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India looks at ways to navigate Trump's reciprocal tariff

NEW DELHI, March 5: With US President Donald Trump's threat of reciprocal tariff stoking fears of a global trade war, India is looking at finding an amicable solution to the challenge under the broader framework of a trade deal with Washington.

In his latest salvo, the US president, while addressing a joint session of the Congress on Tuesday, mentioned India alongside the European Union, China and Canada for charging higher tariffs on American products.

In line with his "America First" policy, Trump announced during the speech reciprocal tariffs from April 2 on numerous trading partners and nations that impose higher levies on imports from the United States.

He said other countries have used tariffs against the US for decades and now, it is "our turn" to start using them against those nations.

"On average, the European Union, China, Brazil, India, Mexico and Canada -- have you heard of them? And countless other nations charge us tremendously higher tariffs than we charge them," Trump said.

He added: "It is very unfair. India charges us auto tariffs higher than 100 per cent. China's average tariff on our products is twice what we charge them. And South Korea's average tariff is four times higher." India is confident of finding a solution, people familiar with the

matter said while referring to the commitment expressed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Trump during their February 13 talks in Washington DC.

At the meeting, the two sides agreed to negotiate a mega trade deal by the end of this year and set an ambitious target of USD 500 billion in annual trade by 2030 to narrow the trade deficit. "Recognising that this level of ambition would require new, fair-trade terms, the leaders announced plans to negotiate the first tranche of a mutually beneficial, multi-sector Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA) by fall of 2025," a joint statement on the Modi-Trump talks said.

To advance this innovative, wide-ranging BTA, the US and India will take an integrated approach to strengthen and deepen the bilateral trade across the goods and services sector, and work towards increasing market access, reducing tariff and non-tariff barriers, and deepening supply-chain integration, it said.

Both sides made firm commitment to boost the overall trade and India hopes that a mutually-beneficial outcome will emerge on the issue of tariffs, the people cited above said as New Delhi looks at navigating the trade landscape with the Trump administration. Commerce minister Piyush Goyal is in Washington this week to hold talks with his American (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

KA has 15 illegal rat-hole mines: Minister

Govt seized over 25,630 tonnes of illegal coal in last 3 years, House told ● Over 263 illegal rat hole coal mines detected in state

GUWAHATI, March 5: The Assam government on Wednesday said that at least 263 illegal rat-hole coal mines have been detected in the central part of the state under the jurisdiction of two autonomous councils.

The government also informed the assembly that it has seized over 25,630 tonnes of illegal coal in the last three years.

In a written reply to a query from Independent MLA Akhil Gogoi, Mines and Minerals minister Kaushik Rai said that 248 rat-hole mines have been found in North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council (NCHAC), comprising Dima Hasao district.

In Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council, comprising East Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong districts, 15 such rat-hole mines



have been found, he added.

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) had banned rat-hole mining in 2014. However, coal is still extracted through this dangerous

method in the Northeast.

Rai further said that coal is extracted in Dibrugarh, Tinsukia and Charaideo districts as well, but did not share details of rat-hole mining

in those areas. At least nine labourers were trapped inside the illegal 3-Kilo Coal Quarry in Umrangso area on January 6 after a sudden gush of water flooded the site. Partially decomposed bodies of all miners were retrieved after several days from the rat-hole mine.

Rai, in a reply to a separate query from AIUDF MLA Ashraf Hussain, said that the government has seized 25,631.98 tonnes of illegally mined and transported coal from different parts of the state in the last three years.

"The process of auctioning the coal through a legal system is underway... We have taken steps to prevent illegal coal mining in the state. A monitoring committee was also formed under the leadership of the DGP to check such illegal activities," he added. (PTI)

Assembly turns spotlight on 'D' voters, Oppn seeks closure of detention centre

GUWAHATI, March 5: Highlighting the plight of the 'D' (Doubtful) voters, the opposition on Wednesday demanded closure of Assam's sole detention centre, now called a transit camp, and tabling of the NRC report in the Assembly.

During a discussion on the contentious issue, AIUDF MLA Aminul Islam claimed that lakhs of people were declared 'D' voters without officials visiting their homes and proper verification.

"There are thousands of cases when only one person in a family is declared 'D' voter but his siblings and parents are still Indian

citizens. This has ruined so many families and shattered the dreams of thousands of youths," he added.

Islam demanded formation of an all-party team by the Speaker to study the conditions of the 'D' voters and living in the detention centre. "Even the Foreigners Tribunals have declared verdicts despite respondents submitting enough proof. These courts are very biased and justice is not done there," Islam said.

CPI(M) member Manoranjan Talukdar said the BJP had promised to close down the detention centre before coming to power, but it has not (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Borjan to get Sainik School, ₹ 4,000-crore solar project, says KAAC CEM



DIPHU, March 5: Chief Executive Member (CEM) of the Karbi Anglong

Autonomous Council (KAAC), Tuliram Ronghang, on Wednesday said that the people of the Borjan Member of Au-

tonomous Council (MAC) constituency are fortunate to receive two major centrally sponsored development schemes—the proposed Sainik School at Langvoku and a solar project that will provide job opportunities for local youths.

"When people in other MAC constituencies opposed the setting up of a Sainik School, the people of Borjan welcomed it. They are fortunate to receive two major central schemes—the establishment of the Sainik School at Langvoku and the solar project, which will create job opportunities for local youths," the CEM said while addressing a CEM interaction programme at Phang Adong LP School playground in Miji Kro village under the Borjan constituency on Wednesday.

Speaking on the solar project, Ronghang stated that (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Ruckus in Assembly over use of two controversial terms

GUWAHATI, March 5: The Assam assembly witnessed a ruckus on Wednesday as the ruling BJP and the opposition engaged in a war of words over the use of two controversial terms, leading to the adjournment of the House for a brief period.

Baghbor MLA Sherman Ali Ahmed, who has been suspended by the Congress, raised an issue related to the sub-divisional agricultural office of Alopatis in the Barpeta district during Question Hour.

While discussing the issue, he equated the "misleading replies" given by the officials to a particular word.

The word was expunged by Speaker Biswajit Daimary after BJP MLA Rupiyoti Kurmi objected to it.

After the Question Hour concluded, Kurmi again raised the issue and asked if Ahmed had said it as he belonged to a particular community.

While mentioning the community, the BJP MLA uttered a pejorative term used for Bengali-speaking Muslims in the state.

This led to a strong protest from the entire opposition with MLAs of the Congress, AIUDF, CPI(M) and Rajior Dal demanding an apology from Kurmi.

The speaker immediately expunged the word, but it failed to pacify the opposition MLAs.

Daimary then adjourned the House for 15 minutes.

As soon as the House reassembled, Ahmed again raised the word stated by Kurmi and demanded an apology from him.

"It's a racial word. How can an MLA use such a word to target an entire community? This should be reprimanded," Leader of the Opposition Debaratra Saikia of the Congress said. As opposition benches continued to protest, Deputy Speaker Numal Momin expunged all mentions of the two words, which finally brought the House to order. (PTI)

Nearly 83,000 hectare of Assam's land encroached upon by four states: Bora

GUWAHATI, March 5: Nearly 83,000 hectare of land belonging to Assam has been encroached upon by four neighbouring states, Border Protection and Development Minister Atul Bora told the assembly on Wednesday.

Responding to a question by Congress MLA Reibuddin Ahmed, Bora said 82,751.86 hectare of land across 18 districts have been encroached upon by Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Meghalaya and Mizoram. The highest area of 59,490.21 hectare is in the possession of Nagaland. Meghalaya has encroached upon 3,441.86 hectare of land, the least among the four states, he said. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Language reflection of nation's cultural identity: Nityananda Rai

GUWAHATI, March 5: Union minister Nityananda Rai on Wednesday stressed the role of language as the reflection of a nation's cultural identity, while emphasising the importance of Hindi both as an official language and a "unifying force in India's diverse linguistic landscape".

He was speaking at the Joint Regional Official Language Conference and Award Distribution Ceremony for the East and Northeast regions, organised by the Department of Official Language, Ministry of Home Affairs, at Sonapur, on the outskirts of Guwahati.

The Union Minister of State for Home Affairs highlighted the significance of the conference as a platform for encouraging the use of Hindi across government departments, offices and banks, an official statement said.

He said that government schemes and initiatives must be effectively communicated to all citizens, ensuring equal access and benefits, and underscored the importance of fostering a strong connection between the government and the public through the use of familiar languages, reinforcing Hindi's role in this endeavour.

Rai emphasised the importance of Hindi as both an official language and a "unifying force in India's diverse linguistic landscape".

The minister maintained that language is not just a means of communication but the reflection of a nation's cultural identity.

He elaborated on various initiatives taken by the government to promote Hindi and other Indian languages, including the launch of the 'Kanthasth' translation tool in 2018 and the emphasis on mother tongues in the National Education Policy of 2020.

Rai also stressed the need to integrate Hindi and other Indian languages with technology, ensuring wider accessibility and efficiency. Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, who was also present on the occasion, termed Hindi a symbol of national unity. He said that despite India's linguistic diversity, Hindi serves as a vital link connecting different regions.

He praised the Ministry of Home Affairs for its efforts in advancing translation software and integrating Hindi into modern technological platforms, calling for even greater inclusion of Hindi in governance and administrative functions. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

B'desh got 'no official response' from India on Hasina's extradition request: Yunus

DHAKA, March 5: Bangladesh interim government's Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus has said that Dhaka had sent "formal letters" to India seeking deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina's extradition but received "no official response" from New Delhi.

In an interview with UK-based Sky News, Yunus said Hasina will stand trial for "crimes against humanity", the state-run BSS news agency reported. Hasina, 77, has been living in India since August 5 last year, when she fled Bangladesh following a massive student-led protest that toppled her Awami League's 16-year regime.

Bangladesh's International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) has issued arrest warrants for Hasina and several former Cabinet ministers, advisers, and military and civil officials for "crimes against humanity and genocide".

"A trial will be taking place. Not



only against her, but also all the people associated with her - her family members, her clients or associates," Yunus said.

Bangladesh has issued two arrest warrants for her.

Yunus said they had sent "formal letters" but received "no official response" from New Delhi.

Last year, India confirmed receiving the 'note verbale' or diplomatic communication from the Bangladesh High Commission in New Delhi but refrained from com-

menting on it.

Yunus insisted, however, that Hasina would face the court, whether physically present in Bangladesh or in absentia, in India.

Yunus said he was beyond shocked at what he saw at one of the now infamous secret jails, code-named the 'House of Mirrors', during his visit to the facility. "This is just the ugliest thing that you can see, you can feel, or you can observe," he said. Hasina is accused of using her security forces and police to oversee the abduction, torture and murder of hundreds of activists.

She denies the allegations and says she is being politically persecuted. Hasina, her close aides and many of those accused of overseeing a network of as many as 800 secret jails have fled Bangladesh, the agency said.

Yunus said the number and range of people involved in the alleged crimes was "taking time" to work through. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

'We must ensure that businesses at every scale actively participate in this scheme' Day not far when India will be USD 5 trillion economy, says PM Modi

NEW DELHI, March 5: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday said that the day is not far when India will turn a USD 5 trillion economy as he urged all stakeholders to invest in people, economy, and innovation to create jobs and boost growth.

Speaking in a post-Budget webinar on employment, Modi said the government has provided skill training to 3 crore youth since 2014 and decided to upgrade 1,000 ITIs and set up five centres of excellence.

Referring to an IMF report of February 2025, Modi noted that between 2015 and 2025, India grew by 66 per cent, making the country a USD 3.8 trillion economy.

Observing that the country's growth surpassed that of several major economies, he said "the day is not far when India will become a USD 5 trillion

economy." He also stressed the importance of making right investments in the right direction to continue expanding the economy.

Modi underlined the critical role of implementing budget announcements in achieving this vision and acknowledged the significant contributions of all stakeholders.

He stated that capacity building and talent nurturing act as the foundation stone for national development and in the next phase of growth, greater investment in these sectors is essential.

"The vision of 'investment in people' stands on three pillars -- education, healthcare, and skill development," he said adding that today, India's education system is undergoing a transformation.

He said this year's Budget serves as a blueprint for India's



future, and that investments have been prioritized equally across infrastructure, industries, people, economy, and innovation. Modi highlighted the PM Internship Scheme that was launched to provide new opportunities and practical skills to youth.

"We must ensure that businesses at every scale actively participate in this scheme. In this year's Budget, we announced 10,000 additional medical seats, with a target of adding 75,000 seats in the medical field over the next 5 years," Modi also talked about the

government's decision to give infrastructure status to the tourism sector, saying that it will generate jobs for youth. He urged industry to invest in the healthcare sector and also talked about the potential of medical tourism to create jobs.

Modi also emphasized the establishment of daycare cancer centres and the development of digital healthcare infrastructure to ensure quality healthcare reaches the last mile.

Modi highlighted that the tourism sector has the potential to contribute up to 10 per cent to India's GDP and create employment opportunities for crores of youth.

"50 destinations across the country will be developed with a focus on tourism," said the Prime Minister adding that granting infrastructure status to hotels in these destinations will enhance (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Women forced to mortgage their gold jewellery under Modi govt: Kharage

NEW DELHI, March 5: Congress president Mallikarjun Kharage on Wednesday attacked Prime Minister Narendra Modi over rise in gold loans and said his remarks during the Lok Sabha polls campaign about 'stealing of mangalsutras' have come true with women forced to mortgage their gold ornaments under his rule.

Citing media reports, Kharage claimed that between 2019 and 2024, four crore women mortgaged their gold and took a loan of ₹ 4.7 lakh crore.

In 2024, 38 per cent of the total loans taken by women are from gold loans, he said.

In February 2025, RBI data showed that gold loans increased by a whopping 71.3 per cent in a year, the Congress chief said.

"Narendra Modi ji, you had talked about 'stealing of mangalsutras'. That has now come true. In your rule, women have been forced to mortgage their gold ornaments. First you made women's 'stri-dhan' disappear by implementing demonetization, now due to inflation and falling household savings, they are forced to mortgage their most valuable thing -- their jewelry," Kharage

said in his post in Hindi on X.

During the Lok Sabha polls campaign last year, Modi had alleged that the Congress will take away 'mangalsutras' and redistribute the wealth of the people.

Kharage alleged that the Modi government has worsened the condition of the economy so much that middle class families who buy two-wheelers are now unable to repay their loans.

In view of rising loan defaults, two-wheeler financiers are cutting down on lending for the first time since 2019, he claimed.

He said 75 per cent of people buy two-wheelers on loan so that they can repay it slowly, but the financial crunch is so severe that as compared to last year, loans worth about ₹ 2 lakh crore are still outstanding till September 2024, which has increased by ₹ 40,000 crore in a year.

Two-wheeler sales have declined by 6 per cent in February 2025, Kharage added.

"Recession, financial crunch and reduction in spending capacity - this is the essence of the economy you run," Kharage said, hitting out at the prime minister. (PTI)

Sensex surges over 900 points; regains 73k-level in afternoon trade

MUMBAI, March 5: Equity benchmark index Sensex reclaimed the crucial 73,000-mark by jumping over 900 points, and the Nifty was trading above the 22,000 level in afternoon trade on a flurry of buying by investors amid a strong rally in Asian markets.

Moreover, stocks in the Asia Pacific region traded on a positive note on Wednesday on the back of a tariff relief signal, after President Donald Trump sparked a global selloff, market experts said.

The 30-share BSE Sensex benchmark zoomed 943.87 points or 1.29 per cent to 73,933.80 at 1245 hours in afternoon trade. On the similar lines, the NSE Nifty appreciated by 312.25 points or 1.41 per cent to 22,394.90.

From the Sensex pack, Adani Ports, Power Grid, Mahindra & Mahindra, NTPC, Tech Mahindra, Tata Steel, Tata Motors, Bharti Airtel, Asian Paints, HCL Technologies, Infosys, Reliance Industries and Kotak Mahindra Bank were among the gainers.

On the other hand, Bajaj Finance, HDFC Bank, IndusInd Bank and Zomato were the only laggards.

Meanwhile, India's services sector activity witnessed a sharp uptick in February boosted by improving domestic and international demand, which resulted in a quicker expansion in output and a



substantial increase in employment, a monthly survey said on Wednesday.

The seasonally adjusted HSBC India Services PMI Business Activity Index rose from January's 26-month low of 56.5 to 59.0 in February, indicating a sharp rate of expansion.

"India's services business activity index rose to 59.0 in February 2025, up considerably from January's 26-month low of 56.5. Global demand, which grew at its fastest pace in six months according to the new export business index, played a major role in driving output growth for India's services sector," said Pranjul Bhandari, Chief India Economist at HSBC.

In Asian markets, Tokyo, Shanghai, and Seoul ended higher, while Hong Kong is trading in the positive zone.

US markets ended lower on Tuesday.

"US equity markets closed lower in a volatile trading session on Tuesday as new US tariffs took effect. The benchmark S&P 500 suffered its worst day of this year after the US tariffs were confirmed," Devarsh Vakil, Head of Prime Research, HDFC Securities, said.

On Tuesday, the 30-share BSE barometer closed at 72,989.93, down by 96.01 points. Extending the losses for the 10th straight session, the 50-share Nifty of NSE fell by 36.65 points to close at 22,082.65.

"Losses in Indian markets were limited compared to global and Asian peers, which saw a significant sell-off after Donald Trump confirmed tariffs on Canada, Mexico, and China. Small-cap stocks

bounced back sharply after facing severe selling pressure, while mid-cap stocks ended the session with mild gains," Vakil said, adding "Nifty is highly oversold and due for a bounce".

On the other hand, Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth ₹ 3,405.82 crore on Tuesday, according to exchange data.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude rose by 0.07 per cent to USD 71.09 a barrel.

On the global front, President Donald Trump launched a trade war Tuesday against America's three biggest trading partners, drawing immediate retaliation from Mexico, Canada and China.

Later in the day, Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick said the US would likely meet Canada and Mexico "in the middle," with an announcement coming as soon as Wednesday. Lutnick told a news channel that the tariffs would not be paused, but that Trump would reach a compromise, as per media reports.

Trump also criticised the high tariffs charged by India and other countries including China, calling it "very unfair" and announcing reciprocal tariffs will kick in from next month.

In his address to a Joint Session of the US Congress, the president said that the reciprocal tariffs will commence April 2. (PTI)

Nothing launches Phone (3a) and Phone (3a) Pro in India

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 5: Nothing has expanded its smartphone lineup with the launch of the Phone (3a) and Phone (3a) Pro, bringing significant upgrades in design, camera, performance, and battery life, said an official statement here on Wednesday.

The new series builds on the success of the Phone (2a) and introduces advanced camera technology, a more responsive display, and the latest Nothing OS 3.1, all powered by the Snapdragon 7s Gen 3 processor.

The design of both models has been refined with an upgraded glass back panel, improved symmetry, and enhanced visual details. The IP64 rating ensures better durability, offering protection against dust and water splashes.

On the camera front, Nothing has introduced its most advanced system yet. The Phone (3a) comes with a 50MP main sensor and a Sony ultra-wide sensor, marking the first time an optical zoom feature has been included in a Nothing device.

Its telephoto camera has a 50MP sensor with a fast f/2.0 aperture, allowing for 2x optical zoom and up to 4x lossless in-sensor zoom, further enhanced by AI algorithms for 30x ultra zoom.

The Phone (3a) Pro takes things

further with a periscope zoom camera, featuring a 1/1.95-inch Sony LYTIA 600 sensor and a 70mm equivalent focal length. With optical image stabilization (OIS) and a 3x optical zoom, it ensures high-quality images in various lighting conditions.

The Pro model's 50MP sensor supports up to 6x lossless zoom, with AI-powered ultra zoom reaching 60x.

For selfies, the Phone (3a) features a 32MP front camera, while the Phone (3a) Pro steps up with a 50MP front camera capable of recording 4K videos with adaptive AI stabilization and night video enhancement.

Both phones are powered by the Snapdragon 7s Gen 3 Mobile Platform, delivering improved performance with 92% better AI processing compared to the previous model.

The RAM Booster feature allows access to up to 20GB of RAM, while a 4,500 mm² vapor chamber reduces temperatures by 23% for better heat management.

Battery life sees an improvement with 5000mAh batteries in both models, providing up to two days of usage on a single charge.

Fast charging has been upgraded to 50W, enabling users to get 50% charge in under 20 minutes.

The display is a 6.77-inch Full

HD+ panel with a 120Hz adaptive refresh rate, ensuring smooth scrolling and gameplay.

With a 1000Hz touch sampling rate in Gaming Mode, response times are enhanced. Brightness levels have been increased to 1300 nits automatically, with a peak brightness of 3000 nits, which is 131% brighter than the Phone (2a).

Running on Nothing OS 3.1 based on Android 15, the new devices are designed for speed, stability, and customization.

Updates to Nothing Gallery, Camera, and Weather apps have been introduced.

Nothing promises three years of Android updates and six years of security updates for the Phone (3a) series.

A key software addition is Essential Space, an AI-powered hub for organising notes, ideas, and inspirations.

Integrated with the new Essential Key, users can capture and send content, record voice notes, or access saved content with simple clicks.

"With these advancements, the Phone (3a) and Phone (3a) Pro aim to redefine the mid-range smartphone segment, offering a powerful mix of premium features and AI-driven enhancements," the statement asserted.

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Borjan to get Sainik School

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

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

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

He stated that Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma had identified Karbi Anglong as a potential location for a biogas plant to be set up by Reliance. Speaking on the proposed biogas plant, the CEM explained that it would run on grass, which could be cultivated by villagers.

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

He also highlighted the financial prospects for local farmers, stating that if grass for the biogas plant is cultivated, the income per bigha could reach ₹ 50,000 annually. For 20 hectares of land, the estimated annual income could be around ₹ 12 lakhs. "The company will provide seeds free of cost and offer technical support for grass cultivation," he added. Ronghang also criticised opposition leaders for opposing the KAAC's efforts to implement various central and state-sponsored welfare schemes.

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

Assembly turns spotlight

done so and continues the facility in Goalpara district of Assam. "All Indians languishing at the centre should be immediately released and the foreigners should be deported. The detention centre should be demolished. Many decisions are taken ex-parte there and the Supreme Court has also questioned this," he added. Independent MLA Akhli Gogoi drew the attention of the House that not only Hindus and Muslims were declared as 'D' voters, but people from the Nepali, Koch-Rajbongshi, Hajong, Garo and Rabha communities were also put under the category. "This entire problem would have been sorted out if the National Register of Citizens (NRC) were completed. The NRC found who was Indian and who was not. But it is just lying. If the NRC is wrong, please rectify it. The final NRC was released on August 31, 2019 by excluding 19,06,657 people. However, it has not been notified by the Registrar General of India yet, leaving the document without any official validity. "I request the government to table the NRC in the Assembly. Then we can recommend it to the Centre and settle this foreigner issue permanently," he added.

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

"The biggest hurdle in deporting the foreigners is the absence of an extradition treaty with Bangladesh. So, I feel an Assembly resolution should be adopted requesting the Centre to sign a treaty with the neighbouring nation," he added. Citing examples, Congress legislator Nurul Huda said thousands of Indian citizens have been suffering in the detention centre for years.

