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## Petrochemical company suffering an annual loss of ₹ 500 cr BCPL's cash crunch: CM bats for sustainable solutions

HT Correspondent

**DIBRUGARH, March 22:** Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has emphasised the urgent need for sustainable solutions to address the financial challenges faced by Brahmaputra Cracker and Polymer Limited (BCPL), which has been incurring losses over the past two years.

During his visit to BCPL in Lepetkata, Dibrugarh, on Saturday, the chief minister revealed that the petrochemical company is suffering an annual loss of ₹ 500 crore.

After touring the plant and receiving a briefing from BCPL CMD Pranjal Changmai, Sarma acknowledged that while government support may continue in the short term, a strong long-term strategy is essential.

"BCPL has faced significant financial challenges, with annual



losses nearing ₹ 500 crore over the last two years. While we remain committed to supporting this important project, we must work towards creating sustainable

solutions that ensure its long-term viability, rather than relying solely on government aid," Sarma stated. BCPL, often referred to as the Assam Gas Cracker Project, is a

major industrial initiative in North-east India. It is a joint venture in which GAIL (India) Limited holds a 70% stake, while the Government of Assam, Numaligarh Refinery Limited (NRL), and Oil India Limited (OIL) collectively own the remaining 30% equity.

Inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on February 5, 2016, the project was launched as part of the historic Assam Accord and has recently completed nine years of operation. Despite its strategic importance to the region, financial sustainability remains a significant concern.

BCPL focuses on producing a variety of petrochemical products, including Linear Low-Density Polyethylene (LLDPE), Polypropylene (PP), and High-Density Polyethylene (HDPE), using natural gas and naphtha as feedstock.

## Himanta greets people on 'Bihar Diwas', lauds eastern state's contribution to cultural heritage



**GUWAHATI/ TINSUKIA, March 22:** Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday extended his best wishes to the people on 'Bihar Diwas' and lauded the eastern state for its contribution to the cultural heritage and development of the country.

The occasion, marking the foundation day of Bihar, was also being celebrated in Assam with a cultural programme in Guwahati in the presence of Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya.

"Bihar has been a centrepiece of India's cultural heritage and has played an important role in the develop-

ment of the country," Sarma said in a post on X.

The people of Bihar are working tirelessly to take the state forward in a new direction, he said.

"On the occasion of 'Bihar Diwas', my best wishes and congratulations to the people of Bihar," Sarma added. A special programme has been organised in Guwahati to mark the occasion.

Officials said cultural performances showcasing the traditional and folk art forms of Assam, Bihar and other regions will be presented as part of the programme.

Foundation days of states and union territories have been celebrated in the presence of the governor over the last couple of years in line with the Centre's decision to mark these occasions across the country to strengthen national identity.

There was a controversy over the 'Bihar Diwas' celebration in Tinsukia, an eastern Assam district with a sizeable Hindi-speaking population and commercial hub.

There were some "preliminary talks for organising a programme on 'Bihar Diwas' but the party had not officially announced any event, BJP sources said.

Several organisations, including the All Assam Students Union, and political parties, like Rajior Dal and AIUDF, questioned the need (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Dr Hemari Kro receives 'Samaj Sewak Perona Award 2025' for social contributions



HT Bureau

**DIPHU, March 22:** Dr Hemari Kro of Diphu, who is the Superintendent in-charge at the office of the Inspector of Schools, has been awarded the 'Samaj Sewak Perona Award 2025' by the Uttar Purvanchal Perona Samanay Unnayan Charitable Trust.

The award was presented to Dr Kro in recognition of his outstanding contributions to society through his social activities during a function held at Pensioner's

Bhawan in the Chandmari area of Guwahati on Friday, March 21.

Dr Kro is the son of the late Langming Kro and Lt. Kave Hansapi. He was previously honored with an Honorary Doctorate (Honoris Causa) in the field of Education and Social Welfare by the Advisory Selection Board of the Bharat Virtual Open Education University, which is affiliated with and collaborates with Central Christian University in Malawi, East Africa. The head office is lo-

cated in Patel Nagar, Delhi.

Each year, the trust presents awards to individuals who have made significant contributions in various fields such as education, art and culture, literature, journalism, social service, and more.

In addition to Dr Kro, 10 other individuals were awarded for their outstanding contributions in various fields. The awards included a citation, a memento, and an Assamese phulan gamocha, which were presented by the chief guest of the function, Dr Dayananda Pathak, former Principal of Pragjyotish College, Guwahati, along with Dr Jatindra Nath Dekka, retired Joint Director of Industries and Commerce, Government of Assam, and Deepa Das, Assistant Headmistress of Tezpur Collegiate High School.

The ceremony was also attended by the Trust president, Dr Prakash Dekka, and secretary, Subita Barman Dekka. Other awards included the Jibon Jora Silpi Perona Bota, awarded to Bihu Semrat Khagen Gogoi, the Karma Maharathi Award presented to Dr Mahananda Kumar, and the Satra Bhushan title given to (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Mobile water treatment unit provides relief to remote, flood-affected people in Assam village

**TUKERGRAM, March 22:** Water-related woes are not new for the 32 households of Tukurgram, a hamlet in Assam's Cachar district, as they endure contaminated floodwaters for five to seven months each year.

After years of hardship, a mobile water treatment unit has become a lifeline, supplying safe drinking water to these households.

The District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) and Public Health and Engineering Department (PHED) identified Tukurgram as one of the worst flood-affected areas and the hamlet does not have a government-provided water pipeline, officials said.

The sanctioned pipeline through Kalinagar Gram Panchayat had to pass through a drain, making its execution difficult while the hamlet on the hillock also lacked road connectivity, electricity, and toilets. Nested beside a picturesque lake that was once part of the meandering Barak River, this hillock turns into an island during the flood-affected months and continues to remain marooned until the water level recedes.

During this period, families living in low-lying areas migrate to the highest part of the hamlet, enduring congested and unhygienic conditions, a local resident said.

Fifty-eight-year-old Abdul Jabbar, one of the 152 residents of the village, said, "Families here rely on the lake for daily water needs, but during floods, the overflowing lake becomes contaminated leading to immense difficulties and health problems."

Rainfall and floods have become increasingly erratic and intense, prolonging the monsoon season and



worsening its impact, he pointed out.

During these months, residents collected rainwater and used alum to decontaminate the water or else 'we have to manage with water from the 'nala' (drains)', Jabbar said, adding that the problem was acute.

After consultations with the agencies concerned, it was decided that UNICEF India in collaboration with a local NGO, DDMA, PHED, and the Community Facilitation and Resource Centre (CFRC)—a nodal government body under DDMA, and the panchayat and the rural development department (P&RD) will address the issue as a top priority, an official said.

"It was decided to work with the community and make interventions that will not only address the immediate water needs but also help build community resilience against future floods," Cachar DDMA Project Officer Shamim Laskar said. An emergency mobile water treatment unit was provided, which purifies the lake water through the (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Rupjyoti directed to apologise

**GUWAHATI, March 22:** The Assam BJP on Saturday directed its MLA Rupjyoti Kurmi to apologise to the people of the state for lunging at the opposition members while hurling abuses in the assembly a day ago.

State party president Dilip Saikia, in a letter to Kurmi, said his behaviour inside the assembly on Friday was against democratic traditions.

The Mariani MLA had got engaged in a spat with opposition legislators while participating in a discussion in the House, and hurled expletives at them, which were later expunged from the records of proceedings. He had also lunged at the opposition members with the marshals preventing him from reaching further close.

"As a member of BJP, we are shocked to see the kind of behaviour from a senior politician like you," Saikia said in the letter.

Noting that the BJP is a party with discipline and tolerance, which has stood firm by its ideals and principles, Saikia maintained that Kurmi's actions were against the party's values and manner. Saikia urged him not to repeat such behaviour in the future.

"At the same time, we direct you to apologise to the people of Assam over the matter," Saikia said in the letter.

Kurmi has already apologised in the assembly for his behaviour.

A former Congressman, Kurmi, who has been representing the Mariani constituency in the assembly since 2006, had switched over to the BJP in 2021. (PTI)

## Three B'deshis sent back from Assam border

**GUWAHATI, March 22:** Three Bangladeshi infiltrators were apprehended in Assam's Sribhumi district and sent back, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Saturday. "@sribhumpolice successfully intercepted three individuals attempting to cross the border illegally," Sarma said in a post on X.

"The team promptly apprehended the infiltrators and took swift action to push them back," he added. The infiltrators were identified as Sazzad Hussain, Saiful Islam and Md Nazmul Haque.

Over 315 infiltrators have been pushed back from Assam, and vigil along the 1,885-km-long Indo-Bangladesh border in the North East had been intensified since turmoil broke out in the neighbouring country last year. (PTI)

## Churachandpur Meitei body urges SC judge for legal protection of villages

**IMPHAL, March 22:** A Churachandpur-based Meitei body on Saturday urged Supreme Court judge Justice B R Gavai to ensure legal protection of villages belonging to the community and resettlement of internally displaced persons in the Kuki-dominated district of Manipur.

The Churachandpur Meitei United Committee submitted a memorandum to Justice Gavai, who led a delegation of Supreme Court judges that visited the ethnic strife-torn northeastern state during the day. "The Meitei villages in Churachandpur have historically belonged to our community but increasing encroachment threatens our rightful ownership... we request for legal protection of our villages," it said.

The committee, which submitted the memorandum to Justice Gavai in Bishnupur district, also called for resettlement of the Meitei community

in the district with enhanced security measures for a peaceful and stable environment.

They also demanded that one person from each internally displaced family of the Meitei community from Churachandpur district be given a government job.

They demanded that the relief camps be run by the IDPs themselves for better transparency and accountability. On the other hand, Relief Committee Manipur, another body representing the IDPs, urged Justice Gavai for resettlement of the displaced persons in their respective homes at the earliest and called for allowing free movement across the state.

In a memorandum submitted to Justice Gavai at Moirang College in Bishnupur district, the committee also called for providing equal and fair remuneration, and free medical services, including OPD and medical (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## The study surveyed a total of 153 respondents across three states Child labour declined in India's incense stick industry, claims report by NGOs

**NEW DELHI, March 22:** A new study by a coalition of child rights NGOs has claimed that child labour in India's incense stick manufacturing industry has found a significant decline in the employment of underage workers.

The research, conducted across Bihar, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh, highlighted progress in eradicating child labour from the sector. However, concerns were raised regarding children engaged in home-based work under unregulated conditions.

The study, undertaken by the Just Rights for Children Alliance in collaboration with multiple NGOs, revealed that 82 per cent of respondents did not witness any child labour in their localities.

Only 8 per cent reported seeing children engaged in incense stick (agarbatti) manufacturing, with a total of 31 children identified



across the surveyed states -- 13 in Andhra Pradesh and 18 in Karnataka.

"The incense stick industry has made remarkable progress in eliminating child labour, thanks to heightened awareness, policy interventions, and stricter regula-

tions. However, we must remain vigilant, as pockets of child labour persist, particularly in home-based settings," the report stated.

The study surveyed a total of 153 respondents across three states, selected based on literature review and local NGO insights.

The sample included shopkeepers, tea sellers, labourers, and local residents, ensuring diverse perspectives on the prevalence of child labour in the industry.

The survey method enabled researchers to gauge community awareness and direct observations regarding the employment of children.

According to the findings, 77 per cent of the observed child labourers worked in home-based production rather than formal workshops, making regulation and monitoring more challenging.

