaid@gmail.com)*

Ukrainians expect Russia to launch fresh offensive to strengthen its negotiating position

KYIV, March 29: Russian forces are preparing to launch a fresh military offensive in the coming weeks to maximize the pressure on Ukraine and strengthen the Kremlin's negotiating position in ceasefire talks, Ukrainian government and military analysts said.

The move could give Russian President Vladimir Putin every reason to delay discussions about pausing the fighting in favour of seeking more land, the Ukrainian officials said, renewing their country's repeated arguments that Russia has no intention of engaging in meaningful dialogue to end the war.

With the spring fighting season drawing near, the Kremlin is eyeing a multi-pronged push across the 1,000-kilometre front line, according to the analysts and military commanders.

Citing intelligence reports, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Russia is getting ready for new offensives in the north-east Sumy, Kharkiv and Zaporizhzhia regions.

"They're dragging out the talks and trying to get the US stuck in endless and pointless discussions about fake conditions just to buy time and then try to grab more land," Zelenskyy said Thursday in a visit to Paris. "Putin wants to negotiate over territory from a stronger position."

Two G7 diplomatic officials in Kyiv agreed with that assessment. They spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorised to brief the press.

Russia has effectively rejected a US proposal for an immediate and full 30-day halt in the fighting, and the feasibility of a partial ceasefire on the Black Sea was thrown into doubt after Kremlin negotiators imposed far-



reaching conditions. Ukraine's emergency service said four people died and 21 were injured Friday evening after Russian drones struck Dnipro in the country's east. At least five more people were injured when a Russian ballistic missile struck Kryvyi Rih, President Zelenskyy's hometown, according to the head of the local military administration. Battlefield success is clearly in Putin's mind.

"On the entire front line, the strategic initiative is completely in the hands of the Russian armed forces," Putin said Thursday at a forum in the Arctic port of Murmansk. "Our troops, our guys are moving forward and liberating one territory after another, one settlement after another, every day."

Kremlin forces keep pressing forward

Ukrainian military commanders said Russia recently stepped up attacks to improve its tactical positions ahead of the expected broader offensive. "They need time until May, that's all," said Ukrainian military analyst Pavlo Narozhnyi, who works with soldiers and learns about intelligence from them.

In the north, Russian and North Korean soldiers have nearly deprived Kyiv of an essential bargaining chip by retaking most of Russia's Kursk region, where Ukrainian soldiers staged a daring incursion last year. Battles have also escalated along the eastern front in Donetsk and Zaporizhzhia.

A concern among some commanders is whether Russia might divert battle-hardened forces from Kursk to other parts of the east.

"It will be hard. The forces from Kursk will

come on a high from their wins there," said a Ukrainian battalion commander in the Donetsk region, who spoke on condition of anonymity to describe his concerns.

"They are preparing offensive actions on the front that should last from six to nine months, almost all of 2025," said Ukrainian military analyst Oleksii Hetman, who has connections to the military's general staff.

Fighting intensifies on parts of the front line Russia entered negotiations with a clear advantage in the war. Now, after recapturing 80 per cent of its territory in the Kursk region ahead of talks, its forces have intensified their fighting across other parts of the front line.

"The number of clashes on the front line is not decreasing," Hetman said. "If they wanted to stop the war, their actions certainly don't show it." Russia ramped up reconnaissance missions to find and destroy firing positions, drone systems and other capabilities that could impede a future onslaught, two Ukrainian commanders said.

"These can be all signs that an attack is being prepared in the near future," Hetman said. Fighting also intensified in the eastern city of Pokrovsk, one of Ukraine's main defensive strongholds and a key logistics hub in the Donetsk region. Its capture would bring Russia closer to its stated aim of capturing the entire region.

"The Russians were significantly exhausted over the past two months. During 10 days of March, they took a sort of pause," military spokesman Maj Viktor Trehubov said of the situation in Pokrovsk. In mid-March, the attack resumed. "This means the Russians have simply recovered." (AP)

Trump optimistic about US-India trade talks 'working out very well', terms Modi 'smart man'



NEW YORK/WASHINGTON, March 29: President Donald Trump has described Prime Minister Narendra Modi as a "very smart man" and his "great friend" while emphasising that tariff talks between the US and India would "work out very well".

The remarks assume significance as they came the same day Foreign Secretary Vikram Miri spoke with US Deputy Secretary of State Christopher Landau to discuss bilateral trade, including the reduction of barriers to achieve a balanced trade relationship.

"Prime Minister Modi was here just recently and we have always been very good friends," the US president said in the White House on Friday.

The remarks came days before Trump's reciprocal tariffs on the United States' trade partners kick in on April 2.

"India is one of the highest tariffing nations in the world... it's brutal, it's brutal. They're very smart. He (Modi) is a very smart man and a great friend of mine. We had very good talks. I think it's going to work out very well between India and our country," Trump said.

"And I want to say you have a

great prime minister," he said.

During their conversation, Miri and Landau "touched on the growing bilateral trade, defence and technology cooperation, and issues relating to mobility and migration", the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said in New Delhi.

US State Department Spokesperson Tammy Bruce said the two officials discussed "ongoing efforts to reduce barriers to achieve a fair and balanced bilateral trade relationship" and strengthen collaboration in defence and technology.

US Assistant Trade Representative Brendan Lynch is currently in India and holding talks with his Indian interlocutors on firming up a bilateral trade agreement (BTA).

Prime Minister Modi visited Washington DC in February and held bilateral discussions with Trump. The visit came less than a month after Trump was sworn in as US President for a second term.

During Prime Minister Modi's visit to the US last month, both sides announced plans to negotiate a mutually beneficial, multi-sector BTA.

In the past, Trump called India a "tariff king" and a "big abuser". (PTT)

Yunus says important for Bangladesh to see China as good friend



BEIJING, March 29: Bangladesh interim government's Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus said it is "important" for his country to see China as a good friend and he expects ties between Dhaka and Beijing to enter a new phase as he wrapped up his four-day China visit on Saturday.

"Our relationship has been very strong over the years. Our business is very strong and we benefit from our collaboration with China," Yunus said.

"Hong Lei, Assistant Minister, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and also the Chief Protocol Officer of the Chinese President Xi Jinping, sees off Yunus on Saturday at the Beijing Capital International Airport at the conclusion of his historic four-day official visit to China," a post on X by Yunus' official handle said.

Yunus was conferred an honorary doctorate degree by Peking University (PKU) here on Friday.

The Chief Adviser met Chinese President Xi Jinping on Friday and sought stepped up investments from China to revive Bangladesh's flag-

ging economy, hit by political and economic crisis.

"It's very important that we see China as our good friend," Yunus said, projecting Beijing as a balancing factor against New Delhi.

He expects bilateral relations to enter a new stage, Yunus told Chinese state-run Xinhua news agency in an interview.

After his China visit, Yunus is scheduled to visit Thailand to take part in the BIMSTEC summit. He has sought a meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi but India is yet to confirm it.

In his talks with Xi, Yunus urged China to play a greater role in establishing peace, prosperity and stability for both nations.

A joint statement issued after the Xi-Yunus talks said Bangladesh welcomed Chinese companies to participate in the Teesta River Comprehensive Management and Restoration Project (TRCMRP).

Considering New Delhi's sensitivities, the previous Sheikh Hasina government wanted India to do the Teesta river basin project.

Yunus highlighted last year's July-August students' mass protests in Bangladesh leading to the ouster of Hasina government in his talks with Xi, adding that the students' movement paved a way to build a New Bangladesh.

Weeks before her ouster last year, Hasina too had made a high-profile visit to Beijing during which she held talks with Xi.

Since the Yunus government took over, China has been hosting a number of Bangladesh delegations

including Bangladesh's Adviser for Foreign Affairs Touhid Hossain and hardline Islamic parties such as the Jamaat-e-Islami and opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP).

Despite the flurry of visits, analysts say Beijing is careful in making any major commitments as it watched the unfolding chaotic situation in Dhaka and the pressure mounting on 84-year-old Yunus to hold elections.

Highlighting Beijing's perspective, an opinion piece in China's state-run Global Times said, "for Bangladesh's interim government, it is urgent to boost the economy and address employment issues, especially youth employment".

"In Bangladesh, unemployment among young people is a big challenge. The country has abundant human resources; however, nearly 40 percent of young people are unemployed", it said.

"Yunus himself knows that reinvigorating the economy requires harnessing global resources. With America's strategic contraction, Bangladesh is uncertain about the extent of assistance the West can provide.

"China remains a viable option for enhancing cooperation in various fields, such as industry transfer and agriculture technology improvement", it said.

After Yunus talks with Xi, the two countries signed nine agreements enhancing economic and technical cooperation between the two governments and cooperation in the areas of development, trans-

lation and publication of classical literary work, exchange and cooperation on cultural heritage.

Bangladesh and China have also agreed to strengthen cooperation in areas such as hydrological forecasting, flood prevention and disaster reduction, river dredging, integrated management of water resources, water resources development and related technology.

In the interview Yunus gave to Xinhua, Yunus said that at present, there are nearly 1,000 Chinese enterprises operating in Bangladesh. "Bangladesh's imports from China are increasing. The bulk of our industrial-use products come from China".

Looking ahead, Yunus emphasized the economic complementarities between the two countries and their huge cooperation potential.

He also pitched for increasing co-operation in the health sector between Bangladesh and China to reduce high flows of Bangladesh patients to India for medical treatment.

Recently, the first group of Bangladeshi patients, doctors, and travel agencies went to Kunming in China's Yunnan province for medical check-ups and treatment, exploring the potential for the medical tourism market.

Meanwhile, Chief Adviser's Deputy Press Secretary Abul Kalam Azad Majumder said China planned to operate flights from Chittagong to Kunming to enable Bangladesh people to travel to China to seek medicare instead of India. (PTT)

Pak govt finalises arrangements to detain, deport Afghans as deadline nears

ISLAMABAD, March 29: Officials in Pakistan said they have completed arrangements to detain and expel a certain category of Afghan citizens after the March 31 deadline for their voluntary return to Afghanistan. A high-level meeting on Friday reviewed the arrangements to repatriate the Afghan Citizen Card (ACC) holders after the March 31 deadline.

Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi chaired the meeting.

The Pakistan government in January asked the ACC holders to leave Pakistan by the end of March or face deportation.

Pakistani authorities refused to reset the deadline for their return despite requests by the Afghan government and rights bodies.

In Friday's meeting, officials informed that all arrangements have been completed to send ACC holders back to Afghanistan.

The officials said that holding centres have been set up to detain Afghan citizens before their deportation, with food and healthcare facilities arranged at the facilities, the Dawn newspaper reported.

Naqvi said the federal government was coordinating with the provinces regarding the repatriation process. He said Islamabad would provide full support to the provinces for the repatriation. The meeting decided that Minister of State for Interior Tahir Chaudhry would visit the provinces to resolve any issues during the repatriation process. (PTT)

Curfew lifted in east Kathmandu, over 100 arrested

KATHMANDU, March 29: Authorities in Nepal on Saturday lifted a curfew imposed in the eastern part of Kathmandu following violent clashes between the security personnel and the pro-monarchy protesters, as tensions eased in the area.

Parts of Kathmandu on Friday witnessed a tense situation after pro-monarchy protesters pelted stones, attacked the office of a political party, set fire to vehicles and looted shops in the Tinkune area of the capital.

Two persons, including a TV cameraman, were killed and 110 others injured in the clashes between the security personnel and the pro-monarchy protesters. The Army was later called out to control the situation.

Police have arrested 105 agitators who were involved in burning houses and vandalising vehicles during Friday's violent demonstration.

The curfew imposed since 4.25 pm on Friday has been lifted from 7 am on Saturday, according to a notice issued by Kathmandu District Administration Office.

Those arrested included the general secretary of the Rastriya Prajatantra Party Dhawal Shumsher Rana and a central member of the party, Rabindra Mishra, among others.

Durga Prasad, the key person behind Friday's violent demonstration, is at large, Superintendent of Police of Kathmandu District Police Range Apil Bohara said.

According to the police, 53 police personnel, 22 Armed Police Force personnel and 35 protesters were injured in Friday's incident.

During the violent demonstration, 14 buildings were set on fire and nine were vandalised. Nine government vehicles were torched and six private vehicles were vandalised.

Protesters also attacked the Kantipur Television building and Annapurna Media House in the Tinkune area.

A Cabinet meeting discussed the evolving security situation following the violent protest.

The government decided to revoke former King Gyanendra Shah's state privileges and cancel his passport, accusing him of inciting violent protests, myrepublica.com reported. (PTT)

New US strikes against Houthi rebels kill 1 in Yemen

DUBAI, March 29: Suspected US airstrikes pounded Yemen overnight into Saturday, reportedly killing at least one person as the American military acknowledged earlier bombing a major military site in the heart of Sanaa controlled by the Houthi rebels. The full extent of the damage and possible casualties wasn't immediately clear, though the attacks followed an intense night of airstrikes early Friday that appeared particularly intense compared to other days in the campaign that began March 15.

An Associated Press review has found the new American operation under President Donald Trump appears more extensive than those under former President Joe Biden, as the US moves from solely targeting launch sites to firing at ranking personnel as well as dropping bombs in cities.

Meanwhile, an AP analysis of satellite photos show the American military also has moved long-range stealth B-2 bombers to Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean — a base far outside of the range of the rebels that avoids using allies' Mideast bases.

New strikes come as US releases video of one bombing

The strikes into Saturday targeted multiple areas in Yemen under the control of the Iranian-backed Houthis, including the capital, Sanaa, and in the governorates of al-Jawf and Saada, rebel-controlled media reported. The strikes in Saada killed one person and wounded four others, the Houthi-run SABA news agency said. (AP)

Hegseth joins WWII memorial service on his first trip to Japan, vows to strengthen alliance

TOKYO, March 29: US Secretary of Defence Pete Hegseth praised Saturday the friendship and trust that his country and Japan have developed while attending a memorial service on Iwo Jima to honour those who died in battle during World War II.