"People are dying inside the centre, but their bodies are not sent to Bangladesh. These are handed over to the relatives in Assam for the last rites. If they were Bangladeshis, why don't you send them to that country?" he questioned the government. In a written reply on Monday, the CM said there are 1,18,134 'D' voters at present in Assam as informed by the Election Department.

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

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Chandra Mohan Patowary said that no one has been kept at the transit camp without the orders of the FTs. "We keep the detainees after they are declared foreigners. We keep them till deportation takes place. Also, the 'D' voter concept was introduced not by the government or police. It was done by the Election Commission and they issued the guidelines for terming someone as a 'D' voter," he added.

The concept of 'D' voters was introduced in Assam in 1997 by the EC. It prepared a list including those who could not provide evidence in favour of their Indian nationality. D voters do not exist anywhere else in India. The issue of D-voters is one of the most contentious topics in Assam's political and social sphere. Several elections have been fought and won over this single issue of illegal Bangladeshi immigrants, who are initially marked as D-voters if their names are found in the electoral rolls. Deletion or regularisation of a D-voter is done as per orders of the Foreigners Tribunals and the subsequent judgements by higher courts. (PTI)

India looks at ways to navigate

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

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

In the financial year 2023-24, the US was the third-largest source of foreign direct investment (FDI) in India with inflows of USD 4.99 billion. According to a CII study released in April 2023, 163 Indian companies had invested over USD 40 billion in the US and created over 4.25 lakh direct jobs. Trump's policy on tariffs has triggered global concerns and stoked fears of a larger trade war. His 25 per cent tariffs on imports from Canada and Mexico came into effect on Tuesday. In addition, the US president has also doubled the 10 per cent tariff he announced on Chinese imports in February. It now stands at 20 per cent. (PTI)

Language reflection of nation's

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

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

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

B'desh got 'no official response'

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

Nearly 83,000 hectare of Assam's

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

Day not far when India will

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

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

Modi noted the provision of 10,000 research fellowships at IITs and IISc, which will foster research and provide opportunities for talented youth. (PTI)

Levi's names Diljit Dosanjh as Global Brand Ambassador

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 5: Levi's has announced Diljit Dosanjh as its newest global brand ambassador, making him the first Punjabi artist to join the iconic denim label's growing community of creative talent.

The collaboration marks a fusion of music, fashion, and culture, reflecting the shared ethos of self-expression that both Dosanjh and Levi's embody.

Amisha Jain, managing director and SVP, South Asia, Middle East, Africa, and Non-EU at Levi Strauss & Co., emphasised the significance of this partnership, calling Diljit a perfect fit for the brand's progressive spirit.

She highlighted his phenomenal journey in music and cinema, aligning with Levi's mission to empower individuals through their unique style and creativity.

The announcement follows a landmark year for Dosanjh, who made history with his record-breaking debut at Coachella. The partnership aims to blend Levi's timeless appeal with Diljit's contemporary influence, reinforcing the brand's reputation as a canvas for cultural expression.

Diljit, known for his genre-defying music and boundary-pushing style, expressed his excitement about the collaboration.

"I've always admired Levi's for the way it blends heritage with modern style. Denim is more than just clothing to me—it's a statement. Partnering with Levi's feels like the perfect fit," he said.

Drawing inspiration from his cross-cultural influence, the collaboration also highlights Levi's expanding menswear collection, including the latest New Loose and Relaxed fits. With the success of his Dil-Luminati Tour merchandise, the partnership seamlessly merges music and fashion, reinforcing Dosanjh's status as a global style icon.

As Levi's and Diljit embark on this new journey together, the collaboration is set to redefine culture, style, and music, creating an iconic fusion of tradition and modernity.

India's services sector growth sees sharp uptick in Feb : PMI

NEW DELHI, March 5: India's services sector activity witnessed a sharp uptick in February boosted by improving domestic and international demand, which resulted in a quicker expansion in output and a substantial increase in employment, a monthly survey said on Wednesday. The seasonally adjusted HSBC India Services PMI Business Activity Index rose from January's 26-month low of 56.5 to 59.0 in February, indicating a sharp rate of expansion. In the Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) parlance, a print above 50 means expansion, while a score below 50 denotes contraction.

"India's services business activity index rose to 59.0 in February 2025, up considerably from January's 26-month low of 56.5. Global demand, which grew at its fastest pace in six months according to the new export business index, played a major role in driving output growth for India's services sector," said Pranjul Bhandari, Chief India

Economist at HSBC.

According to the survey, productivity gains, favourable underlying demand and greater intake of new business. Moreover, gains in international orders supported this uptick in growth, with service providers reporting better demand from clients in Africa, Asia, Europe, the Americas and the Middle East, the survey said.

In order to accommodate for rising new business and alleviate capacity pressures, Indian services firms continued to pursue recruitment drives. Employment expanded sharply, and at one of the fastest rates seen since data collection began in December 2005.

"Job creation and charge inflation remained strong during February. Looking ahead, business sentiment remains broadly positive, but did slightly slip last month to its lowest level since August 2024," Bhandari said.

Advertising, better customer relations, efficiency gains and



healthy demand conditions all underpinned upbeat projections for output in the year ahead. Around one-quarter of survey members forecast growth in the year ahead, while fewer than 2 per cent were pessimistic. Meanwhile, the HSBC India Composite Output Index rose from 57.7 to 58.8, indicating a substantial rate of expansion.

Composite PMI indices are weighted averages of comparable manufacturing and services PMI indices. Weights reflect the relative size of the manufacturing and service sectors, according to official GDP data. At the composite level, payroll numbers expanded at a marked pace that was little

changed from January's survey record, while cost pressures across the private sector were at their least intense since last October, the survey said.

The HSBC India Services PMI is compiled by S&P Global from responses to questionnaires sent to a panel of around 400 service sector companies.

On the domestic macroeconomic front, the Indian economy grew by 6.2 per cent in the December quarter, recovering sequentially from seven-quarter lows, but the expansion came in lower than last year. For the full 2024-25 fiscal (April 2024 to March 2025), the government now pegs GDP growth at 6.5 per cent, marginally higher than its initial estimate of 6.4 per cent but below the revised growth rate of 9.2 per cent for 2023-24. The growth in the current fiscal and less than 7 per cent expected in the next will keep India as the fastest-expanding major economy. (PTI)

Aimed to ensure better connectivity for students, faculty, and staff of the medical college KMCH gets AC Bus strengthening healthcare infrastructure in BTR

HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, March 5: In a significant step towards strengthening BTR's medical infrastructure, a 24-seater air-conditioned bus was officially handed over to Kokrajhar Medical College and Hospital (KMCH) on Wednesday by the Speaker of Bodoland Territorial Council Legislative Assembly, Kati Ram Boro, and EM, transport department, BTR, Ranendra Basumatary.

The initiative, undertaken by the BTR CEM, Pramod Boro, aimed to ensure better connectivity for students, faculty, and staff of the medical college. The addition of the new bus would enhance daily transportation



convenience and contribute to the overall efficiency of medical education and healthcare services in the region.

Addressing the gathering, Speaker, Kati Ram Boro and EM Ranendra Narzary, urged the stu-

dents to focus on their studies and contribute to society upon completing their course.

Earlier, the Principal of KMCH welcomed all dignitaries, faculty, students, and staff, expressing gratitude to the BTR Government, par-

ticularly BTC Chief Pramod Boro and EM Ranendra Narzary, for providing the much-needed bus. He noted that this long-awaited facility will support student visits to field hospitals and academic activities.

The hand-over ceremony was attended by several dignitaries, including Joyanta Basumatary, MP; Lawrence Islary, MLA; Madhab Ch Chetry, MCL; Uttam Brahma, OSD to CEM, BTR, along with joint secretary, transport, Ractim Buragohain, joint commissioner of transport, BTC, D Chakraborty; DTO, Kokrajhar, Dhajen Basumatary, faculties, staff & students of KMCH, among others.

Work strike by contractual health workers in Gossaigaon

HT Correspondent
GOSSAIGAON, March 5: In solidarity with the state-wide work strike called by NHM (National Health Mission) employees, contractual health workers of Gossaigaon Block Primary Health Centre and Gossaigaon RNB Civil Hospital in Kokrajhar continued their protest for the second consecutive day on Wednesday. The work strike, called from March 4 to March 6, witnessed participation from nearly 200 healthcare workers, including doctors, pharmacists, and employees from various levels.

Under NHM Assam, around 24,000 employees, including officers and staff, have been serving in the state's healthcare sector in various positions since 2006. Among them, approximately 20,000 employees, including medical officers, dental officers, CHOs, pharmacists, GNM/staff nurses, laboratory technicians, physiotherapists, radiographers, and NLMs, have been working in medical colleges, district hospitals, model hospitals, primary health centers, state

dispensaries, and sub-health centers for nearly two decades on a fixed pay basis, despite providing essential healthcare services.

Even though NHM technical staff and officers perform duties equivalent to those of their permanent counterparts, they receive significantly lower salaries. Many of these contractual employees face job insecurity as they approach the upper age limit for employment without being regularized. While the state's public health services rely heavily on NHM workers, the Assam government has yet to take concrete steps to address the long-pending burning issues. In contrast, several other states like Delhi, Haryana, Odisha, Manipur, Bihar, and Jharkhand have regularized NHM workers or provided equal pay and benefits.

On January 20, NHM workers submitted a memorandum to the chief minister through the commissioners of all districts, but no response has been received so far. Expressing their dissatisfaction, pharmacist Mofidul Islam stated

that apart from emergency medical services, they had withdrawn from all other duties during the strike.

Islam further raised demands such as the recruitment of NHM workers into permanent positions in the health department through special appointment procedures, priority for NHM workers in new medical colleges and hospitals, implementation of a pay scale system until job regularization, wage security, payment of pending salaries as per the 7th Pay Commission (2016), full execution of the 2021 Gazette Notification (No. HLA.409/2020/Pt/55), and provision of gratuity, pension, death benefits, leave policies, health insurance, and bank loan facilities. Additionally, he demanded equal pay for equal work as per the Supreme Court verdict (Verdict no. 213 of 2013).

During the protest, NHM contractual workers held placards reading slogans like "Our demands are justified, they must be fulfilled," "Don't betray COVID warriors," and "Regularize NHM contractual employees."

NFR to operate three pairs of Holi Special Trains

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, March 5: Three pairs of special trains would be operated by N F Railway. These special trains would run between Narangi - Gorakhpur Jn. - Narangi, Katihar - Amritsar - Katihar and Kamakhya - Anand Vihar Terminal - Kamakhya. Each train would run for four trips in both directions, ensuring smoother travel for passengers during the festive season.

Special train no 05633 (Narangi - Gorakhpur Jn.) would depart on every Thursday from March 6 to 27.

The train would depart from Narangi at 1.20 pm to reach Gorakhpur Jn at 1.00 pm on the next day. Similarly, special train no. 05634 (Gorakhpur Jn - Narangi) would depart on every Friday from March 7 to 28. The train would depart from Gorakhpur Jn at 8.55 pm to reach Narangi at 9.10 pm on the next day.

Special train no 05734 (Katihar



- Amritsar) would depart on every Thursday from March 6 to 27. The train would depart from Katihar at 11.40 am to reach Amritsar at 12.10 am on the third day. Similarly, special train no 05733 (Amritsar - Katihar) will depart on every Saturday from March 8 to 29. The train will depart from Amritsar at 4.20 am to reach Katihar at 3.00 pm on the next day.

Special train no 02525 (Kamakhya - Anand Vihar Terminal)

would depart on every Friday from March 7 to 28. The train would depart from Kamakhya at 10.45 pm to reach Anand Vihar Terminal at 8.50 am on the third day. Similarly, special train no 02526 (Anand Vihar Terminal - Kamakhya) would depart on every Sunday from March 9 to 30. The train would depart from Anand Vihar Terminal at 5.20 pm to reach Kamakhya at 3:40 am on the third day.

NHM employees continue strike for 2nd day in Nagaon

HT Correspondent
NAGAON, March 5: The National Health Mission (NHM) employees in Nagaon continued its protest for the second day on Wednesday against the state government's failure to regularize their jobs and provide pay scales.

The strike, called by the All Assam Health Workers' Welfare Association, NHM, began on March 4 and will continue until March 6. The association has been demanding that the state government provide regular employment to NHM employees, who have been working on a contractual basis for several years. The association has also been demanding that the government provide pay scales to NHM employees, who have been denied this benefit despite working for several years. The employees were also demanding that the government clear their pending salaries and allowances. In Nagaon, NHM employees staged protests and demonstrations at various health institutions, including the Nagaon Medical College and Hospital, the Bhogswari Phukanani Civil Hospital, and the Kaliabor Sub-Divisional Civil Hospital as well as other FRUs across the district here.

Forest advisory after sighting of leopard in Dibrugarh

HT Correspondent
DIBRUGARH, March 5: The recent sighting of a leopard in Jiban Phukan Nagar in Dibrugarh has prompted the Divisional Forest Office, Dibrugarh to issue a public advisory on Wednesday.

On March 1, CCTV footage captured the leopard near the Dibrugarh Address Guest House, sparking concern among local residents. The forest department has been unsuccessful in capturing the leopard so far despite many attempts.

The Dibrugarh Divisional Forest Office has issued a public advisory, instructing residents to stay safe.

"This is to warn the residents of Dibrugarh that we have received reports of a stray leopard spotted within the city limits," the advisory states. It has laid out specific guidelines for residents to follow. Residents are urged to stay indoors, particularly during the

night, and to ensure that all doors and windows are securely locked.

Traveling in groups has been recommended, especially in areas where the leopard has been sighted. The advisory further urged residents of keeping children supervised and close to adults at all times. This precautionary measure aimed to minimise risks during such sightings. They have been advised against feeding stray animals, which could inadvertently attract the leopard to residential zones. Moreover, residents have been asked to report any leopard sightings to local authorities promptly in this number: 9859306062.

"We understand that the presence of a stray leopard can be alarming, but with caution and co-operation, we can ensure public safety. Let's work together to prevent any untoward incidents," the advisory stated.

4th (249th) session of the 13th NCHAC held

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, March 5: The 4th (249th) Session of the 13th (Thirtieth) North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council (NCHAC), Haflong was held on Wednesday at NC Hills Autonomous Council Assembly Hall.

Mohet Hojai, chairman of the council summoned the session of a the Thirtieth NC hills Autonomous Council under the provision of Rule 36 (1) of the Assam Autonomous Districts (Constitution of District Councils) Rules, 1951 (as amended) for the discussion of next budget session of the 13th (Thirtieth) North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council (NCHAC), Haflong to be placed after the announcements of State's Budget.

Addressing the House CEM Debobal Gorlosa introduced and informed for the developmental priorities for Dima Hasao district would involve sectors like infrastructure, healthcare, education and sustainable resource management to ensure stable revenue and long-term growth for the district.

During the session the Members of Autonomous Council were also present in the house.

District level- Viksit Bharat National Youth Parliament-2025

HT Correspondent
NAGAON, March 5: Nowgong College (Autonomous), Nagaon, would host a Youth Parliament on March 12 and 13 under the direction of the Ministry of youth affairs & sports. The college has been designated as the nodal institution for organising this significant event in Nagaon and Hojai.

A preparatory meeting was held at the Principal's Conference Room, chaired by Pulin Ch. Borah, Principal (i/c) of Nowgong College (Autonomous). The meeting was attended by Bikash Ch Pradhan, District Youth Officer, Nagaon, and NSS Programme Coordinators from various colleges in both Nagaon and Hojai districts.

Bhuban Ch Chutia, the organising secretary of the Youth Parliament, outlined the event's rules and regulations. He encouraged all participants to actively contribute to promoting the event and ensuring its success.

Week-long free hearing checkup camp



HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, March 5: Northeast Hearing and Speech Clinic has announced a weeklong Free Hearing Camp in celebration of World Hearing Day and its 1st Anniversary, taking place at Bharalumukh from March 3 to March 10.

Yash Nawka emphasized the importance of hearing checks, stating, "Regular hearing assessments are crucial, especially as we age or if we're exposed to loud environments. Many hearing problems can be subtle at first, but early detection can make a huge difference in treatment and quality of life. Untreated hearing loss can lead to further complications like tinnitus, memory loss, and even balance issues, which is why early intervention is so important. I encourage everyone to take advantage of this free camp - it's a simple step toward better hearing and overall well-being."

Mon district admin receives advanced medical vehicles

HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, March 5: In a significant move to enhance healthcare services in Mon district of Nagaland, the NTPC Limited handed over two advanced life support ambulance vans and two mortuary vans to the district administration of Mon.

The vehicles were handed over by Arnab Maitra in the presence of Kasturi Maitra, president of Bardwi Shikla Ladies Club, NTPC Bongaigaon and Onkar Nath, AGM (HR), NTPC Bongaigaon Salakati.

The event was graced by the presence of Ajit Kumar Verma, IAS, deputy commissioner, Mon representing the District Administration.

The initiative, part of NTPC's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) efforts aimed to address the healthcare challenges faced by the remote district of Mon. The advanced life support ambulances are equipped with modern medical facilities, ensuring that critical care reaches patients in emergency situations without delay. These ambulances are designed to provide life-saving support, featuring



equipment such as ventilators, defibrillators, and monitoring systems to handle emergencies efficiently during transit.

Additionally, the mortuary vans provided are intended to ensure dignified and respectful transportation for the deceased, addressing a crucial need in the district. These vans are equipped with proper refrigeration facilities to preserve the bodies, thereby easing the burden on families and ensuring that traditional customs can be observed with dignity.

During the event, Arnab Maitra emphasised NTPC's commitment to community welfare through its CSR initiatives.

Maitra noted that the contribution was part of NTPC's broader

vision to enhance healthcare infrastructure in remote areas and provide timely and dignified services to the residents of Mon.

Ajit Kumar Verma, IAS, appreciated NTPC's timely support highlighting the importance of such contributions in bridging the healthcare access gap for remote communities.

Verma expressed gratitude on behalf of the district administration for NTPC's consistent efforts towards uplifting the region's healthcare standards.

The project, valued at ₹ 98.26 lakh, is set to benefit over 3.47 lakh residents across Mon district, significantly enhancing the region's emergency healthcare response capabilities.

6-day workshop underway at KKHSOU

Workshop on e-content development for teachers, educators explores digital skills



HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, March 5: A 6-day workshop cum capacity building program on 'E-content Development for Teachers and Teacher Educators of North Eastern States of India' got underway on Wednesday at Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University (KKHSOU). The workshop, which is scheduled to take place from March 5 to 10 has been jointly organised by KKHSOU and Central Institute of Educational Technology, NCERT.

In his welcome address, Professor Pranjit Bora, Registrar (i/c) of Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University spoke at length

on importance of holding such a workshop in the light of NEP 2020. He said that the purpose of the workshop is manifold - enhancing digital teaching skills, bridging the digital divide, empowering educators for online and blended learning, encouraging localized and inclusive content and enhancing student engagement and learning outcomes.

Pranita Gopal, assistant professor, CIET-NCERT, New Delhi highlighted the key objectives of holding the workshop. She said that the workshop has been organized to discuss the principles of digital pedagogy and instructional

design; to apply technology-driven teaching methods to effectively implement and deliver e-learning content and ; finally to develop digital learning materials that can be used as e-learning content for DIKSHA and PM e-Vidya channels by the north eastern states. She was of the opinion that the workshop will significantly contribute to the professional growth of teachers and teacher educators in the North Eastern states. In fact, it will help them harness digital technology to create high-quality educational content, ensuring that learners receive a richer and more engaging learning experience. RC Jain, IAS (Retd.), Chairman, Assam State School Education Board (ASSEB) delivered the inaugural address in which he said that in today's education system, there is an increasing tendency to measure a student's abilities based solely on their marks rather than their actual understanding and knowledge. This has led to a system where students are more focused on rote learning, memorizing information to score well in exams rather than developing critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and a deep understanding of subjects.

NTPC observes 54th National Safety Day

HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, March 5: NTPC, under the leadership of Debabrata Kar, general manager (O&M), observed the 54th National Safety Day with a series of events aimed at reinforcing safety awareness and adherence to safety norms. The day commenced with Kar unfurling the Safety Flag at the plant premises in the presence of NTPC employees, CISF personnel, associates, and contract workers.

Following the flag hoisting, Kar administered the safety pledge to all present, emphasising the significance of safety in both professional and personal spheres. In his address, he highlighted the critical importance of adhering to safety protocols across all plant operations and urged strict compliance with the safety framework by all departments and contract workers. Asutosh Biswas, GM (Operation), also addressed the gathering, focusing on various safety aspects

and the responsibility of every employee in maintaining a safe workplace. The event was organised and coordinated by Pavel Sarker, AGM (Safety), who outlined the objectives and importance of the day, reiterating NTPC's commitment to safety excellence.

A knowledge-sharing forum was conducted as part of the celebrations, where representatives from contractual workers, associates, and other site engagement teams shared insights on best safety practices in their respective areas. They discussed proactive measures and safe practices that are part of daily operations at the plant. MS Kandari, asst commandant, CISF-Fire, along with other senior officials of the station, graced the occasion with their presence. Various heads of departments also spoke on the need for a safety-first approach and the collective responsibility of all employees in promoting a safe work environment.

AJYCP demands solution to Margherita FRU problems

HT Correspondent
MARGHERITA, March 5: The Asom Jatiyotabadi Yuba Chatra Parishad (AJYCP) Margherita Regional committee on Wednesday for more than two hours staged a protest in Margherita, demanding a permanent solution to the ongoing problems at the Margherita First Referral Unit (FRU) hospital.

Protesters warned that if their demands were not met, they would permanently block NH 315 road and intensify their agitation.



More than 100 members of Asom Jatiyotabadi Yuba Chatra Parishad (AJYCP) Margherita Regional committee from North Margherita Rangamancha to Se-gunbari Tiniali Margherita and

demonstrated near the office of Margherita MLA Bhaskar Sharma and urged Assam government health department to take immediate

action.

AJYCP leaders accused the present BJP led government of Assam neglecting the hospital's poor infra-

structure, staff shortages and lack of essential medical facilities.

They demanded urgent reforms to improve healthcare services in the region. Kanchan Bora, vice president of Asom Jatiyotabadi Yuba Chatra Parishad (AJYCP) Tinsukia District Committee, said that Assam government must act immediately and warned that they would continue their protest until the hospital problems were resolved.