Additionally, 85 per cent of these children were engaged in packaging incense sticks, a task requiring minimal skill but drawing vulnerable children into the workforce.

The study also sheds light on the working conditions of these children. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## NIT Silchar's assistant professor arrested for 'molestation' of student

**SILCHAR, March 22:** An assistant professor of the National Institute of Technology (NIT) Silchar has been arrested for allegedly molesting a female student in Assam's Cachar district, police said on Saturday.

The student registered a complaint with the institute on Thursday, alleging that the professor called her to his chamber after class on the pretext of discussing her marks and asked her to lock the door.

The professor was accused of "molesting the student and sexually harassing her", a senior officer said.

The assistant professor was taken into custody, and after extensive questioning at the Ghungoor Police Outpost, he was ar-

rested and transferred to the Silchar Sadar Police Station on Friday evening, Cachar Superintendent of Police Numal Mahatta said.

"The matter was immediately referred to the internal complaints committee of the institute to enquire into it. The chamber where the alleged incident occurred has been sealed," a spokesperson of the institute said.

Students launched a protest, demanding immediate action against the assistant professor who has been teaching in the institute since 2018, and termination of his services.

The institute suspended the accused with immediate effect and the police recorded the statement of the student and registered a case. (PTI)

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# RAT CHINGRUM AMAI 2025

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# Goyal hails startups says many nations want to adopt India's development model

**AHMEDABAD, March 22:** Several nations want to adopt India's development model, which has given prominence to initiatives such as Startup India that encourage innovation, Union Minister of Commerce and Industry Piyush Goyal said here on Saturday.

Addressing the valedictory function of Vejalpur Startup Festival 2.0, Goyal also said India aims to take the number of unicorns from the existing 118 to 1,000 and 5,000.

The startup ecosystem created in the country has encouraged job seekers to become job creators, the Union minister asserted.

"Narendra Modi as the then chief minister of Gujarat ensured fast paced development of the state. Gujarat's development then became the country's development. And slowly, several countries, especially developing countries, today want to adopt India's development model," Goyal said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has dedicated to the nation several jewels in this development model, like Swachh Bharat Mission, Make In India, Digital India, Startup India, International Yoga Day, Ayushman Bharat, among others, he added.

"There is hardly any leader in the world who has been conferred the



highest civilian awards. Modi has been conferred 21 international awards," Goyal said.

Goyal said startups have worked to help India's economy grow with their new and innovative ideas, new ways of functioning, adding that Gujarat has remained the best performing state in startups.

There is an appetite in people here for taking risks, he said while appreciating the state.

"The government has given encouragement to startups, investors, founders and mentors to associate with startups. The Centre started a Fund of Funds (FoF) for startups with

a fund of ₹ 10,000 crore. Another ₹ 10,000 crore fund was announced in the last budget, and the first instalment has been provided to the department," he said.

Angel tax has also been removed, and a portal 'Bhaskar' has been launched for startups to connect with investors, Goyal said.

Urging youth to create a model of people-centric development through their startup ideas, Goyal said, "Sometimes you have to face failures. Do not get scared of failure. The mantra of a startup is to rise from failure and become successful."

Manufacturing will remain impor-

tant, but startups can help in smart and innovative manufacturing, marketing and packaging, the minister opined.

Goyal also mentioned NASA astronaut Sunita Williams, who returned to earth early Wednesday after a prolonged mission to the International Space Station (ISS), during his speech.

"Her family moved from Mehsana in Gujarat to the US. Williams showed courage during her extended stay at the International Space Station and was always seen smiling," he said.

Earlier in the day, Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel, who inaugurated the assembly-level Vejalpur Start-up Festival 2.0, said the term startup has become the identity of the youth today.

"Today's youth are moving forward very quickly with creative thinking, innovative ideas and innovative ideas. Women are also coming up with new startups today with innovative solutions to various problems," Patel said.

The PM has resolved to build a developed India by taking the strength of youth power, Patel said while asserting that the idea of 'Developed Gujarat for a Developed India' will be realised. More than 1000 startups and 4500 people are taking part in the festival. A total of 42 startups were given free stalls to showcase their products. (PTI)

## Punjab's excise revenue rose to ₹ 10,200 crore in past 3 yrs Cheema

**CHANDIGARH, March 22:** Punjab Excise and Taxation Minister Harpal Singh Cheema on Saturday said the state's excise revenue rose from ₹ 6,254 crore to ₹ 10,200 crore in the past three years even as he slammed the previous governments for their alleged failure in boosting the collections.

Cheema said for the first time in Punjab's history, the excise revenue would surpass the five-digit mark, with the target of ₹ 10,145 crore for the financial year 2024-25 likely to be exceeded. He attributed the rise in the state's excise revenue growth to the success of the excise policy implemented since the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) formed the government in Punjab in 2022.

Addressing the media here, Cheema said the success of the tendering process has set the stage for a fourth consecutive year of remarkable growth for the excise department. He said the department received overwhelming response in its ongoing e-tender process for the allotment of retail liquor licences for the 2025-26 fiscal year. He said the department had set a reserve price of ₹ 9,017 crore for 207 retail liquor groups.

As of March 20, 179 of these groups, accounting for 87 per cent of the total number, have been successfully allotted, fetching a dis-

covered price of ₹ 8,681 crore, along with an additional ₹ 871 crore, as premium against the reserved price of ₹ 7,810 crore.

Cheema, who is also the state finance minister, expressed confidence in achieving the ambitious target of ₹ 11,020 crore for 2025-26.

He said the tremendous response to the e-tendering process suggests that the department is likely to surpass this target, potentially reaching approximately ₹ 11,800 crore, which would represent a 16 per cent increase over the previous year's excise revenue.

He criticised the previous governments led by the SAD-BJP alliance and the Congress for their "failure" to boost excise revenue.

He said during the Congress regime from 2002 to 2007, excise revenue declined 6.9 per cent, falling from ₹ 1,462 crore in 2002 to ₹ 1,363 crore in 2007. He alleged that during the decade-long SAD-BJP rule, the term "mafia" became synonymous with governance, and excise revenue dropped from ₹ 4,796 crore in 2015-16 to ₹ 4,400 crore in 2016-17 due to the policy designed to benefit "cronies".

He added that the Congress regime from 2017 to 2022 followed a similar trajectory, with excise revenue stagnating for the first three years of the regime and reaching ₹ 6,200 crore by 2021-22. (PTI)

## Air India restarts services to London Heathrow other airlines also operate flights

**NEW DELHI, March 22:** Air India on Saturday said it has recommenced flights to and from the London Heathrow airport, which had witnessed operational disruptions due to a power outage.

From the national capital, apart from Air India, Virgin Atlantic and British Airways also operated their scheduled flights to London Heathrow (LHR).

Travel plans of thousands of passengers who were scheduled to fly to LHR, including from Indian cities, were disrupted on Friday due to the cancellation of flights, as operations were suspended following the power outage. "Our

operations to and from London Heathrow (LHR) have recommenced after the disruption at the airport yesterday due to a power outage," Air India said in a statement on Saturday.

According to Air India, flight AI111 was on schedule and other flights, to and from London, are expected to operate as per schedule.

"Flight AI161 of 21 March, which was diverted to Frankfurt, is expected to leave Frankfurt at 14:05 pm local time," the statement said.

An official said Air India, British Airways and Virgin Atlantic operated their flights to LHR on Saturday morning, and another Air India flight is scheduled to depart in the afternoon.

*Contd. from Page 1...*

## Himanta greets people on 'Bihar

for such a programme. These organisations had questioned the "rationale" of a political party holding the foundation day of a different state here, alleging that it was being done for electoral benefits.

Sarma, defending the celebration of foundation days of other states, had said that 'Asom Divas' is observed in other states annually on December 2, with governors in attendance.

He termed the objection to celebrate 'Bihar Divas' here as unfounded, cautioning that it could lead to communal tension and the Assamese people living outside the state could have to face the consequences. (PTI)

## Dr Hemari Kro receives 'Samaj

Dr Hariram Das. The Sahitya Jyoti Prerona Bota was awarded to Rupali Mahanta, while the Udioman Silpi Bota was given to Sanskrita Malakar. The Srestho Samvad Sevak Prerona Bota was presented to two individuals, Rubul Das and Hemanta Bora, reporter for Asomiya Pratidin. The Silpi Prerona Bota was awarded to Dr Pravat Haloi, Kamal Deka, and Hansraj Majumdar, while the Sahitya Prerona Bota was presented to Pran Hari Das and Arjun Sen Deka.

A special felicitation was given to Raju Baruah for receiving an Honorary Doctorate, and Dilip Barman, Correspondent of Dinik Batori Kakot and Agradoot newspapers, was also honored by the Trust.

## Mobile water treatment unit

simple process of pumping, filtration, and disinfection using chlorine, he said. "The unit is easy to install and operate and this has become a game-changer for Tukurgram, ensuring safe drinking water, especially during floods," he said.

Implementing sustainable water and sanitation solutions in remote and flood-prone areas is not easy, the project officer said. "Hilly terrain makes access difficult, infrastructure gap persists, raising community awareness and coordinating multiple stakeholders are also challenging tasks, but we are committed to finding solutions," Laskar said.

The Community Facilitation and Resource Centre (CFRC) plays a crucial role in bridging the gap between communities and disaster response agencies, ensuring that relief reaches those who need it most. CFRC nodal officer Ashim Kumar Das said.

"During floods, we act as a bridge between communities and agencies like SDRF and DDM, ensuring timely assistance with evacuation, clean water, and medical aid," Das said. The community has taken ownership of the water treatment unit and to make it more sustainable, a sub-water committee was formed with 14 members, including six women.

"The committee manages the unit's daily operations, schedules water collection, arranges fuel, and ensures maintenance. Each household contributes Rs 20 per week for daily collection of water," he said. There are plans to link the committee with a bank for fund management, he said.

"The mobile water treatment unit provides safe drinking water year-round. We ensure its maintenance, and during floods, we distribute clean water to nearby villages, preventing waterborne diseases and improving resilience," Das added.

The district administration is also exploring ways to bring Tukurgram under the Piped Water Supply Scheme for household tap connections in the near future but till then, the mobile water treatment unit remains a crucial resource, ensuring access to potable water during floods, another official said. There used to be worms in the water, causing stomach ailments, skin infections, and other health issues, especially in children but now, with clean drinking water, these problems have been addressed, said a trained operator of the unit Sajida Begum Talukdar.

Beyond Tukurgram, efforts to improve access to safe drinking water and sanitation have been scaled up across multiple flood-affected regions, UNICEF's chief of field office Madhulika Jonathan said.

"UNICEF and its partners have adopted a multi-sectoral approach to ensure that relief efforts are not just temporary solutions but long-term interventions aimed at strengthening community resilience," she said.

"Through the Assam Flood Relief Programme, hygiene kits, chlorine tablets and water dispensers, raised or disaster resilient community toilets, training in schools, and communities, and emergency mobile water treatment and filtration units were provided to ensure that people could have access to safe and clean drinking water, essential hygiene and sanitation," Jonathan added. (PTI)

## Churachandpur Meitei body

laboratory tests, to the IDPs languishing in the relief camps. They also called for the promulgation of an order for free education, inclusive of admission and examination fees, and for the opening of a grievance cell for the IDPs.

The committee also demanded that IDPs be given priority in recruitment in government and private institutions and timely issuance of all documents, including land records, domicile and birth certificates. More than 250 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in ethnic violence between Imphal Valley-based Meiteis and adjoining hills-based Kuki-Zo groups since May 2023. (PTI)

## Child labour declined in

About 92 per cent of them reported working between five to eight hours daily, with 77 per cent earning less than ₹ 5,000 per month.