Japan is Hegseth's second stop after the Philippines on his first Asia trip. His visit comes as Beijing has been showing increasingly assertive actions in the disputed South China Sea and following threats by President Donald Trump to impose trade tariffs on the East Asian country, a key US ally.

Hegseth landed on the Japanese island of Iwo Jima, now known as Iwoto, where Japanese and American soldiers faced off in one of the war's fiercest battles. He joined several American vet-

erans who survived the battle and Japanese bereaved families, as well as his Japanese counterpart, Gen Nakatani, Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba and other officials at Saturday's Reunion of Honour event.

"Iwo Jima embodies our shared warrior ethos, our shared devotion to the nation, and to duty and our shared reverence for the men of valor who preceded us," Hegseth said in front of the cenotaph built in 1985 marking their first joint memorial.

"The US-Japan alliance shows ... how yesterday's enemy has become today's friends," Hegseth said. "Our alliance has been and remains the cornerstone of freedom, prosperity, security and peace in the Indo-Pacific." (AP)

Trump says first call with newly minted Canadian prime minister was 'extremely productive'

TORONTO, March 29: US President Donald Trump said Friday that his first call with new Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney was "extremely productive" and Carney said Trump respected Canada's sovereignty both in private and public but added that the relationship has changed.

The call came as Trump has declared a trade war on Canada and has threatened to use economic coercion to make Canada the 51st US state, a position that has infuriated Canadians. Trump avoided any mention of that in his social media post and in public remarks later.

"We had a very good conversation. Mark called me," Trump said. "We had a very very good talk. He's going through an election. We'll see what happens."

Trump didn't refer to the prime minister as governor as he did with Carney's predecessor Justin Trudeau.

The US president, in his social media post, said the two sides "agree on many things and will be meeting immediately

after Canada's upcoming Election to work on elements of Politics, Business, and all other factors, that will end up being great for both the United States of America and Canada."

But Trump said more tariffs are coming. And Carney said Trump didn't say he would pull back on tariffs on steel and aluminum, autos and other products.

"It is clear that the United States is no longer a reliable partner. It is probable now that by negotiating we will be able to restore an element of trust but we cannot go back," Carney said.

Carney previously said he would talk to Trump if he respected Canada's sovereignty.

"The president respected Canada's sovereignty today both in his private and public comments," Carney said.

He described the call as positive, cordial and constructive.

"Exactly what we want," Carney said. Carney said he will begin comprehensive negotiations for a "new economic and

security relationship" immediately after the Canadian election on April 28.

Carney, who replaced Trudeau as Canada's leader and the head of the Liberal Party, is at the start of a five-week campaign.

"What we need is a new agreement and a new partnership with the United States because there are too many changes, too many tariffs and too many threats coming at us," Carney said. "There is too much uncertainty in that relationship. We made progress but we still see."

The former central banker was sworn in as Canada's new prime minister on March 14. It's unusual for a U.S. president and Canadian prime minister to go so long without talking after a new leader takes office. Trump ramped up his trade war this week by announcing a 25% tariff on automobile imports. Autos are Canada's second largest export.

Trump previously placed 25% tariffs on Canada's steel and aluminum and is threatening sweeping tariffs on all Canadian

products — as well as on all of America's trading partners — on April 2.

Carney said the significant transformation that Trump is seeking in repatriating manufacturing in the US could lead to inflation and slowing growth. But he said reaching a deal with America's most important trading partner will help Americans and Canadians.

"We are going to end up with a very good relationship with Canada," Trump said.

Canada has previously said it would retaliate with counter tariffs, and Carney reiterated that in his call with Trump.

US Vice President JD Vance took a harder line with Canada on Friday, noting the country is threatening retaliatory tariffs.

"As President Trump always says they just don't have the cards," Vance said in Greenland. "There is no way that Canada can win a trade war with the United States."

Vance claimed that for decades Canada

has forced American farmers and manufacturers to play by an unfair set of rules.

Trump renegotiated the free trade agreement with Canada and Mexico in his first term. At the time Trump called it the "most modern, up-to-date, and balanced trade agreement in the history of our country, with the most advanced protections for workers ever developed."

Trump and Carney agreed that Dominic LeBlanc, Canada's minister of international trade, and United States Secretary of Commerce, Howard Lutnick, will intensify talks to address the coming tariffs in the interim.

The governing Liberals had appeared poised for a historic election defeat this year until Trump declared a trade war and challenged Canada's sovereignty. The crisis has created a surge in patriotism among Canadians, with many in the country feeling that Carney is the best person to lead the country at the moment.

Trump previously acknowledged that he has upended Canadian politics. (AP)

Satjal Academy 23rd Raising Day



IMPHAL, March 29: The 23rd Raising Day of the Meitei Huyen Lanlong Sintam Sanglen (Satjal Academy) Toubul Branch, under the Universal Friendship Organization (UFO) Headquarter No. 2 Lamlangdong Battalion, was commemorated on Saturday with a vibrant ceremony.

The event began with the hoisting of the Lord Ibudhou Pakhangba emblemmed flag, accompanied by the stirring notes of a 'patriot song' that resonated throughout the gathering.

The event also witnessed the presence of several distinguished figures, with Onam Thoiba, the president of UFO Headquarter No. 2 Lamlangdong Battalion, addressing the gathering.

In his speech, Thoiba emphasised the significant strides made by UFO in preserving and promoting the Meitei identity, culture, and traditions over the years.

He noted that the organisation, which was established with the noble goal of safeguarding the Meitei way of life, has now become a well-established entity, gaining recognition and respect in the community.

Reiterating the teachings and vision of the late RK Manisana, the founder of UFO, Thoiba paid homage to his legacy. He highlighted how RK Manisana's commitment to cultural preservation and social unity has shaped the direction of the UFO, ensuring that the organization continues to work toward uplifting the Meitei community and promoting the values of peace and harmony. (NNN)

'We achieved success in bringing all secular parties to a common platform in the last Lok Sabha elections'

48-member delegation from Tripura to attend CPI(M) party congress in Madurai

AGARTALA, March 29: A 48-member delegation from Tripura will participate in the five-day CPI(M) party congress scheduled to be held in Tamil Nadu's Madurai.

The delegation includes Tripura CPI(M) state secretary Jitendra Chaudhury and former chief minister and politburo member Manik Sarkar, a party leader said on Saturday.

"All the delegates from the state are scheduled to leave the state for Madurai by March 31 to join the five-day CPI(M) party congress scheduled to commence on April 2. Besides, 40 delegates, two observers and six party's central committee members will join the session," CPI(M) state secretary, Jitendra Chaudhury told PTI.

Chaudhury said the party strategy adopted in the 23rd CPI(M)



party congress held in Kerala's Kannur will be discussed threadbare in the upcoming party congress.

"In the 23rd party congress, the party laid emphasis on strengthening

its own organisation because no one will give due importance if we are not organised. Besides, the party congress also had given emphasis on bringing secular forces to a common platform to resist the BJP," he said.

Chaudhury said all these issues will be thoroughly scrutinised in the 24th CPI(M) party congress before preparing a way forward for the party.

"We achieved success in bringing all secular parties to a common platform in the last Lok Sabha elections by restricting the BJP as far as seat tally is concerned but could not defy the RSS-backed party from forming the government," he said.

Chaudhury said organisational shortcomings will also come up for discussion in the Madurai meeting. (PTI)

8 Nagaland's DCC presidents attend AICC-convened meet in Delhi

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, March 29: Eight District Congress Committee presidents from Nagaland attended the All India District Congress Committee (DCC) presidents' meeting at Indira Bhawan, New Delhi, on Thursday, the Nagaland Pradesh Congress Committee said in a release on Friday.

The AICC convened this crucial meeting for pan-India grassroots party workers.

In his address at the meeting, Dimapur District Congress Committee president Kutoho Chishi underscored the critical agendas required to fortify the Congress Party's grassroots presence and its efforts in tackling the pressing socio-economic challenges of the times.

He called for enhancing training and resource allocation to empower booth-level agents, ensuring robust electoral preparedness.

Chishi also advocated inclusive policies to engage young leaders and women in decision-making, fostering a dynamic and equitably balanced party structure and hierarchy.

He further highlighted the urgency for the promotion of skill development and job creation initiatives to alleviate the scourge of unemployment plaguing the nation today, urging the party leadership to prioritise it in its national agenda.

Nagaland holds intellectual property campaign

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, March 29: The two-day National Intellectual Property (IP) Yatra Nagaland 2025 commenced at the Capital Convention Centre, Kohima, on Friday, seeking to promote awareness and sensitisation on intellectual property rights among the people of Nagaland.

It also aims to empower individuals and businesses to secure their innovations and contribute to the economic growth of the state.

Organised by the Investment Development Authority of Nagaland (IDAN), in collaboration with the Union ministry of micro, small and medium enterprises (MoSME) and the Patent Information Centre under the Nagaland Science and Technology Council, the event further aimed to raise awareness about intellectual property protection among various sectors.

Addressing the inaugural programme of the



campaign, Nagaland adviser to agriculture department Mathung Yanthan highlighted the importance of collaboration between farmers, agricultural experts, and policymakers to address challenges such as climate change, pest infestations, and market fluctuations.

He called for increased awareness and adoption of innovative farming techniques that can

enhance productivity while maintaining ecological balance.

Delivering the welcome address, joint secretary, IDAN, Reny Wilfred emphasised that the IP Yatra shines a spotlight on the creativity, indigenous knowledge, and entrepreneurial spirit of the people of Nagaland.

He said this programme is a moment to recognise, protect, and showcase the intellectual wealth that resides within the communities, artisans, and farmers.

The initiative, launched by MoSME, seeks to enhance awareness about intellectual property rights, create synergies between government and private institutions, and encourage increased IP filings within India and internationally.

The event was attended by college students, entrepreneurs and agricultural experts.

CRS authorises train operations between Shokhuvi - Molvom



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 29: The Commissioner of Railway Safety (CRS), Sumet Singhal has authorized operation of trains in the Shokhuvi - Molvom (14.64 Km) newly laid BG line section in Nagaland on March 27 and 28.

The CRS had completed the statutory inspection of the said section which is a part of the ongoing 82.50 Km long Dimapur - Kohima new rail line project. During the inspection, he was accompanied by Anjani Kumar, Chief Administrative Officer/Con-2 of NFR; Ashutosh Kumar Mishra, Chief En-

gineer/Con/NFR of Nagaland Project and Vikas Singh, Dy. Chief Engineer/Con/Dimapur/NFR, under whose leadership the sectional works are executed and completed. CRS has approved operations of trains through the newly laid railway line at a maximum speed of 90 KMPH after successful inspection and speed trial in the section. This newly laid line will be helpful for carrying more freight and passenger traffic through this route in the near future.

The 82.50 Km long (2.75 Km in Assam and 79.75 Km in Nagaland) Dimapur - Kohima new railway line project takes off from the Dhansiri

station of Assam to Zubza in Kohima, Nagaland. The project has 8 new stations viz Dhansiri, Dhansirpar, Shokhuvi, Molvom, Pherima, Piphema, Menguzuma and Zubza. The project includes 27 major bridges, 149 minor bridges, 05 Road Over Bridges, 15 Road Under Bridges and 20 Tunnels of 31 km length. The 16.5 km section from Dhansiri to Shokhuvi was already commissioned in October, 2021. Passenger train services from Shokhuvi to Naharlagun in Arunachal Pradesh and Mendiathar in Meghalaya have also been introduced accordingly.

On completion, the 14.64 Km, Shokhuvi - Molvom section will provide enhanced connectivity for the people of the Nagaland with its adjacent states of NE alongwith rest of the nation. This will help grow small scale industries in the area and boost tourism of the state. This project will ensure substantial cost reduction on transportation of man & materials to this hilly state to cater to the needs of the local population, thus reducing the travel time significantly.

Tripura Cong chief meets Rahul Gandhi, raises concerns over BJP's actions

HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, March 29: Tripura Pradesh Congress Committee (TPCC) President Asish Kumar Saha on Saturday stated that he briefed Leader of Opposition and All India Congress Committee (AICC) leader Rahul Gandhi about the prevailing political situation in Tripura, including the ruling BJP's alleged forcible occupation of Congress offices in the state.

Speaking to reporters, Saha informed that he, along with other leaders, met Rahul Gandhi at his office chamber in Parliament on Friday. During the meeting, a separate discussion was also held regarding the political scenarios in Manipur and Tripura.

"Rahul Gandhi held a meeting with the Congress presidents of both states. We provided him with a detailed account of the current situation in Tripura, particularly the ruling BJP's actions against opposition parties. This includes incidents of vandalism, ransacking, and forcible occupation of

Congress party offices in different parts of the state. These concerns were brought to his attention," Saha said.

He further mentioned that the Pradesh Congress Committee, along with District Congress Presidents, conducted a statewide assessment of the party's status and compiled a detailed report on the current political climate. This document was then submitted to the AICC for review.

"We also discussed the present organizational condition of our party in Tripura, emphasizing the need to strengthen the structure at booth, district, and Mandal levels. Additionally, we extended an invitation to Rahul Gandhi to visit the state, which he accepted. We are hopeful that he will visit soon. Furthermore, we have invited AICC President Mallikarjun Kharge to Tripura as well. During the meeting, Rahul Gandhi took note of the concerns regarding the indigenous people of the state and assured his full support," Saha added.

Inter school speech competition

HT Correspondent

ITANAGAR, March 29: The Deepak Nabam Living Home (NGO) organised inter school speech competition on Saturday to enhance communication skill, build confidence and foster critical thinking and ultimately lead to self expression and leadership quality among the students and youths. The day long programme was held at DK conventional hall, IG Park in city. The topic and theme of the speech completion is "Dr B.R Ambedkar and constitutional values." The day long function was witnessed by Public Liaison officer to speaker, APLA and NHAI member Michael Tajo and host of dignitaries including youth and students leaders.