Margherita FRU hospital has been facing staff shortages and inadequate medical equipment, affecting healthcare services for local residents for which AJYCP Margherita Regional committee protest has put pressure on authorities to act quickly.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

It is easier to prevent bad habits than to break them
- Benjamin Franklin

Fat shaming remark uncalled for

Fat-shaming is the new normal in Congress party political circles these days. Congress spokespersons use it with critical remarks regarding the cricketing performances of top Indian cricketing icons. Ask Shama Mohamed, the Congress party's spokesperson at the centre of a fat-shaming controversy involving her loose tongue. Shama Mohamed's instant notoriety springs from the vitriolic pitch she directed at India skipper Rohit Sharma, who had collected girth in the middle. Shama Mohamed lost her pert smile. She gathered her thoughts and let go at the "poor lad" who was in Dubai skipping the India side against the New Zealand side on Sunday! Fat persons generally take their own time collecting their thoughts and Rohit Sharma continues to give more attention to the Champion's Trophy than to somebody called "Shama Mohamed" whom he had never spoken to or exchanged pleasantries with. And because, political correctness is associated with ignoring insults to prominent people, India's mainstream TV media chose not to give Shama Mohamed's "fat comments" the legitimacy it cried for. Instead, each one of the TV studios, the so-called "national television channels", picked on Congress leader of the opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi and his captaincy record, "90 election losses skipping the Congress, blah, blah and blah." This made better television than Shama Mohamed defending her string of sentences including the one with which Mohamed staved off a senior Pakistani cricketer.

Silence is golden. But under Modi, idiot box noises run the country. Right then, Shama Mohamed was pitched against Rahul Gandhi with the image of Rahul doing push-ups and a leap into the Arabian Sea. Shama Mohamed hadn't done any of these and the Modi-friendly TV anchors made news of the more newsworthy Rahul Gandhi! Also, getting back at Shama Mohamed was best done by getting back at Rahul Gandhi, whom Shama Mohamed idolizes. It is another matter that fat-shaming Rohit Sharma kept the focus on the slim and trim Shama Mohamed. Shama should seriously put some weight on. After all, Kerala is best known for its human indices, its healthy food habits and its healthy living, right? So why Rohit Sharma? It cannot be because the Congress likes a healthy India-Pakistan contest in the middle of the pitch. This argument doesn't carry water nor weight. Shama Mohamed isn't being slandered for being a traitor with cries of "go back to Pakistan."

To be frank, Shama Mohamed has a big complaint with the BCCI. Shama isn't impressed with Rohit Sharma's "unimpressive captaincy" and said as much in her opening comments on Rohit Sharma. She thinks Virat Kohli is a better buy than Rohit Sharma. She's never heard that Sharma won five IPLs for Mumbai Indians and the T20 World Cup for India. It is a matter of research. What got into Shama Mohamed, what provoked her, why the outburst, why target Rohit Sharma? Why when India was taking on New Zealand? Shama Mohamed's remarks on Rohit Sharma's fitness and captaincy have sparked a massive row" and the Congress spokesperson has been compelled to cheer the "Men in Blue" after their victory against Australia in the Champions Trophy semi-final. Mohamed, in fact, wished them the "very best of luck" for the March 9 finale.

Electoral roll manipulation in state elections is prima facie true

The evidence brought forward by Trinamool Congress (TMC) from Bengal is just another in a series of evidences of electoral roll manipulation that invariably favours BJP and its allies, as it has recently been witnessed in the recent Maharashtra and Delhi Vidhan Sabha election. Opposition political parties have not only alleged Election Commissions complicity in voter lists fraud, but also demanded to fix the responsibility. Since, evidences emerged so far suggests that electoral roll manipulation in state elections is prima facie true, it must be investigated, action to be taken, and take steps to prevent such manipulation in the future.

Chief Minister of West Bengal Mamata Banerjee has his party leaders that in every assembly constituency, there are 20-30 thousand voters who are "not residents of the state" and are likely to tilt the balance in favour of the BJP. She has cited examples of voters with the same Electors Photo Identity Card (EPIC) number in West Bengal and in other states, and said that the move to induct such "outsiders" into West Bengal's voter list was intended to influence the Assembly election of 2026.

On March 3, TMC had warned that if Election Commission does not accept its 'mistakes' within 24 hours the party would release another set of documents which will cause 'more embarrassment' to the poll body. The party had released example of multiple voters' cards having same number. TMC has demanded that EC clean up the electoral rolls in the next 100 days. The party has also demanded an investigation to find out "who in the BJP is the mastermind" behind electoral roll manipulation.

Election Commission on March 2 had admitted that some Electoral Photo Identity Cards in different states have identical numbers due to a "decentralized and manual mechanism" being followed prior

to shifting of electoral rolls database to the ERONET (Electoral Roll Management). Nevertheless, TMC has rejected the EC's explanation and has insisted on cleaning the electoral roll from 'outsiders'.

The issue was first raised by West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee on February 27. She had alleged that BJP won Maharashtra and Delhi Elections by "enrolling fake voter" from Haryana and Gujarat. Mamata Banerjee had also accused the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) of enrolling "fake voters" from other states in the electoral rolls with the "help" of the Election Commission. TMC has cited proof of people from Haryana enrolled in West Bengal, and hence,

DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Dr. Gyan Pathak

present. He claimed several "irregularities" took place in the recently concluded assembly elections.

"Between the 2019 Assembly elections and the 2024 Lok Sabha election, 32 lakh voters were added to Maharashtra's electoral rolls over five years. However, between the 2024 Lok Sabha elections and the 2024 Assembly elections, 39 lakh new voters were added in just five months," Rahul Gandhi had pointed out.

Similar voter list manipulation was alleged even during the Delhi election. The electoral roll data now publicly available also suggests voter list manipulation in very large scale. After getting voters name deleted and new voters enrolled, the net increase in electors in Delhi was 895881 between January 2024 and 2025. It should be noted that total electors were decreased by 68,236 during 2020 and 2024. Young electors attaining 18 years age in 2020 were 2.08 lakhs, in 2024 were 2.5 lakh and in 2025 were 2.08 lakh. It means sudden increase in total number of voters were due to outsiders, and

the increase shows a discrepancy since its pattern is not supported by other patterns of increase in votes, such as first time voters.

One can even see the surprising election results. In most of the constituencies' addition of new voters mostly favoured BJP to win. There was only one constituency Hari Nagar where electors decreased by 261, and BJP won by a margin of 6632 vote. In all other constituencies net new voters increased by thousands.

It may be surprising to note that net new voter addition in Mustafabad was 21117 and BJP won by a margin of 17578; Karawal Nagar net addition was 22770 BJP's winning margin was 23355; Malviya Nagar net addition 5471, BJP's winning margin 2131; Uttam Nagar net addition 21159 BJP's winning margin 29740; Matiala net addition 30327 BJP's winning margin 28723; Bijwasan net addition 12649, BJP's winning margin 11276; Palam net addition 9880 BJP's winning margin 8952; Laxmi Nagar net addition 8166 BJP's winning margin 11542; Nangloi Jat net addition 26173 BJP's winning margin 26251; Motinagar net addition 8695 BJP's winning margin 11657; Madipur net addition 9915 BJP's winning margin 10899; Badli net addition 22900 BJP's winning margin 15163; and Bawana net addition 36727 BJP's winning margin 31475.



There are other surprising data too, which needs closer analysis. For example, increase on new net voter are higher in the constituencies where there have been larger AAP support base. The new voters addition thus has a pattern which depended on the support bases of BJP and AAP. The new voters addition were according to constituency wise requirements.

To understand it more clearly, one can take the example of the Central Delhi where AAP has very high traditional support base. Out of seven constituencies, AAP had won six – Burari, Sadar Bazar, Chandni Chowk, Matia Mahal, Ballimaran, and Karol Bagh. AAP lost only Timarpur to BJP by 1168 votes. Barring Burari, where net new additions were 43220, in all other constituencies net new addition ranged between 4432 and 7048. Burari showed abnormal addition and in rest addition seemed to be normal.

AAP had raised the issue of deletion of name of their voters from the lists and enrolment of outsiders in large number in majority of constituencies. There emerges a pattern that shows BJP the major beneficiary of the abnormal electoral roll deletion and addition of name exercise.

Electoral roll manipulation is only the tip of the iceberg of the election process manipulation. There are many other issues, such as EVM manipulation through numerous ways, voter turnout manipulation, and creating hurdles before peace loving voters by deliberately created tensions and violence, and so on. Entire electoral process and management needs a fresh look to have a free and fair poll in the country. EC have been alleged by the Opposition of favouring BJP by not even acting against their leaders as promptly and properly as against the opposition. Independent investigation is needed to know the layers of truth for the sake of Democracy in India. (IPA Service)

Bangladesh: Political turmoil, geopolitical shifts, and the future of democracy

By: Dipak Kurni

As the seasons transition from spring to autumn, Bangladesh finds itself at a critical crossroads, navigating political upheaval, shifting global alliances, and rising tensions that threaten to reshape its democratic fabric. The country's turbulent political landscape, already fraught with instability, has been further shaken by the student-led uprising that culminated in the fall of Sheikh Hasina's government in August. Amidst this turmoil, Bangladesh's army chief, General Waker-Uz-Zaman, has issued a stern warning, urging political factions and student movements to halt their violent confrontations and uphold national stability.

A nation in chaos: The student uprising and its aftermath

The spark that ignited this recent wave of political unrest was an unprecedented midnight demonstration on February 23 by students of Dhaka University. Their demand was clear: the resignation of Bangladesh's home affairs advisor, Jahangir Alam Chowdhury, a retired lieutenant general, whom they blamed for the government's inability to curb rampant crime, extortion, and attacks on women and liberal activists. The failure of authorities to address these concerns led to a rapid escalation in tensions, culminating in violent clashes and a law-and-order crisis.

A desperate Chowdhury called an emergency press conference at 2:30 AM, promising swift action to restore security. However, in a grim turn of events, journalists attending the conference were attacked, further undermining the credibility of the government. The situation deteriorated to such an extent that the military had to step in, with General Waker-Uz-Zaman delivering a forceful address warning political actors, students, and Islamist factions against further destabilizing the nation.

The military's message: Stability over chaos

In his unequivocal remarks, General Zaman emphasized three key points. First, he admonished political groups, including student movements, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), and Jamaat-e-Islami, for their violent rivalries, cautioning that their actions endangered Bangladesh's sovereignty.

Second, he condemned efforts to free radical Islamist elements, particularly those involved in the 2009 Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) mutiny, in which dozens of army officers were massacred. "The mutineers who were punished deserve

it," he declared, drawing a firm line against any attempts to rewrite history in favor of those who had challenged military authority.

Third, and most crucially, General Zaman asserted that elections must be held by December 2024, quashing speculation that the interim government led by Nobel Laureate Mohammed Yunus might delay the process under the guise of implementing systemic reforms. The military's direct intervention signals an implicit rejection of prolonged governance by unelected officials and a clear preference for returning to an elected administration.

Geopolitical realignments and the shadow of global powers

Bangladesh's domestic turbulence has not unfolded in isolation. The nation finds itself caught in the shifting currents of global power struggles, with major international actors seeking to influence its trajectory.

The ousting of Sheikh Hasina's government has been viewed by many as a "colour revolution," allegedly fueled by American deep-state funding funneled through USAID under the Biden administration. However, with the transition of power in Washington, the geopolitical tide appears to be turning once more.

Recent reports suggest that former US President Donald Trump, in his meeting with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, indicated that he would leave the Bangladesh situation to India's discretion. This statement has been interpreted as a green light for Delhi to take a more assertive role in stabilizing its eastern neighbour. General Zaman's speech, in which he referred to Mohammed Yunus by name rather than his official title of Chief Advisor, further hints at a possible shift in Bangladesh's military loyalties.

Interestingly, this development aligns with historical precedents. Two previous Bangladeshi military rulers, General Hussein Mohammed Ershad and General Moeen U Ahmed, initially adopted anti-India postures before ultimately recognizing the geopolitical necessity of maintaining amicable ties with their larger neighbour.

In contrast, it was the democratically elected government of Begum Khaleda Zia that most severely strained Bangladesh-India relations, offering sanctuary to separatist rebels from India's northeast and obstructing regional connectivity initiatives.

The electoral battlefield: Can stability be restored?

As Bangladesh inches closer to

the promised elections, the key question remains: will the political landscape be inclusive and representative? The re-entry of the Awami League into the electoral process could serve as a stabilizing factor, potentially mitigating the risk of political violence.

Historically, both the Awami League and BNP have commanded substantial voter bases, each polling between 30-48% and 25-40% respectively. Islamist parties, including Jamaat-e-Islami, have typically garnered a smaller but still significant share of 5-8%.

However, concerns loom large over the integrity of the upcoming elections. The proliferation of illegal arms among political cadres raises fears that the electoral process could descend into bloodshed.

The emergence of a new political entity, the National Citizen's Party, formed with alleged backing from Yunus, further complicates the political calculus. While initially enjoying substantial support, the student-led movement behind this party appears to be losing public favor due to its association with lawlessness and the erosion of institutional stability.

The road ahead: A new great game unfolds

Bangladesh's immediate future is fraught with uncertainties. The military has signaled its intent to restore order, but its commitment to a genuinely free and fair election remains under scrutiny. Political actors from all sides have begun courting India, recognizing its crucial role in shaping the post-crisis order. Meanwhile, ordinary Bangladeshis, weary of instability and economic hardship, yearn for a return to normalcy.

The broader geopolitical implications of Bangladesh's crisis cannot be overlooked. If the elections proceed transparently, the country could emerge from this turmoil with a renewed sense of democratic legitimacy. However, if the process is marred by violence, manipulation, or exclusion, Bangladesh risks further entrenching its political divisions, setting the stage for prolonged instability.

The coming months will be decisive in determining whether Bangladesh can navigate these treacherous waters and uphold its democratic foundations, or if it will become yet another battleground in the larger contest of global power politics. Only time will tell how the 'Great Game' will unfold in Dhaka, and whether the forces of democracy will ultimately prevail. (The writer can be reached at dipakkurmigpltd@gmail.com)

Bangladesh election schedule

By: Saleem Samad

Jatiya Party abruptly ended when the Awami League regime collapsed and Hasina fled to India last August.

The back-scratching has prompted the leaders of the student revolution to say no to the Jatiya Party – a loud and clear message that they should not be in politics in future. The two military juntas took power and formed king's parties – one was the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), which ruled the country for the fourth consecutive term. The second was the Jatiya Party. General Ershad's party ruled for nine years until his regime collapsed in 1990.

BNP was formed when military dictator General Zia ur Rahman, a liberation war decorated officer, took power in the vacuum when independence hero Sheikh Mujib ur Rahman was assassinated in August 1975 by a dozen young military officers without a political vision to steer the country through a crisis.

General Rahman took over the helms of affairs of the country, after a soldier's mutiny in less than three months of the previous military putsch. Despite having a political vision, for unknown reasons, he rehabilitated those politicians who opposed the independence of Bangladesh in crucial positions.

He also rehabilitated scores of Bangla-speaking military officers who fought alongside the Pakistan Army against the Mukti Bahini guerrillas and Indian troops during the bloody war in 1971 and dodged the surrender ceremony of Pakistan armed forces. Also, most of the Bangla-speaking military officers were recruited in senior positions in the police services.

In a speech, last week, commemorating the fallen officers of the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) revolt 17 years ago, General Waqar-uz-Zaman has said, "We are thinking that we will finish the work quickly and take the army back to the cantonment."

"We have to be patient. Work with professionalism. Until an elected government comes, we have to do this with patience," he furthermore stated. Many have remarked that the COAS has expressed discomfort against the Yunus government when the situation of law and order reached an alarming level.

The crime situation in Bangladesh is such that there

are thefts, robberies and dacoities committed in broad daylight causing widespread panic among the citizenry.

The Home Affairs Advisor, Lt. General Jahangir Alam Chowdhury, called a press conference at his house at 3 am and blamed the Awami League for the law and order situation. He said, "Awami League is funneling ill-gotten money to desperate criminals."

Political and administrative circles believe that the comments of the army chief regarding the alarming rise of crime amid the demand for the resignation of the home advisor, and his accountability have given the allegation of failure of the government.

Meanwhile, Indian Nobel laureate Prof Amartya Sen, who was born in Bangladesh and studied in a school in Dhaka in an interview with the Indian official news agency Press Trust of India (PTI) a few days ago praised the Bangladeshi Army for its restraint in not attempting to establish military rule, as has happened in many other countries.

Dr Sen said "Yunus is an old friend. I know he is highly capable and, in many ways, a remarkable human being. He has made strong statements about Bangladesh's secularism and democratic commitment."

In many third-world countries, the military has always been ambitious to take over power and overthrow a legitimate government; Bangladesh Army seems to behave very rationally.

Bangladesh military officers are refused deployment in United Nations Peacekeeping and also provided visit visas to the United States, Canada, Great Britain, Australia and European countries for track record on human rights abuse. That is one of the reasons that General Zaman has advised his troops deployed for the anti-crime operation so-called "Devil Hunt" to avoid excessive force and shoot to kill suspects.

On the other hand, the mainstream political parties Bangladesh BNP and Islamist party Jamaat-e-Islami have been demanding an early election, a month after Yunus took charge of the government in August last year.

Dr Yunus, however, urged the political leaders to hold their patience until the crucial reforms of the election commission, judiciary, civil admin-

istration, constitution, media, anti-corruption, police administration and others are implemented.

The Chief Adviser of the Interim Government aims for the reforms in a bid to develop a state system based on public ownership, accountability, and welfare. The political parties negotiating with the government have in the back of their mind the fact that the Yunus administration does not have the legitimacy to implement the reforms in the absence of a parliament.

They are saying in closed-door party meetings that the political parties would be empowered to implement the reforms. Without the reforms, most observers and political think tanks believe that the political parties will take the country back to square one when they refuse to have the reforms in place.

Reforms will bring about more accountability and transparency of elected public representatives, which the politicians will not agree to in any case. In addition, the independence of the judiciary, and civil and police administration will jeopardize their authority over their constitution.

This is not the first time that the political and administrative reforms have been taken seriously. In 1990, days after the downfall of the military dictator, the student leaders were able to convince the mainstream opposition parties, the Awami League, BNP and Left coalition leaders to sign a pledge that they would bring about reforms of the government institutions.

Unfortunately, both the Awami League and BNP ruled the country several times. They deliberately ignored the reforms, leading to politicization of police, civil services, judiciary, election commission and other governmental institutions to manipulate in favor of the politicians and their henchmen.

Therefore, political historian Mohiuddin Ahmed predicts that hundreds of pages of reform documents would be thrown out of the windows of the iconic massive parliament building designed by Louis Kahn, a celebrated visionary architect. (The author is an award-winning independent journalist based in Bangladesh. He could be reached at saleemsamad@hotmail.com; X: @saleemsamad)

'Physical involvement of Afghan nationals' in Bannu Cantonment, claims Pakistan army

PESHAWAR, March 5: Intelligence reports "unequivocally confirm the physical involvement of Afghan nationals" in the terror attack in northwest Pakistan in which five soldiers, 13 civilians and 16 terrorists, including four suicide bombers, were killed, the army said Wednesday.

Till late Tuesday night, there were reports of death of 12 civilians, including four children, as two explosive-laden vehicles rammed into the boundary wall of the main cantonment in Bannu in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province while the army personnel killed at least six terrorists.

Following the suicide attack on the Bannu Cantonment, about 200 kilometres south-west of Peshawar, Pakistan army said it reserves the right to take necessary measures in response to the threats emanating from across the border.

Islamabad "expects the interim Afghan government to uphold its responsibilities and deny its soil for terrorist activities against Pakistan," the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), the media wing of the army, said in a statement.

The ISPR statement noted that intelligence reports "unequivocally confirmed the physical involvement of Afghan nationals in this heinous act, with evidence also pointing to the fact that the attack was orchestrated and directed by khwarij ring leaders operating



from Afghanistan."

The term 'khwarij' refers to a group in early Islamic history which was involved in violence and the Pakistan army uses it for the banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).

Hafiz Gul Bahadur-affiliated little known Jaish Al Fursan, in a statement, had claimed the attack in Bannu. The group is one of the several factions of TTP.

As the terrorists rammed the explosive-laden vehicles into the perimeter wall of the Bannu Cantonment, several terrorists attempted to enter the high-security zone, the troops engaged the intruders with precision, killing all 16 terrorists, including four sui-

cide bombers, the ISPR said.

In the intense exchange of fire, five brave soldiers, who put up a heroic resistance, were killed in the line of duty, the ISPR added.

Meanwhile, 13 civilians lost their lives while 32 were injured as a result of a mosque and a residential building suffering "severe destruction" due to the impact of the suicide blasts.

President Asif Ali Zardari, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and province's Governor Faisal Karim Kundi and Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur condemned the attack and an inquiry into the incident has been ordered.

Islamabad has consistently voiced concerns that the banned

TTP uses Afghan soil to launch attacks in Pakistan, asking the Afghan interim government to rein in the group; Kabul has denied the allegations.

Last month, the ISPR said an Afghan national "involved in terrorism inside Pakistan" was killed during an operation in the province's North Waziristan district.

That operation was carried out within a month of Pakistan repatriating the body of an Afghan national involved in terrorist activities and killed in a counterterrorism operation in Balochistan's Zhob district.

Earlier in December, in a press conference, ISPR Director General Lieutenant General Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry said terrorist outfits were being provided "sanctuaries, support, and are allowed unrestrained activities on Afghan territory."

Bannu has witnessed several militant attacks over the past several months. On February 8 this year, two policemen died when terrorists attacked a police post in the Fateh Khel area of the district. On November 20 last year, 12 troops were killed in a suicide attack on a security check post in the Mali Khel area of the district.

On October 14, security forces foiled a gun and bomb attack on Iqbal Shaheed Police Lines and killed five militants who wearing

burqas and suicide vests. Four police officials died during the operation.

In July 2024, a terrorist attack targeting Bannu Cantonment had seen death of eight personnel from the security forces while a retaliatory operation killed 10 terrorists.

The ISPR statement had attributed that attack to the Hafiz Gul Bahadur group, "which operates from Afghanistan and has used Afghan soil to orchestrate acts of terrorism inside Pakistan in the past as well."

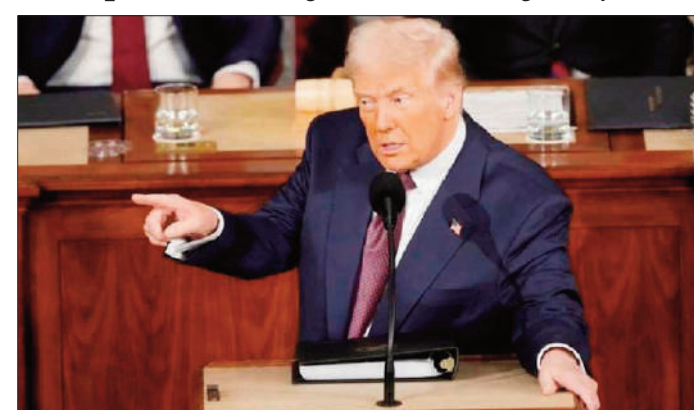
Pakistan has witnessed an uptick in terror activities recently, especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan provinces after the banned TTP ended its ceasefire with the government in November 2022.

February saw a marginal increase in terrorist attacks but a sharp surge in civilian casualties, according to a report published by an Islamabad-based think tank, Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS).

According to PICSS, the country witnessed 79 terrorist attacks last month, resulting in the deaths of 55 civilians and 47 security personnel, while 45 civilians and 81 security personnel were injured.