Despite India's legal framework prohibiting child labour, enforcement remains a challenge. The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986, and its 2016 amendment prohibit employment of children under 14 in all occupations, except for assistance in family enterprises.

The intense stick industry, which employs over two million workers nationwide, is primarily a home-based sector, with women constituting 80 per cent of the workforce. Karnataka alone accounts for 60 per cent of agarbatti production, with labourers earning meager wages for their work.

While the decline in child labour in the industry is a positive development, the report emphasizes the need for continued monitoring, stricter enforcement of labour laws, and enhanced rehabilitation measures for affected children.

"It is essential to sustain this progress through collective action from government agencies, civil society organizations, and industry stakeholders," the report said. (PTI)

## Construction of largest Namo Bharat station likely to finish by April

**NEW DELHI, March 23:** The largest Namo Bharat station in the Delhi-Ghaziabad-Meerut corridor, Sarai Kale Khan, is likely to be completed by the end of April.

According to an official statement, with key construction and electrification works nearing completion, trial runs on the stretch between New Ashok Nagar and Sarai Kale Khan are expected to begin by the end of this month.

The National Capital Region Transport Corporation (NCRTC) stated that track work between New Ashok Nagar and Sarai Kale Khan stations has been completed.

Sarai Kale Khan will serve as a major transport hub, connecting the Namo Bharat corridor with Hazrat Nizamuddin Railway Station, Delhi Metro's Pink Line, the Veer Haseqat Rai Inter-State Bus Terminal (ISBT) and Ring Road, it stated.

To enhance interconnectivity, a 280-meter-long foot overbridge (FOB) is being built to link the Namo Bharat station with Hazrat Nizamuddin Railway Station, it mentioned.

The NCRTC stated that this FOB, equipped with six travelators, will ensure smooth movement between different modes of transport.

NCRTC is also constructing a network of FOBs that will allow commuters to easily cross the busy Ring Road and access the Namo Bharat station, as well as the ISBT and the metro station, it stated.

A dedicated vehicle drop-off zone is also being developed under the elevated station, accommodating more than 40 vehicles simultaneously, the NCRTC said.

Additionally, a city bus interchange with space for

over 15 buses is being constructed beneath the station to create a well-organized public transport system, it said.

Designed to handle high passenger volumes, the station will have five entry-exit gates, multiple staircases, 14 lifts, and 18 escalators, it stated.

According to the NCRTC, all lifts and escalators have already been installed. The station spans 215 metres in length, 50 metres in width, and 15 metres in height, ensuring efficient passenger movement across different levels.

Currently, Namo Bharat trains are running along a 55-kilometer stretch from New Ashok Nagar in Delhi to Meerut South, covering 11 stations. Beyond this operational section, the corridor will extend further to three more stations - Shatabdi Nagar, Begumpul, and Modipuram, it added.

The NCRTC further said that Begumpul, the deepest and largest underground Namo Bharat station in Meerut, is also in its final stages of construction.

The last station on the corridor, Modipuram, is also nearing completion, with staircases under construction and other civil works progressing steadily, it said.

Meanwhile, trial runs for the Meerut Metro have commenced between Meerut South and a section before the underground Meerut Central Station.

The NCRTC highlighted that this will be the first instance in India where a local metro service will operate on the same infrastructure as the Namo Bharat trains.

The Meerut Metro will run across 13 stations along a 23-kilometer stretch, and the entire project is expected to become fully operational by the end of June, the NCRTC added. (PTI)

## IMF pushes for tax target of over ₹ 15 trillion in Pak's next budget

**ISLAMABAD, March 22:** The International Monetary Fund (IMF) proposed a tax target of over ₹ 15 trillion for Pakistan in the next budget, according to a media report on Saturday. The development comes days after the IMF urged Pakistan's Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) to refrain from granting tax exemptions to international investment projects, including the Chaghi-Gwadar railway track project worth USD 2 billion.

ARY News reported citing sources that the IMF delegation maintained that tax exemptions for international investments would hinder the country's revenue generation. The IMF and Pakistan are holding virtual talks, with 85 per cent of the discussions completed successfully. The talks are focused on finalising the details of the next budget, which is expected to be presented in the National Assembly soon.

The new budget is expected to increase the tax-to-GDP ratio to 13 per cent and collect Rs 2,745 billion in non-tax revenue. The government is also expecting the economy to grow by over 4 per cent in the next fiscal year, driven by increased investment and consumption.

The government had requested Gulf countries to invest in the Chaghi-Gwadar railway track project, but the IMF has refused to grant tax exemptions to the SIFC for international investments. The SIFC has been providing a platform for investment and facilitating the transportation of minerals from Reko Diq to Gwadar through a new railway line.

Briefing the IMF delegation, officials stated that a platform is being provided to facilitate investment, and a new railway line will be constructed to transport minerals from Reko Diq to Gwadar, according to the ARY News report.

Pakistan set ₹ 12.97 trillion tax collection target for the fiscal year 2024-25 but the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) has been facing challenges to meet the target.

Any increase in the tax collection for the next fiscal starting from July would increase the burden on the people.

Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb on Friday told media that Pakistan hopes to receive positive news from the IMF as the global lender moves towards the conclusion of talks in securing the next tranche of USD 1 billion out of the USD 7 billion loan package agreed last year.

The minister also reassured that Pakistan was on track to meet the IMF's economic discipline targets after an IMF delegation visited the cash-strapped country this month and met various officials. (PTI)

## Preserve wealth and manage inflation with ICICI Pru GIFT Select

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, March 22:** To ensure an additional income stream in times of economic environment and financial planning, ICICI Prudential Life Insurance has launched a unique long-term savings product - ICICI Pru GIFT Select, a product designed to provide guaranteed income while preserving wealth. "Our goal is to help customers achieve their long-term financial aspirations with certainty," said Amit Palta, chief product and distribution officer, ICICI Prudential Life Insurance.

"The product offers flexibility, allowing customers to choose the duration of their guaranteed income while also receiving a lump sum on maturity in a tax-efficient manner. The increasing income feature, compounding at 5% annually, helps them manage inflation effectively," the statement quoted. ICICI Prudential Life Insurance is also transforming life insurance distribution with digital innovations, empowering agents through the IPRU Edge mobile app. "Agents play a crucial role in helping customers make informed financial decisions. With IPRU Edge, we are equipping them with a digital office at their fingertips," Palta explained.

"The mobile app provides business leads, social media marketing content, and a paperless buying journey, allowing agents to focus on growth," the statement said.

As per reports the productivity of agents between April and December 2024, using IPRU Edge surged by 25%.

Notably, 98% of eligible agents using the app were paid commissions on the same day. AI-powered solutions have enabled the company to issue approx. 50% of the savings policies on the same day. ICICI Prudential Life's commitment to customers is evident in its 99.3% claim settlement ratio for the period April 2024 to Dec 2024, with an average claim settlement time of just 1.2 days for non-investigated claims.

## QNET India advocates need for healthier hydration with KENT-QNET RO Purifier

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, March 22:** On the occasion of World Water Day, QNET emphasised the need for enhancing awareness about healthier drinking practices, particularly through adopting alkaline-mineral water, in Indian households.

Alkaline-mineral water, characterised by its higher pH levels compared to regular water, offers significant health advantages, said an official statement on Saturday.

Regular consumption of alkaline water can aid in balancing the body's acidity, enhancing hydration, and supporting better digestion.

Furthermore, its mineral-rich nature ensures your body receives es-

sential nutrients often missing in regular purified water, thus promoting overall well-being.

QNET, India region, in partnership with KENT, reinforced the need for adopting the advanced water purification solution - the KENT-QNET SMART water purifier with Alkaline-Mineral and advanced RO technology. The statement claimed the this innovative system ensures optimal pH balance in drinking water and effectively removes harmful dissolved impurities such as arsenic, rust, bacteria, and viruses. In Guwahati, certain localities have reported groundwater TDS levels ranging from 600 to 1,400 ppm.

## PhonePe Wealth launches Consistency, Risk and Investment Style of the Portfolio

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, March 22:** PhonePe Wealth announced the launch of CRISP - a unique tool designed to help investors make more informed mutual fund investment decisions said an official statement on Saturday.

The tool comes at a time when unique mutual fund investors in India have grown from 20 million as on December 31, 2019 to 53 million as on December 31, 2024 as per sources, but choosing the right funds still remains a significant challenge for most investors.

The CRISP (Consistency, Risk and Investment Style of the Portfolio) tool addresses this critical challenge by offering a holistic solution for investors to select appropriate funds beyond just looking at past returns.

Retail investors, especially those investing via wealthtech platforms, have been largely relying on past point-to-point performance of funds to make their investment choices.

This has often led to investors making wrong investment choices.

CRISP simplifies investing decisions by converting performance, risk and portfolio data of mutual funds into ac-

tionable insights.

"The mutual fund industry is experiencing significant growth due to industry's investor awareness initiatives and democratization of mutual fund investing by wealthtech platforms," said Nilesh D Naik, Head of Investment Products, ShareMarket (PhonePe Wealth).

"At PhonePe Wealth, our focus is on supporting investors on our platform through innovative tools like CRISP. We are committed to developing research and technology-driven solutions that help investors embrace core investing principles and prudently navigate their wealth creation journey," he added.

The CRISP framework assesses funds based on parameters such as consistency in performance where it assesses a fund's performance consistency relative to its peer group based on rolling returns over a five-year period, assigning a score of "High," "Medium," or "Low." This approach helps investors identify funds that have consistently outperformed, rather than those with sporadic or unpredictable performance.

Another parameter - relative risk vs.

peers where the tool demarcates risk for the fund compared to peers and categorises it as "Within acceptable range" or "Too High". This enables investors to spot risk outliers and avoid investing in funds that take extreme risks.

The final parameter investment style or factor analysis, CRISP analyses a fund's style exposure across factors like Value, Quality, and Momentum, over a five-year period, providing insights into the fund's management style. This is presented in an easy-to-understand investment style classification of "High", "Medium" and "Low" across the three factors. This becomes an extremely important input for investors while constructing their mutual fund portfolios, to ensure desired level of exposure across different styles or factors and to achieve diversification.

The tool is currently available on the PhonePe platform and will soon be integrated into their stock broking platform, ShareMarket.

This is in line with ShareMarket's mission to provide access to research and intelligence to its investors and trader community, the statement concluded.



# Minister Megwal visits Baksa to review central schemes

*Reviewed key departments, including handloom and textiles*

**HT Correspondent**  
**KOKRAJHAR, March 22:** Union minister of state (Independent Charge) for law & justice and parliamentary Affairs, Arjun Ram Meghwal, visited Baksa of Bodoland Territorial Region to assess the progress of various central government schemes on Saturday.

During his visit, he chaired a review meeting at the district commissioner's conference hall in Mushalpur, where he emphasized the need for enhanced agricultural productivity and the establishment of cold storage facilities to support farmers.

Highlighting Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Antyodaya vision—uplifting the poorest of the poor—Meghwal stressed the importance of improved inter-district coordination and rural entrepreneurship development. He advocated for strengthening cooperative networks and streamlining supply chains to enhance market access for farmers and small-scale enterprises.