PROVIDING ASSISTANCE IN THE MONSOON AND WINTER PATROLLING

Tender Notice No.: SCL/Engg/38 of 2025, Dated: 27-03-2025.
E-Tender are invited by the undersigned for the following work:
SN-1: Brief Description of Item:
Providing assistance in the Monsoon and Winter Patrolling in Chandranathpur-Badarpur Jn.-Badarpur Jn.-Silchar, Arunachal Jn.-Jiribam, Jiribam-Khongsang, Katakhal Jn.-Bhairabi and Bhairabi-Hortoki section under the jurisdiction of ADEB/Badarpur Ghat. **Tender Value:** ₹2,93,98,597/-; **Earnest Money:** ₹2,97,000/-; **Date & time of closing of tender at 15:00 hrs. on 22-04-2025 and opening of tender at 15:00 hrs. on 23-04-2025.** For complete information with the tender document of above e-tender will be available upto 15:00 hrs. on 22-04-2025 in website <http://www.ireps.gov.in>.
DRM(W), Lunding at Silchar
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
Serving Customers With A Smile

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM
ASSAM ENGINEERING SERVICE RECRUITMENT BOARD
Assam Textile Institute Campus, Ambari, Guwahati, Assam
Website: www.aesrb.in

RECRUITMENT NOTICE

ASSAM ENGINEERING SERVICE RECRUITMENT BOARD

Schedule for Teaching Proficiency Test (TPT) for recruitment into vacant posts of Lecturer (Technical) in the Government Polytechnics of Assam

In continuation of the Notice of Assam Engineering Service Recruitment Board (AESRB) vide No.AESRB/067/2025/847 dated 26.03.2025, this is for information of all shortlisted candidates that the schedule for Teaching Proficiency Test (TPT) has been published in the official website of AESRB (www.aesrb.in).

The shortlisted candidates are to attend the Office of the Director of Technical Education, Assam, Kahilipara, Guwahati-781019 for the Teaching Proficiency Test (TPT) as per the schedule and Instructions made available, failing which their candidature will stand cancelled.

No further communication will be made in this regard separately.

Sd/-
Member Secretary
Assam Engineering Service Recruitment Board

Janasanyog /D/14187/24/30-Mar-25

Commuters lay stress on proper utilisation of traffic signals, CCTVs at Arunachal capital complex

Lack of proper planning a concern



HT Correspondent

ITANAGAR, March 29: The local residents and commuters of NH-415 in Itanagar city on Saturday has urged the Traffic and Road safety Cell of Arunachal Pradesh Police (APP) including the Capital Traffic Police to utilise the traffic signal to optimum use for public use.

The commuters while speaking to media said, "We are happy to know the strength of the capital traffic police has been increased due to recent passing out of huge contingents of personnel from Police Training Centre (PTC) recently. The people of state are also happy with the

onetime promotion to the police personnel who has been rendering their services for more than 15 to 35 years of deducted service to the state and country due to which the moral of the police force has been increased to many fold."

It is a matter to let everyone know that the capital traffic police should do something in planned way with advice and suggestion from all stake holders for the better traffic management in city. It seems there is no proper traffic planning and the commuters has to face wastage of time in a radius of only few kilometers of National Highway four lane road in the city

where the traffic move are always in maximum all the time since morning and evening hours, a commuter said.

It has been a matter of discussion among the general public that the state traffic and road safety cell of Arunachal Pradesh has introduced few traffic signals specially one at Try junction of Arunachal Pradesh legislative Assembly (APLA) and another at Try junction of 0 Point Tlnali but it is surprising to know that the one located at 0 Point Tlnali seems to be defunct and out of order for several months, another commuters said.

The commuters while urged upon the Arunachal Pradesh Police department, State Traffic and Road safety cell to utilise the said traffic signal equipments and apparatus which has been procured and installed by incurring huge amount of money from state exchequers to shift it to the place where it is required.

The locals also appeal the Smart city management committee, Itanagar Municipal corporation, Itanagar Capital complex district administration, Capital police to check and ensure the proper functioning of all the CCTV installed in various parts of entire capital complex. The authority has been further requested to ensure the proper functioning of the CCTV installed in all the check gates, check nakas, Tri-junction of busy markets and public places.

Three militants arrested in Manipur

IMPHAL, March 29: Security forces have arrested three militants of two valley-based proscribed outfits in Manipur, police said on Saturday.

A member of the banned PREPAK was apprehended from Sekmaijin Mayai Leikai in Kakching District on Friday, while an active cadre of the PREPAK-Progressive Group was held from Mantripukhri in Imphal West district.

Police also arrested a member of the outlawed KCP (Politburo Standing Committee) from Khundrakpam Awang Leikai in Imphal East district on Friday.

Meanwhile, the security forces recovered a large cache of arms and ammunition during separate search operations in Imphal East, Kakching and Bishnupur districts over the past few days.

The recovered arms include IEDs, hand grenades, rifles, a machine gun and 15 packets of explosives, a police officer said. (PTI)

No. BDB/Tenden/46/2023-24/

SHORT NOTICE INVITING TENDER

Sealed tender affixing a non-refundable Court fee stamp of Rs.8.25(Rupees eight & twenty five paise) only with a validity period of 180 days which will subsequently to be converted and drawn up in the printed of F-2 form are invited from the registered contractors of class-I (A,B & C), Class-II & Class III category of Assam PWD (Roads & Building) and BTC according to their eligibility for submitting tenders for the works under 15th FC (Tied Grant) under P&RD Dept. BTR Kokrajhar for the year 2023-24 during 2024-25 as stated below. The tenders will be received by the undersigned up to 2.00PM on 22/4/25 and will be opened on the next day as on 23/4/25 & place at 2.30 PM.

Sl. no.	Name of activity.	A.A amount. (Rs. In Lakhs)	Tender Value (in Lakhs)	EMD/Bid Security (Earnest Money) (in Rs.)	Cost of Tender paper (in Rs.)	Pre-bid date and Time.	Last date & time of bid submission.	Date & Time of bid opening..	Time of completion of Work.
1.	"Const. of Community Toilet at Orangajuli tea estate Labour Club".	11,00,000/-	11,00,000/-	1% for ST, SC & 2% for Gen. Enterprise.	330	1/4/25	22/4/25	23/4/25	6 month

Detail N.I.T. may be seen in all working days during office hours in the office of the undersigned. Tender papers will be issued to the contractors or their authorized agents from 22/4/25 to 23/4/25 up to 1.30 PM. In the office of the undersigned on payment in the form of demand draft/bankers cheque from any Nationalized Bank, duly pledged in favour of the Principal Secretary, BTC Kokrajhar payable at Kokrajhar.

IPR(BTC)-2023-24/1686

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

'One by one, all the BJP-ruled state governments will introduce it'

BJP will be in power at Centre for at least 30 years: Amit Shah

NEW DELHI, March 29: Union Home Minister Amit Shah has exuded confidence the BJP will remain in power at the Centre for at least 30 years due to its consistent performance.

In a democracy, he said, the victory of any party depends on its hard work and if it toils day in and day out and "if you live not for yourself but for the country, victory will be yours".

"When I was the national president of the BJP, I had said the BJP will remain in power for the next 30 years. Only 10 years have gone now," he said at the Times Now Summit 2025 Friday night.

The senior BJP leader said when a party performs well, it gets the trust of the public and the confidence to win. "But those who do not perform do not have this confidence," he said.

Asked about the Uniform Civil Code, the home minister said all BJP-ruled states will introduce the UCC one-by-one as it is one of the key agendas of the BJP since was formed. The home minister said since its inception, the BJP's resolve has been to introduce the UCC in the country.

"It will come. It was the decision of the Constituent Assembly (to introduce UCC). The Congress might have forgotten it but we have not. We said we would abrogate Article 370. We have done that. We said we would construct a Ram temple at Ayodhya. We have



done that too. Now UCC remains. We will do that too," he said.

Shah said the Uttarakhand government has already enacted the law for implementation of the UCC in the state.

"One by one, all the BJP-ruled state governments will introduce it. Gujarat has already set up a committee for it. It is an ongoing process. All states will bring it as per their convenience," he said.

Asked about the alleged discovery of a huge amount of cash at the Delhi residence of High Court judge Yashwant Varma, the home minister said the Chief Justice of India has taken cognisance of the issue and ordered an inquiry (through a committee of three high court judges).

"We are cooperating with it. We should wait for the outcome of the committee constituted by the chief

justice," he said.

The Supreme Court on Friday rejected a PIL seeking Delhi Police to register an FIR over the alleged discovery of burnt wads of cash from Justice Varma's residence.

Shah said, "When no FIR can be registered, how can a seizure be carried out? The FIR can only be registered with the Chief Justice of India's permission."

Asked whether the RSS interferes in the functioning of the Modi government, the home minister said there has been no interference from the Sangh, the BJP's ideological fountainhead.

"The RSS has been preparing patriots for the last 100 years. I have learnt from the RSS how to keep patriotism at centre while keeping many dimensions together. There is no question of interference," he said.

PDP leader requests for continuation of special cells for women in J-K

JAMMU, March 29: Senior PDP leader and legislator Waheed Ur Rehman Para on Saturday expressed serious concern over the discontinuation of special cells for women in Jammu and Kashmir, calling it a "reckless decision that endangers the lives of vulnerable women".

Para, who is PDP's legislative party leader in J-K Assembly, urged Chief Minister Omar Abdullah, Health Minister Sakina Itoo, and National Commission for Women (NCW) which is funding the project to restore and institutionalize these cells, ensuring they remain operational and effectively address gender-based violence.

Established in November 2021 under the Violence-Free Home - A Woman's Right Initiative, it has assisted nearly 9,800 survivors across all 20 districts of Jammu and Kashmir.

Implemented by the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) in collaboration with the Jammu and Kashmir Home and Social Welfare Departments, the special cells have functioned within police stations to bridge the gap between survivors and the justice system. NCW sources said the Jammu and Kashmir government had to take over this project, but they did not do so.

According to NCW sources, the MoU was set to end on March 31. However, the J-K government "took no action", and the MoU remains valid only until March 31, 2025.

The plan was for us to start the project and provide hand-holding support to the J-K government, but they allegedly did not take responsibility, the NCW sources said.

However, the health minister said she had requested NCW for a one-year extension for the special cells.

"I have formally written to NCW India requesting an extension of at least one year for the Special Cells for Women in J-K. The support these cells provide is crucial but along with these cells, One Stop Centres are also providing legal aid, counseling, medical assistance, and shelter to women in distress in J-K," Itoo had posted on X on March 24.

A group of over 600 women's rights activists, intellectuals, and professionals have also appealed to CM Abdullah to intervene to prevent the proposed closure of special cells for women.

In a letter addressed to Abdullah dated March 26, prominent activists Shabnam Hashmi and Dr Syeda Hameed underscored the role the special cells have played in providing psycho-social-legal support to women facing violence.

"The shutting down of Special Cells for Women is a grave mistake. These cells have helped hundreds of women survive violence, and we continue to receive calls for their restoration. This reflects the apathy of the administration towards the suffering of women in our region," Para said in a statement.

He said the shutting down of these cells raises serious questions about the government's priorities and whether women's issues are being "deliberately sidelined".

Para emphasised that the dismantling of these Cells reflects a "broader pattern of governance failures" in J-K, where essential social welfare initiatives are being neglected or discontinued.

He accused the administration of failing to prioritize women's rights and safety, calling it yet another example of how the central government and the UT administration are failing the people of J-K. (PTI)

Bihar turned 'doobta' under Lalu Prasad's rule, says Nadda

NEW DELHI, March 29: Bihar, which had been progressing in many fields including academics, turned into "doobta Bihar" and plunged into "jungle raj" under Lalu Prasad government, said BJP chief J.P. Nadda on Saturday.

Addressing a Bihar Diwas programme organised by Delhi BJP's Purnvanchal Morcha, Nadda said Bihar came out of darkness under Nitish Kumar's rule and witnessed progress under leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Lauding the state, the BJP president said Bihar has a special aura and dynamism -- It gave democracy to the world, and Nalanda and Vikramshila were great places of learning.

Even in modern times, students from Bihar studied in large numbers at Delhi University

colleges and many professors from the state were known globally for their academic prowess, he said. "Around 1970s, Bihar was a progressing state. It turned into 'doobta' (declining) Bihar under Lalu raj. It was difficult to venture out in the evenings in Patna in those times," he said, referring to Rashtriya Janta Dal (RJD) rule under Lalu Prasad's chief ministership during 1990s.

He said doctors were forced to escape from the state and new vehicles were taken out forcefully from showrooms for wedding parties.

Taking a dig at RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav, Nadda said some people say there was no 'jungle raj' in Bihar because they "were not born that time." Nadda lauded Delhi BJP and its Purnvanchal Morcha workers for bringing the party's government in the capital when it was slipping into "destruction" and called them to join campaigning in Bihar as well. The Bihar assembly polls are due later this year.

Listing Bihar's progress under the National Democratic Alliance and Modi government, Nadda said Bihar had just 384 kilometres of rural roads in 2005, which has now expanded to over 1.12 lakh kilometres.

He cited the setting up of Indian Institute of Technology, All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Indian Institute of Mass Communication, and Indian Institute of Foreign Trade in the state and announced that Patna Medical College is going to be the biggest hospital in Asia. (PTI)

Prez Murmu asks people to adopt environmentally conscious lifestyle

NEW DELHI, March 29: President Droupadi Murmu on Saturday asked people to adopt a lifestyle that is conscious and sensitive towards the environment and makes it more vibrant.

Inaugurating the two-day National Conference on Environment-2025 at Vigyan Bhawan here, she said environmental protection and promotion will be possible only through continuous activism and participation of all.

Citing that tribal communities have lived in harmony with nature for centuries, she said, "We should take inspiration from their lifestyle. Today, when the world is battling the problems of global warming and climate change, their lifestyle becomes even more exemplary." The President said it is people's moral responsibility to provide the legacy of a clean environment to the coming generations.