Security forces, meanwhile, intensified counter-terrorism operations, eliminating 156 terrorists, injuring 20, and arresting 66, the report said. (PTI)

Trump criticises high tariffs charged by India



NEW YORK/WASHINGTON, March 5: US President Donald Trump criticised the high tariffs charged by India and other countries, terming them as "very unfair" and announced reciprocal tariffs from April 2 on nations that impose levies on American goods.

Trump made these remarks in an address to the Joint Session of the Congress on Tuesday. It was the first address of his second term in the White House. On January 20, Trump was sworn in as the 47th President of the US.

"If you don't make your product in America, however, under the Trump administration, you will pay a tariff and in some cases, a rather large one," Trump said.

"Other countries have used tariffs against us for decades and now it's our turn to start using them against those other countries. On average, the European Union, China, Brazil, India, Mexico and Canada — have you heard of them? And countless other nations charge us tremendously higher tariffs than we charge them," Trump said.

"It's very unfair. India charges us auto tariffs higher than 100 per cent." In February, President Trump said that his administration would "soon" impose reciprocal tariffs on countries such as India and China, reiterating what he had said during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the US capital last month.

Trump has made it clear to Prime Minister Modi that India will not be spared from Washington's reciprocal tariffs and emphasised that "nobody can argue with me" on tariff structure.

"China's average tariff on our products is twice what we charge them. And South Korea's average tariff is four times higher. Think of that. Four times higher. And we give so much help militarily and in so many other ways to South Korea. But that's what happens. This is happening by friend and foe," Trump said.

"We've been ripped off for decades by nearly every country on earth, and we will not let that happen any longer," Trump said.

Asserting that this system is "not

fair to the United States" and never was, Trump said that reciprocal tariffs will kick in from April 2.

"Whatever they tariff us, other countries, we will tariff them. That's reciprocal, back and forth," Trump said amid applause from Republican lawmakers.

"Whatever they tax us, we will tax them. If they do non-monetary tariffs to keep us out of their market, then we will do non-monetary barriers to keep them out of our market. There's a lot of that too. They don't even allow us in their market. We will take in trillions and trillions of dollars and create jobs like we have never seen before," Trump said.

He added that "I did it with China, and I did it with others and the Biden administration couldn't do anything about it because it was so much money they couldn't do anything about it."

He added that the US has very large deficits with both Mexico and Canada.

"But even more importantly, they have allowed fentanyl to come into our country at levels never seen before, killing hundreds of thousands of our citizens and many very young, beautiful people, destroying families. Nobody's ever seen anything like it. They are in effect receiving subsidies of hundreds of billions of dollars. We pay subsidies to Canada and to Mexico of hundreds of billions of dollars. And the United States will not be doing that any longer. We are not going to do it any longer."

Trump is implementing a 25 per cent additional tariff on imports from Canada and Mexico and a 10 per cent additional tariff on imports from China. In a retaliatory action, Canada said that effective March 4, 2025, it is imposing 25 per cent tariffs on USD 30 billion in goods imported from the United States.

Mexico said it will announce reciprocal action on Sunday.

China also announced it will impose additional tariffs of up to 15 per cent on imports of key US farm products.

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

Residents prepare for first cyclone in 51 years to hit Australian coast near Brisbane

MELBOURNE, March 5: Residents were stacking sandbags to protect low-lying properties on Wednesday ahead of a tropical cyclone forecast to become the first in 51 years to hit the Australian east coast near Brisbane, the nation's third-most populous city. Tropical Cyclone Alfred is forecast to cross the coast between the Queensland state capital Brisbane and the tourist city of Gold Coast to the south late Thursday or early Friday, Bureau of Meteorology manager Matt Collopy said. Brisbane and Gold Coast are a continuous urban sprawl. Their centres are 80 kilometres (50 miles) apart.

Alfred was over the Pacific Ocean 400 kilometres (250 miles) east of Brisbane and tracking west Wednesday with sustained winds near the centre of 95 kph (59 mph) with gusts to 130 kph (81 mph).

"That is destructive winds," Collopy said. It was expected to maintain that strength until reaching land.

"Large swells and powerful waves have been observed along the Queensland coast for several days now with severe coastal erosion and inundation happening," Collopy told reporters in Brisbane. "This will continue and likely get worse as the system approaches and makes landfall."

Heavy rain and life-threatening flooding were expected in the days ahead, he said. "The wave, wind, rainfall and particularly the storm surge present significant risks," Collopy added.

Tropical Cyclone Zoe struck Gold Coast in 1974

Cyclones are common in Queensland's tropical north but are rare in the state's temperate and densely populated southeast corner that borders New South Wales state. Cyclone Zoe crossed the coast at the southern end of Gold Coast on the New South Wales border in March 1974, causing extensive flooding.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said his government was providing the Queensland government with 250,000 sandbags in addition to 80,000 the military had already delivered.

"This is a rare event, to have a tropical cyclone in an area that is not classified as part of the tropics, here in southeast Queensland and northern New South Wales," Albanese told reporters in Brisbane.

"That is why this preparatory work is so important," Albanese added. Brisbane Lord Mayor Adrian Schrinner said modelling showed that up to 20,000 homes in his city of more than 3 million people could experience some level of flooding. A cyclone refuge centre would be established at Brisbane's show grounds for people who had nowhere else to shelter during the storm. Evacuation centres for longer-term stays would also be opened, Schrinner said.

Schools and hospital operating theatres to close

Queensland Premier David Crisafulli said boats moored in the region would not be allowed to move without the permission of the Brisbane harbour master from Wednesday afternoon due to the cyclone danger.

From Thursday, schools will be closed, hospitals will not carry out non-urgent surgeries and public transport will not run in the affected area, he said.

Crisafulli urged the public to prepare their homes and plan evacuation routes. He said 68 people had been evacuated from South Stradbroke Island, which lies off the coast between Brisbane and Gold Coast, on Tuesday night and evacuations continued Wednesday. "This is a very rare event for southeast Queensland. I acknowledge that, but I'm asking Queenslanders to take it seriously and I want you to know that we are taking it seriously," Crisafulli said. (AP)

China hikes defence budget to USD 249 billion amid hectic military modernisation

BEIJING, March 5: China on Wednesday announced a 7.2 per cent increase of its national defence budget totalling to USD 249 billion this year amid its hectic efforts to modernise armed forces, including fast paced development of warships and new generation fighter jets.

The planned defence expenditure for the country is 1.784665 trillion yuan (about USD 249 billion) this year, according to a draft budget report submitted to China's Parliament by Premier Li Qiang, state-run Xinhua news agency reported.

Last year, China increased its defence budget by 7.2 per cent to about USD 232 billion (1.67 trillion yuan).

China has the world's second-largest military budget after the US whose latest defence spending amounted to over USD 890 billion as proposed by President Donald Trump.

The Chinese defence spending is amounted to three times that of India's ₹ 681, 210 crore (USD 78.8 billion).

China's defence budget figures are viewed by critics with scepticism in the light of massive military modernisation, including building aircraft carriers, rapid construction of advanced naval ships and modern stealth aircraft being carried out at a feverish pitch by the Chinese military.

Announcing the annual budget which includes the defence spending at the opening of the annual session of China's parliament, the National People's Congress (NPC) Chinese Premier Li Qiang said last year, China made major new progress in national defence and military development.

Li emphasised on the Chinese President Xi Jinping's core leadership of the ruling Communist Party as well as the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and the military follow the party leadership.

Xi is also the Chairman of the Central Military Commission (CMC) which is the overall high command of the military.

We will stay committed to the Party's absolute leadership over the people's armed forces, thoroughly implement the system of ultimate responsibility resting with the chairman of the Central Military Commission, continue improving the political conduct of the military," he said.

The Chinese military functioned under the leadership of the Communist Party unlike the armed forces of other countries which functioned under the government.

"We will step up military training and combat readiness, speed up the development of new combat capabilities, and establish a framework of modern military theories with Chinese characteristics, so as to firmly safeguard China's sovereignty, security, and development interests," Li said in his work report submitted to the NPC.

On Tuesday, Lou Qinjian, spokesperson for the NPC, defended China's increasing defence expenditure, saying that "peace needs to be safeguarded with strength".

Since 2016, China's annual defence spending has maintained single-digit growth for nine years in a row, he said, adding that China's defence expenditure as a share of GDP has been kept under 1.5 per cent for many years. (PTI)

Indian-origin nurse attacked by patient in Florida, could lose eyesight

HOUSTON, March 5: A 67-year-old Indian-origin nurse was repeatedly punched in the face by a patient at a Florida hospital in a possible hate crime that could lead to her losing her eyesight, local media has reported. Nurse Leela Lal, also known as Leelamma Lal, was assaulted and "every bone of her face broken" by Stephen Eric Scantlebury, a 33-year-old patient she was tending to in the psychiatric ward at the Palms West Hospital in West Palm Beach, Florida on February 18, police said.

In a local court, a police officer testified that a video clip showed Scantlebury saying, "Indians are bad" and "I just beat the (expletive) out of an Indian doctor," news channel WPTV.com said.

Scantlebury faces a charge of attempted second-degree murder in the attack and also faces a hate crime enhancement, which could result in harsher penalties if he is convicted, the media said.

WPTV.com reported after the incident that HCA Florida HealthCare, which runs the Palm West Hospital, said the attack occurred "within a matter of seconds" and was "witnessed by multiple people" and added that Lal was taken by helicopter to St Mary's Medical Centre in West Palm Beach.

Slovak president swears in new minister in reshuffle to stabilise government

BRATISLAVA (SLOVAKIA), March 5: Slovakia's President Peter Pellegrini swore in a new minister of tourism and sports on Wednesday in a reshuffle aimed to stabilise the government.

The appointment of Rudolf Huliak came two weeks after the three parties in the governing coalition agreed on a move to increase the power of the Smer (Direction) party of populist Prime Minister Robert Fico.

Under the agreement, the coalition's two junior partners — the Hlas (Voice) party and the ultranationalist and pro-Russian Slovak National Party — gave up control of one ministry each to Smer.

With the addition of the ministries overseeing investments, regional de-

velopment and information, and tourism and sports, Smer now controls nine ministries, Hlas six and the Slovak National Party two.

The deal was a result of a recent crisis in the coalition that risked its parliamentary majority.

The coalition had 79 seats in the 150-seat parliament known as the National Council before four Hlas lawmakers and three others, including Huliak, in the Slovak National Party parted with their parliamentary factions.

The lawmakers did not join the opposition but have demanded posts in the government, parliament and state institutions in exchange for their loyalty. That has made it difficult for the government to advance its agenda. (AP)

Veterans speaking out on Trump administration's plans to cut VA's budget

NORFOLK (US), March 5: Stephen Watson served in the Marines for 22 years and receives care through the Department of Veterans Affairs for a traumatic brain injury. He supports President Donald Trump and adviser Elon Musk's cost-cutting program — even if it affects the VA. "We're no better because we're veterans," said Watson, 68, of Jesup, Georgia. "We all need to take a step back and realize that everybody's gonna have to take a little bit on the chin to get these budget matters under control." Gregg Bufundo served during the first Gulf War and has nerve damage to his feet from carrying loads of weight as a Marine mortarman. He says he may need to turn to the VA for care after being fired as a wilderness ranger and firefighter through the layoffs at the US Forest Service. "They're going to put guys like me and my fellow Marines that rely on the VA in the ground," said Bufundo, 53, who lives in Tonasket, Washington.

The Trump administration's move to end hundreds of VA contracts — halted after public outcry — and ongoing layoffs are affecting the nation's veterans, a critical

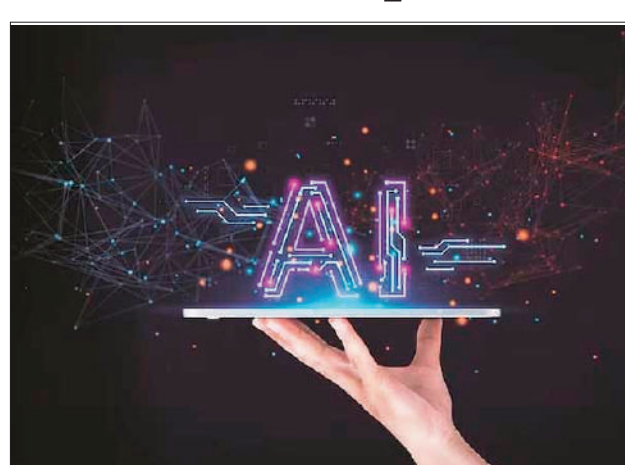
and politically influential constituency.

More than 9 million veterans get physical and mental health care from the VA, which is now being examined by Musk's Department of Government Efficiency.

The VA manages a USD 350 billion-plus budget and oversees nearly 200 medical centres and hospitals, many in Republican-led states and districts. Veterans have shown up at town hall-style meetings to voice their anger, and groups like the Veterans of Foreign Wars are mobilizing against cuts. Veterans were more likely to support Trump, a Republican, than Vice President Kamala Harris, a Democrat, in November's presidential election, according to AP VoteCast, a survey of the American electorate conducted in all 50 states. Nearly 6 in 10 voters who are veterans backed Trump, while about 4 in 10 voted for Harris.

Joy Ilem, national legislative director for the non-partisan group Disabled American Veterans, said her group was studying how the ongoing cuts might affect care. (AP)

AI pioneers who channeled 'hedonistic' machines win computer science's top prize



WASHINGTON, March 5: Teaching machines in the way that animal trainers mold the behaviour of dogs or horses has been an important method for developing artificial intelligence and one that was recognised Wednesday with the top computer science award.

Two pioneers in the field of reinforcement learning, Andrew Barto and Richard Sutton, are the winners of this year's A.M. Turing Award, the tech world's equivalent of the Nobel Prize.

Research that Barto, 76, and Sutton, 67, began in the late 1970s paved the way for some of the past decade's AI breakthroughs. At the heart of their work was channeling so-called "hedonistic" machines that could continuously adapt their behaviour in response to positive signals.

Reinforcement learning is what led a Google computer programme to beat the world's best human players of the ancient Chinese board game Go in 2016 and 2017. It's also been a key technique in improving popular AI tools like ChatGPT, optimising financial trading and helping a robotic hand solve a Rubik's Cube.

But Barto said the field was "not fashionable" when he and his doctoral student, Sutton, began crafting their theories and algorithms at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

"We were kind of in the wilderness," Barto said in an interview with The Associated Press. "Which is why it's so gratifying to receive this award, to see this becoming more recognised as something relevant and interesting. In the early days, it was not."

Google sponsors the annual

USD 1 million prize, which was announced Wednesday by the Association for Computing Machinery.

Barto, now retired from the University of Massachusetts, and Sutton, a longtime professor at Canada's University of Alberta, aren't the first AI pioneers to win the award named after British mathematician, codebreaker and early AI thinker Alan Turing. But their research has directly sought to answer Turing's 1947 call for a machine that "can learn from experi-

ence" — which Sutton describes as "arguably the essential idea of reinforcement learning."

In particular, they borrowed from ideas in psychology and neuroscience about the way that pleasure-seeking neurons respond to rewards or punishment. In one landmark paper published in the early 1980s, Barto and Sutton set their new approach on a specific task in a simulated world: balance a pole on a moving cart to keep it from falling. The two computer scientists later co-authored a widely used textbook on reinforcement learning.

"The tools they developed remain a central pillar of the AI boom and have rendered major advances, attracted legions of young researchers, and driven billions of dollars in investments," said Google's chief scientist Jeff Dean in a written statement.

In a joint interview with the AP, Barto and Sutton didn't always agree on how to evaluate the risks of AI agents that are constantly seeking to improve themselves. They also distinguished their work from the branch of generative AI technology that is currently in fashion

— the large language models behind chatbots made by OpenAI, Google and other tech giants that mimic human writing and other media.

"The big choice is, do you try to learn from people's data, or do you try to learn from an (AI) agent's own life and its own experience?" Sutton said.

Sutton has dismissed what he describes as overblown concerns about AI's threat to humanity, while Barto disagreed and said "You have to be cognizant of potential unexpected consequences." Barto, retired for 14 years, describes himself as a Luddite, while Sutton is embracing a future he expects to have beings of greater intelligence than current humans — an idea sometimes known as post-humanism.

"People are machines. They're amazing, wonderful machines," but they are also not the "end product" and could work better, Sutton said. "It's intrinsically a part of the AI enterprise," Sutton said. "We're trying to understand ourselves and, of course, to make things that can work even better. Maybe to become such things." (AP)

₹116 Crore for Solid Waste Management under CITIS 2.0 in Tripura



HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, March 5: The Agartala Smart City Limited has signed an agreement for a ₹116 crore project under the City Investments to Innovate, Integrate & Sustain 2.0 (CITIS 2.0) initiative to enhance Integrated Solid Waste Management in the city.

The signing took place on March 3 in Jaipur during the Asia-Pacific RRR Regional Conference, in the presence of Union Minister of Housing & Urban Affairs Manohar Lal, along with senior officials including the Secretary of MoHUA, Joint Secretary of SBM(U), and Director of NIUA. Representing Tripura, Dr. Shailesh, Municipal Commissioner of Agartala Municipal Corporation (AMC), Mission Director & CEO of Agartala Smart City Limited, and other key officials attended the event.

Agartala Smart City Limited celebrated the development on Facebook, calling it a significant milestone for Tripura's urban sector.

"After competing with cities across India through a challenge-based selection process, which included proposal submissions and personal interviews of Smart City CEOs by an expert panel from the European Union and India, Agartala secured its place among 18 cities under CITIS 2.0. The ₹116 crore project will be implemented over the next two years to transform Agartala into one of the cleanest cities in India," the post read.

Additionally, a tripartite agreement was signed in March between the Urban Development Directorate, NIUA, and MoHUA, securing a ₹5 crore grant for climate-resilient planning and the establishment of an Urban Climate Observatory.

'Defiance undermines the authority of the Union home minister' COTU statement on Government of India threat to national unity: COCOMI

IMPHAL, March 5: The Coordinating Committee on Manipur Integrity (COCOMI) has strongly condemned the "provocative and inflammatory" statement issued by the Committee on Tribal Unity (COTU), a Kuki-Zo based organisation, on March 3, 2025, wherein they "openly challenge the authority of the Union Home Minister and the Government of India."

"This brazen declaration is not only unconstitutional but a direct threat to national unity, law and order, and the sovereignty of the Indian state", said a COCOMI statement on Tuesday.

"The COTU's so-called 'Unbreakable declaration of the Kuki-Zo community' is nothing short of a secessionist manifesto that incites unrest, endorses illegal blockade tactics, and openly defies the democratic and constitutional framework of the country", the COCOMI further said. "This rhetoric of defiance and extremism, issued on a public platform, warrants immediate legal and administrative intervention".

By declaring their struggle for a 'Separate Administration' as 'non-negotiable' and threatening to 'carve their own path, no matter the cost', COTU has openly challenged the constitutional framework of India, the COCOMI said and added that this "defiance" undermines the authority of the Union Home Minister and disrespects the due process of law.

The statement that "no free movement shall be permitted in Kuki-Zo land" is an unlawful act that directly contravenes the fundamental rights guaranteed by the Indian

Constitution, the committee maintained, while noting that no entity or community has the legal right to impose restrictions on citizens' movement within Indian territory.

The COTU's warning that "no Kuki-Zo volunteer shall be arrested" and that "any such action will be met with consequences" is an outright challenge to the rule of law, the COCOMI also said and stressed that the demand for impunity for individuals engaging in disruptive activities must be met with strict legal repercussions.

The COCOMI then said that the "explicit" statement that the COTU will "unleash total resistance if the government enforces peace without addressing their demands" is a clear act of rebellion.

"Such statements by so-called civilian groups called COTU encourage violence and create an atmosphere of intimidation and civil unrest, and the declaration that their demand for a Union Territory with Legislature is 'final' and 'not negotiable' contradicts the democratic principles of dialogue and resolution", it said.

"This inflexible stance is a deliberate attempt to destabilize peace efforts in Manipur", the committee further said and alleged that the COTU's call for 'No peace before separation' exposes their role in perpetuating violence.

"By making peace conditional upon separation, the COTU has blatantly revealed itself as the primary instigator of violence in Manipur."

Their statement justifies continued un-



rest and conflict solely to push their vested political agenda, the COCOMI further said and alleged that this proves beyond doubt that the turmoil in Manipur since May 3, 2023, has been premeditated and orchestrated by the COTU to justify their demand for separation.

"Instead of seeking peace, the COTU has deliberately blamed the Meitei community to cover up their own planned acts of aggression and violence", the COCOMI alleged.

Hailing the Union Home Minister's directive to restore free movement on all state roads by March 8 as a bold and necessary step to restore normalcy in Manipur, the COCOMI said the "sharp

resistance from the COTU and their "dictating words of defiance have once again shattered the hopes of the people for peace and stability".

"The COCOMI calls for an immediate response from the Central government to ensure a sense of security and confidence among the people. If the Union Home Minister fails once again to keep his word, it could be the last time the people who genuinely want peace in the state place their trust in him," it said.

It also said that this is not the first time the Union Home Minister has failed to keep his promises during this crisis, and repeated failures only deepen the people's frustration and sense of abandonment.

The COCOMI also urged the Union Home Minister and the Government of India to take immediate and decisive legal action against the COTU and its leadership for "openly challenging" the sovereignty of the nation.

It demanded the Centre to direct law enforcement agencies to arrest and prosecute those responsible for issuing this inflammatory statement and ensure strict enforcement of law and order to prevent further incitement and blockades in Manipur.

Uphold the democratic fabric of India by reaffirming that no community or group can dictate terms that challenge national integrity, the COCOMI further demanded.

The "COTU's reckless provocation is a direct affront to the peace and stability of Manipur. The time for action is now. The Government of India must not allow such open defiance of its authority to go unchecked", it reiterated.

"We reaffirm our commitment to a united Manipur. We demand accountability for those attempting to undermine national sovereignty. We call upon all democratic institutions, civil society organizations, and responsible citizens to denounce this dangerous separatist rhetoric," the COCOMI asked.

The COCOMI added that it will not stand idle as elements with divisive intentions attempt to sow seeds of discord in the region, and that the law must prevail, and immediate action is imperative to uphold the integrity of the state. (NNV)

New road under bridge, improved drainage system ensures smooth train operations

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 5: North-east Frontier Railway (NFR) has successfully completed a series of crucial infrastructure upgrades during February. It aimed at improving safety and ensuring smooth train operations in important sections of its network.

One of the significant achievements during the month was the successful construction of a Road under Bridge (RUB) at km 57/7-8 between Panisagar and Pencharthal station on the Baraigram - Agartala section. Commissioned on February, this new RUB has permanently eliminated unauthor-



ized track crossings at the location, substantially enhancing safety for both train operations and the local population.

In addition, NFR completed the replacement of old girders at Major Bridge No 103 located at

km 102/7-8 between Chaparmukh and Kamrup station. Following the successful replacement of all four girders existing speed restriction of 75 kmph will now be withdrawn, enabling trains to operate at higher speeds while ensuring safer pas-

sage across the bridge.