Recognizing Baksa's potential in honey production, the Minister urged local authorities to facilitate capacity-building programmes and technical support for beekeepers. He emphasised that better market access and value addition

could significantly boost profitability for honey producers in the region. Additionally, Meghwal reviewed key departments, including handloom and textiles, acknowledging their role in generating local employment and economic growth. He underscored the need for targeted interventions to bolster rural livelihoods and harness Baksa's agricultural potential.

The review meeting was attended by MCLA Ghanashyam Das, District Commissioner Gautam Das, Block Development Officers (BDOs), Heads of Departments, and other senior government officials. The Minister's visit reaffirmed the central government's commitment to strengthening rural infrastructure and economic development in the region.

## Arunachal Guv bats for deeper integration between local communities, forces

**ITANAGAR, March 22:** Deeper integration between local communities and security forces will help foster trust and cooperation, leading to better management of international borders, Arunachal Pradesh Governor KT Parnaik said on Saturday.

Speaking at a seminar organised by the 56 Infantry Division of the Indian Army at Likabali military station in Lower Siang district, Parnaik stressed the need to bolster security along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) through advanced technology and community collaboration.

He said securing the borders and developing the state must go hand in hand.

He advocated for deeper integration between local communities and security forces, fostering trust and cooperation in border management, according to a statement issued by the Raj Bhavan.

Parnaik said the Centre has undertaken the Vibrant Villages Programme (VVP) to equip border villages with essential infrastructure.

He emphasised the need for coordinated efforts among the state government, armed forces, and local communities to make these villages self-reliant and thriving.



The governor, who is a veteran, underlined the importance of information warfare in shaping narratives. The two-day seminar, which began on Friday, hosted discussions on the state's ancient trade routes, tribal societal evolution, and cultural interactions. Experts also deliberated on crisis management, inclusivity, cultural sensitivity, and the role of the press in shaping public perception. (PTI)

## Reliance Jio keen to invest in IT sector in Tripura: CM

**AGARTALA, March 22:** Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha on Saturday said that Reliance Industries Jio is keen to invest in the Information Technology sector in the state.

A company delegation met the chief minister and discussed the state's potential in the industrial sector.

Saha in a post on Facebook said he had earlier met Mukesh Ambani, chairman and managing director of Reliance Industries, in Mumbai and Assam, and requested "him to support our vision for viksit (developed) Tripura".

He said a team led by the North Eastern Zone Business Head of Reliance Jio visited the state during the day to explore investment opportunities in key sectors like IT and IT-enabled services, data centres, besides natural gas exploration and fertilizer production, petroleum, ethanol production from bamboo, rubber wood furniture, agro-food processing and tourism.

"Their enthusiasm for the IT sector, in particular, is very exciting! Looking forward to collaboration with Reliance Group of Industries for transforming Tripura's future together," the CM said.

In February, the state government signed 87 Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) valued at a total of ₹ 3,700 crore in a business meet. (PTI)

## Ashokashtami Festival at Shri Ashwaklanta Temple



**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, March 22:** The historic and sacred Maha Vishnu Tirtha, Shri Shri Ashwaklanta Temple in North Guwahati will once again celebrate Shri Shri Ashokashtami with devotion and a spiritual atmosphere. Surrounded by the footprints of Lord Vishnu and several mystical ponds, this revered temple will host the pious Ashokashtami festival from 1:30 am on April 4 to midnight on April 5.

According to the temple management committee's president, Dalai Laxeshwar Sharma, over a hundred thousand devotees are expected to visit, and special arrangements have been made for them. To ensure a smooth experience for pilgrims, accommodation, food distribution, and security measures have been put in place.

As per ancient beliefs, on the Ashokashtami tithi, the holy waters of the Ganges merge with the Brahmaputra River. As a result, performing pind daan (ritual offerings to ancestors), asthi visarjan (immersion of ashes), and shraddha (rituals for the departed souls) on this auspicious day grants moksha (salvation) to the departed souls. This is why a large number of devotees visit the temple on this occasion to perform these sacred rites.

With a heritage spanning over a hundred years, Shri Ashwaklanta Temple is revered as the "Second Gaya Tirtha," continuing to be a center of faith and devotion for countless worshippers across generations.

## 27 Myanmar nationals deported from Manipur

**IMPHAL, March 22:** Altogether 27 Myanmar nationals who had entered Manipur illegally were deported by the Indian authorities, officials said on Saturday.

The foreigners, including a minor, were handed over to the authorities of the neighbouring country at Indo Myanmar Friendship Gate in Moreh in Manipur's Tensnong district on Friday.

They had been lodged at the Foreigners' Detention Centre at Sajiwa Jail in Imphal.

"After completing their jail terms, Indian authorities repatriated the Myanmar nationals," an official added.

Illegal immigrants from Myanmar were accused of being largely responsible for the ongoing ethnic violence in the northeastern state.

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

The Centre had imposed President's rule in the state on February 13 after N Biren Singh resigned as chief minister. (PTI)

## Fire breaks out

**HT Correspondent**  
**BOKAJAN, March 22:** Fire broke out at Ghurapati Zakrisato Colony as a result of which goods and important materials in a house were reduced to ashes on the Assam-Nagaland border, in Karbi Anglong.

However, fire tenders prevented fire from spreading to nearby properties. The fire that started at 9 am was suspected to be ignited from a short circuit.

Following fire incident, two LPG cylinders exploded.

Due to the fire, traffic on both sides of Assam-Nagaland was stopped for one hour.

## Youth commits suicide following financial crunch

**HT Correspondent**  
**TEZPUR, March 22:** A young boy of around 36 years old of Tezpur area ended his life jumping into river Brahmaputra at Rudra Pad area under Lalmai police outpost on Friday afternoon after embracing financial crunch.

After primary investigation by the police, the youth was identified as Deepak Kalita, a resident of Dekargaon area under Kacharigaon Police outpost here. According to the father of the youth, Deepak was an employee of a Reliance smart point here and over the past few days he was facing a financial crunch. Alongwith his mobile phone, wrist watch, helmet, wallet etc, police recovered his motorbike on the river bank. However, though SDRF team has expedited search operation till filing of the report the body of the youth is not found.

## Missing man's body found

**HT Correspondent**  
**HOWRAGHAT, March 22:** The body of Mukti Prasad Laskar (67), a former Sericulture Department employee, was recovered from the Jamuna (Chomna) River by Bolo village of Panditghat area in Howraghat, Karbi Anglong district on Saturday. The deceased's family said he went missing from his home on Friday afternoon. Late Laskar's body was found floating in the Jamuna (Chomna) River by Bolo village on Saturday afternoon and retrieved by Howraghat police. The body has been sent to Diphu for postmortem. It remains to be seen whether the death of Mukti Prasad Laskar was a suicide or something else. Late Laskar who was originally from Kamrup in Nagaon district was a resident of Panditghat for a long time.

## Man attempts to murder wife, in-laws

**HT Correspondent**  
**NAGAON, March 22:** In a sensational incident, one Shankar Lagachu, a resident of Majuli, attacked his wife, brother-in-law, and mother-in-law with a sharp object, leaving them critically injured at Nonoi Namkurigaon village under Nagaon PS last night here.

According to sources, the incident occurred around 11 pm when Lagachu entered into his brother-in-law's house and attacked him first, following attack on his wife,

Anjali Bora, and mother-in-law, Anima Bora.

Besides, the perpetrator also tried to kill his nine year old baby girl. But the baby girl luckily escaped from his attack due to the some locals, sources added.

The injured were brought to a local hospital immediately for treatment, and the police have recovered the sharp object used in the attack.

According to the victim family, Lagachu had married Anjali despite

being already married and having three children from his first wife. He had also been physically abusing Anjali since their marriage for which she was brought back later to her maternal house in Nagaon from Majuli a few months ago. The family alleged that Lagachu had been suspecting Anjali of having an affair with her brother and had been threatening to kill him. The locals have condemned the incident and demanded severe punishment for the perpetrator.

## Manipur Governor inaugurates hostel, staff quarters of College of Agriculture



**IMPHAL, March 22:** Manipur Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla inaugurated several projects at the College of Agriculture and the College of Food Technology on Saturday, a Raj Bhavan statement said.

The governor inaugurated a newly constructed girls' hostel and a new Type-IV staff quarter at the College of Agriculture (COA), Iroisemba.

Later, the governor visited the College of Food Technology, Lamphelpat, and inspected the Biofloc Unit and food processing pilot plant located on the campus. As part of the event, Bhalla inaugurated a Tulsi-flavoured water manufacturing unit.

Bhalla also distributed food processing equipment to Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and encouraged them to utilise the various training programmes provided by Central Agricultural University (CAU), Imphal, to develop skills in food processing and entrepreneurship, enabling them to become self-reliant, the statement added. (PTI)

## Two-day nature camp in Kheroni



**HT Correspondent**  
**KHERONI, March 22:** Aryabhata Science Center organised a two-day 'Nature Camp', Environment Education Programme under the aegis of Mission Life in Assam for Kheroni Girls High School on Saturday.

The Nature Camp was held at Kheroni in West Karbi Anglong. On the first day, the resource persons gave talks and demonstrated awareness of nature and the environment. On the second day, the female students were taken to Koka Tourist Resort, situated on the bank of the Amrengh River, a scenic place. At Koka Tourist Resort entrepreneurs provided the students with boating and studied the causes of water pollution and ways to de-

contaminate it. To instill a scientific mindset among school students and the society in the state programmes and experiments to promote science as a profession were held. The camp was attended by 56 students and 10 teachers from eight schools in the area.

The two-day camp by Aryabhata Science Centre, Rongkhang Zone was earlier inaugurated by Associate Principal of Khmeri Girls High School, Rajen Setri. Sunil Buragohain, Govind Devnath, Haripad Das and Ramdhan Timung participated as Resource Persons and provided knowledge on environment and environmental balance, causes of global warming and its adverse effects as well as beautification of the Koka tourist destination.

## Heroin seized in Karbi Anglong

**HT Correspondent**  
**BOKAJAN, March 22:** The police of Khatkhathi police station, Karbi Anglong, recovered heroin and arrested one Rojob Ali in the morning at around 9. The police acting on information pursued and intercepted a motorcycle, AS 25 Y 8576. After tailing the motorcycle for around 1 km by the police, the motorcycle met with an accident. The police picked up the motorcycle and rider from the accident site. On searching the vehicle the police recovered 23 plastic cases filled with heroin which was packed in polythene packets. The contraband was found hidden below the seat and weighed 276.91 grams.

# Bihar Diwas celebrated in Arunachal with full fervor

*Marks cultural bonhomie and camaraderie*

**HT Correspondent**

**ITANAGAR, March 22:** Bihar Diwas 2025 was celebrated with great enthusiasm and cultural fervor in Arunachal Pradesh, bringing together members of the Bihari community and locals to commemorate the foundation day of Bihar.

The event, organized by BJP Arunachal Pradesh in collaboration with the All Bihar and UP Welfare Association of Arunachal Pradesh under the visionary initiative of Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat – Sneh Milan 2025, was held at D.K Auditorium Hall, IG Park, Itanagar.

Chief Guest Kaling Moyong, state BJP President, highlighted Bihar's historical and intellectual significance, acknowledging its contributions through great personalities. He praised the Bihari community in Arunachal Pradesh, recognizing their role in education, administration, business, and infrastructure. He stated that their dedication has been instrumental in the socio-economic growth of the state.