"Elders in every family worry about which school or college their children will study in and what career they will choose. While this

worry is justified, we also have to think about what kind of air our children will breathe, what kind of water they will get to drink, whether they will get to hear the sounds of birds, and able to experience the beauty of lush green forests," Murmu said.

She added, "For this, we will have to adopt a lifestyle that is conscious of and sensitive towards the environment so that it is not only protected but also enhanced and made more vibrant."

The President said the basis of India's development is "nourishment, not exploitation; protection, not elimination". The country should move towards development following this tradition, she said.

Murmu said India has presented many examples to the world through its green initiatives.

"I am confident that with the participation of all stakeholders and the countrymen, we will play the role of green leadership at the global level. We all have to make India a developed nation by 2047

Farm loan waiver: Maha govt committed to fulfil all poll promises, says Shinde

PUNE, March 29: Maharashtra Deputy CM Eknath Shinde on Saturday said the government will fulfil all promises made in the election manifesto, a day after his cabinet colleague Ajit Pawar's 'farmers need not wait for a crop loan waiver' statement caused a flutter.

He also called for maintaining balance in the state finances, adding that funds should be available for welfare schemes, development, and employees' salaries.

Shinde said the monthly aid for women under the Ladki Bahin Yojana will be raised from ₹ 1,500 to ₹ 2,100 after the state's financial condition is strengthened.

Shinde's assurance comes a day after Deputy CM and Finance Minister Ajit Pawar advised farmers to pay their crop loan instalments on time rather than awaiting a loan waiver announcement, citing the state's current financial constraints.

"Whatever promises we have mentioned in the manifesto, we will fulfil them. Each and every promise will be honoured. We will not call it a printing mistake," Shinde, who heads Shiv Sena, told reporters when asked to comment on Pawar's remarks.

Shinde visited Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj's samadhi at Vadhu in Pune district on his death



anniversary.

He highlighted the government's support for farmers over the past two-and-a-half-years, stating, "Our government is committed to the welfare of farmers. We provided relief of ₹ 16,000 crore for crop damages caused due to unseasonal rains".

Shinde also pointed to an allocation of ₹ 45,000 crore for allied agricultural businesses and ongoing initiatives like the Shetkari Samman Yojana and Crop Insurance Scheme as evidence of the government's commitment to the agricultural sector.

When questioned about the promise to increase the monthly aid under the Ladki Bahin Yojana from ₹ 1,500 to ₹ 2,100 as mentioned in the poll manifesto,

Shinde said, "Once the economic condition of the state is strengthened, our sisters will be given ₹ 2,100. Whatever we have promised, we will fulfil it."

The Deputy Chief Minister further said funds should be available for all things, including "welfare schemes, development, and employee salaries".

According to Shinde, the increased investment would ultimately improve the financial strength.

Shinde defended the Saugat-e-Modi scheme amid the Opposition's criticism, saying that initiatives launched by the prime minister lifted 35 crore Indians out of poverty and provided free rations to 80 crore people across all communities. (PTI)

Effective awareness brought down SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act cases, says TN CM

CHENNAI, March 29: Effective awareness campaigns and proactive measures led to a decrease in the number of cases registered under the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act by six per cent this year compared to last year, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin said on Saturday.

Also, the areas prone to violence shrunk to 368 in 2024 from 445 in 2021, and this was less than 19 per cent, he said.

Addressing a meeting of the state-level Vigilance and Monitoring Committee of the Adi Dravidar and Tribal Welfare Department constituted under his chairmanship, at the Secretariat here, Stalin said shortly after the DMK government took up the reins in 2021, the committee was constituted and three meetings were held. This panel had 7 MPs belonging to the Adi Dravidar and Tribal communities as members.

His government hiked the amount of compensation given to victims of violence from ₹ 8 lakh to ₹ 12 lakh from 2022 and in the last four years, 421 people of violence-affected families have been provided jobs and 649 people have been granted pension. About ₹ 207.26 crore has been given to 17,098 people as compensation, the chief minister said.

During the current year, as part

of a new initiative, an assistance centre to report atrocities, help in registration of cases, know the current status of cases, provide remedies and extend legal aid was started and it was functioning well.

"According to the 2011 census, the literacy rate of the people in Tamil Nadu is 80.09 per cent, while the literacy rate of the Adi Dravidar and Tribals is 73.26 per cent," he said, and added efforts on providing them education and imparting skills enhanced their capabilities for employment.

Also, 120 village knowledge centres were being set up at an estimated cost of ₹ 117.27 crore to conduct seminars and training, Stalin said, and listed out the various measures being taken by the state government to improve the socio-economic prosperity of the community.

"Also, to improve the livelihood of women through basic income generating activities, the subsidy extended through TAHDCO has been increased from ₹ 2.50 lakh to ₹ 6 lakh from 2023 and ₹ 8.25 crore subsidy has been given to 140 beneficiaries this year," Stalin said.

Later, the chief minister virtually launched vehicles and inaugurated buildings for police and fire and rescue services departments worth ₹ 100 crore. (PTI)

IRCTC case: Lalu Prasad, Rabri Devi, Tejashwi Yadav seek discharge

NEW DELHI, March 29: RJD president Lalu Prasad, his wife Rabri Devi and their son Tejashwi Yadav on Saturday urged a court here to discharge them in a corruption case connected to purported irregularities in the Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC) between 2004 and 2014.

The three made the submissions before special judge Vishal Gogne, claiming that the CBI's case was based on "pick and choose" and the allegations against them were "false".

The accused made the submission through senior advocate Maninder Singh during the arguments on the framing of charges in the case.

They have been charge-sheeted for various offences, including criminal conspiracy, cheating and corruption, that carry a maximum jail term of seven years.

The three claimed before the judge that the allegations levelled against them by the CBI were false, selective and motivated, adding that the central probe agency lacked evidence to prosecute them in the case.

The hearing in the case will resume on April 21.

"Part arguments heard on behalf of A-1 to A-4 (Lalu, Rabri, Tejashwi and Lara Projects LLP). Put up for further submissions," the judge said.

Prasad, who was the railway minister during the UPA-1 government, had earlier questioned the validity of sanctions obtained by the CBI to prosecute him in the case.

The agency told the court on February 28 that there was sufficient evidence to prosecute the accused.

The case stems from alleged irregularities in the grant of operational contracts of two IRCTC hotels to a private firm.

According to the CBI chargesheet, a conspiracy was hatched between 2004 and 2014 in pursuance of which BNR hotels of the Indian Railways, located in Puri and Ranchi, were first transferred to the IRCTC. Later, they were leased to the Patna-based Sujata Hotels Private Limited for operations and maintenance. (PTI)

"It has played a decisive role in the field of environmental justice or climate justice. The historic decisions given by tribunal have a wide impact on our lives, our health, and the future of our earth."

The national conference aimed to bring together key stakeholders to discuss pressing environmental challenges, share best practices, and collaborate on future action plans for sustainable environmental management. (PTI)

PM Modi govt making banks' collection agents' of 'loot': Kharge

NEW DELHI, March 29: The Congress on Saturday hit out at the Modi government after the RBI's decision to allow banks to increase charges on ATM cash withdrawals, and said banks have been reduced to "collection agents" to "loot" citizens. Giving a list of charges levied by banks, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said a "painful" price rise and "unbridled loot" was the BJP's mantra.

"Our banks have been unfortunately made 'collection agents' by the Modi government! ATM withdrawal charges to be costlier," Kharge said in a post on X.

"The Modi government has extracted at least ₹ 43,500 crore due to non-maintenance of minimum balance from savings accounts and Jan Dhan accounts combined, between 2018 and 2024," he said.

"Other bank charges to LOOT citizens - an inactivity fee, which is ₹ 100-200 every year. Bank statement issuance fee is ₹ 50-100. ₹ 20-25 per quarter is charged for SMS alerts. Banks charge 1-3 per cent as loan processing fees," he added. (PTI)

Oppn fumes over MP gov't 'aspirational youth' label for unemployed persons

BHOPAL, March 29: The Madhya Pradesh government's decision to label unemployed youths in the state as "Aakanshi Yuva" (aspirational youths) has invited criticism from the opposition Congress, which accused it of making a mockery of jobless persons.

The state's Rojgar Portal used the term "Aakanshi Yuva" while listing the number of unemployed youths in Madhya Pradesh and displayed their numbers as more than 29.37 lakh.

Minister of State for Technical Education and Skill Development Gautam Tentwal on Saturday said that the government's thinking behind Aakanshi Yuva is that youths working in government or non-government jobs aspire to get higher positions, and unemployed youngsters aspire for jobs and get registered in the employment office.

Defending the government's move, BJP spokesman Pankaj Chaturvedi told PTI, "The Bharatiya Janata Party government's efforts in Madhya Pradesh and the country is to provide employment, i.e., self-employment. That is why the state government organised a mega global investors meet, where opportunities for employment and self-employment are created."

He said "aspiring youth" awakens a different sentiment, which is the idea of "self-employment based on their talent and skill development".

Chief Minister Mohan Yadav recently emphasised that unemployment cannot be eradicated solely through government jobs.

A recent government release stated, "In a country like India, with a population of 1.45 billion, the proportion of government jobs is not more than one per cent. Even the country's largest employer, the Armed Forces, including the Army, Navy, and Air Force, employs only 1.35 million personnel."

It said the state is making efforts to connect aspirational youth with employment through self-reliance and entrepreneurship.

"From now on, unemployed youth in the state will be referred to as 'aspirational youth (Aakanshi Yuva)," the release said.

The chief minister also shared that Madhya Pradesh has received investment proposals worth more than Rs 30 lakh crore through the Global Investors Summit and Regional Industry Conclaves.

These investments will generate employment for 21 lakh youths, he said, adding that young people will also be engaged in agriculture, animal husbandry, and skill-based enterprises.

Congress has, however, slammed the state government, accusing it of making a mockery of unemployed youth in the state.

Taking to X, Leader of Opposition in the Madhya Pradesh Assembly, Umang Singh said, "The educated youth who have no work despite having qualifications are 'unemployed'!"

As the MP government is unable to provide them employment despite many assurances, it has made a mockery of their helplessness by coining the new term "aspirational yuva", he wrote in the post in Hindi. (PTI)



where the air, water, greenery and prosperity attract the entire world community," she said.

The President said balancing the legacy of a clean environment and development is both an opportunity and challenge.

"A clean environment is important for our daily life and health. Air pollution caused by dust and smoke has a bad effect on lungs. Many studies show that air pollu-

tion has an adverse effect on life expectancy. Only by making every possible effort to clean the environment will we be able to build a healthy and prosperous India," she said.

Murmu added that all institutions associated with environment management and citizens of the country have to continuously strive for environmental protection and promotion.

She said at the ground level, mo-

India launches Operation Brahma to assist quake-hit Myanmar

NEW DELHI, March 29: As Myanmar reels from death and destruction caused by a massive earthquake, India on Saturday delivered 15 tonnes of relief material and dispatched more supplies by air and sea along with rescue teams under the emergency mission 'Operation Brahma'.

In a reflection of New Delhi's strong resolve to help the neighbouring country, Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke with Myanmar's Senior General Min Aung Hlaing and said India stands in solidarity with the people of that country.

"Conveyed our deep condolences at the loss of lives in the devastating earthquake. As a close friend and neighbour, India stands in solidarity with the people of Myanmar in this difficult hour," the prime minister said on 'X'.

"Disaster relief material, humanitarian assistance, search & rescue teams are being expeditiously dispatched to the affected areas as part of #OperationBrahma," he said.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said Indian naval ships INS Satpura and INS Savitri are carrying 40 tonnes of humanitarian aid and headed for the port of Yangon.



In a social media post, Jaishankar also said that an 80-member strong search and rescue team from the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) departed for Myanmar's capital Nay Pyi Taw.

They will assist the rescue operations in Myanmar, he added.

India has deployed NDRF abroad on two previous occasions -- during the 2015 Nepal earthquake and the 2023 Türkiye quake.

In the morning, India delivered 15 tonnes of relief materials to the Myanmar city of Yangon after a C130J military aircraft of the Indian Air Force transported the con-

signments to the Myanmar city.

The supplies included tents, sleeping bags, blankets, ready-to-eat meals, water purifiers, solar lamps, generator sets and essential medicines, officials said.

Two more IAF aircraft are being loaded with relief material for Myanmar and the planes will depart from Air Force Station Hindon soon, according to officials.

Sixty para-field ambulances are also being sent by air to Myanmar as part of Operation Brahma, the officials said.

"#OperationBrahma gets underway. First tranche of humanitarian

aid from India has reached the Yangon Airport in Myanmar," Jaishankar posted on 'X' after India dispatched the first consignments of relief supplies.

The relief materials were handed over to Chief Minister of Yangon U Soe Thein by Indian envoy to Myanmar Abhay Thakur.

India has acted as a "First Responder" to assist the people of Myanmar affected by Friday's massive earthquake, External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said.

"A team of 80 NDRF personnel are being airlifted to Myanmar on-board two IAF sorties from Hindon in Ghaziabad. The teams are expected to reach by Saturday evening," an official told PTI.

Commandant P K Tiwary of the 8th NDRF battalion based in Ghaziabad near Delhi will lead the USAR (Urban Search And Rescue) team. The team is also taking along rescue dogs for the collapsed structure search and rescue operation being undertaken as per International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG) norms, the official said.

The powerful 7.7 magnitude earthquake rocked Myanmar and neighbouring Thailand on Friday,

destroying buildings, bridges and other infrastructures.

Myanmar's military-led government said in a statement on Saturday that 1,002 people have been found dead and another 2,376 injured, adding detailed figures are still being collected. The Indian embassy in Myanmar said it is co-ordinating speedy delivery of assistance and relief supplies from India with Myanmar.

"We are also in constant touch with Indian community. Reiterate our emergency number for needy Indian nationals: +95-95419602," it posted on 'X'. Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday expressed concern over the devastating earthquake in Myanmar and Thailand and said India stands ready to offer all possible assistance to the two countries.