In the Lumding - Badarpur hill section, NFR also undertook vital flood protection works at two vulnerable locations at km 67/9-68/0 and km 68/3-4 which had faced severe muck flow and waterlogging from upstream areas during the last monsoon. NFR has constructed two robust RCC Box culverts across the track, along with side drainage channels and necessary slope protection works. These improvements will ensure efficient drainage and protect the track during heavy rains, securing uninterrupted train services through this critical hilly terrain.

Tripura traffic inspector arrested for ₹74 Lakh embezzlement

HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, March 5: A Traffic Inspector in Tripura has been arrested for allegedly misappropriating ₹74 lakh from the Bishalgarh Traffic Police Unit in Sepahijala district, officials said on Wednesday.

Additional superintendent of police, Sepahijala District, Rajib Sutradhar, stated that during routine reconciliation of traffic fines, discrepancies amounting to ₹74 lakh were identified.

"While verifying the records, we found that the amount collected as fines was not deposited in the government treasury by the Bishalgarh Traffic Unit. Inspector Amarjit Debbarma, who was responsible for handling the funds, initially claimed that he had submitted the amount. However, our internal investigation revealed that he had misappropriated the money. Despite being given multiple chances to return the amount, he failed to do so. Consequently, we registered a case at Bishalgarh Police Station, arrested him, and presented him before the court, seeking three days of police remand," Sutradhar said.

He further stated that Debbarma had been serving in the Bishalgarh Traffic Unit since 2023 and had failed to deposit fines collected from eight challans.

"We are investigating whether any other individuals were involved in the embezzlement," he added.

Two earthquakes, including one of 5.7 magnitude, rock Manipur

SHILLONG/IMPHAL/GUWAHATI, March 5: Two consecutive earthquakes, including one of 5.7 magnitude, rocked Manipur on Wednesday and the tremors were felt across the Northeast, officials said.

The earthquake of 5.7 magnitude struck the state at 11.06 am. Its epicentre was 44 km east of Yairpok in Imphal East district, and at a depth of 110 km, according to officials of the Regional Seismological Centre in Shillong.

The tremors were felt in Assam, Meghalaya and other parts of the region, they said.

A second earthquake of 4.1 magnitude hit Manipur at 12.20 pm. It struck the Kamjong district of the state, at a depth of 66 km, they added.

Cracks were seen in several buildings in Manipur following the quakes. Videos shared on social media showed cracks at a school building in Wangjing Lamding in Thoubal district where a relief camp for the ethnic strife hit people was being run.

"We are confirming the reports of the damage," an official in Imphal said. No damage was reported so far in other states of the region. (PTI)

Manipur Gov reviews ongoing national highway projects in state



IMPHAL, March 5: Manipur governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla on Wednesday reviewed the progress of ongoing national highway projects in the state with officials of Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited (NHIDCL), CRPF and others, a Raj Bhavan statement said.

During the meeting, NHIDCL executive director MS Deval briefed the governor on the current status of various national highway projects in different parts of the state and also highlighted key challenges affecting project execution.

Bhalla also directed the officials to take steps to address these challenges and ensure timely completion of the projects. (PTI)

Five militants held in separate ops in Manipur

IMPHAL, March 5: Five militants, including three minors, were held in separate operations in Churachandpur and Imphal East districts of Manipur, police said on Wednesday.

A 19-year-old man was arrested with three minors from the Bethel area of Churachandpur on Tuesday. All of them were cadres of the proscribed United Kuki National Army (UKNA), a police officer said. They were allegedly involved in extorting local businesses, and smuggling of drugs and weapons, he said.

Two pistols were recovered from them, he added. In another operation, a member of the banned Kangleipak Communist Party (MKLP) was arrested from Old Modern College Gate in Imphal East on Tuesday.

He was allegedly involved in extorting public, small local businesses, and government officers, police said.

Ten hand grenades, 10 tube launching, and an iron ammunition box were recovered from him, they said. (PTI)

Fodder Bank at vibrant village Zemithang

HT Correspondent

ITANAGAR, March 5: A significant step towards supporting livestock farmers in extreme winter conditions was taken with the inauguration of a Fodder Bank at Vibrant Village Zemithang recently.

The initiative was inaugurated by Dr Sanjay Kumar, chairman, Agricultural Scientist Recruitment Board (ASRB), New Delhi, in the presence of deputy commissioner, Tawang, Kanki Darang, Dr Kadirvel G, ICAR-Agricultural Technology Research Institute, Zone-VI, Guwahati, Deewan Mara, CO, along with senior officers and local villagers.

The Fodder Bank aimed to ensure adequate fodder supply for livestock during extreme cold winters, supporting farmers in maintaining the health and productivity of the animals. Addressing the gathering, Dr Sanjay Kumar emphasised the importance of livestock care and urged farmers to treat them with the same concern as human beings. He also advised KVK scientists to focus on producing seedlings suited to the local climate and to collaborate with the army and state departments for the benefit of farmers.

Furthermore, Kumar encouraged farmers to explore secondary agriculture, including mushroom cultivation, vermicomposting, and the cultivation of sea buckthorn, to enhance their income and agricultural sustainability.

On this occasion, essential agricultural inputs such as vermi beds and seeds were distributed to farmers and Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) from various villages. An exhibition stall was also organized by KVK Tawang, showcasing innovative agricultural practices and technologies to support local farming communities.

This initiative marked a progressive step towards strengthening the agricultural and livestock sectors in Zemithang and empowering farmers with sustainable solutions for extreme climatic conditions.



Congress committed to ousting NDPP in Nagaland: AICC secretary Ulaka

KOHIMA, March 5: The Congress is committed to bringing a change in the political scenario of Nagaland, by ousting the NDPP from power, said Saptagiri Sankar Ulaka, the newly elected party in charge of the state on Wednesday.

Ulaka met office bearers of the Nagaland Pradesh Congress Committee (NPCC) to prepare strategies for the future, particularly the 2028 assembly elections.

"We are preparing for the 2028 elections to form a Congress-led government in Nagaland," Ulaka said while addressing a press conference here.

The people of Nagaland have shown their trust in the Congress party through overwhelming support in the Lok Sabha elections held last year.

The Congress, which does not have an MLA in the state assembly, won the lone Lok Sabha seat in Nagaland after a gap of 20 years. Party candidate Congress candidate S Supongmeren Jamir defeated his nearest rival Chumben Murry of the NDPP, a BJP ally, by a margin of 50,984 votes.

The people of Nagaland under the current NDPP and BJP coalition government faced misgovernance, which has affected the

state's development, alleged Ulaka, a Lok Sabha MP from Odisha.

Lauding the rule of Congress chief minister SC Jamir, he said, "It has been 20-22 years that we are out of power and I think the people of Nagaland deserve better governance, corruption-free governance, better solution to the problems."

The Congress is also confident of the regime change in the central government in 2029, he said.

"There is nothing that can stop us but as a party, as an organisation, what all things need to be done, we will do it right away and in a proper way," the Congress leader said.

The AICC secretary also emphasized the party's preparation strategy, which includes meetings with district committees, assembly-level Congress committees, and the identification of potential candidates for the upcoming elections.

In the next three months, the Congress plans to conduct district tours and form key committees in a time-bound manner, ensuring proper organisation and readiness for the elections, he said.

"We are ready to ensure a corruption-free, development-oriented governance system," Ulaka

asserted. He also highlighted other pressing issues in Nagaland, such as the lack of quality education, growing unemployment, and the steep rise in prices of essential goods.

Ulaka was particularly vocal about the challenges faced by women of the state, citing alleged increase in atrocities against them, as well as the widespread corruption plaguing various sectors.

He accused the current state government of institutionalising corruption, with reports of a 20 per cent cut being demanded for nearly every public service.

Lone Lok Sabha MP and Nagaland Pradesh Congress Committee (NPCC) president S Supongmeren Jamir supported Ulaka's leadership and experience, saying that his involvement would bring about significant change for the people of Nagaland.

"We are confident that with the guidance of experienced leaders like Ulaka, we can bring justice and development to our people," said Jamir.

The Congress Party is determined to address the widespread issues faced by Nagaland and aims to restore the state's prosperity, he said. (PTI)

Acquiring certificate is not the end: Along 38th convocation of Indra Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), Regional Centre, Kohima



HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, March 5: Nagaland minister of tourism and higher education Temjen Inma Along on Wednesday said acquiring a certificate is not the end but just a beginning to learn more and strive for the best outcome in life.

Along was addressing the 38th convocation of Indra Gandhi National Open University

(IGNOU), Regional Centre, Kohima, at Capital Convention Centre, Kohima as the guest of honour.

Congratulating the students who have successfully completed their course in different disciplines, he exhorted them to be a game changer in society rather than being parasites.

He also urged the graduating students to be

truthful to oneself and bring back those qualities of honesty, hard work and hospitalities that "our forefathers" had practiced long before amongst the Nagas and lead the society in the right direction.

Delivering the director's report, regional director, IGNOU, Dr Premila Swamy D informed that under the Kohima Regional Centre, 220 (UG and PG) candidates received certificates out of 914 eligible students from across the country, consisting of 711 master degree holders, 155 bachelor's degree holders, 31 diploma holders and 17 under certificate programmes, during the convocation. Altogether 914 students passed out from the IGNOU centres in 2025.

The IGNOU students shared their experiences in the institute during the convocation.

The main convocation function of the university was held at its headquarters in New Delhi. Commissioner and secretary, higher education, Rajesh Soundararajan and director, higher education, V Lovitoly Sema and officials from IGNOU were part of the convocation programme.

'Cleanliness is next to Godliness'

HT Correspondent

ITANAGAR, March 5: Cleanliness is next to godliness, said Yumlam Achung, former All Nyishi Youth Association (ANYA) and former Itanagar Market Welfare Association (IMWA).

He appealed all section of society to maintain cleanliness and hygiene to remain in a clean and green environment and disease free society.

Achung informed that we under the banner of former ANYA leaders forum (FALF) has on Wednesday organised a cleanliness driver at Nyokum Lapang where the Nyokum Yullo festival was celebrated with great fervor and traditional gaiety.

"We are happy to see the effort being put-up by the Itanagar municipal corporation (IMC) but it could not be possible until all section of society join hands," he said.

Vijayan accuses Congress of 'aiding' BJP's rise, Oppn party hits back

'Left has consistently been at the vanguard in defending India's secular and democratic fabric'

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, March 5: Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan claimed that the Left has been at the forefront of resisting and exposing the anti-people policies of the "Sangh Parivar-led central authorities," mobilising the public while also challenging the Congress's claim of being the sole force capable of countering the BJP.

He urged parties like the Indian Union Muslim League (IUM), a key ally of the Congress in Kerala, to think about their stand towards the grand old party.

Vijayan made these remarks in an article published in the media ahead of the CPI(M) state conference in Kollam.

The Congress sharply reacted to the senior CPI(M) politburo member's article, alleging that, following the Lok Sabha elections, the Chief Minister had adopted a pro-BJP stance.

"After the failure of attempts to stir minority sentiments during the elections, both the Chief Minister and his party have now embraced an approach that caters to majority communalism," Leader of the Opposition in the State Assembly, V D Satheesan, alleged.

Vijayan said that from resisting



bulldozers on Delhi's streets to leading the legal battle against religious-based citizenship laws in the Supreme Court, the Left has been at the forefront of key struggles, including the historic farmers' protest, the fight to restore Jammu and Kashmir's statehood, and the challenge against the BJP's corporate-funded Electoral Bond Scheme.

"At every stage, the Left has consistently been at the vanguard in defending India's secular and democratic fabric from these relentless attacks," he wrote in the article. The CPI(M) veteran claimed that in openly exposing anti-people

policies and mobilising the public against them, the Left has played a crucial role in resisting these measures. "This resistance has led people to think critically about the central government. While this is the reality, the Congress claims that only they can resist the Sangh Parivar. But what is the truth?" he questioned.

He alleged that despite farmers' anger against central policies being strongly reflected in the last Lok Sabha and subsequent assembly elections in states like Rajasthan, Haryana, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, and Maharashtra, it was Congress's strategy that ultimately helped

bring the BJP to power.

Vijayan further claimed that Congress's approach towards other opposition parties that challenge the BJP is marked by arrogance, with the latest example evident in the Delhi Assembly elections.

"In both 2015 and 2020, Congress failed to win even a single seat in the Delhi Assembly. Yet, instead of focusing on defeating the BJP, Congress made its primary goal the defeat of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), which is the main opposition force in Delhi. Congress leaders openly stated that helping AAP win was not their job," the CM alleged.

He argued that had Congress recognised its limitations and prioritised secular unity with a clear political vision, the outcome could have been entirely different.

"Instead, they created an opportunity for the BJP to dominate the national capital," Vijayan alleged.

"At a time when our secular democratic values are facing serious challenges, Congress's actions are unforgivable. Regardless of any differences with AAP, Congress should have worked towards resolving them and ensuring the BJP's defeat," the CPI(M) veteran said. He pointed out that many

leaders within the INDIA alliance, including Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah and SP chief Akhilesh Yadav, had already criticised Congress's "wrong approach." Just a few months ago, Congress had adopted a similar strategy in Haryana, alienating regional allies there as well, he alleged.

"So, is Congress genuinely trying to defeat the BJP or merely ensuring its victory? Their words say one thing, but their actions tell a different story. Can truly secular parties trust a Congress like this? Let parties like the League think about it," Vijayan said.

Hitting back at Vijayan, LoP Satheesan said that the Congress has always maintained an uncompromising stance against the Sangh Parivar.

"Where has Rahul Gandhi ever compromised with the BJP? It is Pinarayi Vijayan's CPI(M) that has made settlements with the BJP. CPI(M)'s latest discovery seems to be that the BJP is not a fascist party. While opposition parties, including Congress, firmly call the Modi government fascist, CPI(M) now claims it is not even 'neo-fascist' but only has the potential to be. (PTI)

All hostels for SCs, STs in every UP district to be named after Ambedkar: CM Yogi

LUCKNOW, March 5: Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Wednesday highlighted the BJP-led "double-engine" government's commitment to Bhimrao Ambedkar's legacy and said they had decided to name all hostels to be built for Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe students in every district of the state after "Baba Saheb Ambedkar".

Adityanath slammed the opposition during the Budget discussion in the UP Vidhan Sabha, accusing them of failing to honour Ambedkar and other Dalit and backward leaders despite their claims of protecting the Constitution.

"Our government has taken several historic initiatives, including the construction of the Ambedkar International Centre and the establishment of Panch Teerth. We have also decided that all hostels to be built for Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) students in every district of the state will be named after Baba Saheb Ambedkar." The chief minister emphasised that this year marks the 'Amrit Mahotsav' of India's Constitution.

"The Samajwadi Party (SP) had multiple chances to govern but never built institutions in Baba Saheb Ambedkar's name. Instead, they removed even the existing ones," he remarked.

He highlighted the BJP government's initiatives under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership, stating, "Unlike the opposition, we have built the 'Panch Teerth' in Baba Saheb's honour and are constructing the Ambedkar International Memorial and Cultural Center in Lucknow."

He further mentioned that this centre would also provide scholarships to Dalit students.

Taking another swipe at the opposition, Adityanath said the SP only engages in political sloganeering while the BJP government has taken concrete steps to honour great personalities. He pointed out that the BJP government built a hostel named after Savitribai Phule at Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University in Lucknow for the benefit of Dalit students.

"The Samajwadi government had removed Ambedkar's name from the Kanauj Medical College, but we reinstated it," he noted.

Discussing the development of historical sites, he said, "In Prayagraj, we built a grand corridor at Nishadraj Shringverpur, which was inaugurated by Prime Minister Modi. The Samajwadi Party was trying to encroach on this historic site but we have preserved and developed it as part of our heritage."

The chief minister accused the SP of obstructing the construction of Maharaja Suheldev's victory memorial. "The Samajwadi government tried to halt the memorial but our government has now completed grand memorials in Bahraich and Shravasti," he said.

Adityanath highlighted the transformation of Sant Ravidas' birthplace in Varanasi, saying, "They attempted to stop the development at his birthplace but we have built a magnificent statue and corridor in his honour."

CM Yogi further criticised the opposition for hindering the development of important historical sites.

"The Samajwadi Party blocked the development of Maharishi Valmiki's meditation site in Lalpur. We turned it into a model tourist destination," he said.

Similarly, he accused them of obstructing progress at Rajapur, the birthplace of Goswami Tulsidas, adding, "Our government has carried out extensive development work there." The chief minister highlighted the BJP government's dedication to honouring historical figures and driving progress in UP.

He praised Prime Minister Modi's decision to declare November 26 as Constitution Day as a tribute to Ambedkar. Announcing new welfare initiatives, Yogi said, "On the 300th birth anniversary of Lokmata Ahilyabai Holkar, we are planning to establish seven hostels exclusively for women."

"To mark Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel's 150th birth anniversary, the Uttar Pradesh government has decided to create employment zones covering 100 acres in every district," he said.

Focusing on tribal heritage, he noted, "We have already built a tribal museum in Imlia Kodar and Balrampur in honour of Bhagwan Birsa Munda's 150th birth anniversary and similar museums are being constructed in Mirzapur and Sonbhadra." (PTI)

Will put across porters' demands to govt, fight for their rights: Rahul



NEW DELHI, March 5: Drawing attention to the financial difficulties faced by railway porters, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday said they risked their lives to help people during the stampede at the New Delhi Railway Station last month and yet their voice was not being heard.

The former Congress president, who posted on his YouTube channel a video of his recent interaction with porters at the New Delhi Railway Station, asserted that he would fight for their rights.

Gandhi also urged people to share suggestions on the 'Awaz Bharat Ki' portal to improve crowd management and strengthen security. "We will listen to the voice of India!" he said on X.

The increasing number of stampedes at railway stations and other public places is a matter of great concern, Gandhi said, noting that many innocent people lose their lives or get injured in such incidents.

"We need to think together about how to prevent such tragedies," he said. In his post accompanying the video of his interaction with porters, Gandhi said, "A few days ago, I reached New Delhi Railway Station and met the porter brothers there again. During the interaction, they told me how everyone together made every possible effort to save people's lives on the day of the stampede."

"Whether it was trying to remove people from the crowd, ensuring that the injured reached the ambulance and administration, or taking out the bodies of the dead using their physical abilities, hand-carts or spending money from their own pockets, they helped the passengers in every way," the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha said. Gandhi thanked them for saving many lives and helping in the relief work during the stampede at the station on February 15.

At least 18 people were killed in the incident at the New Delhi Railway Station, which was witnessing a surge of passengers waiting to board trains for Prayagraj.

The Congress leader said, "I am very impressed to see the compassion of these brothers who come to earn daily wages".

"They are still living in financial difficulties - but are full of passion and goodwill. They need help, about which they conveyed their demands. I will definitely make every possible effort to help them," Gandhi said.

In a post in Hindi on X, the Congress leader quoted a porter as saying, "Some days we don't even have money to eat. We either send money home or eat food."

"Our porter brothers are forced to live in such difficulties," he said in his post on X.

"During the stampede at New Delhi Railway Station, these people risked their lives to help people, but their voice is not being heard. I will put their demands before the government and fight with all my might for their rights!" Gandhi said.

In the video, the porters told Gandhi that they are demanding Group D employment. (PTI)

Nitish will contest Bihar polls with BJP but may switch sides later: Prashant Kishor

BETTIAH (BIHAR), March 5: Election strategist-turned-politician Prashant Kishor on Wednesday claimed that JD(U) president Nitish Kumar will contest the upcoming assembly polls in Bihar in alliance with the BJP but may switch sides later, with hopes for another term as the chief minister. The Jan Suraj Party founder, who was addressing a press conference in West Champaran district, however, also asserted that the 74-year-old leader had grown too unpopular to enjoy a fifth consecutive term in office "no matter which alliance he becomes a part of".

"Anybody can become the chief minister in November, after the assembly elections are over, except Nitish Kumar. You can take it from me in writing. If I am proven wrong then I will give up my own political campaign," Kishor said.

About speculations that Kumar may quit the NDA ahead of the assembly polls, in view of the BJP's apparent reluctance to declare him as the chief ministerial candidate, the former election strategist said, "He will contest in alliance with

the BJP. He has always done so, barring the elections of 2015, when I had handled his campaign." Kishor also claimed that the BJP was wary of declaring Kumar as the chief ministerial candidate of the NDA because of his declining popularity. "I challenge Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah to declare that Nitish Kumar will be the chief minister for a full five-year term after the elections (if the NDA comes to power). If they do so, the BJP will find it hard to win seats," Kishor said.

The former JD(U) national vice president, who was expelled from the party in 2020 following a spat with Kumar, also claimed that the ruling party was "going to do very badly" (in the polls). "Nitish Kumar may try switching sides after it becomes clear to him that the BJP was not going to back him for another term in office. But the number of seats won by JD(U) would be so dismal that he would not get the top job, no matter which formation he joins," Kishor predicted.

The 47-year-old politician also alleged that the

septuagenarian CM was "physically tired and mentally retired", claiming, "Not me, but the late BJP leader Sushil Kumar Modi had stated that Nitish Kumar suffers from a serious mental illness. I have been challenging him for long to spell out the names of ministers in his own cabinet, without looking at a piece of paper. He cannot tell the name of the district he is touring unless prompted by officials. It is unfortunate that with such a state of mind, he is ruling Bihar."

He also maintained that Kumar had "brought disrepute to Bihar by touching the feet of Modi last year, in the presence of many other chief ministers, when the new Union government was being sworn in." "If he has so much of reverence for the PM, he could have touched the latter's feet in private. But he is resorting to sycophancy merely to keep himself in the chair. Why does he not use his clout with the BJP, which is now dependent on JD(U)'s support to survive in power at the Centre, to revive the moribund sugar industry in Bihar?" Kishor asked. (PTI)

SP MLA Azmi suspended from assembly for lauding Aurangzeb, Yogi asks party to expel him

MUMBAI, March 5: Samajwadi Party MLA Abu Azmi was suspended from the Maharashtra legislative assembly till the ongoing budget session ends on March 26, over his remarks eulogizing Mughal emperor Aurangzeb.

Crying injustice, Azmi said the action against him was taken despite him retracting his remark.

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath asked the Samajwadi Party to take a stand on Azmi's remarks, demanding that it must expel him for glorifying the Mughal ruler.

Maharashtra minister Chandrakant Patil moved the motion of suspension of Azmi from the House for the remainder of the session's term.

Members of the treasury benches said Aurangzeb's praise amounted to an insult of Maratha king Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj and his son Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj.

The motion was passed by a voice vote. "Azmi's comments praising Aurangzeb and criticizing Sambhaji Maharaj do not suit the stature of a member of the assembly and is an insult of the democratic institution of the legislative assembly," Patil said.

Azmi, president of the Samajwadi Party's state unit, had said that during Aurangzeb's reign, India's border reached Afghanistan and Burma

(Myanmar).