He also reaffirmed BJP's commitment to the welfare of Biharis across India, announcing initiatives to connect Biharis outside Bihar with their Janmabhoomi (birthplace) and strengthen their partici-

pation in India's progress. He encouraged migrant Biharis to visit Bihar at their convenience and share the developmental initiative in the state and also to reconnect with their roots. He said that through the celebration of Bihar Diwas in the state can able to meet their own people residing in Arunachal Pradesh. He said that in every districts HQ people of Bihar are residing and Chat puja is also celebrating in the state with enthusiastic manner.

Moyong also commended the leadership of CM Pema Khandu, under whom Arunachal Pradesh has seen remarkable development in infrastructure, education, and healthcare. He emphasized Arunachal Pradesh's diverse and inclusive culture, calling it a "Mini India", where different communities live in harmony.

He thanked and appreciated the organizing committee to celebrate Bihar Diwas and featured cultural performances showcasing the traditions of Bihar and Arunachal Pradesh, symbolizing India's unity in diversity. The event concluded with a pledge to further strengthen the bond between the two states and continue fostering cultural and so-



cial harmony.

Resource person of the day AK Mishra State Liaison Officer DHTE highlighted on Bihar's history, development and contribution in National building. He appreciated the state govt for all round development in the state. He also highlighted the various manufacturer unit in Bihar and said that 26% on railway is contributed to the nation from Bihar.

Techi Kaso, MLA, 13-Itanagar Assembly Constituency, congratulated the people of Bihar on Bihar Diwas and acknowledged their role

in strengthening national unity. Er Kumar Shailendra MLA, Bihar expressed happiness for meeting with people of Bihar in Itanagar during his visit on Saturday in Arunachal Pradesh. He highlighted political and socio-economic development of Bihar. He said that NDA led govt in Bihar has been marching towards all round development in the state. He appealed all the people of Bihar who have been residing outside Bihar to join the electoral process in the state to fulfill the dream shown by PM Modi

for Vikshit Bharat.

Nyato Dukam, minister of industries, Labour, Textile & Handicrafts, appreciated the role and contribution of Biharis in Arunachal Pradesh, stating that Biharis introduced business skills to the people of Arunachal Pradesh. He acknowledged their generosity and hard work, saying that the people of Arunachal Pradesh will always be grateful for their contributions. He urged Biharis to continue supporting the welfare of the people of Arunachal Pradesh and strengthening the spirit of unity and cooperation.

Tarh Tarak, State Vice-President cum Convener of Bihar Diwas 2025, while welcoming all the dignitaries, highlighted the main objectives of Bihar Diwas under the Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat – Sneh Milan 2025 initiative. He emphasized that the event aimed to foster unity, cultural exchange, and deeper integration between Bihar and Arunachal Pradesh, strengthening the spirit of national harmony and cooperation.

Bipin Kumar President All Bihar and UP Welfare Association of Arunachal Pradesh welcome all the dignitaries.

Zingnu Namchoom MLA cum State general secretary, MQ Khan Principal Govt Dera Nating College, Itanagar, Pankaj Kumar Singh Co-Convener Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat, Bihar, Tarh Soping Co-Convener Bihar diwas, Viney Kumar Gupta Treasurer State BJP, Morcha, prominent dignitaries, including senior government officials, political leaders, party karyakartas, community representatives also attended the program.

The celebration featured vibrant cultural performances, including folk dances from Bihar and different tribes of Aunachal Pradesh were performed during the day long programme.

The Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat – Sneh Milan Sammaroh 2025 initiative played a pivotal role in fostering cultural integration and unity between different communities. The event emphasized the importance of national unity and the spirit of cooperation among states, reinforcing the shared heritage of Bihar and Arunachal Pradesh. The Bihar Diwas celebration concluded with a pledge to continue strengthening cultural and social ties between the two states, further promoting harmony and brotherhood.



# Grand homecoming after successful Sunita Mission in the space

By: Dr. Ratan Bhattacharjee

Finally Sunita Williams and Butch Wilmore are back and they are enjoying freedom from the encapsulated life in the space when the Space X Dragon of Elon Musk splashed down off the coast of Florida. The voyage from the blue sky to the blue ocean was watched as if it were a super thrilling movie all over the globe. 'India's daughter' Sunita is finally safe with his fellow astronaut Butch Wilmore and Trump's administration can claim the credit for it. After nine months on the International Space Station, the Sunita Mission, in a test flight of Boeing's Starliner spacecraft, was initially supposed to last about eight days. But it was extended after the Starliner suffered thruster problems and NASA decided to bring the astronauts home via Elon Musk's SpaceX after nine months. Williams was born in Euclid, Ohio but considers Needham, Massachusetts to be her hometown. Her father, Deepak Pandya was an Indian American Neuroanatomist from Jhulsan village in Mehsana District of Gujarat while her mother, Ursuline Bonnie Pandya (née Zalokar) was a Slovene American. Now she resides in Falmouth Massachusetts. She is the youngest of three children. Her brother, Jay Thomas, is four years older and her sister, Dina Annad, is three years older than her. In December 1995, she went back to the Naval Test Pilot School as an instructor in the Rotary Wing Department and as the school's Safety Officer. She has logged more than 3,000 flight hours in more than 30 aircraft types. Sunita retired from the Navy in 2017. Sunita Williams was selected as an astronaut in 1998. She flew on the space shuttle in 2006 and then on the Russia Soyuz in 2012. She completed two spacewalks on this mission and now holds the record for total spacewalking time by a female astronaut, 62 hours and 6 minutes, NASA said. Williams, who celebrated her 59th birthday aboard the International Space Station, is from Massachusetts, is married and enjoys time with her dogs.

Sunita began her astronaut candidate training at the Johnson Space Center in August 1998 where she has been shifted after her rescue after 286 days

stay in the Space. In the third spacewalk, Williams was outside the station for 6 hours and 40 minutes to complete three spacewalks in nine days. By 2007, she had logged 29 hours and 17 minutes in four spacewalks, eclipsing the record previously held by Kathryn C Thornton, for most spacewalk time by a woman. Also in September 2012, she became the first person to do a triathlon in space, which coincided with the Nautica Malibu Triathlon held in Southern California. She used the International Space Station's own treadmill and stationary bike. In July 2015, NASA announced the name of Sunita Williams as one of the first astronauts to US Commercial spaceflights. She began working with Boeing and Space X to train in their commercial crew vehicles along with other chosen astronauts. In August 2018 she was assigned to the first operational mission Flight Starliner 1 to the International Space Station of Boeing CST -100 Starliner.

On April 18 2022 NASA said the cadre of Starliner astronauts included Barry Wilmore, Michael Fincke and Sunita. On June 16 finally NASA decided to make the mission led by Sunita with her co astronaut Barry Wilmore. The June 5, 2024, launch of Starliner made Sunita Williams, its pilot, the first woman to fly on a flight test of an orbital spacecraft. The mission was scheduled to last eight days, but problems with the Boeing's Starliner service module led NASA to leave Williams and Wilmore aboard the ISS for eight months. On 18 March 2025 both returned on SpaceX, Crew 9 was launched in September 2024, with two vacant seats to accommodate Williams and Wilmore's return. Before the mission, Sunita Williams was not among the top 50 astronauts as measured by time in space. On August 24, 2024, she became among the top 30 and is expected to be among the top 12 in time-in-space duration when she returns in 2025.

Sunita has been married to Michael J. Williams, a federal marshal in Texas for more than 20 years and both flew helicopters earlier in their career. They reside in suburban Houston, Texas but later shifted to Minnesota. In 2012, Sunita basically a dog lover expressed a desire to adopt a girl from Ahmedabad. She practices Hinduism. In Decem-

ber 2006, she took a copy of the Bhagavad Gita for the International Space Station. In July 2012 she took a symbol Om and a copy of the Upanish. She was awarded Padmabhushan by India Government and other awards were conferred on her including the Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel Visva Pratibha Award which is given to as the first person of Indian descent who was not an Indian Citizen. She was actively conducting nearly 60 tests successfully in the Space and till her reaching the earth kept a smiling face. Sunita and Butch are really brave astronauts to have said that they were prepared to stay longer and were eager to pitch in by conducting science experiments and maintenance aboard the orbiting laboratory.

NASA has said that it needs Starliner as an option. Human spaceflight is a difficult endeavor NASA had to rely on Russia for nearly a decade before SpaceX started flying crews. NASA astronauts Sunita Williams and Barry Butch Wilmore are flying home with two others: NASA

astronaut Nick Hague and Russian cosmonaut Aleksandr Gorbunov. The four made up what's known as Crew-9. Initially, the crew included NASA's Stephanie Wilson and Zena Cardman, but they were bumped from the flight to make room for Wilmore and Sunita Williams when NASA decided that those two had to return in the Crew-9 capsule.

History of Mankind was written anew when the Dragon spacecraft of Elon Musk has splashed down, setting off an effort to hoist the capsule onto a recovery ship and allowing the astronauts to exit. Crews in fast-moving boats arrived at the floating capsule, made sure the crew was safe and healthy, and checked to see that there were not any dangerous propellants leaking. Once the recovery vessel arrives, harnesses were used to lift the spacecraft onto the ship's deck. Their safe return as well as their activities in the space opened a new horizon for space research in India and America.

After nine months in space, adjusting to gravity

can be tough. After nine months in space, NASA astronaut Sunita Williams exited the Dragon capsule, smiling and waving as she was brought in for medical checks. The two astronauts find that the real challenge for them now is how they will recover and walk on earth as earlier in their normal life. It may take time but the greater thing is that the world saw an ever brave woman whose life's story is written in Space and her safe homecoming made the world ever elated and overwhelmed. It is the victory of Space Research and NASA. Even in India her achievements will inspire millions first as a woman and secondly as an astronaut. Now every one keeps eyes glued to tv and takes a keen interest in space technologies and space stories. All are waiting for a newer horizon to open in the Space Research in the time to come. (The author is a former Affiliate Faculty Virginia Commonwealth University, a multilingual columnist and writer. He can be reached at proftratanbhattacharjee@gmail.com)



## 286 days in space

By: Satyabrata Borah

Sunita Williams and Butch Wilmore started their space journey on June 5, 2024. They flew on Boeing's Starliner spacecraft. This trip was planned to be short, only 10 days. But something unexpected happened. There were technical problems with the spacecraft, and their return had to be delayed. What was supposed to be a short mission turned into a long stay in space. In the end, they stayed in space for 286 days. It became one of the most unusual and memorable journeys in space history.

Even though the situation was unexpected, Sunita Williams and Butch Wilmore did not lose hope. Instead of worrying, they made the best of their time. They became part of the team at the International Space Station. They worked together with other astronauts and helped with many science projects. They took part in daily tasks and did important research that could help life on Earth and in future space missions. They showed great strength, teamwork, and a positive attitude during their long time in space.

Sunita Williams also made a big achievement during this mission. She set a new record by spending 62 hours in spacewalks. These spacewalks are not easy. They require physical strength, focus, and courage. But Sunita did it with dedication and skill. Her efforts became an inspiration for many young people who dream of going to space one day.

As time passed, it became clear that returning home in the Starliner spacecraft was not possible. The team made a new plan. Instead of waiting for the old spacecraft to be fixed, a new way of returning was arranged. Another spacecraft, this time from a different company, was prepared for their return. The new spacecraft was SpaceX's Dragon capsule. It had been used in earlier missions and was known for its safety and success.

Finally, on March 18, 2025, after spending many months in space, Sunita Williams and Butch Wilmore began their journey back to Earth. They were joined by two more astronauts, Nick Hague and Aleksandr Gorbunov. Together, they travelled in the Dragon capsule named "Freedom." This was the first time in history that astronauts went into space in one company's spacecraft and returned in another. It was a big moment in the world of space travel and showed how teamwork between different companies can make missions more successful.