"Concerned by the situation in the wake of the Earthquake in Myanmar and Thailand. Praying for the safety and wellbeing of everyone," Modi said on 'X'.

"India stands ready to offer all possible assistance. In this regard, asked our authorities to be on standby. Also asked the MEA to remain in touch with the Governments of Myanmar and Thailand," he said. (PTI)

Not acceptable that children need to wear masks to play outside: SC



NEW DELHI, March 29: Supreme Court Judge Justice Vikram Nath on Saturday laid stress on the need to regulate emissions and invest in cleaner technologies to combat pollution, saying it was unacceptable for children to grow up in an environment where they needed masks to play in the open.

Justice Nath also said there was a need to explore solutions which struck a balance between economic growth and environmental wellbeing and that government policies must focus on green technologies. He was speaking during the inaugural session of the National Conference on Environment - 2025 at Vigyan Bhawan. President Droupadi Murmu was the chief guest at the event.

"The capital city of India regularly experiences high levels of pollution. I believe we can all agree that it is not acceptable for our children to grow up in an environment where they need masks to play outside or worry about respiratory ailments at a young age," Justice Nath said.

"This is an urgent call for action, a signal that we must come together to regulate emissions, invest in cleaner technologies and think of sustainable transport options that allow economic progress without compromising the air we breathe," he said.

He flagged water pollution as another key concern, saying many sacred and pristine rivers had been burdened with untreated waste.

"When I see these riversides, I feel a mix of nostalgia and concern... Nostalgia for how vibrant and pure these waters once were and concern for our inability to preserve them in their natural glory. Treating industrial effluent, enhancing sewage infrastructure and encouraging local communities to maintain cleanliness along riverbanks are essential steps," Justice Nath said.

Applauding the role of the National Green Tribunal, the apex court judge said the green body had emerged as a beacon of hope since its establishment in 2010 and played a pivotal role in streamlining the resolution of environmental disputes. By championing "polluter pays" and precautionary principles, the tribunal has pushed industries, government bodies and

citizens to rethink the use of natural resources, he added.

Regarding the solutions, Justice Nath said, "The government's policies must encourage green technologies. Industries must be mindful of their environmental footprint and civil society must continue raising awareness and holding us accountable."

He said while the judiciary was committed to upholding the constitutional guarantee to a healthy environment and ensuring that green violations were checked, no single institution could accomplish the monumental task of environmental protection alone.

"It is when we work in tandem that we can create meaningful and lasting transformation in the days ahead. Let us remember why we are here. We are here because we believe that progress does not have to be through pollution and that development can and must be in harmony with nature," the Supreme Court judge said.

"Let us leave with the understanding that the environment is not an external entity we manipulate at will. It is an extension of our collective souls, intrinsically linked to our health, culture, economy and spirit," he said.

"When we protect nature, we protect ourselves and it is with that spirit of unity and responsibility that I urge all of us to continue this journey forging a future where India stands tall as a symbol of sustainable growth and environmental harmony," he added.

Speaking at the event, National Green Tribunal Chairperson Justice Prakash Shrivastava said the conference "stands out for its inclusivity, bringing together jurists, experts, faculty and students, all united by a commitment to sustainability" and that it had been carefully designed to address environmental challenges through four technical sessions. Attorney General R Venkataramani said urbanisation meant an increase in energy consumption that, in turn, led to an increase in the exploitation of natural resources.

"I consider that our regulatory bodies need radical changes. Lack of social awareness and social acknowledgement of environmental consciousness or serious impediments that deserve deeper engagement," he said. (PTI)

Six arrested in ₹ 25 lakh robbery case in Dwarka

NEW DELHI, March 29: The Delhi Police has solved a robbery case and arrested six people in connection with looting of ₹ 25 lakh from a company in Dwarka here, an official said on Saturday.

Three of the arrested were employees of the firm, they said.

The accused have been identified as Pramod Kumar Kamat (36), Chhote Lal (25), Subhash (23), Suraj Kumar (28), Ravinder Kumar (25) and Gauri Shankar (23).

Police said all the six accused have no previous criminal records and they allegedly planned and executed the crime to pay off debts and fund a lavish lifestyle, he said.

According to police, Dwarka South police station registered a case on March 23, after receiving a complaint regarding a robbery of ₹ 25 lakh at knifepoint.

A senior police officer said, "The complainant, Aman Chauhan, revealed that he had been carrying a bag containing the money, when two unidentified men attacked him from behind. They snatched the bag and fled in a car with yellow number plate of Haryana."

He said preliminary inquiry revealed that Ankit Singh, a manager at Gran Spirits Pvt Ltd in Gurgaon, had directed worker Pramod Kumar Kamat to collect a bag purportedly containing ₹ 15 lakh from Dwarka Sector 10 metro station and hand it over to Chauhan at Sector 8. The bag originally contained ₹ 25 lakh, it was revealed later. (PTI)

Air Force civil engineer shot dead at his home in Prayagraj

PRAYAGRAJ (UP), March 29: An Indian Air Force civil engineer was shot dead Saturday morning by an unidentified assailant while he was sleeping at his official residence in the high-security cantonment area here in Uttar Pradesh's Prayagraj, police said.

The attacker fired at the engineer from the window of his room, Puramufit Station House Officer (SHO) Manoj Singh said.

Police said his wife and son were present in other rooms when the incident happened in their Engineers Colony house inside the Air Force Station.

Air Force civil engineer SN Mishra (51) received a bullet in his chest and he was rushed to the Army hospital. Mishra succumbed to his injuries at the hospital, the SHO said. The body has been sent for post-mortem.

Slamming the Uttar Pradesh government, Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav said the incident shows that the law and order situation in the state has collapsed.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (City) Abhishek Bhatti said police has inspected the spot and surveillance teams also went to collect information.

CCTV footage installed in the Air Force Station shows a person jumping over the boundary and coming inside, he said, adding that efforts are on to nab him.

Mishra is survived by his wife, a daughter and a son. The daughter lives in Lucknow and was not there in the house at the time of the shooting. (PTI)

Haryana Assembly passes bill to take control of Dharendra Brahmchari's Aparna Ashram in Gurugram

CHANDIGARH, March 29: Haryana Assembly on Friday passed a bill that will allow the state government to take over the management and control of the late Yoga Guru, Dharendra Brahmchari's Aparna Ashram in Gurugram. As per the bill, for the past several years disputes have been going on between the Society and its members.

The Assembly passed the Aparna Institution (Taking Over of Management and Control) Bill, 2025, which provides "for the taking over, in the public interest, for a limited period, for proper and efficient management and control of Aparna Institution situated within the revenue estate of Village Silokhra, district Gurugram".

Congress members raised concerns regarding the bill, with party MLA B B Batra saying in the House, "This bill cannot be presented in this Assembly, presenting this bill in this House is illegal, it's a fraud on the constitution...it is beyond the jurisdiction of the government".

Batra also claimed that the bill would not hold the legal ground and said it would get challenged in courts and then "we the lawmakers will get blamed for having passed this law".

On Batra claiming that bringing the bill is beyond the jurisdiction of the government, Chief Minister Nayab Singh clarified that the bill does not bypass any central government laws; instead, all necessary processes are being followed in compliance with them.

Congress' Batra said that Dharendra Brahmchari's Society was registered in Delhi and not in Haryana.

"If there is a dispute between members of the Society and if anybody has jurisdiction to appoint an administrator, that lies with the Delhi government. The Society is not registered under the Haryana Act," he said.

As per the bill, Swami Dharendra Brahmchari, a renowned yoga guru, who died in an aeroplane crash in June 1994, was of the view that yoga is the only solution to all the problems and diseases that are not been cured by allo-



pathic or other types of treatments.

He left no stone unturned to popularise yoga through physical demonstrations and speaking about its benefits, it said.

Dharendra Brahmchari incorporated and registered a Society under the name and style Aparna Ashram under the Societies Registration Act, 1860, with the Registrar of Societies, District South-East, New Delhi, having its registered office at New Delhi.

He aimed to spread the useful knowledge of yoga among the masses through education, research, training and dissemination. The said Society was made for the benefit of the public at large, therefore, the said Society comes within the definition of a public trust, as per the Bill.

Apart from incorporating the said Society, Dharendra Brahmchari also created an institution namely Aparna as a separate entity through an instrument of Memorandum of Institution (MoI) and constituted its independent Governing Council.

In furtherance to set up, develop and establish the proposed institution, Brahmchari purchased land measuring over 24 acres situated within the revenue estates of Gurugram, in the name of Aparna Ashram with the help of donations, grants and the financial assistance received by him from time to time from the Central Government and vested the land in the institution. The institution is located near Sector 30, Gurugram.

Climate anxiety can't make India compromise on people's basic needs: Bhupender Yadav

NEW DELHI, March 29: India has the right to grow responsibly based on national circumstances and the climate anxiety gripping the world cannot force it to give up its right to ensure food, water and energy for its people, Union Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav said on Saturday.

Addressing the National Conference on Environment, organised by the National Green Tribunal, he said rapid economic growth is the best defence against climate change for developing nations. The minister also said India is committed to mitigating climate change and has met its Paris Agreement commitments on green energy nine years ahead of the 2030 target.

"India reserves its right to grow responsibly based on our national circumstances... But the climate anxiety which has gripped the world cannot force India to give up its right to ensure food, water, energy... to its 140 crore people. India is confidently striking a balance between challenges and opportunities," he said.

Yadav said that under the Paris Agreement, the world agreed that the global fight against climate

change must be based on the principles of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities (CBDR-RC). "The agreement states climate action (CBD) will be based on national circumstance and address the concerns of poverty alleviation. Poverty eradication is the main problem for developing countries," he said. Yadav recalled that when 35 per cent of the developing world and one-third of India was in the grip of hunger in the 1970s, the developed world did not eat less to redistribute food to the hungry.

"We instead chose the path of (the) Green Revolution. Our scientific community rose to the challenge and increased yields through better varieties of seeds, more fertilisers and better technology," he said.

The minister said India is focused on capacity-building, knowledge-sharing and collaborating with the world to meet the challenges of climate change, biodiversity loss and desertification. "We are ramping up innovations in low-carbon technologies. We believe rapid economic growth is the best defence against climate change for developing nations. (PTI)

India's solar PV module manufacturing capacity to reach 125 GW by 2030: Pralhad Joshi

NAVSARI, March 29: India's solar PV module manufacturing capacity will increase to 125 gigawatt (GW) by 2030 from the current 80 GW, and its installed solar cell manufacturing capacity will soon touch 40 GW from 25 GW at present, Union Minister of New and Renewable Energy Pralhad Joshi said in Gujarat's Navsari district on Saturday.

In 2014, solar PV module manufacturing was nearly absent in the country, he said after inaugurating a state-of-the-art 5.4 GW solar cell manufacturing facility of Waaree Energies Limited at Degam here.

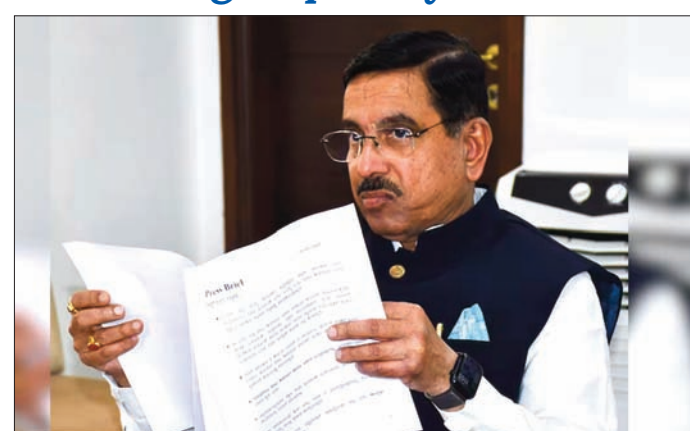
"Today, companies like Waaree are producing 80 GW solar PV modules. By 2030, our total solar PV manufacturing capacity will be 125 GW. Similarly, solar cell manufacturing was nil in 2014. But today we are manufacturing 25 GW, and very soon we will reach

a target of 40 GW. We are moving ahead with the thinking of integrated solar, right from polysilicon to module, to be manufactured in India," he said.

India has emerged as the world's third largest producer of renewable energy, and will achieve the target of 500 GW of renewable energy capacity by 2030 from 220 GW currently, the Union minister added. He said the target of 500 GW would be achieved because "if Prime Minister Narendra Modi is there then it is possible".

The world's largest bid for green ammonia was brought out by India, and 50 per cent export order has been booked for electrolyser and green hydrogen manufacturing, Joshi pointed out.

"We're the third largest producer of renewable energy. Ten years ago, we were nowhere on the map of renewable energy. A lot has



been achieved under the leadership of PM Modi. India is back to basics in harnessing the power of nature and has emerged as not just a participant but the leader in global renewable energy," he said.

Despite having 17 per cent of the global population, India's

greenhouse gas emission contribution is less than 4 per cent, but this has not made the country stay back because PM Modi has said the country will harness the sun and wind to make earth safe for the next generation, Joshi emphasised.

"Solar PV modules used to be

imported from China and other countries. But I can say with pride that when we prepared ALMM (Approved List of Models and Manufacturers), we provided thousands of crores of rupees under Production Linked Incentive (PLI) and viability gap funding scheme for local manufacture of solar components for Central government schemes such as PM Suryaghar Yojana, PM Kusum etc," he said. It is the government's commitment that everything from polysilicon to module and from green ammonia to methanol will be manufactured in India and it will become a world leader.

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60 AND ALL DOESN'T MATTER, EXPERIENCE AND ENTHUSIASM IS THE BEST COMBO: SALMAN KHAN

MUMBAI, March 29: Enthusiasm and experience... it's the best combo in the world, says Salman Khan who turns 60 this year and finds things going a lot better and easier now, be it in terms of his fitness regimen or his work.

In fact, says Bollywood's star through the decades whose latest film "Sikandar" releases on Sunday, the enthusiasm is more now than at any time in his youth.