"Our GDP accounted for 24 per cent (of the world GDP) and India was called a golden sparrow (during his regime)," claimed the MLA from Mankhurd Shivaji Nagar constituency in Mumbai.

Asked about the fight between Aurangzeb and Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj, Azmi had termed it a political battle.

His comments rocked both houses of the state legislature on Tuesday, with members of the ruling side demanding his suspension and that he be booked for treason.

Azmi said his remarks were twisted. "Whatever I have said about Aurangzeb is something that has been stated by historians and writers. I have not made any derogatory remarks against Shivaji Maharaj, Sambhaji Maharaj or any national icons. Still, if anyone is hurt by my remarks, then I take back my statements and comments," he said on Tuesday.

In a video statement released by his office on Wednesday, Azmi asserted he had not said anything wrong, but retracted the remark, which he made outside the assembly, to ensure the House functions. "Despite this I was suspended," he said.

Deputy Chief Minister and Shiv Sena head Eknath Shinde on Tuesday

led the attack on Azmi both in the legislative council and assembly.

"Azmi is purposely insulting Shivaji Maharaj and Sambhaji Maharaj. Rather announced expunging of "derogatory remarks" of the leader of opposition about the July 13, 1931 "martyrs" amid pandemonium in the House.

BJP leader and LoP Sunil Sharma made the remarks on the 1931 "martyrs" after PDP legislator Waheed-ur-Rehman Para demanded restoration of the public holiday on July 13 besides the December 5 holiday to mark the birth anniversary of National Conference founder Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah. Both the holidays were scrapped by the lieutenant governor-led administration following abrogation of Article 370 and the bifurcation of the erstwhile state into two Union territories in August 2019. Taking part in a debate on the motion of thanks to LG's address at a time when NC president Farooq Abdullah reached the visitors' gallery to watch the proceedings, Para sought restoration of the two holidays and highlighted the importance of the July 13, 1931 when 22 men fell to the bullets of Dogra Maharaja's soldiers outside Srinagar central jail and the contribution of the NC founder.

They have sacrificed their lives

BJP members stage walkout from J-K assembly amid uproar over 1931 'martyrs'

JAMMU, March 5: The BJP on Wednesday walked out of the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly here after Speaker Abdul Rahim Rather announced expunging of "derogatory remarks" of the leader of opposition about the July 13, 1931 "martyrs" amid pandemonium in the House.

BJP leader and LoP Sunil Sharma made the remarks on the 1931 "martyrs" after PDP legislator Waheed-ur-Rehman Para demanded restoration of the public holiday on July 13 besides the December 5 holiday to mark the birth anniversary of National Conference founder Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah. Both the holidays were scrapped by the lieutenant governor-led administration following abrogation of Article 370 and the bifurcation of the erstwhile state into two Union territories in August 2019. Taking part in a debate on the motion of thanks to LG's address at a time when NC president Farooq Abdullah reached the visitors' gallery to watch the proceedings, Para sought restoration of the two holidays and highlighted the importance of the July 13, 1931 when 22 men fell to the bullets of Dogra Maharaja's soldiers outside Srinagar central jail and the contribution of the NC founder.

They have sacrificed their lives against autocracy and for democracy and the House, irrespective of party affiliation and ideology, should come together to restore the July 13 holiday and also Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah's holiday given his political stature and the contribution, Para said.

The PDP MLA also demanded passing of a resolution in the House for shifting of prisoners from outside jails to J&K and requested Chief Minister Omar Abdullah to take the issue of property attachment and other strong arm tactics with the Centre. He also criticized the BJP for turning J&K into a glorified municipality and said the speech of the LG is talking more of BJP's agenda rather than reflecting the people's aspirations and sentiments, and the election promises of NC.

When you choke and suffocate the people, it will result in separatism, boost Jamaat-e-Islami and strengthen the Pakistani agenda. There is an illusion of peace in Kashmir but the reality is that you have a foot on the spring and once it is lifted, the situation will be much worse than the 2010, 2014 and 2016 unrest. This is not a warning but a reality, he said. BJP's Sharma reacted angrily to Para's statement and opposed the restoration of holiday on July 13 (PTI)

Govt clears Kedarnath, Hemkund Sahib Ji ropeway projects worth ₹ 6,811 cr



NEW DELHI, March 5: The government on Wednesday approved two ropeway projects in Uttarakhand -- Sonprayag to Kedarnath and Govindghat to Hemkund Sahib Ji -- at a total cost of ₹ 6,811 crore to help significantly reduce the travel time to the pilgrimage sites and boost tourism.

The construction of these two ambitious projects is likely to be completed in 4-6 years. The two ropeways will be constructed under the National Rope-

ways Development Programme -- Parvatmalia Pariyojana.

The decisions of the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA), chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, were announced by Information and Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw.

The Sonprayag to Kedarnath ropeway is planned to be developed in public-private partnership and will be based on the most advanced Tri-cable

Detachable Gondola (3S) technology having the capacity to carry 1,800 passengers per hour per direction (PPHPD), which could ferry 18,000 passengers per day.

Vaishnaw informed that the 12.4-km ropeway project from Govindghat to Hemkund Sahib Ji too will be developed on DBFOT mode at a total capital cost of ₹ 2,730.13 crore.

Currently, the journey to the Hemkund Sahib Ji is a challenging 21-km uphill trek from Govindghat and is covered on foot or by ponies or palanquins. The proposed ropeway is planned to provide convenience to pilgrims visiting the Hemkund Sahib Ji and the tourists visiting the Valley of Flowers, and will ensure all-weather last-mile connectivity between Govindghat and Hemkund Sahib Ji.

The journey to the Kedarnath temple is a challenging 16-km uphill trek from Gaurikund and is currently covered on foot or by ponies, palanquins and helicopter. The proposed ropeway is planned to provide convenience to pilgrims visiting the temple and ensure all-weather connectivity between Sonprayag and Kedarnath. (PTI)

No. SLRC-G-IV/Assam/Advertisement for Analogous Posts-IV/2023-24/01/123

NOTICE

The provisional results of the written Examination (OMR based), conducted by the State Level Recruitment Commission for Class IV Posts for the various Class-IV posts advertised vide advertisement No. SLRC-G-IV/Assam/Advertisement for Analogous Posts-IV/2023-24/01/14 dated 27/10/2023, will be declared on 7th March, 2025. The results can be viewed by individual candidates in the official website of Assam State School Education Board, Div-I (erstwhile SEBA) i.e. www.site.sebaonline.org and website of Govt. of Assam (www.assam.gov.in). For viewing the results, the candidates are required to login in the websites by entering their Application Number and the Password that was used at the time of filling the application and downloading of the Admit Cards.

Successful candidates of the written examination will have to appear for the next level of tests/oral interview and document verification, the details of which will be notified in due course of time.

The results of the candidates declared are provisional and subject to fulfillment of the eligibility criteria as prescribed in the Advertisement and veracity of the documents and declaration made during filling of the online applications.

The cut-off marks of each category of posts in respect of Paper-I and Paper-II will also be available in the official website of Assam State School Education Board, Div-I (erstwhile SEBA) i.e. www.site.sebaonline.org on the same day.

N.B: The Commission will not be responsible for any typing/printing mistake.

Sd/-

Secretary,
State Level Recruitment
Commission for Class-IV Posts

Janasanyog/D/13312/24/6-Mar-25

UP economic growth outpaces national average: CM Yogi

'The opposition should apologize to the people for their past governance failures'

LUCKNOW, March 5: Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Wednesday said that Uttar Pradesh's economic growth has outpaced the national average and the state budget for the next fiscal is a tool to take development to the last mile.

Presenting a comprehensive overview of the state's economy in the Legislative Council, Yogi asserted that the budget reflects the government's strong commitment to accelerating economic growth while increasing per capita income. "In 2023-24, India's GDP grew at a rate of 9.6 per cent, while Uttar Pradesh's GSDP increased by 11.6 per cent," he said, highlighting the state's rapid economic expansion.

He noted that the state budget is ₹ 8,08,736 crore, describing it as not merely an expenditure plan but a tool to ensure development reaches the last mile. He also pointed out that this budget is 2.5 times larger than that of 2016-17 (when Samajwadi Party was in power) and 10 per cent higher than the previous fiscal year.

"This reflects our strong commitment to accelerating economic growth while increasing per capita

income. ₹ 2.25 lakh crore has been allocated solely for capital expenditure, ensuring rapid development. Compared to 2016-17, per capita income has nearly doubled," he stated.

Targeting the opposition, particularly the Samajwadi Party (SP), Adityanath remarked that they often question the rationale behind increasing the budget size.

"The budget is not just about increasing expenditure; it is also about maintaining financial discipline. Even the Reserve Bank of India has set limits for fiscal deficit management. Our fiscal deficit stands at 2.97 per cent of the state's GSDP, well within the 3 per cent threshold. This is despite the fact that we have not imposed any new taxes in the last eight years. In fact, we reduced VAT on petrol and diesel, demonstrating our commitment and political will," he said.

The CM further stated that corruption has been curbed, and all departments have been adequately funded to ensure holistic development. Referring to past financial mismanagement under SP rule, he quipped, "Gone are the days when just Re 1 was allocated for projects



worth ₹ 100 crore. When we came to power, we had to spend thousands of crores just to clear the mess left behind by previous governments."

The CM emphasized that in the past eight years, Uttar Pradesh has set an example of financial transparency and discipline.

"There was a time when no one was willing to give us loans or invest in the state. Today, banks line up to finance our projects. The perception of Uttar Pradesh has changed nationwide," he said,

adding that NITI Aayog has ranked the state among the leading states in financial discipline.

He also highlighted that despite having a population of 25 crore, UP is a revenue-surplus state, unlike in the past when it struggled to attract investments.

"The opposition should apologize to the people for their past governance failures," he added.

Citing NITI Aayog and RBI reports, the CM provided a data-backed defence of UP's economic progress.

He said UP has shown steady improvement in revenue share. Its contribution to national tax revenue was 9.9 per cent in 2022-23, 10.5 per cent in 2023-24, and is projected to be 11.6 per cent in 2024-25.

For debt management, he said the state's interest expenditure as a percentage of revenue is lower than most states, proving its ability to manage finances efficiently.

On GSDP growth, he said from ₹ 12.75 lakh crore (1950-'2017), UP's GSDP has surged to ₹ 27.51 lakh crore in 2025, with a goal of reaching ₹ 32 lakh crore by 2026.

Adityanath asserted that Uttar Pradesh has emerged as a leader in several key areas, including digital transactions, Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) implementation, and attracting Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). He noted that 71.65 lakh people in UP file income tax returns, contributing significantly to national revenue.

"The Uttar Pradesh of today is not the same as before. We have established a financially strong and investment-friendly state, ensuring that development reaches every citizen," he said. (PTI)

IIT Madras develops framework to protect critical infrastructure against ballistic missiles

NEW DELHI, March 5: Researchers at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Madras, have developed a framework that can boost protection of critical infrastructure in the country against the threat of ballistic missiles, according to officials. The framework will help designers develop innovative solutions for improving the ballistic resistance of reinforced concrete (RC) panels, they said.

The findings of the research were published in reputed peer-reviewed journal "Reliability Engineering & System Safety". Using computational simulations, the researchers studied the impact of missiles on RC, which is the main material used to construct vital structures ranging from military bunkers, nuclear power buildings and bridges to runways.

According to Alagappan Ponnalagu, assistant professor, Department of Civil Engineering, IIT Madras, concrete structures face highly localised damage such as penetration, perforation, scabbing, spalling and crushing under projectile impact load.

"Due to the strategic importance of these structures, it is necessary to protect them against projectile and debris impact, which can result in localised damage or even the collapse of the entire structure," he said. Ballistics is a field of engineering that deals with the launching, flight behaviour, and impact effects of projectiles such as bullets, bombs, and rockets. This science is used not only for designing bunkers, but also for designing the walls of nuclear power buildings, bridges, and other protective structures.

The researchers conducted the study during Finite Element (FE) simulation, a computational technique used to simulate and analyse physical phenomena in engineering and science.

"FE simulation relies on the Finite Element Method (FEM), a numerical approach for solving complex problems involving partial differential equations. These problems often arise in fields like structural mechanics, among others. The researchers focused on the development of the novel performance-based design framework based on Depth of Penetration (DOP) and Crater Damage Area in the RC panels."

"In addition to that, a probabilistic formula for estimating the crater diameter in RC panels is proposed. The study is helpful not only in terms of providing the ballistic design framework and probabilistic crater quantification formula, but also in understanding the ballistic behaviour of RC panels," he said. Ponnalagu explained that ballistic design is crucial for widely utilised concrete structures in today's unpredictable world.

"Usually, extensive experimental and numerical studies have been done to investigate concrete panels, resulting in design guidelines for local damage parameters. However, with the advent of performance-based design, the ballistic design of concrete structures lacks a comprehensive design philosophy. Moreover, while quantifying damage parameters, incorrect and inconsistent results are obtained by using deterministic empirical formulations."

"We have now provided a reliable design formula for estimating crater diameter in addition to the development of a novel performance-based ballistic design framework for RC panels. This study is helpful not only in terms of providing the ballistic design framework and probabilistic crater quantification formula but also in understanding the ballistic behaviour of RC panels," he said. (PTI)



JU protests enter 3rd day, VC admitted to hospital with high blood pressure

KOLKATA, March 5: Protests at Jadavpur University continued for the third consecutive day on Wednesday, as students demanded action against alleged assaults on their peers.

The agitating students had set a 4 pm deadline for interim vice-chancellor Bhaskar Gupta to address their grievances. However, Gupta did not appear, as he was admitted to a private hospital in the morning and is currently under medical observation, officials said. His wife claimed that his blood pressure had elevated and that he was unwell.

Despite this, students vowed to continue their protest, accusing the VC of showing no responsibility or urgency since the incident occurred.

"The VC showed no sympathy despite a student fighting for his life, nor any urgency to resolve the pending issues to defuse the crisis. He also did not show any courtesy or urgency to meet us. We gave a 4 PM deadline, but now he is admitted to the hospital for reasons best known to him," a protesting student from a left-backed organisation said.

"We will continue to maintain the pressure so that he comes for talks with us after he returns from the hospital," he added.

Throughout the day, members of the All India Democratic Students' Organisation (AIDSO) and several ultra-left student groups, including the Democratic Students' Federation (DSF), staged demonstrations.

The state Congress held a protest at Jadavpur University gate against alleged atrocities against the protesting students.

The students' demands include registering a hit-and-run case against education minister Bratya Basu, whose car allegedly hit In-dranuj Roy, a student currently undergoing treatment.

They also called for the withdrawal of police cases against students and the release of those arrested.

According to the protesters, seven cases have been registered in connection with the incident, including four against Roy.

Additionally, the agitators demanded that the university bear the full cost of treatment for the injured students. (PTI)

Priority should be given to persons with higher disability in govt jobs: HC

INDORE, March 5: The Madhya Pradesh High Court has directed the state government to strictly adhere to one of its circulars and give priority in government jobs to persons with higher disability.

The high court gave this direction recently while disposing of the petitions of five persons suffering from higher disability. These petitions said the state government was "completely ignoring" its own circular in the appointment of divyangs or differently-abled persons.

In the circular issued on July 3, 2018 by the General Administration Department of the state government, it was said, "It has often been seen that divyangs whose percentage of disability is less, are being given reservation in government service. Divyangs whose percentage of disability is more, are not being given appointments in government service. This action is contrary to the intention of the provision mentioned in the Divyang Jan Adhikar Niyam 2017. Therefore, priority should be given to those divyangs who have more disability."

In light of this circular, Justice Subodh Abhyankar of the Indore bench of the high court on February 24 cancelled the recruitment of a total of five candidates on Class IV posts under the divyang quota by the Skill Development Department of the state government, Kannod Municipal Council of Dewas district and Jaora Municipal Council of Ratlam district. The court directed the state government to re-issue advertisements for the recruitment of divyangs on these posts and complete the appointment process within four months by strictly following its 2018 circular in this regard.

The respondents were also directed to issue fresh advertisements for appointments of divyang persons strictly complying with the intent, letter and spirit of the circular dated 3.7.2018, as also the observations made hereinabove, as expeditiously as possible, also ensuring that the disability does not come in the way of the duties attached to the post. Let the aforesaid exercise be completed within a further period of four months, it said. (PTI)

Another FIR lodged against Ansal Group in UP's Ghaziabad

GHAZIABAD (UP), March 5: Another FIR was lodged against the Ansal Group in this Uttar Pradesh district on Wednesday on a number of charges, including cheating and forgery, police said.

Assistant Engineer, Ghaziabad Development Authority, Gyan Prakash Dwivedi, who is attached to enforcement zone 5, got the FIR lodged against Ansal Properties and Infrastructure Limited (APIL) at the Crossing Republic police station, they added.

In the FIR, Pranav Ansal, Vikas Yadav, general manager Amit Shukla and other officials of the firm have been booked under Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) sections 318(4) (cheating), 338 (forgery of valuable security, will etc.), 336(3) (forgery for cheating), 61(2) (criminal conspiracy) and section 3 of the Prevention of Damage to Public Property Act, police said.

Ghaziabad Police Commissioner Ajay Kumar Mishra said the FIR was lodged on Wednesday morning.

The complaint was registered following Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's orders, instructing officials to take strict action against the Ansal builders in the entire district, where homebuyers have been cheated. It is alleged that the Ansal Group violated the township policy and sold 99.75 acres of land located in Dundahera village (within the Crossing Republic police station limits) by preparing fake documents. Police teams have been formed to investigate the case, the commissioner said. (PTI)

Equity in technology needed for true gender parity: Smriti Irani

NEW DELHI, March 5: Former Union minister Smriti Irani on Wednesday underscored the urgent need for ensuring equity in technology for true gender parity.

Speaking at the Indo-American Chamber of Commerce Conference on Women Empowerment, Irani highlighted the systemic biases embedded in AI systems and called for a collective effort to address these disparities.

She urged the stakeholders to prioritize digital equity as a cornerstone of women's empowerment.

"In the age of AI, it is not man confronting woman or woman confronting man. It is humanity confronting what AI will do to us," Irani said. She pointed to a research, which revealed that out of 133 AI systems around the world, 44% of AI systems are not gender-inclusive. Irani shared a striking example of gender bias in AI-driven financial systems. "A woman with the same income, tax returns and financial standing as her husband was offered a credit limit 10% lower than his. Another woman's credit limit was set 20 times lower than her husband's despite identical financial profiles," she said.

The former minister also drew attention to the psychological manipulation of women through AI-driven consumer behaviour. "Seventy-two per cent of content

purchased by women is algorithmically designed to encourage higher spending on consumer durables and perishables, while they are 33% less likely to receive investment advice online," she noted. Irani urged for a deeper study of consumer behaviour in the digital age, particularly its impact on women.

The former minister praised India's strides in financial inclusion, citing initiatives like the 'Jan Dhan Yojana' and the 'Mudra' loan scheme, which she said has empowered millions of women. "Bankers say that the non-performing asset (NPA) for women owned businesses are about 1.8 to 1.9 per cent as compared to men which stands at 2.3 per cent," she said. Irani, however, highlighted the lingering disparities. "While there is no gender gap in bank account ownership, women receive only 27% of the credit equivalent to their deposits, compared to 52% for men. So we have better NPA records, but we have moderately okay credit records," Irani said. Irani urged India to lead the way in ensuring equity in technology.

"This is a nation that gave the world zero and is a global leader in IT services. Let us also be the country that shows the world how to achieve equity in technology," she said. (PTI)



Navratna status gives us freedom to fund anyone from railway ecosystem: IRFC

NEW DELHI, March 5: Indian Railway Finance Corporation, which earned Navratna status from the government, on Wednesday said that with this recognition, it can go beyond its present funding activities to the needs of the Indian Railways to all other companies operating in the whole rail eco-system.

Interacting with the media persons to update the future plans after being awarded the Navratna status, Indian Railway Finance Corporation (IRFC) CMD and CEO Manoj Kumar Dubey said the company, which was funding to the Indian Railways, has now got wider leeway to finance all other companies and activities which come under the rail logistics eco-system. On March 3, 2025, the government approved the upgradation of IRCTC and IRFC to Navratna Central Public Sector Enterprises. Dubey said that his company will have several edges as compared to his competitors when it comes to bidding for railway-linked projects because the IRFC maintains very low expenses, has access to cheap raw material (loan) and it wants a margin of over 40 paise, a margin it gets from the Railways currently.

He informed that the firm has funded Rs 5 lakh crore to the Indian Railways till date, however, the Railways hasn't taken any loan from it for the past two years.

As and when the railways require money, it has to come to us and that business is always assured to us. Apart from that, what we have embarked upon is anything back and forth linkage with the railways we wish to fund, Dubey said. We have found that in our gamut of systems others are funding with a big margin of 200 and 250 basis points. Think over a scenario that I am funding with anything between 40 bps to 150 bps and the kind of yield it will give to my bottomline, he added.

Dubey banked upon the company's zero NPA status. Out of all the three government financial institutions -- the Rural Electrification Corporation (REC), Power Finance Corporation (PFC) and IRFC -- that can issue 54EC bonds (capital gain bonds), only NPA status makes us safest among all, he said. A press statement from the company said that it has already secured funding for 20 BOBR (Bogie Open Bottom Rapid discharge railway wagon) rakes for NTPC worth 700 crore and was recently declared the lowest bidder to finance a ₹ 3190 crore loan for Patratu Vidyut Utpadan Nigam Limited (PVUNL), a subsidiary of NTPC. (PTI)

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HC: Will state book 5 cops indicted in magistrate report on encounter of Badlapur case accused

MUMBAI, March 5: The Bombay High Court on Wednesday asked the Maharashtra government if it proposes to register an FIR against five policemen indicted by a magistrate's report on the encounter of the Badlapur school sexual assault accused.

The court posed this question even as the state government reiterated that it had already set up a commission headed by the retired Chief Justice of the Allahabad High Court and a probe is being carried out by the state CID into the alleged police shootout.

The accused in the case was allegedly shot dead in a police encounter in September last year while being taken from the Talaja prison to Kalyan in Thane district. The escorting police team claimed that they shot at the accused in self-defence after he snatched the gun of one of them and opened fire. Since it was a custodial death, as per law, a magistrate conducted an inquiry and submitted his report to the HC. The magistrate said there was substance in the allegations made by the parents of the deceased accused that this was a fake encounter, and raised suspicion on the policemen's self-defence claim. As per the inquiry report, five policemen were responsible for the death of the accused.

On Wednesday, a division bench of Justices Revati Mohite Dere and Neela Gokhale said it only wanted to know what the state government proposes to do now that the magistrate has submitted his report.

Once that the report has come, our question is whether it is incumbent on the State to register a FIR or not. Today the question is whether the State proposes to lodge an FIR or not? Say yes or no, the court said. The state government has to tell us whether FIR ought to be registered or not, it added.

Senior counsel Amit Desai, appearing for the government, said the state is already carrying out an independent investigation, besides the inquiry commission, and hence believes that it is acting in accordance with the law.