Their return was smooth and safe. The Dragon capsule landed gently in the Gulf of Mexico, near the coast of Florida. The landing happened at 5:57 p.m. local time. Rescue teams were already waiting to help them out of the capsule and bring them back safely. Everything went according to plan, and there were no problems during the return.

When Sunita, Butch, Nick and Aleksandr stepped out of the capsule, they were smiling. After such a long and unexpected journey, their happy faces showed how strong and brave they had been. They had gone through a lot, but they stayed positive and worked hard every single day in space. Their return was not just the end of a mission. It was a celebration of human strength, hope, and the spirit of exploration.

This mission will be remembered for many reasons. It showed how astronauts can adapt to sudden changes and turn difficult situations into new opportunities. It also showed that even when plans go wrong, teamwork and smart thinking can lead to a successful outcome. The story of Sunita Williams and Butch Wilmore's space journey is not just about science and technology. It's also about human courage and determination.

People all over the world were inspired by their story. Young students, space lovers, and future scientists saw how strong the human spirit can be. The mission also showed the value of working together. Different space agencies and companies supported each other to make sure the astronauts returned home safely.

As space travel continues to grow, missions like this one will guide future journeys. The lessons learned from this experience will help make future missions better and safer. Sunita Williams and Butch Wilmore have not only added new pages to space history but have also shown us how important it is to keep moving forward, no matter what challenges come our way.

This mission was not just about space. It was about people. It was about facing the unknown with courage, working together with others, and staying strong in the face of difficulties. And when the astronauts returned, their smiles told the world that the human spirit is truly limitless.

## Sanskrit: The world's timeless inspiration and treasure

By: Shashanka Das

Sanskrit, one of the oldest and most sophisticated languages known to humankind, holds a unique position in the world's cultural and intellectual history. Its influence spans across continents and centuries, impacting linguistic, philosophical, and scientific advancements. While deeply rooted in ancient India, Sanskrit's significance transcends geographical boundaries, inspiring global thought and culture. In the modern era, the world is rediscovering the timeless relevance of Sanskrit as a repository of wisdom, a tool for problem-solving, and a means of fostering global harmony.

Sanskrit has served as an unparalleled source of inspiration to humanity. Its texts, encompassing the Vedas, Upanishads, epics like the Mahabharata and Ramayana, and philosophical treatises, provide profound insights into life, ethics, and spirituality. The philosophical concepts of dharma (duty), karma (action), and moksha (liberation) have deeply influenced not only Indian traditions but also global ethical and moral frameworks.

The language's structured grammar, as codified by the ancient scholar Pāṇini in his work 'Aṣṭadhyāyī,' continues to astound linguists. Pāṇini's grammar, with its algorithmic precision, is regarded as a precursor to modern computational linguistics. Sanskrit's sophisticated structure has inspired developments in artificial intelligence and programming languages, making it a timeless beacon of human intellect.

In the contemporary world, where technological advancements are reshaping human lives, Sanskrit remains relevant in unexpected ways. Its precise grammatical structure has made it a subject of interest in nat-

ural language processing and artificial intelligence. Researchers have noted that the language's clarity and logical framework can significantly enhance machine learning algorithms.

Moreover, Sanskrit texts contain knowledge in diverse fields such as mathematics, astronomy, medicine, and architecture. For instance, ancient Indian mathematicians like Aryabhata and Bhaskara wrote their treatises in Sanskrit, contributing to concepts such as zero and the decimal system. The 'Charaka Samhita' and 'Sushruta Samhita,' foundational texts of Ayurveda, offer timeless insights into holistic health practices, which are increasingly being recognized worldwide.

In a world grappling with environmental crises, ancient Sanskrit texts emphasize living in harmony with nature. The concept of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' (the world is one family) promotes global unity and sustainable living, values that resonate profoundly in today's interconnected world. The Western world's fascination with Sanskrit began during the colonial period, when scholars and administrators encountered India's rich linguistic heritage. Sir William Jones, a British philologist and judge, famously stated in 1786, "The Sanskrit language, whatever be its antiquity, is of a wonderful structure; more perfect than the Greek, more copious than the Latin, and more exquisitely refined than either." His observations laid the foundation for comparative linguistics and the study of Indo-European languages.

European scholars like Franz Bopp, Max Müller, and Friedrich Schlegel delved into Sanskrit texts, recognizing their literary and philosophical profundity. The Bhagavad Gita, Upanishads, and Yoga Sūtras found admirers among transcendentalists like Ralph Waldo Emerson

and Henry David Thoreau. The influence of Sanskrit philosophy is evident in the works of German philosophers like Arthur Schopenhauer, who praised the Upanishads as the most beneficial reading.

The appeal of Sanskrit in the West was not confined to academics. It influenced art, literature, and spiritual movements. Theosophy, a spiritual movement led by Helena Blavatsky, drew extensively from Sanskrit texts, spreading Indian philosophy across Europe and America.

In a world fraught with conflicts, social inequalities, and environmental degradation, Sanskrit offers timeless solutions. The language's teachings emphasize ethical living, mutual respect, and harmony. Concepts such as 'Ahimsa' (non-violence) and 'Satyameva Jayate' (truth alone triumphs) have universal relevance and can guide humanity toward a more compassionate and just society.

Sanskrit's holistic worldview addresses both material and spiritual well-being. The 'Yoga Sūtras' of Patanjali, for example, provide a comprehensive framework for mental and physical health. Yoga, rooted in Sanskrit, has gained global acceptance as a means to promote well-being, stress relief, and inner peace.

Furthermore, Sanskrit's ancient legal texts, such as the 'Manusmṛiti' and 'Arthashastra,' offer insights into governance, economics, and social justice. These texts can inspire modern policymakers to create equitable and sustainable societies.

Sanskrit is undoubtedly one of the greatest gifts of ancient India to the world. It has preserved India's cultural and intellectual heritage for millennia, encompassing vast knowledge in diverse domains. The Mahabharata, the world's longest epic, and the Ramayana are timeless

tales that impart moral and ethical lessons relevant across ages and cultures.

Sanskrit's contributions to science, philosophy, and literature are unparalleled. Ancient Indian astronomers like Varahamihira and Aryabhata made groundbreaking discoveries in Sanskrit. The philosophical systems of Vedānta, Sāṃkhya, and Nyāya, all articulated in Sanskrit, continue to influence global thought.

Indian dance, music, and drama, deeply rooted in Sanskrit, have enriched global cultural landscapes. The Nāṭya Śāstra, an ancient treatise on performing arts, has influenced theatrical traditions worldwide.

In recent decades, there has been a renewed global interest in Sanskrit. Universities across the world offer Sanskrit courses, and scholars continue to explore its vast literary and philosophical corpus. Institutions like the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute in India and the University of Oxford's Sanskrit Department have been at the forefront of promoting Sanskrit studies.

Modern technology has also contributed to Sanskrit's rediscovery. Digital archives and online resources have made ancient texts accessible to a global audience. Initiatives like Sanskrit podcasts, YouTube channels, and mobile applications are popularizing the language among younger generations. Moreover, Sanskrit's role in global spirituality cannot be overstated. International Yoga Day, celebrated annually on June 21st, highlights the language's spiritual legacy. The chanting of Sanskrit mantras has found resonance in meditation and wellness practices worldwide.

As the world grapples with challenges of identity, sustainability, and

well-being, the rediscovery of Sanskrit offers a beacon of hope. Governments, educational institutions, and cultural organizations are recognizing the need to preserve and promote this ancient language. India, as the custodian of Sanskrit's legacy, has a pivotal role to play in this global resurgence. Initiatives such as the establishment of Sanskrit universities, the promotion of Sanskrit in schools, and the digitization of ancient texts are crucial steps in ensuring that this treasure trove of knowledge remains alive.

In the West, institutions like the American Institute of Indian Studies and the European Association for South Asian Studies continue to foster academic interest in Sanskrit. Collaborative research between Indian and Western scholars is bridging cultural gaps and creating new avenues for mutual understanding.

Sanskrit, a language that once seemed confined to the annals of history, is experiencing a global revival. Its timeless wisdom, philosophical depth, and scientific precision make it an invaluable asset for humanity. As the world rediscovers the Sanskrit language, it is not merely reclaiming an ancient heritage but also finding answers to contemporary challenges.

From shaping global intellectual discourse to inspiring modern technological advancements, Sanskrit's journey from ancient India to the global stage underscores its enduring relevance. As Ralph Waldo Emerson aptly said, "The Indian philosophy is as beautiful as it is profound, and its divine simplicity is one of the great teachings of the world." The world, indeed, stands to gain immensely from this ancient treasure, a gift from India to all of humanity. (The author can be reached at 9706619975 / Shashankadasnov1@gmail.com)

## Endurance and innovation: The new era of space exploration

By: Dipak Kurmi

The remarkable journey of astronauts Sunita Williams and Butch Wilmore aboard the International Space Station (ISS) has finally concluded after an unexpected 286-day mission. Initially planned as an eight-day expedition, their stay extended by nearly nine months due to a malfunction in the Boeing Starliner spacecraft, highlighting the challenges that persist in human space travel. Their eventual return to Earth, facilitated by a SpaceX Crew Dragon module, underscores the increasing role of private space enterprises in shaping the future of space exploration.

NASA's SpaceX Crew-9 mission, which saw the safe return of its crew, including NASA astronauts Nick Hague and Sunita Williams, as well as Roscosmos cosmonaut Aleksandr Gorbunov, has been a testament to international collaboration and cutting-edge technology. The mission, a part of NASA's Commercial Crew Program, is designed to provide cost-effective, safe, and reliable transportation to and from the ISS, a crucial stepping stone toward future long-duration missions beyond Earth's orbit.

**Unraveling the Complexities of Long-Duration Spaceflight**  
Living in space for extended periods presents unique physiological and psychological challenges. Williams and Wilmore's prolonged stay has provided invaluable data for researchers studying the effects of microgravity on the human body. Previous studies have shown that extended exposure to zero gravity can lead to bone density loss, muscle atrophy, and alterations in brain structure due to fluid shifts. These factors are of critical importance as space agencies plan missions to the Moon, Mars, and beyond.

Throughout their mission, Williams and Wilmore contributed to over 150 scientific experiments and technology demonstra-

tions, accumulating more than 900 hours of research. These included investigations into stem cell technology for treating autoimmune disorders, blood diseases, and cancer, as well as studies on circadian rhythm adaptation in space. Williams, in particular, played a crucial role in installing a new multi-functional exercise device aimed at mitigating the effects of prolonged weightlessness on the human body.

Spacewalks were another vital aspect of this mission. Williams, accompanied by Wilmore and Hague on separate occasions, carried out intricate repair work on the ISS's exterior. They removed a malfunctioning radio frequency antenna, installed protective patches on an X-ray telescope, and collected samples from the station's outer surface to analyze microbial survival in space. Notably, Williams now holds the record for the longest spacewalking duration by a female astronaut, with a cumulative 62 hours and 6 minutes spent outside the ISS.

**The Growing Influence of Private Space Enterprises**  
The return of Williams and Wilmore aboard SpaceX's Crew Dragon spacecraft reaffirms SpaceX's dominant role in the private spaceflight industry. Founded by Elon Musk, SpaceX has revolutionized space travel with reusable rockets, significantly reducing launch costs and increasing mission efficiency. To date, SpaceX has conducted 62 successful space missions, outpacing many national space agencies. The recent Crew-9 mission was the fourth flight of the Dragon capsule named Freedom, previously utilized in NASA's Crew-4 and Axiom missions.