"Sixty and all doesn't matter. Today, the way I train and whatever I do, it is better than what I was in my 20s, 30s and 40s. I don't feel it at all. In fact, it's a lot easier, it's a lot better," Salman told PTI in an interview. He made his acting debut with a supporting role in the 1988 film "Biwi Ho To Aisi" but the big breakthrough came the following year with the mega hit "Maine Pyar Kiya" (1989) that catapulted him to stardom.

Thirty-six years later, the stardom endures for the actor,

who will be 60 on December 27 this year.

"Work-wise, everyone's experience is there. Chronologically, it gives you that experience, with the people you meet, the people you work with and life experiences that teach you a lot. The enthusiasm has not gone away. With the increase in experience, even the enthusiasm has increased. So now, the combination of being enthusiastic and being experienced is the best combination in the world," Salman said.

The blend of passion and expression, he added, is something he wants to use to his advantage in the coming years.

Over the years, Salman established himself as a bonafide Hindi movie star of the masses with hits such as "Karan Arjun", "Andaz Apna Apna", "Judwaa", "Partner", "Dabangg", "Bodyguard", "Ek Tha Tiger", "Sultan" and "Tiger Zinda Hai".

Alongside Shah Rukh Khan and Aamir Khan, he has shaped the industry, set box office records and built a massive fan follow-

ing.

All the three Khans turn 60 this year. Asked about the enduring popularity of the trio and their unmatched stardom, Salman said it is a bit unfair and countered with his own query -- how can one forget the likes of Ajay Devgn and Akshay Kumar.

"There is Vicky Kaushal, who just did a film ('Chhaava')... there is the younger generation, and their films are doing really well," he added.

According to Salman, all actors, no matter how big, have faced flops.

While die-hard fans may show up initially, a movie's real success depends on repeat audiences, he pointed out.

"Only if the film is good, only if they like the film will they go and see the film. Otherwise, the film will not do so well. Some people might just go and see the film, some might like it, and some may not. So, all of this will reflect on the box office collections.

"But the hero of the film is not Shah Rukh Khan, Salman Khan, Aamir Khan, Ajay Devgn, Akshay Kumar... the hero of the film is the film itself. It is the destiny of the film. It is how well the film has been made, and how it connects with the people who go to the theatre spending their hard-earned money, what they think of the film," Salman added. He gave the example of his 1990s films -- "Andaz Apna Apna" and "Love" -- which didn't achieve commercial success but have garnered significant appreciation over time.

"A film like 'Love', which I really loved but it did not do well. Then there's 'Andaz Apna Apna', and now that we've OTT and satellite, this film is a cult film," he said.

His latest film, releasing a day ahead of Eid, sees him as the archetypal Hindi film hero taking on the baddies -- a trope as ageless perhaps as Salman himself who stars opposite a much younger Rashmika Mandanna.

Salman essays the role of Sanjay Rajkot aka Sikandar, who challenges a corrupt system and fights for the rights of ordinary citizens in the film. "Sikandar" is directed by A R Murugadoss and also stars Kajal Aggarwal, Sathyaraj, Sharman Joshi, and Prateik Babbar. Produced by Sajid Nadiadwala, the film will be released in theatres on Sunday.

His other Eid releases, including "Wanted", "Dabangg", "Bodyguard", "Kick", "Sultan" and "Bajrangi Bhaijaan", were all massive box office successes. (PTI)

ATHLEISURE IS HERE TO STAY: MALAIKA ARORA

MUMBAI, March 29: Model-actor Malaika Arora says athleisure is a "huge business" in India and it is here to stay.

The model, also known for popular dance numbers "Chaiyya Chaiyya", "Kaal Dhamaal" and "Munni Badnam Hui", walked the ramp for designer Namrata Joshipura's athleisure collection on the third day of the Lakme Fashion Week X FDCI here.

Arora walked to the beats of rapper Hanumankind's latest song "Run It Up" in a blingy black onesie with a jacket. She completed her look with a sleek ponytail and black pencil heels.

"Athleisure is a huge business. I'm somebody who truly stands for athleisure. I propagate it, I wear it, I'm all for it... Athleisure is here to stay," Arora told PTI during the post-show press conference on Friday evening.

Athleisure is casual, comfortable clothing designed to be suitable both for exercise and everyday wear.

Arora's Instagram bio reads: "A wanderer in the world of fitness, fashion and food."

When asked which of the three Fs -- fitness, fashion and food -- was most important to her, she said: "They are my three favourite Fs... How can I live without any one of them? I need food, fitness, and fashion in my life."

Even after walking the ramp for so many years, Arora said she still feels nervous.

"Nervousness never goes away," she added.

Lakme Fashion Week X FDCI will come to a close on Sunday. (PTI)



Trade experts predict ₹ 50 crore opening for Salman Khan's 'Sikandar'

MUMBAI, March 29: Superstar Salman Khan's new Eid release, action drama "Sikandar", is expected to

earn around ₹ 40 to 50 crore at the box office on the opening day, say trade experts.

"Sikandar", directed by A R Murugadoss, is Salman's first film in two years that is releasing on the festival of Eid. His last film was "Tiger 3", which came out around Diwali in 2023.

Since the trailer dropped earlier this month, the buzz has been decent for the action movie, which also stars Rashmika Mandanna.

"With early estimates pointing to a ₹ 50 crore opening on Sunday and a strong box office run ahead, 'Sikandar' is all set to bring audiences together for an

unforgettable cinematic experience," Gautam Dutta, CEO-Revenue & Operations, PVR INOX Ltd, said in a statement.

Salman Khan's films have become synonymous with Eid, turning the festival into a highly anticipated event for his fans.

Over the years, his Eid releases, including "Wanted", "Dabangg", "Bodyguard", "Kick", "Sultan", and "Bajrangi Bhaijaan", have consistently dominated the box office, drawing massive crowds to theatres.

However, his last Eid film -- "Kisi Ka Bhai Kisi Ki Jaan" (2023) -- did not live up to the hype, something that Salman hopes to break with "Sikandar".

Mumbai-based exhibitor and distributor Rajesh Thadani said he is optimistic about a good opening for the movie.

"Salman's film is releasing on

Eid, and everyone looks forward to watching his movies in theatres during this holiday period.

However, the collection on Sunday evening shows will drop because of Eid, but in the morning or afternoon, it will open well.

The film should do a lifetime collection of ₹ 200 to 300 crore; not sure if it will ₹ 500 crores because it all depends on the content," Thadani told PTI.

Vishek Chauhan, who has a theatre chain in Bihar, said the excitement among Khan's fan-base will drive ticket sales significantly.

He is hopeful the film will mint ₹ 60 to 70 crores in the first two days of its release.

"The fan base of Salman Khan is excited about the film. It should get an opening of ₹ 25 to 30 crores, but it will not be that great because it is an Eid holiday, but on Monday, it will be ₹ 40 to 50 crores," Chauhan told PTI.

Chauhan pointed out that the response to "Sikandar's" trailer has been more positive compared to Salman's previous Eid release, "Kisi Ka Bhai Kisi Ki Jaan".

"The trailer is better received... My cinema is sold out," he said, adding, they've retained the regular ticket prices of ₹ 200-250 for the film.

Ashish Saksena, COO - Cinemas, BookMyShow, said the advance bookings numbers of the platforms show a "strong traction across key markets". (PTI)

It was a dream debut: Shamita Shetty on 25 years of 'Mohabbatein'

MUMBAI, March 29: Actor Shamita Shetty says she was lucky to have debuted with a timeless film like "Mohabbatein", which turns 25 this year. "Mohabbatein" launched Shamita, the younger sister of Bollywood star Shilpa Shetty, into showbiz. It was directed by Aditya Chopra and produced under the banner of Yash Raj Films.

The hit musical romantic drama released in theatres on October 27, 2000.

Shamita, who played a feisty college student named Ishika, said seeing her debut film turn 25 was a "great feeling".

"I'm happy that after so many years I'm still standing here. I was very lucky to have debuted in a film like that. It was a dream debut for me and that's a film that I can still watch. It's timeless," she told PTI on the sidelines of the Lakme Fashion Week (LFW) X FDCI here. The 46-year-old actor, also known for films such as "Zeher", "Bewafaa", "Cash" as well as the reality show "Bigg Boss 15", said she is looking forward to doing good work.

"I'm waiting for something nice to come my way. Let's see if there's some filmmaker out there who believes I can do good work on screen. I'm ever willing to work," she added.

Shamita also congratulated LFW on its 25th edition. "Lakme Fashion Week was one of the first platforms to help fashion designers showcase their work and creativity. They have continued to do so for so many years. They were one of the firsts and then came the rest of them," she said. Asked how she would define her fashion statement, the actor said: "It's fairly simple... For me, comfort always takes precedence." (PTI)

Tamannaah on 10 yrs of 'Baahubali: The Beginning': It was a magical movie that happened to us

MUMBAI, March 29: Actor Tamannaah Bhatia says no one could have predicted that "Baahubali: The Beginning", which turns 10 this year, would go on to become an "unforgettable" chapter in the history of India cinema.

Directed by SS Rajamouli, the first part in the pan-India superhit "Baahubali" franchise released in theatres on July 10, 2015 with Prabhas in the lead. It was the first Telugu film to get a worldwide release in Hindi.

Bhatia, who played the role of the skilled warrior Avantika in the two-part fictional period saga, said the film was more than a career turn-around for her.

"Baahubali" was a magical movie that happened to us. I don't think any of us could have imagined or predicted what that film would do. But what it did for us, not just me as an

actor, but also the country and the film industry, that's something unforgettable and historic," the actor told PTI on the sidelines of the Lakme Fashion Week X FDCI here.

This year is also special for Bhatia as she completes 20 years in the film industry. She made her acting debut with the 2005 Hindi film "Chand Sa Roshan Chehra".

The 35-year-old actor, also known for her work across Telugu, Tamil and Hindi film industries such as "Happy Days", "Kallloori", "Devi", "Aranmanai 4", and the upcoming "Odela 2", said she's just getting started.

"It actually takes 20 years for creative people to figure themselves out. In my case, it's true because I started very young. I truly feel I've just started out and I'm going to make each day count and hopefully give audiences something special to watch



every time," she added.

On Friday evening, Bhatia walked the ramp for popular designer duo Falguni Shane Peacock alongside filmmaker Karan Johar.

The actor, who rocked the stage in an intricate metal corset clubbed with a black jacket and black flaring pants, praised the couturiers for skillfully blending glamour with silhouette.

"Casual glamour is something that I have found out to be my innate expression in styling myself or anything I do. I feel very comfortable and natural in casual glamour.

"They (designers) have done that for me in this amazing pair of pants. I could live in these pants. And, this beautiful metal corset is so glamorous and comfortable at the same time. I love the karigari. I love how they put an urban spin to Indian craftsmanship, which is so much fun and cool to wear," she said. (PTI)

BFI'S LEADERSHIP BATTLE NEEDS EARLY SOLUTION FOR THE SAKE OF INDIAN BOXERS

NEW DELHI, March 29: The Indian boxers are regaining momentum after months of inactivity but if the Boxing Federation of India's (BFI) election deadlock continues, the uncertainty around the formation of new body could adversely impact progress of the country's pugilists.

President Ajay Singh, seeking a third term, has announced a series of age-group tournaments and assured that national camps will also resume soon, along with a revamped coaching setup.

But if a new president takes over post-elections, there is no guarantee if the new EC will keep the current system.

Singh stated, "We will fulfil

our responsibility, a new team is free to take their calls later." However, potential disruptions could harm the boxers' preparation and affect consistency.

India's boxers are yet to compete in an international tournament in this Olympic cycle. With the Commonwealth Games and Asian Games scheduled for next year, they are still adjusting to new world governing body's weight categories. Further delays could hurt them.

Singh has promised to recruit new coaches and review the controversial selection policy.

Indian boxing has been without a High-Performance Director since Bernard Dunne stepped down in March last year. The

BFI invited applications for a foreign coach in August, but no appointment has been made.

Foreign coach Dmitry Dmitruk and chief coach C.A. Kuttappa are also absent from the men's team which is currently in Brazil for the first World Cup. The president has also introduced a new selection process for national camps. Previously, the top four finishers at the Nationals secured camp spots. Under the new system, a pool of eight boxers will be formed based on performances across three tournaments, from which four national campers in each weight class will be selected.

But if Singh loses the election, these plans risk being over-



turned, further disrupting the boxers' training and development.

The BFI's internal power struggle has already cost athletes

valuable time. The ongoing factionalism led to repeated postponements of the women's Nationals.

Days before the Nationals,

Singh suspended Secretary General Hemanta Kalita and Treasurer Digvijay Singh after an investigation led by former Delhi High Court Judge Sudhir Kumar Jain found them guilty of "financial irregularities."

Two rival factions have emerged in the run up to the elections, one being led by Singh. On the other side are Kalita, Digvijay, and Vice President Rajesh Bhandari, who support former sports minister Anurag Thakur's presidential bid.

As a result state units that aligned with the opposing faction, including Assam, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Himachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and Odisha, boycotted the women's

Nationals, depriving their boxers of crucial competition.

Like several other National Sports Federation (NSF) elections in recent times, the BFI elections have been marred by legal disputes and procedural delays.

The Returning Officer has paused the electoral proceedings until greater clarity emerges.

The Delhi Amateur Boxing Association (DABA) and the Himachal Pradesh Boxing Association challenged the exclusion of their representatives, which stemmed from a March 7 order by Singh that only elected members in state bodies could participate in the electoral process. (PTI)

ISL PLAYOFFS

NorthEast United and Jamshedpur FC face each in battle of equals

SHILLONG, March 29: NorthEast United FC would look to continue their four-game unbeaten run against Jamshedpur FC when the two sides face each other in a play-off match to seal a place in the Indian Super League semifinals here on Sunday.