The observations made by the magistrate cannot be a basis for registering an FIR (first information report), Desai said. The state is carrying out its independent investigation and based on that it will come to a conclusion on whether a chargesheet needs to be filed or closure report based on whether or not a cognizable offence is made out, he added.

Desai said at this stage, when an investigation is already underway, it is not permissible for the court to ask about registering an FIR based on the magistrate's inquiry report. The court will continue hearing the matter on March 10. The bench had last week appointed senior advocate Manjula Rao as amicus curiae (friend of the court) to assist it after the deceased accused's parents said they no longer wished to pursue the case. The court had asked Rao to assist the court on several issues including whether an FIR ought to be registered by the state based on the report submitted by the magistrate. The deceased accused was arrested in August 2024 for allegedly sexually assaulting two minor girls inside the toilet of a school in Badlapur. He was an attendant at the school.

On September 23, 2024, he was killed in an alleged police shootout while being taken from the Talaja prison for questioning. (PTI)

Cultural fest at Rashtrapati Bhawan with focus on South India

NEW DELHI, March 5: An annual cultural festival that celebrates India's diverse heritage by showcasing the unique traditions of different regions is set to be held on the premises of the Rashtrapati Bhawan from March 6-9, the government said on Wednesday.

The event -- 'Vividhita ka Amrit Mahotsav' -- is being inaugurated by President Droupadi Murmu on March 5 and this year the focus is on South India, according to the Culture Ministry.

It will be open to the public from March 6-9 from 10 AM to 8 PM daily, the ministry said in a statement.

Key highlights of this edition include over 500 artisans and weavers showcasing traditional handicrafts and handlooms, including Kanjeevaram and Kasavu

sarees, Pochampally ikat, Mysore silk, and intricate brass and wooden crafts, officials said.

More than 400 artistes will present folk and classical dance and music, bringing South India's cultural essence to life, they said.

"Authentic cuisines will feature signature South Indian delicacies such as Bisi Bele Bath, Kerala Sadya, Chettinad specialties and Andhra's fiery flavours," it said.

"The first edition, held last year, focused on north-east India and received an overwhelming response with 1.3 lakh visitors and over ₹ 1 crore in sales for artisans."

"Following this success, the second edition highlights south India, featuring the five states of Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, and Andhra Pradesh, along with Lakshadweep and



Puducherry," it said.

The festival aims to make the Rashtrapati Bhawan a hub for cultural exchange, bringing India's vibrant heritage closer to its citizens,

the ministry said.

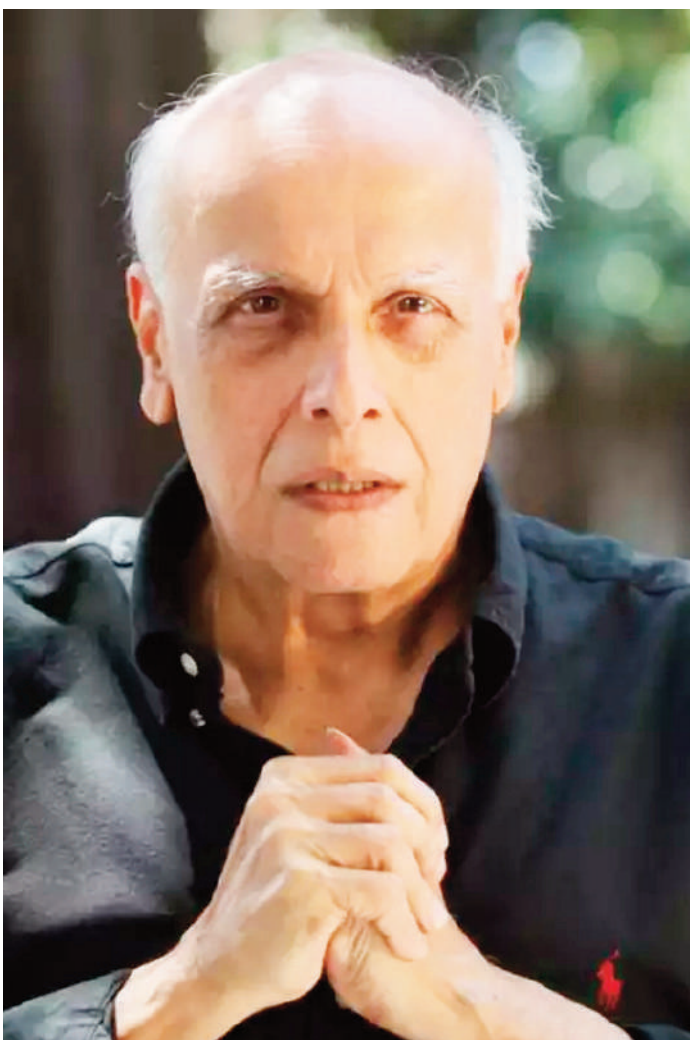
A Youth Engagement Zone with interactive workshops, storytelling, and cultural activities to inspire the younger generation is

also a key attraction.

"This festival has been made possible through the support of the Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Textiles, Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Ministry of Tourism, and all the participating states and Union Territories which have played a crucial role in preserving and promoting India's diverse heritage," it added.

The entry to the venue is from gate no. 35 of the Rashtrapati Bhawan.

The festival serves as a platform to connect people with their roots while empowering artisans and performers. This Mahotsav is not just a celebration but a reaffirmation of India's unity in diversity, strengthening cultural bonds and fostering pride in our collective heritage, the ministry said. (PTI)



Intimate cinema is almost extinct in this sensation-seeking age: Mahesh Bhatt

MUMBAI, March 5: Veteran filmmaker Mahesh Bhatt on Tuesday said intimate stories are rare to find in Hindi cinema, especially at a time when the industry is largely focused on sensation-driven content.

At the trailer launch event of filmmaker Vikram Bhatt's new film "Tumko Meri Kasam", the cinema icon praised the director for his decision to explore a deeply personal story about a real person rather than relying on the familiar horror format.

"It is a mystery in itself that, in this industry, redefining and reinventing yourself again and again is not an easy thing to do. To be here for 35 years and to move from the idiom which the market has acknowledged you for which is horror and to come into an intimate space where the heart beats, the soul cries, and to pull out the story from the life of a

living person is a challenge," Mahesh Bhatt told reporters.

"In these times, where intimate cinema is almost extinct... I don't think there are many people who make films like this. So I think in this age and time, had the courage, the audacity to back a story of a man who himself has been audacious," he added.

Starring an ensemble cast of Anupam Kher, Adah Sharma, Ishwak Singh, and Esha Deol, "Tumko Meri Kasam" is loosely based on the life of Dr. Ajay Murdia, the founder of Indira IVF, a chain of fertility clinics.

Vikram Bhatt, known for horror movies such as the "Raaz" franchise, "1920", "Haunted - 3D", and "Shaapit", has directed the film from a script he wrote.

"I think such stories are rare to find in this sensation-seeking age. To find a filmmaker who feels very comfortable in the

horror medium, and he says, 'No, let me let go of my crutches and let me dive into that place where people come to experience movies.' "In the darkness of an auditorium, people want to see a journey into the human heart. And I think 'Tumko Meri Kasam' is an explosion for Vikram Bhatt. Normally, people rise; I think he explodes, and that's why I'm here," Mahesh Bhatt said.

Vikram Bhatt credited Mahesh Bhatt for backing him even after some of his films didn't do well commercially.

"He's my father, my mentor, my guide. He's everything. I wouldn't be here after so many flops if it were not for him," he said. Singh, who rose to fame with OTT series like "Paatal Lok" and "Rocket Boys", recalled a story from his theatre days in Mumbai.

"He was promoting and sup-

porting theater back in the day when I was just finding my feet on stage. And after the third show of a play, he gave me a pat on the back and said some words of encouragement. And that's the day I decided, 'I'm going to do this professionally.' So, this is a surreal feeling," he said.

Kher wondered why Vikram Bhatt took more than twenty years to cast him in a film.

"I always wanted to work with Vikram. He made many films but never cast me. But I think he was waiting for a great story to justify me being in his film. Dr. Ajay Murdia's story was inspiring not only for the families he helped but also for anybody who helps in giving life to life," he said.

Deol, who is returning to the silver screen, thanked Vikram Bhatt for bringing her back to films. (PTI)

Babil Khan and Malayalam actor Anna Ben to co-star in Indo-American film 'Yakshi'

MUMBAI, March 5: Actors Babil Khan and Anna Ben are leading the cast of "Yakshi", an upcoming Indo-American co-production.

The film, which offers a unique blend of Indian folklore and contemporary storytelling, is written and directed by Karan Sunil, best known for his work on the series "Code-Switched".

The project is backed by Lambe Log Productions and Full Spectrum Features.

Ben, known for her performances in Malayalam films "Kumbalangi Nights" and "Helen", took to social media to share the news about the film.

"This was truly written in the stars. Had the most amazing time working with these wonderful human beings. @ksunzz @lambelogs-productions, thank you for trusting me to be Maya. Thank you for letting me discover a whole new side as an artist."

"And most importantly, it gives everyone a safe space to work and collaborate. @babil.i.k, you are an absolute darling! I hope we get to work together more and can't wait to see you do all the wonderful things you are dreaming of doing," the actor wrote.

The key details about "Yakshi", including its plot and the release date, are yet to be announced officially. (PTI)

Nayanthara tells people, fans to not address her as 'Lady Superstar'

NEW DELHI, March 5: Titles and accolades are priceless, but they can sometimes forge an image that distances actors from their craft, popular Tamil cinema actor Nayanthara said as she announced her decision to renounce the moniker 'Lady Superstar' that was bestowed on her.

Nayanthara, known for films such as "Sri Rama Rajyam", "Anaamika", "Chandramukhi", "Ghajini", and "Jawan", made the announcement on Tuesday in an X statement addressing fans, media, and film fraternity.

"Many of you have graciously referred to me as 'Lady Superstar', a title born out of your immense affection. I owe you all a lot for crowning me with such a valuable title. However, I humbly request you all to call me 'Nayanthara'."

"This is because I feel that the name is what I hold closest to my heart. It represents who I am not just as an actor but as an individual. Titles and accolades are priceless, but they can sometimes create an image that separates us from our work, our craft, and the unconditional bond we share with you, the audience," she wrote.

Nayanthara is the latest South cinema personality, after Kamal Haasan, Ajith, and Jayam Ravi, to relinquish a title given to them.

The actor's real name is Diana Mariam Kurian and it was Sathyan Anthikad, the director of her first film "Manassinakkare", who gave her the stage name 'Nayanthara'.

Nayanthara, 40, said the "language of love" keeps people connected beyond all limits. "While the future might be unpredictable for all of us, I'm so happy that your unfading support will remain constant, and so will my hard work to entertain you. Cinema is what keeps us united, and let us keep celebrating it together. With Love, respect, and gratitude, Nayanthara," she added. (PTI)

Amitabh Bachchan reshapes X post about son Abhishek being a 'victim of nepotism': I feel the same

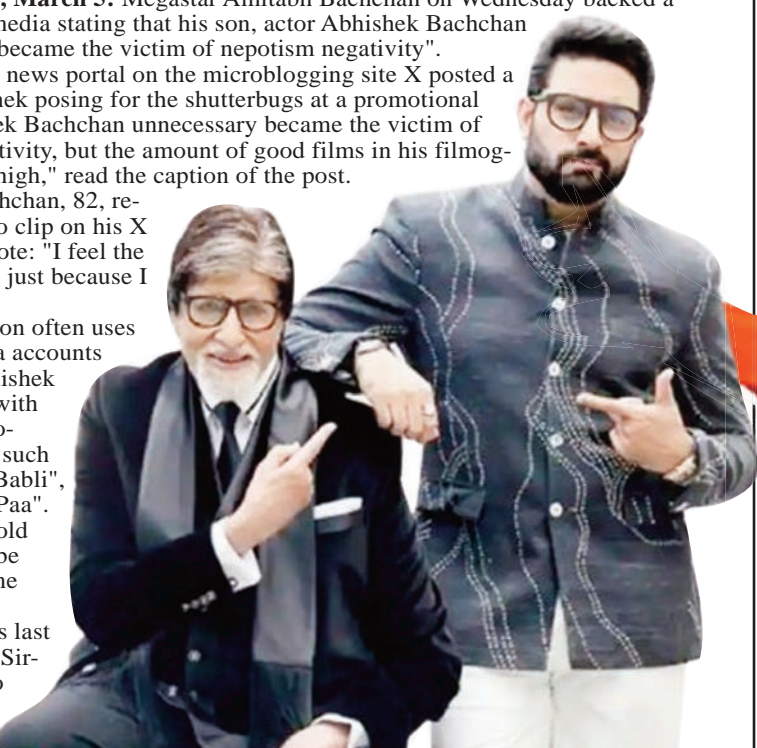
NEW DELHI, March 5: Megastar Amitabh Bachchan on Wednesday backed a post on social media stating that his son, actor Abhishek Bachchan "unnecessarily became the victim of nepotism negativity".

A Bollywood news portal on the microblogging site X posted a video of Abhishek Bachchan posing for the shutterbugs at a promotional event. "Abhishek Bachchan unnecessarily became the victim of 'nepotism' negativity, but the amount of good films in his filmography are very high," read the caption of the post.

Amitabh Bachchan, 82, reshared the video clip on his X account and wrote: "I feel the same... And not just because I am his Father."

The screen icon often uses his social media accounts to promote Abhishek Bachchan, 49, with whom he has co-starred in films such as "Bunty Aur Babli", "Sarkar", and "Paa".

The 49-year-old actor will next be seen in the Prime Video film "Be Happy". He was last seen in Shoojir Sir-car's "I Want To Talk". (PTI)



Akshay Kumar-Katrina Kaif's 'Namaste London' to re-release on March 14

MUMBAI, March 5: Akshay Kumar and Katrina Kaif's romantic drama "Namaste London" will return to theatres once again on the festival of Holi on March 14.

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positive reviews, especially for the pairing of Akshay-Katrina and the music, from the critics.

"Thrilled to announce the re-release of #NamasteLondon on the big screen this Holi, 14th March! Get ready to relive the magic — unforgettable songs, iconic dialogues, and

timeless romance with @katrinakaif, all over again. See you at the movies!" Akshay posted on Instagram.

Katrina, who starred with Kumar in many movies such as "Humko Deewana Kar Gaye", "Welcome", "Singh Is Kinning" and "Sooryavanshi", also shared the news on her Instagram Stories.

"Excited to announce the re-release of #Namaste London on the big screen this Holi, 14th March! Get ready to relive the magic-unforgettable songs, and timeless romance all over again," she wrote.

"Namaste London" features Katrina as Jazz, a British-Indian woman forced into marrying Arjun (Akshay), a traditional Punjabi man. When she refuses to accept the marriage, Arjun follows her to London, determined to win her back. The movie also starred the late Rishi Kapoor as well as Javed Sheikh, Upen Patel and Clive Standen. "Namaste London" joins the growing list of older films re-released in theatres over the past year. Other titles like "Laila Majnu", "Rockstar", "Gangs of Wasseyapur", "Karan Arjun", "Bareilly Ki Barfi", "Tumbbad" and "Kaho Naa... Pyaar Hai" have also made their way back to the big screen. (PTI)



Treated Jallianwala Bagh massacre with sensitivity: Ram Madhvani on 'Waking of a Nation'

MUMBAI, March 5: Filmmaker Ram Madhvani says he has dug deeper into one of the poignant historical events in India's freedom struggle, the Jallianwala Bagh massacre in his upcoming series "Waking of a Nation" but in a "sensitive and honest" way.

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

In "Waking of a Nation", co-written by Madhvani, Shantanu Srivastava, and Shatrughat Nath, they are honouring the memories of those who lost their lives, he said.

"We've not shown the massacre, we just show the soldiers coming in. I didn't want to show it, and that was the most sensitive part about the way we approached it. Other filmmakers have shown the massacre. I felt it would be better, as we don't know if there were 400 or 2,000 people, so it would be more dignified not to show it."

"We dedicated this to the people who have lost their lives during the massacre, and we wanted to treat that with the utmost respect and sensitivity," Madhvani, best known for "Aarya" and "Neerja", told PTI in an interview.

The filmmaker said he has also tried to stay away from the caricature portrayal of the British in Hindi cinema.

"Though they've done a villainous thing, they were thinking that they were doing their duty. They are shown

as villains but not in a melodramatic way. The idea was to try and be fair, which is the wrong word to use when I'm talking about the white skin. But to try and be fair to the idea of duty and why people do what they do in the name of duty, there are so many things that you can do."

In crafting "Waking of a Nation", Madhvani said he drew inspiration from acclaimed films that handle historical narratives with nuance, including "The Battle of Algiers", Oliver Stone's "JFK", and Kathryn Bigelow's "Detroit" to evoke a similar sense of authenticity.

"These were the movies that we used as a reference point, but only more for a treatment and more for a documentary way of shooting because that's the way you can represent truth and honesty," the Emmy Award-winning director said.

Madhvani has narrated the story of the massacre through the eyes of four friends: a lawyer, Kantilal Sahni, a journalist named Ali Allahbakhsh, an ordinary man, Hari Singh; and his wife, Poonam.

The show also stars British actors Paul McEwan and Alex Reece, among others.

Madhvani said the show can be a thriller, a courtroom drama and it also has "conspiracy and crime".

"I'm not a political person. I'm looking at it from the British Raj perspective because I'm troubled by the idea that we are speaking in English and

today we are dressed in Indian attire," Madhvani, who hails from Barsi, a small town near Maharashtra's Solapur region, said.

"I'm troubled by the idea of cultural colonisation that has happened to us, so that's the lens from which I'm looking at it. Eventually, the reason it will reach out to people is because the soul of the story is four friends and their connection," he added.

Madhvani credits his casting director, Abhimanyu Ray, for zeroing in on Raina, Dutta, Singh, and Mehta for the show.

"It's their talent that brought them here. It's because of the auditions and the re-auditions that we decided that they will be able to take the emotional burden of the roles that they are playing. I don't judge it on earlier work. I judge it on what they are capable of in the auditions that they do," he said.

Produced by Ram Madhvani and his wife Madhvani, "Waking of a Nation" is set to premiere on March 7 on Sony LIV.

As the launch date draws near, the director is both excited and nervous. "When you are taking on something which is this big in India, there are so many pressures about wanting to do justice to them, first of all to the audience, and my entire team, so I am still scared. There is a line in 'Neerja', 'Fear gave her courage'. I don't think there is any harm in being scared as long as you are honest about your fears." (PTI)



LeBron James becomes first to score 50,000 combined points in NBA regular season and playoffs

LOS ANGELES, March 5: LeBron James is well on his way to rewriting every previous definition of basketball longevity, and the 40-year-old star is now racking up numbers the NBA has never seen before.

James became the first player to score 50,000 combined points in the regular season and postseason on Tuesday night, surpassing the mark with a 3-pointer early in the first quarter of the Los Angeles Lakers' 136-115 win over New Orleans. James finished with 34 points against the Pelicans after topping another milestone in his unprecedented career.

"I mean, that's a lot of points," James said afterward, rubbing his beard in wonder. "Obviously, the first thing that comes to mind is where I'm from. Picking up the game when I was a little kid and having a love for the sport, and hoping that someday I'd be able to play at the highest level. I've been able to do that and really enjoy my career. So it's definitely an honor. It's pretty cool to see that."

James already is the top scorer in NBA history in both the regular season and the playoffs. Maintaining a spectacular level of play midway through his record-tying 22nd season, he is pulling away from the other greats of the game: Lakers



great Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, who played 20 seasons, is a now-distant second with 44,149 combined points.

James got his milestone 3-pointer off an assist by Luka Dončić, a trivia tidbit that pleased both

superstars. Dončić's arrival in last month's seismic trade with the Dallas Mavericks has invigorated both James and the Lakers, who look like championship contenders with a seven-game winning streak and 17 victories in their last 20

games.

"It's amazing, watching him do this stuff at this age," said Dončić, who had 30 points, 15 assists and eight rebounds against New Orleans. "It's just unbelievable, that 50K points. I can't even explain how insane that is. He might get to 70K. You never know."

The Lakers recognized the milestone at the next timeout, with public address announcer Lawrence Tanter saying: "Ladies and gentlemen, we all have just witnessed history." James acknowledged the standing ovation with several waves from the bench.

James is tied with Vince Carter for the most seasons played in NBA history. But while nearly every other NBA player who lasted to his late 30s finished at a fraction of his peak powers, James' game shows no signs of decline in his 40s.

He was named the NBA's Western Conference player of the month earlier Tuesday after he averaged 29.3 points, 10.5 rebounds, 6.9 assists and 1.2 steals in February while playing more than 35 minutes per game for the Lakers, who went 9-2 to surge into second place in the West.

With their victory over the Pelicans, the Lakers improved to 11-2 since acquiring Dončić.

Struggling UP Warriorz face must-win clash against Mumbai Indians



LUCKNOW, March 5: Time is running out for UP Warriorz, who face a must-win situation against Mumbai Indians in their Women's Premier League match here on Thursday.

With their playoff hopes hanging by a thread, the Warriorz must bounce back from back-to-back defeats to stay in contention.

It was a disappointing homecoming for the Warriorz, who were comprehensively beaten by Gujarat Giants at the Ekana Stadium in their previous fixture.

The 81-run defeat not only pushed them to the bottom of the points table but also dented their net run rate. Now, with just a couple of games left, they must avoid a third consecutive defeat that could all but end their campaign.

The first-ever WPL match in Lucknow saw Beth Mooney producing a batting masterclass, guiding Gujarat Giants to 186/5, the third-highest total this season.

On a pitch that played true and offered value for shots, the Warriorz's batting unit however failed miserably, raising serious concerns about their approach and execution.

UP Warriorz have been struggling to settle on a stable batting order. Their latest experiment -- pushing Georgia Voll to No. 3 -- backfired, as they collapsed to 48/6 inside 10 overs, with only one batter from the top six reaching double digits.

Despite the collective failure, Chinelle Henry stood tall yet again. The West Indian all-rounder's aggressive 14-ball 28 helped UPW limp past 100 before they were bowled out for 105.

Henry, who has been their stand-out batter this season, has amassed 138 runs at an average of 34.50 and a staggering strike rate of 209-plus, highlighting her ability to score quickly even in difficult situations. Given the ongoing struggles at the top, UP Warriorz might consider restoring Voll to her preferred opening role -- a position where she flourished in the Women's Big Bash League.

Grace Harris, who has shown glimpses of form, will be crucial in the middle order.

The Aussie's experience and power-hitting could provide the much-needed balance, especially in crunch moments.

Additionally, skipper Deepti Sharma, who has been quiet with

the bat since her 39-run knock against Gujarat, will need to step up and deliver a captain's innings. Unlike their struggling opponents, Mumbai Indians find themselves in a relatively better position.

Placed third on the table with six points, they remain in contention to top the standings and secure a direct spot in the final.

In the WPL format, the top-placed team qualifies directly for the final, while the second and third-placed teams battle in an Eliminator to determine the other finalist.