With private space companies like SpaceX and Boeing now deeply embedded in NASA's operations, the paradigm of space exploration is shifting. The success of SpaceX's reusable launch vehicles has inspired new commercial ventures worldwide, including in India, where space startups are gaining traction. This

shift indicates that the future of space travel will be increasingly privatized, with government agencies working alongside commercial partners to push the boundaries of human spaceflight.

**The Road Ahead: From ISS to Mars**

The ISS has served as a hub for international scientific cooperation for nearly 25 years, hosting over 260 astronauts from 21 countries. However, its tenure is expected to conclude by 2030, paving the way for new space stations. China has already established its Tiangong space station, while India is set to launch its first indigenous space station by 2035. The global space race, once driven by Cold War politics, is now fueled by scientific ambition and commercial interests.

As private enterprises continue to innovate, NASA and its international partners remain focused on deep-space exploration. The Artemis program aims to return humans to the Moon as a precursor to Mars missions, with Elon Musk's SpaceX envisioning human settlement on the Red Planet within the next few decades. The experience gained from missions like Crew-9 and prolonged ISS stays will be instrumental in ensuring the success of future interplanetary expeditions.

**A New Dawn for Space Exploration**

The unexpected extension of Williams and Wilmore's mission serves as a reminder of the unpredictable nature of space travel. However, it also highlights humanity's resilience, adaptability, and unwavering commitment to pushing the boundaries of what is possible. With the rapid advancements in private spaceflight and continued global collaboration, the dream of interplanetary human exploration is closer than ever. The lessons learned from these extended missions will lay the groundwork for the next generation of spacefarers, paving the way for a future where humanity is no longer confined to Earth. (The writer can be reached at dipakkurmigpltd@gmail.com)



# Philosophy and poetry: India's influence on Western thinkers

By: M.R.Lalu

Indian spiritual wisdom and its literature have captivated the minds of great Western writers. Many of them have written ardently about the profound impact of Eastern philosophies and expressed deep admiration for what India represents in the realm of spirituality. The wisdom of India, not only in literature but also in spiritual teachings, attracted some of the most brilliant minds from the West. Among them was Ralph Waldo Emerson, who was deeply influenced by India's spiritual philosophies. He encountered the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita, and later, his Transcendentalist movement significantly reflected concepts of self-reliance and the divine presence in nature. Emerson's works often mirrored Indian spiritual principles, especially those related to self-realization and the interconnectedness of all.

Ralph Waldo Emerson's poem *Brahma* offers a mesmerizing exploration of the ultimate truth that Hinduism conveys. Emerson was drawn to Vedanta philosophy as well as the works of Kalidasa. His poem *Brahma* delves into the concept of the pure being, the unknowable and formless, which Vedanta describes as the changeless reality behind all changes, the formless essence behind all forms, and the single screen upon which all manifestations are reflected. The philosophical work *Brahma* expresses the Hindu belief that life and death are illusions, describing the indestructibility of the Atman, the eternal self. "In its third stanza, 'They reckon ill who leave me out... And I the hymn the Brahman sings,' Emerson stunningly conveys pure Vedanta in poetic form. He asserts that Brahman is present in all things: in flight and wings, in belief and doubt, in hymns and the singer. Emerson deeply reflects on the interconnectedness of everything, a core teaching of the Upanishads. In his essay *The Over-*

Soul, Emerson explores the notion of Brahman. He writes, 'There is one mind common to all individual men. Every man is an inlet to the same and to all of the same. The soul is not a thing that can be divided from the universal soul; it is part of the infinite mind, as a wave is part of the ocean.'

T.S. Eliot, another towering American writer, nurtured a keen interest in Eastern philosophical traditions during his time at Harvard University. His poetry, particularly his iconic work *The Waste Land*, is imbued with imagery and metaphors drawn from Hindu and Buddhist traditions. The influence of the Upanishads can be felt in this masterpiece, which reflects a deep engagement with Indian spiritual ideas.

Henry David Thoreau yet another American writer was profoundly moved by the Dharma aspect of the Bhagavad Gita. He particularly cherished the principle of detachment that Lord Krishna imparts to Arjuna. In his book *Walden*; or, *Life in the Woods*, he writes: In the morning I bathe my intellect in the stupendous and cosmogonical philosophy of the Bhagavad Gita, since whose composition Years of the gods has elapsed, and in comparison with which our modern world and its literature seem puny and trivial. The book is based on his two-year experiment of living in a small cabin near Walden Pond in Massachusetts. By being alone, he sought to understand life more deeply by stripping away material excess and immersing himself in nature. His entire experiment was to experience the philosophy of the Bhagavad Gita in practice. Thoreau's philosophical writings were heavily influenced by Indian spiritual traditions, especially those of Hinduism and Buddhism, shaping his contemplations on nature, life, and the self.

When it comes to George Bernard Shaw, an Irish playwright, his connection with Indian spiritual wisdom holds deeper significance.



His works often criticized Western materialism while he promoted the depth and significance of Indian philosophy. Shaw was moved by the spiritual principles of Hinduism, especially its concepts of self-realization and spiritual progress. His admiration for Indian spiritual thought extended beyond literature as he was deeply influenced by figures like Mahatma Gandhi. Shaw's philosophical works and plays reflect a growing interest in India's views on nonviolence, self-discipline, and the importance of spiritual wisdom. Shaw writes: I find that in the simplicity of the Indian philosophy and in its moral teachings, there is a grand humility which is greatly misunderstood in the West. In the practice of Ahimsa, I see the most advanced form of human morality.

Max Müller, a German Orientalist, was another prominent figure influenced by Indian spiritual wisdom. He was deeply inspired by Vedantic philosophy through Swami Vivekananda. It is said that Max Müller had great reverence for Sri Ramakrishna, the master of Vivekananda, and was an admirer of Vedanta.

Another notable figure is the German-born Swiss novelist Hermann Hesse, who is renowned for his deeply spiritual and remarkable literary masterpiece, *Siddhartha*. This novel takes us through the life journey of a young boy who dedicates his life to enlightenment. Though Siddhartha becomes a follower of Lord Buddha, he chooses to go on an independent search for the truth, which he believes can only be realized through personal experience, not by following anyone's teachings. This splendid literary piece cap-

tures the essence of both Hinduism and Buddhism and is a reflection of Hesse's own spiritual understanding.

Leo Tolstoy, the Russian novelist, was also immensely influenced by Indian spiritual thinking. He is known to have struggled with depression and was even contemplating suicide. However, his encounter with Indian spiritual philosophies led him to explore the complexities of life with endurance and balance. In his famous essay *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*, published in 1894, Tolstoy writes: Christ's teaching about non-resistance to evil with violence, and the Indian teachings of Ahimsa, or nonviolence, have led me to the conviction that we should not take part in violence. We should not participate in any form of violence, be it physical or psychological. Tolstoy's fascination also extended to the Gita's principle of selfless action without attachment.

Aldous Huxley, a famous English writer and philosopher, connects a wide range of Vedantic principles in his work *The Perennial Philosophy*. He deeply engages with Hindu philosophy, particularly Advaita Vedanta. He was greatly influenced by sages like Shankaracharya and his vision that enlightenment comes through self-realization, a core philosophy propagated by the great Indian sage. Huxley also held deep respect for the Bhagavad Gita; its ideals, such as selfless Karma without attachment, transformed his perspective on life. Huxley had profound knowledge about the illusory world, which Vedanta calls Maya, a false sense that separates the individual from the divine. India's spiritual wisdom has undeniably inspired millions around the world. One of the key reasons for this attraction was the profound impact of Indian wisdom on Western literature and philosophy. (The author is a freelance journalist based in Kerala who can be reached at [mrlalu30@gmail.com](mailto:mrlalu30@gmail.com))

## 'March of Glory': Reliving India's historic 1975 Hockey WC victory

By: Vivek Shukla

For avid hockey fans aged nearly 60 or more, one date remains etched in their minds: March 15, 1975. Fifty years ago, Indian hockey reached its zenith when the Indian team defeated arch-rival Pakistan in a packed Merdeka Stadium in Kuala Lumpur to lift the Hockey World Cup trophy. In a country then largely lacking sporting triumphs, that hard-fought victory instilled a much-needed sense of national pride.

India has changed significantly since that groundbreaking win, making great strides in various sports. From Cricket World Cups to Thomas Cups, India has produced sporting icons like Prakash Padukone, P. Gopichand, Sachin Tendulkar, Virat Kohli, Leander Paes, Neeraj Chopra, and Gukesh Dommaraju. Yet, the charm of the stars of the 1975 hockey World Cup team hasn't diminished, even after five decades. Recently, Delhi witnessed the book launch of 'March of Glory,' authored by eminent hockey writers Errol D'Cruz and K. Arumugam. Ashok Kumar, who scored the winning goal in the final, and other hockey legends like Harbinder Singh and Zafar Iqbal, both former Indian captains, attended the event. Fittingly, it was held at Shivaji Stadium, which has hosted countless pulsating hockey matches over the years.

Soft-spoken K. Arumugam and D'Cruz deserve immense credit for producing such a fascinating book that meticulously captures every detail of the unforgettable triumph. The cover design is equally impressive. "Ashok Kumar, son of the hockey wizard Dhyan Chand, received an offer to play for a club in Italy just before the Kuala Lumpur World Cup. Despite the temptation, the classy forward declined the offer to play for India." The rest, as they say, is history – he scored the golden goal.

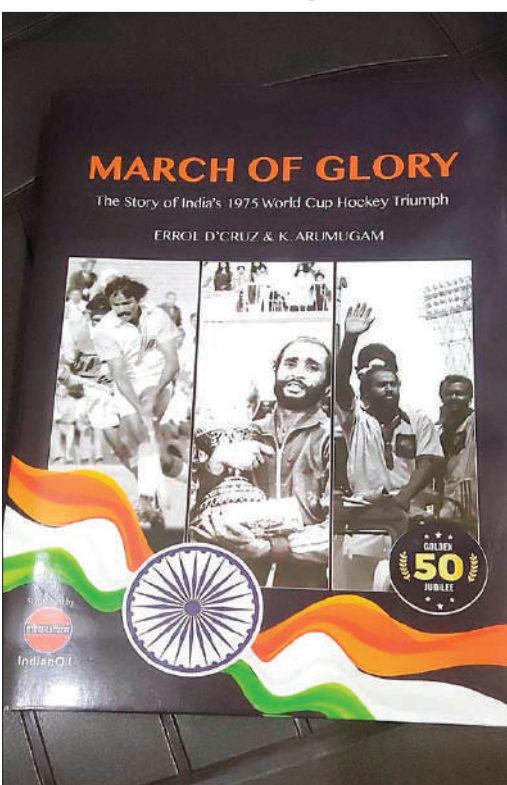
When the stunned Pakistani team realized they were down by a goal in the final, they protested, claiming the ball hit the goalpost and didn't cross the line. In 2010, legendary Malaysian hockey umpire G. Vijayanthan, who officiated the tense final, told this writer in an interview: "Ashok took the shot from a rebound, and it hit the inside of the post. It was a clean goal... I was watching from a vantage point. The Pakistanis said the ball hadn't crossed the goal line, but I upheld the goal."