The Highlanders finished fourth in the league standings with 38 points from 24 games, securing 10 victories and eight draws. Jamshedpur FC ended up fifth, earning as many points from the same number of matches.

The top two teams - Mohun Bagan Super Giant and FC Goa this season -- at the end of the League stage automatically qualify for the semi-finals. Teams finishing between third and sixth will feature in a single-leg knockout to determine the other two semi-finalists.

Sunday's match will be the first-ever playoffs meeting between the two sides in ISL history.

Jamshedpur FC have endured defensive struggles recently, leaking three or more goals in each of their previous two league games. The Highlanders,



in contrast, have recorded consecutive clean sheets in the ISL and could register their longest-ever shutout streak if they deny Jamshedpur FC a goal in Sunday's match.

However, history suggests the Highlanders will be in for a challenge themselves in the playoffs, having conceded in all four of their previous games at this stage of the competition.

Jamshedpur FC have given away 35 goals in open play this season, the second-most by any side in a single ISL campaign. In contrast, NorthEast United are the second-highest scoring

side (46 goals) in the league and that could prove to be a tall task for the visitors to deal with.

In head-to-head record, NorthEast United FC and Jamshedpur FC have faced each other 16 times in ISL history. The Highlanders have won four matches, while the Red Miners have emerged victorious on six occasions. Six matches have ended in draws.

NorthEast United head coach Juan Pedro Benali outlined his side's objectives entering into the knockout.

"We need to be ready, not make any excuses, and score whenever chances come our way. We need to convert our opportunities and always be focused, and stop Jamshedpur FC's special style of play," he said.

Jamshedpur FC head coach Khalid Jamil expressed his pleasure at playing the ISL playoffs in Shillong.

"We are very happy to be in Shillong. There is a lot of love for football here. The stadium is looking fantastic, the crowd support is amazing, and we are looking forward to securing a positive result," he said. (PTI)

Dhoni should be promoted up the order: Watson



CHENNAI, March 29: Baffled by some of the tactics of Chennai Super Kings in their clash against Royal Challengers Bengaluru, former Australia all-rounder Shane Watson said he does not understand why MS Dhoni continues to bat lower down the order.

CSK suffered a heavy 50-run defeat while chasing a stiff 197-run target and Watson also felt that skipper Ruturaj Gaikwad should have opened the innings.

Dhoni came to bat at number nine as Ravichandran Ashwin was sent ahead of him. He smashed the RCB bowlers all around the park for an unbeaten 30 off 16 balls but the effort went in vain as it came too late. The match was as good as over before Dhoni came to the crease.

"This is exactly what CSK fans come to see -- 30 off 16 deliveries from Dhoni. I would have absolutely loved to see him come up the order. In my opinion, he should have batted ahead of Ashwin," Watson, who is a JioStar expert, said.

"Given the game situation, Dhoni could have played like this for another 15 balls. Over the last couple of years, he has consistently shown that he's still batting beautifully. I truly believe he should be promoted up the order so we can see the full extent of his skills."

However, this is not a new phenomena as Dhoni, after having retired from the game, he had batted lower down the order even in the previous edition.

The top and middle order of the CSK crumbled as skipper Gaikwad endured four-ball-duck batting at number three on Friday night. "It was disappointing to see certain decisions, like Rahul Tripathi opening the batting. Ruturaj Gaikwad is a quality opener, yet he had to come in later. Even one of the shots Ruturaj played, where he gave him-

self room against Hazlewood, was uncharacteristic," Watson said. "Normally, he stands still and reacts, but this showed he was under pressure. Deepak Hooda, at the moment, just isn't up to it; he played each ball as if he was trying to survive."

"Batting Sam Curran at No. 5 was also questionable. I see him as more of a No. 7 batter. Right now, CSK hasn't got their combinations right, and they need to make a few adjustments. If they persist with this batting line-up, they risk being exposed."

Both Watson and Aakash Chopra hailed Dhoni's keeping skills even at the age of 43.

"From a wicket-keeping perspective, he's still as sharp as ever -- whipping the bails off in an instant. That tells me his game is in great shape, and he's as well-prepared as he possibly can be," Watson said.

"If CSK had sent him in earlier, they would have had a better chance of crossing the line. Of course, the crowd absolutely loved what he did tonight (Friday), but if he had come in sooner, CSK might have had a stronger shot at victory."

Chopra explained what sets Dhoni apart.

"He's simply remarkable. The fastest hands in the game -- when we talk about speed, the definition is now 'fast, faster, MS Dhoni.' We always say, 'Don't try this at home' because what he does is truly unique."

"Fundamentally, in fielding, the hands naturally move backward upon receiving the ball to absorb impact. Otherwise, the ball spills out due to the hardness of the hands. But Dhoni defies this logic. His hands move in just one direction -- toward the stumps. There's only one player in the world who can execute that kind of stumping with such precision, and that's MS Dhoni," Chopra said. (PTI)

NZ beat Pak by 73 runs in 1st one-day cricket international

NEW ZEALAND, March 29: Mark Chapman scored 132 and Daryl Mitchell 76 in a 199-run partnership as New Zealand made 344-9 and went on to beat Pakistan by 73 runs Saturday in the first one-day international.

Chapman posted his third one-day international century and rebuilt the innings with Mitchell after New Zealand had been three wickets down in the 13th over, struggling against bounce and swing from the Pakistan fast bowlers.

Muhammad Abbas, the first Pakistan-born player to play for New Zealand, made 50 from 24 balls -- the fastest half century by a player on debut in one-day international. Babar Azam led Pakistan's run chase with 78 from 83 balls but when he was out Pakistan slumped, losing seven wickets for 22 runs.

For much of its innings Pakistan was ahead of New Zealand, 64-0 after 10 overs where New Zealand had been 34-2.

Usman Khan and Abdullah Shafique put on 83 for the first wicket. Babar and Mohammad Rizwan added 76 for the third wicket then Babar and Salman Ali Agha contributed a further 85 for the fourth wicket. Pakistan was 249-3 in the 39th over and still well on target.

New Zealand captain Michael Bracewell was forced to bring back his strike bowlers Will O'Rourke and Jacob Duffy. O'Rourke offered a short ball to Babar which he hooked to Mitchell on the boundary at backward square.

Duffy then ran out Tayyab Tahir (1) and bowled Irfan Khan first ball as Pakistan slumped to 253-6 in the 40th over. Pakistan's hopes faded as

wickets dwindled and the run-rate rose. Pakistan was 271-9 when Salman was out for 58 from 48 balls.

"We started the second innings with good intent and we got the things you need for a big chase," Rizwan said. "But at the end the pressure was very big because as you get near to the end, the pressure becomes more."

Pakistan won the toss, bowled and was on top early through the efforts of its four seam bowlers, Naseem Shah, Akif Javed, Mohammad Ali and Haris Rauf. Akif and Ali were making their ODI debuts.

There were patches of grass on the pitch at McLean Park and the ball moved more than is usual at the venue where the average first-innings score in ODIs is 244. Naseem Shah and Akif Javed used the conditions superbly.

New Zealand slumped to 34-3 in the 13th over, bringing Chapman and Mitchell together. Runs were hard to come by at first but after bowling his seamers through the first 25 overs, Rizwan was forced to go to his fifth bowler. The New Zealanders cashed in. Chapman and Mitchell took 67 runs from the five overs bowled by Salman and 51 runs from five overs bowled by Irfan Khan.

Irfan had his revenge dismissing both Chapman and Mitchell. Chapman's 132 came from 111 balls and Mitchell's 76 from 84 deliveries. "It was certainly pretty tricky to bat early on," Chapman said. "We were probably aiming for a total lower than we got in the end. But it's something we pride ourselves on, being able to adapt to the conditions then putting up a score and just scrapping." (AP)

We've got firepower, don't discount us: Fleming

CHENNAI, March 29: A combative CSK head coach Stephen Fleming stoutly countered the criticism that his team's brand of cricket was getting outdated, saying the team had enough "firepower" and no one should make the mistake of discounting them.

Five-time IPL champions CSK lost to RCB by 50 runs, unable to chase a steep 196/7 set by Rajat Patidar's side on Friday.

CSK's defeat to RCB in the 'Southern Derby' in their own den was their first since the inaugural edition of the IPL in 2008 and it was also their biggest reversal at home thus far.

In response to a question if his brand of cricket was getting outdated, the former New Zealand skipper shot back, "What do you

mean, my way of playing (cricket)? Like winning the first game, that's a good way to play. We've got firepower all the way through. I don't understand this question."

"Just because we don't swing (the bat) from ball one and have a little bit of luck go our way, we'll see at the end," said the New Zealander after his team was restricted to 146/8 in 20 overs. The 51-year-old added that CSK should not be "discounted" just because they had lost one match. "It's a positive brand of cricket, no doubt about it, but don't discount us. It's a silly question."

The coach, however, conceded the team's fielding wasn't of the highest standard on Friday, adding that the opponents came

really hard at them.

Patidar's fine half-century and Josh Hazlewood (3/21) excellent bowling, which reduced CSK to 30/3 at the end of six overs, took the wind out of the home team's sails. "No, we didn't get it right. It's so hard to read (the pitch), but we thought it was going to skid on with the dew, but it actually got a bit tacky. So, it certainly made it harder."

"A couple of half chance, one or two, it's a real chance. It's just a little bit clumsy. They came very hard, and we had opportunities to really peg them back, but we just let them off the hook. A score of 175 would have been more realistic, but we just weren't good," added Fleming. (PTI)

Lilia Vu has another bogey-free day and leads a pack of LPGA stars in Arizona



Korda said. "When everyone is playing nicely, you kind of feed off each other as well."

The Ford Championship is the first domestic LPGA event since the Asia swing (Korda skipped it for the second straight year), and the field was as strong as it gets this side of a major, with every-

one from the top 10 in the world and 19 out of 20.

Vu, a double major winner in 2023 who struggled with a back injury last year, was feeling stress on the range and said her caddy settled her down. He told her to pick a target, and that's about as simple as Vu made it

look. She goes into the weekend at 14-under 130 without having made a bogey yet.

"Just focused on the shot in front of me and getting from point A to point B," Vu said. "That really kind of helped me. Somehow just happened to play well. Felt like everything was grooving in the right spot."

Charley Hull, who led after the first day with a 63, struggled to get going as a light wind picked up in otherwise comfortable weather for Arizona. She was even par through six holes -- that meant losing ground on this day -- and rallied for a 69. But she made only one birdie on the four par 5s and joined Korda, Thitikul and Nanna Koertge Madсен at 12-under 132.

"I hit some really good chips out there and even some good

saves and played solid. Just looking forward to the weekend now," Hull said.

The cut was at 4-under 140, good scoring for a course that still features firm, bouncy greens that can make it difficult to get easy looks at birdie. Thitikul and Vu relied on plenty of medium-length birdie putts.

Lydia Ko was one shot above the cut line when the Olympic gold medalist finished birdie-eagle-birdie to get with five shots of the lead going into the weekend.

"Just with how firm the course is, I was kind of scratching my head on the 11th thinking, Why does it feel like I had a poor ball-striking day?" I didn't, but just with how firm the greens are sometimes it's really hard to get really close to the pins. (AP)

Confused CSK pitted against clueless Rajasthan Royals

GUWAHATI, March 29: Shaken by the sound thrashing that Royal Challengers Bengaluru handed them, a confused Chennai Super Kings might feel more "at home" against an equally clueless Rajasthan Royals on an expected slow turner in their next IPL game here on Sunday.

Losing by 50 runs at 'Fortress Chepauk' would have seemed like a wishful thinking for an opposition side till date but RCB's 'class of 2025' under an ever-improving skipper Rajat Patidar has exposed some chinks in the CSK armoury and match against Royals couldn't have come at a better time for Raturaj Gaikwad's men.

CSK coach Stephen Fleming looked livid about Chepauk conditions where normally the CSK template is to play games where they either defend 165 to 170 if batting first or chase 155 to 160 by restricting opposition.

The kind of batting line-up that they have with MS Dhoni now becoming a designated 'tail-ender' at No. 9 due to Impact Substitution has worked well.

But the moment it became a chase of 175 plus, the same line-up didn't have enough firepower and one world class bowler (Josh Hazlewood) and another seasoned veteran (Bhuvneshwar Kumar) were good enough to stop the home team on their tracks. Dhoni's 30 off 16 balls only has value for nostalgia merchants as the former India captain is doing disservice to his team by coming in to bat when



all is seemingly lost.

In this backdrop, playing Royals on a surface which is "more Chepauk-ish than typical Barsapara Stadium track full of runs" might just help them get a win against a side that also doesn't boast of a great bowling attack.

Also Riyan Parag is too raw as a skipper and to put it mildly seems completely out of place for a high stakes assignment like leading a billion dollar franchise.

But all these years, CSK had the personnel to play that game, espe-

cially in the bowling department, which doesn't look top notch this year. Slinger Matheesha Pathirana and left-arm wrist spinner Noor Ahmed are fantastic but to be fair it is the Indian line-up that is not exactly looking great.

Khaleel Ahmed is an okay new ball bowler, who would have occasional good days and when it comes to semi-retired Ravichandran Ashwin and his long-time colleague Ravindra Jadeja, the aura of invincibility in this format no longer exists.

But just like Moeen Ali and Varun Chakravarthy exploited the conditions to fullest during other night for KKR, Ashwin and Jadeja might just use their experience to good effect against the likes of Sanju Samson, Riyan Parag, Shubham Dubey, Nitish Rana and Dhruv Jurel.

could struggle.

It is an intriguing situation where Royals don't have one big overseas batting heavyweight like Jos Buttler and their Indian bowling assortment comprising Tushar Deshpande and Sandeep Sharma also doesn't inspire confidence. Royals also do not have a quality spinner to exploit the Barsapara track.

In a nutshell, CSK is slightly ahead in a battle of two weak teams.