With three matches remaining for them, the inaugural edition champions in 2023, MI, have a realistic chance of leapfrogging to the top, but they cannot afford another slipup, having lost to table-toppers Delhi Capitals in their previous outing, where their batting failed to click to be restricted to a modest 123/9.

India skipper Harmanpreet Kaur looked promising but failed to convert her start, falling for 22 off 16 balls, while Nat Sciver-Brunt struggled for fluency, managing just 18 off 22 balls.

The English all-rounder, however, remains a key figure in MI's campaign, having already scored 272 runs from five matches, including three fifties, at a strike rate of 147-plus.

Incidentally, Sciver-Brunt had hammered an unbeaten 75 against UP Warriorz in the first leg, and her ability to anchor the innings while accelerating at will will make her a major threat once again.

Teams:

UP Warriorz: Deepti Sharma (c), Anjali Sarvani, Chamari Athapaththu, Uma Chetty (wk), Sophie Ecclestone, Rajeshwari Gayakwad, Arushi Goel, Kranti Goud, Grace Harris, Chinelle Henry, Poonam Khemnar, Alana King, Tahliia McGrath, Kiran Navgire, Shweta Sehrawat, Goucher Sultana, Saima Thakor and Vrinda Dinesh.

Mumbai Indians: Harmanpreet Kaur (c), Yastika Bhatia (wk), Nadine de Klerk, Sanskriti Gupta, Saika Ishaque, Shabnim Ismail, Jintamani Kalita, G Kamalini, Amandeep Kaur, Amanjot Kaur, Sathyaamoorthy Keerthana, Amelia Kerr, Akshita Maheshwari, Hayley Matthews, Sajeewan Sajana, Nat Sciver-Brunt, Parunika Sisodia and Chloe Tryon. (PTI)

Vani takes one-shot lead on a tough scoring day

GURUGRAM, March 5: Vani Kapoor dropped two late bogeys but maintained focus to get a birdie on the final hole to take sole lead on the first day of the fifth leg of the Women's Pro Golf Tour here Wednesday. Vani, winner of the fourth leg last month, shot 2-under 70 and took a one-shot lead over her good friend Amandeep Drall (71) at the Classic Golf & Country Club.

Vani and Amandeep were the only players to shoot under par on an extremely windy day when scoring was tough. Rhea Jha was placed sole third. She landed an eagle two on Par-4 eighth but had five bogeys and one birdie in her 74.

On a rather tough day for scoring, five players were tied for fourth with rounds of 4-over 76 and the group included amateur Ceerat Kang, Anahita Singh, Oviya Reddi, Neha Tripathi and Ridhima Dilwari.

Leader Vani had four birdies against two bogeys in the round. She opened with a par and then birdied the second and the third. Then followed a series of eight pars and another birdie on Par-4 12th. She dropped back-to-back shots on the 16th and the 17th but closed with a birdie. (PTI)

Bay Hill broadcast to feature few commercial and more player-caddie chatter

ORLANDO (FLORIDA), March 5: The Arnold Palmer Invitational will have fewer commercials and more emphasis on data and player-caddie interactions as part of a pilot program a key sponsor has endorsed.

Instead of Mastercard -- the presenting sponsor -- having a 30-second commercial, it will get brand visibility through various graphics on the broadcast that show anything from the leaderboard to player factoids and statistics. PGA Tour Commissioner Jay Monahan said the move is another response to a "Fan Forward" survey of some 50,000 people who indicated what innovations they wanted to see on the broadcast and on the golf course. That already has led to more player interviews during the competition -- known as the "walk and talk" down the fairway -- and showing fewer shots with no real consequences. The tour said more conversations between players and caddies was one of the top responses in the survey of casual and core fans, along with being presented more data over certain shots. (AP)

Prague Masters: Praggnanandhaa draws with Shankland

PRAGUE (CZECH REPUBLIC), March 5: Grandmasters R Praggnanandhaa and Aravindh Chithambaram continued to remain in joint lead after drawing their sixth-round games in the Prague Masters Chess tournament here.

Praggnanandhaa was held to a draw by Sam Shankland of the United States, while Aravindh split the point with Quang Leim of Vietnam to be on four points out of a possible six, on a day when all the games were drawn for the first time in the tournament.

Praggnanandhaa and Aravindh continued to be followed by top seed Wei Yi of China, Anish Giri of Holland, Vincent Keymer of Germany and Quang Leim, all of whom are on three points apiece.

Another half-point behind are the Czech duo of Nguyen Thai Dai Van and David Navara, Gurel Ediz of Turkey and Shankland.

With three more rounds to come, Praggnanandhaa holds the edge over Aravindh as he is set to play the next two games with white pieces. Aravindh, on the other hand, has only one game with white left.

The seventh round will be crucial for Praggnanandhaa as he takes on Wei Yi, while Aravindh



will meet Anish, who has drawn all his games so far.

Praggnanandhaa was under pressure for some time in the middle game against his American opponent, who played white. The opening featured a regular Italian game and Shankland threw open the position with a knight sacrifice on the king side.

Soon after, Praggnanandhaa had to part with one of his rooks for a minor piece, and what resulted was a very complex position.

Navigating between better and equal thereon, the Indian allowed Shankland to go for a forced repetition and the game was drawn after 43 moves.

The standard in golf is getting higher, that means scores should be getting lower

ORLANDO (FLORIDA), March 5: The Cognizant Classic once had a reputation for some of the toughest scoring conditions on the PGA Tour because only one number for the score was required next to the winner's name.

During a 16-year stretch from when it first went to PGA National in 2007, only seven players -- two who were runner-up -- finished in double digits under par.

Arnold Palmer took notice.

The King spent more than a decade watching the winning score

at his beloved Bay Hill average 15-under par. Tiger Woods won four of those. One year he finished at 19-under despite spending most of the final round on his knees with the dry heaves from some bad pasta.

So in 2007, Palmer decided to convert Bay Hill into a par 70, turning two of the par 5s into par 4s. The winning score during that three-year experiment was roughly the same. Woods won in 2009 at 5-under 275, the same winning score he had in 2002, only then it was

moves.

In the Challengers section, the fortunes of Divya Deshmukh did not change as she suffered another defeat and was pushed to the sole last spot among 10 players. Vaclav Finel defeated Divya in a rook-and-minor-piece endgame leaving the Indian on 1.5 points.

Jonas Buhl Bjerre of Denmark regained the joint lead by beating Marc'Andria Maurizzi of France. The Dane shares the top spot with Nodirbek Yakubboev of Uzbekistan.

Results (Round 6): Sam Shankland (USA, 2.5) drew with R Praggnanandhaa (Ind, 4); Aravindh Chithambaram (Ind, 4) drew with Quang Leim Le (Vie, 3); Wei Yi (Chn, 3) drew with Gurel Ediz (Tur, 2.5); Nguyen Thai Dai Van (Cze, 2.5) drew with David Navara (Cze, 2.5); Vincent Keymer (Ger, 3) drew with Anish Giri (Ned, 3).

Challengers: Finel Vaclav (Cze, 2.5) beat Divya Deshmukh (Ind, 1.5); Ivan Salgado Lopez (Esp, 3.5) drew with Richard Stalmach (Cze, 2.5); Stamatios Kourkoulous-Arditis (Gre, 2.5) drew with Nodirbek Yakubboev (Uzb, 4.5); Jonas Buhl Bjerre (Den, 4.5) beat Marc'Andria Maurizzi (Fra, 3); Nemec Jychym (Cze, 2) lost to Ma Qun (Chn, 3.5). (PTI)

13-under 275. Low score always wins, no matter the number.

And it's time to stop this fascination with how low they go. The standard in golf is getting higher, meaning scores should be getting lower.

Jake Knapp did the unthinkable last week when he opened with a 59. Even more staggering was the winner, Joe Highsmith, who closed with rounds of 64-64 for the lowest weekend total at PGA National and a score of 19-under 265, another PGA National record. (AP)

Time to give my racket and bandana a rest: TT stalwart Sharath announces retirement

CHENNAI, March 5: Indian table tennis legend A Sharath Kamal will hang up his racket and the iconic bandana later this month, having stayed at the top of his game for more than 22 years and resisting the temptation of lasting another Olympic cycle at the ripe old age of 42.

In his own words, life has come full circle for one of India's finest athletes who will say goodbye to professional table tennis in front of his friends and family in Chennai, where the WTT (World Table Tennis) Star Contender and his swansong will be staged from March 25 to 30.

Sharath's contribution to the game goes beyond the staggering numbers, including seven gold medals at the Commonwealth Games, two path-breaking bronze medals at the Asian Games and five appearances at the Summer Olympics.

Paris last year was easily the highlight for him as an Olympian, having received the honour of carrying India's flag at the opening ceremony.

The results did not go his way in the French capital but considering his fitness and ranking (he remains India's highest ranked player at no. 42), Sharath decided to carry on for another season and take it

from there.

Another Commonwealth Games and Asian Games are on the horizon but Sharath has had enough.

"Not saying I am letting it go completely, but this is certainly the end for us on the big tables, in front of the big crowds. Time to give my bandana and racket some rest," he said.

"Grateful beyond words for all the joy, for all the love, for all the pain, for all the lessons, and for all the people this sport has given me."

For the better of the past two decades, Sharath inspired the younger generation to take up the sport before Manika Batra emerged to share that responsibility.

Sharath not only lifted the profile of the sport, he announced the arrival of Indian table tennis on the global stage and made his presence felt against the all-conquering Chinese and other Asian giants including Japan and South Korea.

His booming forehead made his opponents nervous and over time, he continued to evolve and developed an equally lethal backhand.

Kamlesh Mehta, an Arjuna awardee and another fine player to have come out of India, listed out the reason for Sharath's longevity in the game.



"The game has changed so much in the last 20 years. When he started, he was not doing the banana flick. He had to learn that banana flick and strengthen his backhand.

"He was able to make those changes, learn new things and put it in his game. That's the reason he could sustain himself for so long," Mehta told PTI.

As any elite athlete, Sharath had his

share of ups and downs. The hip and hamstring injury he suffered during the 2015 World Championships was a major setback in his career.

"Many people had written him off after that injury but he came back stronger," recalled Mehta.

Some of Indian table tennis' best results coincided with the twilight of Sharath's career.

With Sharath now having the support of a formidable bench strength, India were able to stun Japan for a bronze medal at the 2018 Asian Games. Fellow Chennai resident G Sathiyan was the architect of that famous win.

Another unthinkable happened when he and Manika teamed up to land a historic mixed doubles bronze in Jakarta. Even Sharath did not see it coming on the highly competitive continental stage.

There was no stopping him as he entered his 40s, bullish about his returns at what was going to be his final appearance at the Commonwealth Games.

Ahead of the 2022 edition in Birmingham, he had to work doubly hard to maintain his fitness as his battered and bruised body was not responding to the zeal of a teenager. With an unprecedented three gold medals, he surpassed his own

expectations.

"Even the players ask me how I am able to add a new stroke every time I play them. I don't have a proper answer to that, I can only say it is not easy.

"What I have been able to do at 40 is unbelievable in a very positive way. How am I able to still play like this?" Sharath had wondered after the bull run in Birmingham 2022.

Three years later, he remains a potent force on the pro circuit and would like to say goodbye to competitive table tennis on a high later this month.

Sharath also has a wise head on his shoulders as he planned his retirement well in advance. He is the first Indian to be elected into the International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF) athletes' commission.

He is also part of the athletes' body in the Indian Olympic Association (IOA) and in future, he is aiming for a seat on the athletes' commission of the International Olympic Committee.

Apart from that, he sees himself as an administrator at the Table Tennis Federation of India, ensuring his presence around the sport. However, the massive void he leaves on court may never be filled. (PTI)

'RIGHT TIME TO MAKE WAY'

Smith bids adieu to ODIs after Australia's CT exit

DUBAI, March 5: Australia's stand-in skipper Steve Smith on Wednesday announced his retirement from ODI cricket following his team's four-wicket loss to India in the Champions Trophy semifinal here but the star batter will continue to play Tests and T20 Internationals.

The 35-year-old, who was leading the world champion side in the absence of an injured Pat Cummins, informed his teammates after the match that he would be stepping away from the 50-over format with immediate effect.

Reflecting on his decision, Smith said it was the right time to step aside as Australia builds itself for the 2027 ODI World Cup.

"It has been a great ride, and I have loved every minute of it," Smith said.

"There have been so many amazing times and wonderful memories. Winning two World Cups was a great highlight along with the many fantastic team-mates who shared the journey," he added in a media release shared by Cricket Australia.

A key member of Australia's victori-



ous 2015 and 2023 ICC World Cup-winning teams, Smith was named Australia's men's ODI Player of the Year in 2015 and 2021 and earned a place in the ICC men's ODI Team of the Year in 2015. He took over the ODI captaincy in 2015 and, fittingly, led the side one last time in his final match.

"Now is a great opportunity for people to start preparing for the 2027 World Cup so it feels like the right time to make way," he said.

The veteran of 170 ODIs said Test

cricket remains a priority and he is looking forward to the World Test Championship Final in June.

"I feel I still have a lot to contribute on that stage," he said.

"Now is a great opportunity for people to start preparing for the 2027 World Cup, so it feels like the right time to make way," he added.

Smith leaves behind a stellar ODI legacy built over a period of more than 15 years, since making his debut as a leg-spinning all-rounder against the West Indies in 2010.

Over the years, he transformed into one of Australia's most dependable batters, accumulating 5,800 runs at an average of 43.28, including 12 centuries and 35 half-centuries. He also chipped in with 28 wickets at 34.67.

Tributes poured in for the star with CA chief executive Todd Greenberg and chairman of selectors George Bailey hailing Smith's immense contribution to Australian cricket.

"Congratulations to Steve on an amazing One Day International career during which he has made a vast con-

tribution to Australia's performances in the 50-over format," stated Greenberg.

"Right up until his final ODI innings Steve exhibited an incredible ability to accumulate runs in all conditions and his astute leadership has been crucial in the team's ongoing success including the 2015 and 2023 ICC World Cup victories."

"We're fortunate Steve still has much to offer in the Test and T20 arenas and I look forward to witnessing the next stage of one of cricket's great careers," Greenberg added.

Bailey echoed the sentiment. "We fully understand and support Steve's decision to retire from One Day International cricket."

"Steve has said on many occasions he is approaching the remainder of his playing career on a series-by-series basis, a position which hasn't changed and one Cricket Australia supports."

"His record as a batter across 167 games is exemplary and to leave the format as a two-time World Cup winner cements his legacy as one of the great Australian ODI players," he said. (PTI)

Ravindra, Williamson centuries power NZ to 362/6 against SA in CT 2nd semifinal

LAHORE, March 5: Centuries from Rachin Ravindra and Kane Williamson powered New Zealand to a big total of 362 for 6 -- the highest in Champions Trophy history -- against South Africa in the second semifinal at the Gaddafi Stadium here on Wednesday.

The duo shared 164 runs for the second wicket to provide the perfect platform for the later batters to blast away in the final overs.

New Zealand added 112 runs in the final 10 overs after reaching 250 in 40 overs.

Daryl Mitchell (49 off 37 balls), Glenn Phillips (49 not out off 27) and Michael Bracewell (16 off 12) provided the fire power in the final overs as South African bowlers wilted on a good batting track.

The semifinal will mark the end of the Champions Trophy in Pakistan as the final will now be played in Dubai on March 9 between India and the winners of Wednesday's match.

Opting to bat, New Zealand's left-handed opener Ravindra blasted 108 of 101 balls with 13 fours and one six while stalwart Williamson struck 102 off 94 balls with 10 fours and two sixes.

New Zealand built on a strong opening stand of 48 between Ravindra and Will Young, who scored 21 off 23 balls before he was dismissed by Lungi Ngidi in the eighth over.

After conceding just 32 in his first six overs, Ngidi went for runs in his final overs though he finished with three wickets.

Ravindra scored his second century of this Champions Trophy after his 112 against Bangladesh and fifth hundred in an ICC tournament. He had scored three centuries in the World Cup in India in 2023.



Williamson batted calmly after early jitters to get to his 15th hundred and his fourth against South Africa. He has now scored hundreds in his last three ODIs against the Proteas.

The right and left handed combination of New Zealand proved difficult for the South African bowlers with all-rounder Wiaan Mulder going off with a strain after bowling six overs for 48 runs and one wicket. (PTI)

Connolly's shot selection irks Ian Healy

SYDNEY, March 5: Former Australian wicket-keeping great Ian Healy has questioned the tactical acumen of Cooper Connolly, saying he was "angry" with the way the opener handled India's pace spearhead Mohammed Shami in the Champions Trophy semifinal in Dubai.

Connolly, a late addition to the Australian squad and a surprise pick to open the batting against Rohit Sharma's side ahead of Jake Fraser-McGurk in the last-four clash on Tuesday, was dismissed for a nine-ball duck by Shami. India defeated Steve Smith's side by four wickets with Virat Kohli's brilliance shining through on a slow wicket to make the final.

"I got so angry. (Opening partner) Travis Head was gesturing about how slow the wicket was to his partner (in Connolly)," said Healy on SEN Radio. Australia were expecting Connolly to rise to the occasion, but the batter, playing only his fourth ODI, edged it behind the stumps.

"Cooper Connolly just kept swinging. In those conditions, you have to work the ball around into gaps and not swing (for the fences). He faced nine balls for nought. A duck and he played and missed at the first eight and then nicked the ninth," said Healy. Australia were dismissed for 264 in 49.3 overs with India chasing down the target with 11 deliveries to spare.

"Mohammad Shami was the bowler and I was just getting so angry. It was such poor thinking and when you're batting in tough conditions, you have got to work hard. He was swiping away, square on the off-side and just not watching the ball at all," Healy added that the opener wasn't even watching the ball and kept missing the line. Though Smith and Alex Carey scored half-centuries, the momentum in Australia's batting was missing after the setback of losing Connolly early. "There were three and a half hours of hard work (to be had there) and it was just reckless thinking rather than getting the ball on the bat and using your footwork."

"Connolly's footwork was absent, his shot selection was poor and his technique of the shot was poor because he wasn't watching the ball. His head was watching the gap (in the field) where he thought the ball was going to go and he kept missing it all the time," added Healy. (PTI)

Rejuvenated Virat Kohli ready to conquer new peaks

DUBAI, March 5: Seldom does a Virat Kohli knock in a winning chase leaves one wanting for more. But his 84 that guided India to a semifinal victory over Australia in the Champions Trophy here had that touch of incompleteness to it. A familiar Kohli hundred on Tuesday would have been his 25th three-figure mark while hunting down a target. But the master would not be too displeased about the knock he eventually managed as he ticked many boxes. Here are the two most important of them.

Box No.1: He tamed spinners, an Achilles Heel that haunted him for long, and more recently exploited by England's Adil Rashid and Bangladesh's Rishad Hossain.

Box No.2: The fifty was full of determination to defeat an opponent who had given India and him several heartbreaks in the past. Through it, he, perhaps, was conveying his readiness to battle on for some more time, conquer some more peaks.

But that has not come without its share of hard work. Kohli had to spend an extra two hours at nets to polish his skills ahead of the match against Pakistan after he was dismissed by Hossain against Bangladesh.

Subsequently, he negated Pakistan's Abrar Ahmed, but Adam Zampa is in a different league as a white ball leg-spinner. The slow Dubai pitch that slows down even more during the second half would have given more zing to Zampa's craft.

Since their first meeting in 2017, Zampa had dismissed Kohli five times in white ball formats, and counterattack has been Kohli's preferred way to nullify the Aussie leg-spinner.

Before the Champions Trophy match, Kohli had made 264 runs off 245 balls against him at a strike-rate of 107.

But the nature of the pitch here demanded a different approach from Kohli as he ticked off Zampa, taking 23 off 24 balls. He also made 12 runs off nine balls against Tanveer Sangha.

It was not spectacular but effective in a tricky chase of 265, even though he eventually fell to Zampa. But much after the team's job was done.

India head coach Gautam Gambhir appreciated the way Kohli planned his chase. (PTI)

You cannot build pressure on Kohli and that's frustrating: Ashton Agar

NEW DELHI, March 5: Batting stalwart Virat Kohli can be a bowler's nightmare when on song and his repertoire of strokes make it nearly impossible to "build pressure on him", said Australian spinner Ashton Agar following another masterclass from the Indian ace in the Champions Trophy semifinal.

Kohli added to his match-winning unbeaten century against Pakistan in the group stage by slamming a fluent 84 against Australia in Dubai to guide India into the final of the marquee tournament.

"It is not the damage that he can do to the fence, it's just the fact that you cannot build pressure on him. So it's really hard to get him out in a sense. You never really feel like you're on top of him unless the ball is really spinning. And you don't get a lot of pitches in one-day cricket like that," left-arm spinner Agar, who has taken 79 wickets across formats for Australia, said on ESPNcricinfo's Match Day.

Kohli's ability to find the gaps and squeezing ones and twos with



ease too drew praise from the Australian cricketer, who said that for a bowler it's really "frustrating".

"That's the frustrating part about bowling to him. He has this fantastic ability to hit your best ball, the top of middle stump, slightly spinning away, he holds the bat's face slightly longer than other batters do, opens it in the last second, and hits it in the cover point gap. He's probably the best in the world at doing that and

he's very difficult to build pressure on."

Agar added that Kohli was the fulcrum around which the Indian team built the innings to overcome Australia.

"India batted around Virat beautifully. The guys who came in kept pushing the rate and allowed Virat to do his thing, hit the odd boundary and just keep ticking over. I saw a stat that Virat has scored the most singles since the year 2000, which is phenomenal. It was a bit of a masterclass from him and all the batters contributed nicely." Kohli's effort included 56 singles and four twos, indicating his exemplary fitness level. Former India cricketer Sanjay Manjrekar added, the fact that Kohli is able to find the gaps despite five fielders inside the circle is a testament to his mastery over batting.

"Now you have five fielders inside the circle, so it's not easy as it used to be -- like during our times -- when you had four fielders. Very rarely has he hit the ball straight to the fielder and hasn't got a run," said Manjrekar. (PTI)

Punjab FC and Hyderabad FC clash in inconsequential ISL game

HYDERABAD, March 5: A playoffs spot already out of their reach, Punjab FC and Hyderabad FC face each other in an inconsequential match of the Indian Super League (ISL) here on Thursday.

Playing in their penultimate league match, Punjab FC look for fourth straight unbeaten game against Hyderabad FC.

A win in Thursday's game will mark Punjab's first league double over any team in the competition's history. However, Hyderabad FC have been unbeaten in their last five home games, winning twice.

At the same time, Punjab FC have scored goals in each of their last 13 ISL games, which is the longest ac-

tive streak among all teams.

Hyderabad FC, on their part, have struggled in getting goals. They have gone scoreless in their last two ISL matches after netting in six consecutive games before this slump. In their three ISL encounters thus far, Punjab FC have won twice, while one game has resulted in a draw.

Hyderabad FC interim head coach Shameel Chembakath said that his team needs to close out games with better discipline.

"If you see the second phase of the competition, there were a few matches where we did well but conceded late goals. We need to work on that," he said. (PTI)

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