Teams:

Chennai Super Kings: Raturaj Gaikwad (c), MS Dhoni, Ravindra Jadeja, Shivam Dube, Matheesha Pathirana, Noor Ahmad, Ravichandran Ashwin, Devon Conway, Syed Khaleel Ahmed, Rachin Ravindra, Rahul Tripathi, Vijay Shankar, Sam Curran, Shaik Rashid, Anshul Kamboj, Mukesh Choudhary, Deepak Hooda, Gurjanpreet Singh, Nathan Ellis, Jamie Overton, Kamlesh Nagarkoti, Ramakrishnan Ghosh, Shreyas Gopal, Vansh Bedi, Andre Sid-darth.

Rajasthan Royals: Riyan Parag (stand-in captain), Sanju Samson, Shubham Dubey, Vaibhav Suryavanshi, Kunal Rathore, Shimron Hetmyer, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Dhruv Jurel, Nitish Rana, Yuvraj Singh, Jofra Archer, Maheesh Theekshana, Wanindu Hasaranga, Akash Madhwal, Kumar Kartikeya Singh, Tushar Deshpande, Fazalhaq Farooqi, Kwen Maphaka, Ashok Sharma, Sandeep Sharma.

Match starts at 7.30 pm. (PTI)

Delhi Capitals eye second win as KL Rahul returns against wounded Sunrisers



VISAKHAPATNAM, March 29: Fresh from their morale-boosting win over LSG and bolstered by the return of India wicketkeeper-batter KL Rahul, Delhi Capitals will look to build on the momentum when they take on formidable Sunrisers Hyderabad in the IPL here on Sunday.

After a thunderous start to their campaign, SRH lost to Lucknow Super Giants by five wickets on Thursday as the defeat showed that their explosive batting line-up can be reined in.

Going out of their den, the pressure will be on skipper Pat Cummins to inspire a turnaround.

Delhi, on the other hand, will be strengthened by the return of Rahul, who missed the season opener against LSG due to the birth of his first child.

A key architect of India's Champions Trophy triumph in Dubai earlier this month, Rahul was picked by Delhi Capitals for ₹ 14 crore. Despite his experience, he chose not to lead the side, entrusting the responsibility on Axar Patel.

Once considered an all-format mainstay for India, Rahul was not a part of India's T20 World Cup-winning squad last year and struggled to impress during his IPL stint with LSG, leading to his non-retention.

His tense on-field exchange with Sanjiv Goenka, where the team owner looked visibly frustrated, became one of the talking points last season.

Rahul will be eager to let his performances do the talking in a fresh start at a new franchise.

"I've been out of the T20 team for a while. I know where I stand as a player, and I know what I need to do to get back. This IPL is an opportunity to rediscover my game and push for a return to the T20 squad," Rahul had said recently.

He was seen training under India's assistant coach Abhishek Nayar in Mumbai before joining the Delhi Capitals camp here.

Rahul's return will give Delhi's top order, which struggled in the previous match, the much-needed stability.

Chasing 211, DC found themselves reeling at 65/5 before Ashutosh Sharma (66 not out off 31 balls) and Vipraj Nigam (39 at No. 8) scripted a thrilling one-wicket victory. Tristan Stubbs also played a handy knock of 34 at No. 6.

Beyond his batting, Rahul will be an integral part of the leadership group, providing crucial inputs to Patel, who is leading an IPL team for the first time.

DC have often struggled to close out games in recent seasons, and the hard-fought win over LSG should inject the much-needed belief in the squad.

Delhi boast of a formidable bowling attack, spearheaded by Mitchell Starc, whose face-off with fellow Australian Travis Head promises to be a key battle.

Starc, alongside Axar and Kuldeep Yadav, will be crucial in countering SRH's explosive opening pair of Abhishek Sharma and Head. Stubbs and Mohit Sharma can also provide crucial breakthroughs towards the end.

SRH announced their intent with 286/6 in their season opener, with Ishan Kishan smashing a 47-ball 106 after Head (67 off 31 balls) and Abhishek Sharma (24 off 11) provided a fiery start.

However, they faltered in their second outing, managing just 190/9 against LSG.

Wicketkeeper-batter Heinrich Klaasen acknowledged the short-fall, stressing the importance of converting starts into substantial totals.

"A score of 210-220 would have been par on the wicket. Overall, we just didn't put enough runs on the board," Klaasen admitted. "Losing wickets at crucial moments disrupted our momentum. We need to ensure that doesn't happen frequently."

SRH's bowling attack, led by Mohammed Shami, Cummins, and Harshal Patel, remains potent but was found wanting against LSG.

Cummins, in particular, had an off day, averaging 15 runs per over. The Australian captain will be keen to bounce back and lead from the front.

Teams:

Sunrisers Hyderabad: Pat Cummins (c), Ishan Kishan (wk), Atharva Taide, Abhinav Manohar, Aniket Verma, Sachin Baby, Heinrich Klaasen, Travis Head, Harshal Patel, Kamindu Mendis, Wiaan Mulder, Abhishek Sharma, Nitish Kumar Reddy, Mohammed Shami, Rahul Chahar, Adam Zampa, Sameer Rizvi, Ashutosh Sharma, Darshan Nalkande, Vipraj Nigam, Ajay Mandal, Manvath Kumar, Tripurana Vijay, Madhav Tiwari, Mitchell Starc, T Natarajan, Mohit Sharma, Mukesh Kumar, Dushmantha Chameera, Kuldeep Yadav.

Delhi Capitals: Axar Patel (c), KL Rahul (wk), Jake Fraser-McGurk, Karun Nair, Faf du Plessis, Donovan Ferreira, Abhishek Porel (wk), Tristan Stubbs (wk), Sameer Rizvi, Ashutosh Sharma, Darshan Nalkande, Vipraj Nigam, Ajay Mandal, Manvath Kumar, Tripurana Vijay, Madhav Tiwari, Mitchell Starc, T Natarajan, Mohit Sharma, Mukesh Kumar, Dushmantha Chameera, Kuldeep Yadav.

Match starts: 3.30pm. (PTI)

CSK always make pitches as per their strengths, so it's surprising: Pujara on Fleming comment

CHENNAI, March 29: Indian Test legend Cheteshwar Pujara believes that Chennai Super Kings is "one franchise" that has always prepared tracks at the Chepauk as per its strengths and hence finds it difficult to digest head coach Stephen Fleming's comment of "not having any home advantage". CSK suffered their heaviest home defeat while chasing, losing by 50 runs to Rajat Patidar-led Royal Challengers Bengaluru.

Pujara, who was with the franchise for a season in 2021, also indicated that CSK middle-order comprising Deepak Hooda, Shivam Dube, Sam Curran and Mahendra Singh Dhoni might have to shoulder more responsibility. "At CSK, you can't complain. It's one franchise where they've been preparing pitches according to their strengths. If he's (Fleming) saying that [there is no home advantage], they don't have a say, then I'm quite surprised," Pujara told ESPN-Cricinfo.

Pujara said that the legacy franchises like Mumbai Indians, Chennai Super Kings and Kolkata Knight Riders always get what they want in terms of conditions.

Incidentally, even KKR management is reportedly unhappy as Eden Gardens curator Sujun Mukherjee has refused to provide them with a surface where their main weapon Varun Chakravarthy was clobbered for 43 runs in four overs in the match against RCB.

"If you speak about MI, CSK, KKR - I don't think that's the case [them not getting pitches they ask for]. Any other franchise, I can still understand. Those (three) franchises make sure they get what they want. Their strength has been when they play at home."

The man who has 7000-plus Test runs didn't beat around the bush when he indicated that CSK batting might just lack firepower, which could be dangerous in a marathon tourney like the IPL.

"There is a lot of concern in the batting line-up outside of Rachin Ravindra, Raturaj Gaikwad because their middle-order will have to click at some point," Pujara said.

Since the CSK template is to either chase targets in the range of 150-160 or defending totals in the vicinity of 170, Pujara believes that a shift in playing philosophy is the need of the hour even if it means scoring at a quicker clip.

"They will have to start scoring runs quickly. They rely heavily on their middle-order. Yes, their top-order is their strength, but when they don't perform well that's the time the middle-order has to step up, it doesn't look like they're completely ready for it. (PTI)

Balance of RCB squad is 10 times better than previous seasons: AB de Villiers

CHENNAI, March 29: With Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) off to one of their best starts in the IPL, retired South African great AB de Villiers feels that the balance of the team looks "10 times better" than the previous editions and the head-start it has got will make the job easier going forward.

Led by Rajat Patidar, RCB crushed five-time IPL champions Chennai Super Kings by 50 runs at Chepauk on Friday to win their second straight away game. It was also RCB's first win against CSK in Chennai since the inaugural edition in 2008.

"The balance of the RCB squad is 10 times better compared to previous seasons," the Bengaluru franchise loyalist said on his podcast 'AB de Villiers 360'.

"At the (IPL) auction (last year), I spoke about RCB needing balance. It's not about the bowlers, batters or fielders... it's about having a sound balance in IPL teams and options," said the South African great, who played almost all his IPL for RCB. With India swing bowler Bhuvneshwar Kumar drafted into the side for the CSK game after not finding a place in the opening match against defending champions Kolkata Knight Riders, de Villiers said, it's the depth in options, which make RCB a formidable side this season.

"I saw Bhuvu and thought 'he wasn't going to play and he came in'. That's what you want. You want guys like 'wow is this guy the replacement'. He's not even in the starting lineup in the first game (vs KKR) and now they are getting Bhuvu Kumar to replace someone in the second game. This is the kind



of balance and depth you need in the side," added de Villiers.

Kumar's crucial wicket of the dangerous Deepak Hooda in Power Play left CSK reeling at 3/26, from where they never recovered and finally managed 146/8, chasing 197 for victory.

"Great start for RCB and it really is looking good. We are not going into the space of, 'Is this the year (RCB will win the IPL)?"

"But I do believe this is the best start RCB have ever had, not only from the results point of view but also from the way the squad looks and how free they look out there especially playing away from home," said de Villiers who last played in the IPL in 2021 edition.

Both of RCB's wins this season

so far have been in opponents' territory -- vs KKR in Kolkata and vs CSK in Chepauk -- and de Villiers said it was truly amazing.

"The defending champions, KKR... to beat them away from home at the star of the campaign, and also CSK whose record at Chepauk, is absolutely incredible. From here, the road actually gets easier for RCB as we look at the points table. RCB are right on top; the only team with two wins and a fantastic bat run rate."

De Villiers said the scheduling was really tough for RCB but they had shown the gumption to take everything in their stride.

"The start of a campaign is never easy but they did it absolutely spot on. Look at that 'away, away, now

All India players who competed in last three ICC events, deserve respect: Rohit

NEW DELHI, March 29: Rohit Sharma says the Indian team has endured cricket's vicissitudes in the last nine months but it waged a collective battle to achieve success and every member of the side that competed in the last three ICC tournaments deserves "respect".

In their last three ICC limited-overs tournaments, India have lost only one out of 24 matches, with the defeat coming against Australia in the 2023 ODI World Cup final in Ahmedabad.

The India team recently won the ICC Champions Trophy and the T20 World Cup at home last year.

In between a India lost rare home Test series against New Zealand and away in Australia.

Reflecting on his remarkable tenure as India captain, Rohit said: "Look at what this team has achieved in this big three tournaments. After playing the tournament like that and getting defeated only once and that too in a final (2023 ODI World Cup)."

"But imagine if we had won that as well to go undefeated in three ICC tournaments is crazy, never heard of but I will take this, 23 wins in 24 games is unheard of. It looks very nice from the outside but the team has gone through a lot of ups and downs.

"We had some really tough times as well but that is when you got to celebrate. If you do things like this you got to celebrate. I feel all the people who played these three tournaments, they deserve respect," Rohit



said in a video posted by Mumbai Indians on their 'X' page.

Interestingly, Rohit's interview has come on the day when BCCI top brass was due to sit the future roadmap for the side but somehow the meeting has been postponed.

"It's for any sportsman who are going through something and there is a low, they want to fight back, bounce back and try and make it whatever is front of you into a high.

"And thereafter we had a little bit of low

where we lost a home series and we didn't play well in Australia and then came the Champions Trophy. These nine months are perfect example of how life is, it is always going to be up and down."

Rohit said the journey to glory and the change in mindset started in 2022 after India crashed out in the semifinal of the T20 World Cup in Australia.

"But thereafter we made a lot of things clear with the players that this is what we expect from you and this how we want you to play. So there was lot of clarity, a lot of conversations with the players to perform."

"There needs to be a freedom amongst the group so that they go out and play without any fear. There were few lows, a few series that we lost but we never panicked and we never went away from our thought process."

"When you are building a squad the first thing that you need to put in front of you is what does the team want? Where did we lack in the previous series, previous tournaments? Why did we not get the results?"

Reflecting on a forgettable 2024 IPL, where Mumbai Indians finished last, Rohit said every sportsman needs to have determination to bounce back. He said he was focussed to end his career in the shortest format which he did after the T20 World Cup triumph.

India defeated South Africa by 7 runs in Barbados to win the trophy.

"...that is where as a sportsman you need

to show a little bit of grit, determination to comeback from the low. It (2024 IPL) was a low for the team and I think we didn't play our best cricket also and there were so many things after IPL to look forward to.

"I knew there was a World Cup coming up and I had to shift my focus to the World Cup, knowing that this is going to be my last T20 World Cup. So I really wanted to make it count, and obviously I knew without the help of other players it is not going to be possible. So we just got around as a group and there was a lot of collective performance from everyone throughout the tournament," Rohit said.

"My career for 17-18 years has always been up and down, which has taught me so many things in life, and these nine months were no different," he said.

Talking about his journey with MI, the dashing opener said: "Obviously, since the time I started till now a lot of things have changed because I used to bat middle-order then, now I am opening the batting. I was captain then (MI), now I am not the captain. There were a few teammates with whom I won championships, they are not there, they are in the coaching role now."

"So, the roles have changed, a lot of things have changed but the mindset has not changed. What I want to do for this team has not changed, just to go out there and win games and trophies, that is what MI is known for all these years." (PTI)