Vijayanthan, whose roots trace back to Thanjavur in Tamil Nadu, described the Pakistani players' behaviour as "nasty." Recalling the aftermath, he said skipper Ishaquddin and others "created havoc," even alleging that he had awarded the goal to India under pressure, a "preposterous allegation."

The book's final chapter, 'Spirit of '75 and a Deep Connect,' evokes strong emotions. The heroes of the 1975 World Cup are now in their 70s.

Ajit Pal Singh, Ashok Dewan, Aslam Sher Khan, Ashok Kumar, and Harinder Singh Chimini all reside in Delhi. Dewan was just over 20 when selected to play in the final, despite not being the team's first goalkeeper. He later captained the Indian team. Harcharan Singh has settled in Gurdaspur, Punjab. Further south, crowd favorites Govinda, Leslie Fernandez, and Phillips live in Chennai. Sadly, Surjit Singh, Micheal Kindo, Mohinder Singh, Varinder Singh and Shivaji Pawar are no longer with us, but they remain integral to the team's legacy.

'March to Glory' features many heartwarming photographs, most captured by noted sports journalist Ashok Vahie. If Patrick Eagar was the pre-eminent cricket photographer, Ashok Vahie surely holds that title for hockey. Some of his pictures will bring tears of joy. In the chapter 'Celebration and a Caution,' when Ajitpal Singh's team visited Bombay, they received a grand welcome from Bollywood too. One picture shows actor



Navin Nischal kissing Aslam Sher Khan's gold medal, the latter having become a national star after his last-minute goal in the semi-final. Another picture shows Ajitpal Singh standing with Danny, Asrani, and Omprakash.

The writer duo must be appalled for giving fair deal to MAM Ramaswamy and Ashwani Kumar for their yeoman service in providing all the help to team India. Both were stalwarts of Indian Hockey Federation (IHF). Ashwani Kumar was tough top who served as the Director General of Punjab Police and later BSF. There are so many hockey fans like Tej Singh Jaglan and Shamendra Singh across India who still recall the mind boggling commentary of that epic final match by Jasdev Singh. Who can forget his "passionate declaration a split second after the final hooter. " Aur Khel Khatam... Bharat 2-1 se jit gaya. Bharat Hockey Champion hei.

Tailpiece: When the Indian team arrived in Chennai from Kuala Lumpur, M. Karunanidhi was among the VIPs who greeted them that too without his cap.

## The heart that never left

By: Dr. Uddipta Bora

The rain had swallowed Guwahati whole. Streets shimmered under golden streetlights, their reflections distorted by puddles. The Brahmaputra flowed lazily, its waters thick and endless, carrying the weight of old secrets and forgotten sins. Ayaan stood at SukreswarGhat, his drenched clothes clinging to his skin, his breath shallow.

In his hands, the wooden box felt heavier than it should have—like it carried more than just a heart. It carried guilt.

He had done it. He had done the unthinkable. Mira had whispered the impossible into his ear that night at the café, her voice soft, almost loving.

"If you love me, bring me her heart."

At first, he had laughed, waiting for her to crack a smile, to tell him she was joking. But she didn't. She had only looked at him with that strange, unwavering gaze, her fingers lightly tapping the rim of her coffee cup.

"You still think about her, don't you?"

"That's not—" he had started.

"She still has a part of you, Ayaan. And I need you whole."

That was how it had started. Not with violence, not with hate. But with a request wrapped in love. And love could make men do terrible things.

Now, as he stood on the steps of the ghat, the air thick with rain and the scent of wet earth, Ayaan hesitated. He lifted the lid of the box with trembling hands.

Inside, the heart lay still. And then—It pulsed.

Ayaan staggered back, nearly dropping the box. His chest tightened as the impossible played out before him. The heart—Rhea's heart—was still alive.

Then, it spoke.

"Ayaan... why?"

His blood ran cold. The voice was soft, familiar, carrying the same warmth it always had. But it was impossible. He was losing his mind.

"I forgave you."

His knees buckled. His vision blurred.



He wanted to close the box, to pretend he hadn't heard, but the voice didn't stop.

"I waited, Ayaan. Even when you left. Even when you forgot me."

Thunder rumbled overhead, a low growl that shook the ground beneath him. His breath came in shallow gasps. He tried to speak, but no words came.

Then, behind him—footsteps. Slow. Deliberate. Nearing.

Ayaan turned, his heart hammering against his ribs.

And there she was. Rhea.

She stood under the streetlamp, untouched by the rain. Her white dress swayed slightly as if caught in an unseen current. Her dark eyes held no anger, no accusation. Just sorrow.

"You loved her more than you ever loved me," she whispered.

Ayaan opened his mouth to speak, but his throat felt tight, as if invisible hands were gripping it. "And still, she asked you to destroy me."

His body trembled. He wanted to look away, but he couldn't.

"I didn't—" His voice cracked. "I didn't want this."

"But you did it anyway."

She stepped closer. The air around them grew colder. The rain had stopped mid-fall, each drop frozen in place. The world was holding its breath.

She knelt beside the heart, her fingers grazing it gently. The moment she touched it, a single drop of blood spilled onto the stone, bright and stark against the grey.

The ground trembled.

Ayaan choked back a sob. "Rhea, please..." His voice was barely a whisper. "Forgive me."

She lifted her gaze to his, and for a fleeting moment, something flickered in her expression—something almost human.

"I already did."

Then she smiled.

And the world went dark.

When Ayaan woke, he was alone.

The rain had returned, washing away any trace of what had happened. The box was gone. The heart was gone.

But the stain of blood remained on the stone steps.

And from somewhere deep within the wind, a whisper came—soft, sorrowful, and final.

"Some love never dies, Ayaan. Some love never leaves."

## The Invisible Touch

By: Mowsam Hazarika

Unseen, yet you arrive,  
And the dry leaves, brittle and silent,  
Are reborn in your presence,  
Rustling with life,  
Whispering secrets to the wind.

Your approach carries a melody,  
A hidden rhythm,  
Flowing on the wings of the breeze,  
Drawing every ear to listen,  
Every soul to feel.

The flowers awaken gently,  
Unfolding their tender hearts,  
Singing your timeless tune,  
Nature's own symphony,  
Harmonized by your unseen hand.

This melody,  
A heartbeat of the earth,  
Reaches the soul's depths,  
Your unseen arrival  
Binding hearts and thoughts alike.

Though invisible,  
Your essence transforms,  
Turning lifeless leaves  
To lush, verdant beauty.

Even the mind blooms,  
Sprouting green thoughts,  
A garden of renewal,  
Awakened by your silent touch.



## Light Hopes Fix You In My Eyeballs

By: Bipul Chandra Kalita

Sky rocketing dreams pave your zigzag paths  
To youthful ambitions  
To play passions upon emotions,  
Squeezing original and practical mindset;  
I can't touch  
Your height and weight,  
I can't feel the symphony of your mystic light.

My dreams touch muddy roads  
To heavenly joy  
To reach my earthly goal,  
Lightening burdens of luxuries;  
You never try  
To feel me  
To feel your heavenly existence on earth,  
Opening widely insight to refresh your sight.

Won't you taste the sweetness of love's soft wink?  
Your rough snorts hurt me,  
I soften my heart  
To read your face  
Despite your troublesome desires;  
Light hopes fix you in my eyeballs,  
Thus you live roughly in my simple and soft life.



'When I say they should be a state, I mean that'

## New Canadian leader says Trump will want trade talks as Americans suffer from trade war

**TORONTO, March 22:** Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney has said that US President Donald Trump will ultimately respect Canada's sovereignty and be ready for comprehensive trade talks because Americans are going to suffer from Trump's trade war.

Carney said talks with Trump will not happen "until we get the respect we deserve as a sovereign nation. By the way, this is not a high bar."

Trump kept up his near-daily attacks on Canada on Friday, repeating that the country should be the 51st state and that the US keeps Canada "afloat."

"When I say they should be a state, I mean that," the American president said. Carney met with Canada's provincial leaders at the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa for trade war talks.

Carney, sworn in last Friday, still hasn't had a phone call with Trump. Trump mocked Carney's predecessor, Justin Trudeau, by calling him Governor Trudeau, but he has not yet mentioned Carney's name. The new prime minister said he wants a comprehensive discussion on trade and security with the



Americans and not a one-off tariff discussion.

"In the end, Americans are going to lose from American trade action and that's one of the reasons I am confident that there will be that discussion with the appropriate amount of respect and the breadth," Carney said. "I am ready for it anytime they are ready."

Trump put 25 per cent tariffs on Canada's steel and aluminium and is threatening sweeping tariffs on all Canadian products as well as all

of America's trading partners on April 2.

Carney became Prime Minister after winning a Liberal Party leadership race triggered by Trudeau's decision to step down earlier this year. He's expected to trigger the process for early parliamentary elections this Sunday, with a vote expected before April 28.

The governing Liberals appeared poised for a historic election defeat this year until Trump declared trade war and upended

Canadian politics.

The almost daily attacks on Canada's sovereignty have infuriated Canadians, who are cancelling trips south of the border and avoiding buying American goods when they can. The surge in Canadian nationalism has bolstered Liberal poll numbers.

Carney said in an effort to diversify trade the premiers of Canada's provinces agreed work on a plan to develop a national trade and energy corridor. He said after some discussions about the response to the tariffs, the premiers turned their sights to "nation building" to build things faster than ever before. That includes finding ways to better move energy and critical minerals. They also talked about moving quickly to eliminate trade barriers between provinces and with the federal government.

Carney also said Ottawa is also going to waive the one-week waiting period to get employment insurance for people whose jobs are cut because of the tariffs, and temporarily allow Canadian businesses to defer income tax and sales tax payments to help boost their liquidity. (AP)

## US senator, Trump supporter Daines meets Chinese Vice Premier He with warm exchanges

**BEIJING, March 22:** US Senator Steve Daines, a strong supporter of President Donald Trump, met with Chinese Vice Premier He Lifeng, with warm exchanges in front of journalists on Saturday even as tensions between their countries spiked over trade tariffs and the handling of the illegal trade in fentanyl.

Daines, the first member of Congress to visit Beijing since Trump took office in January, will meet with Chinese Premier Li Qiang on Sunday and the nation's No 2 official will give him an introduction to China's policies, according to He.

Daines, who previously worked for American consumer goods company Procter & Gamble in south China's economic hub of Guangzhou, said this trip marked his sixth visit to China and he had met Li in 2018 when he served as the party secretary of Shanghai.

He said this visit comes at a time when there are some important issues to discuss between China and the US. "I've always believed in having constructive dialogue and that has been the nature of all my visits to China over the course of many years," he said.

The US Embassy in China posted on X later Saturday that Daines voiced Trump's ongoing call for Beijing to stop the flow of fentanyl precursors from China. Daines also expressed hopes that further high-level talks between the two countries will take place in the near future, the post added.

Ahead of the trip that began on Thursday, his office said he is coordinating closely with the White House and will be "carrying President Trump's America First agenda." Daines served as a go-between during the first Trump administration when tariffs were also a major issue.

Daines, a senator for Montana, said on X earlier this week that he would be talking with Chinese officials about curbing the production and distribution of fentanyl and "the need to reduce the trade deficit and ensure fair market access for our Montana farmers, ranchers and producers."



Just months into Trump's second term, tensions between the world's two largest economies have risen after the US imposed 20 per cent duties on Chinese goods and drew retaliatory tariffs of 15 per cent on US farm goods from China.

Additionally, the US accuses China of doing too little to stop the export of precursor materials for fentanyl, a highly potent opiate blamed for tens of thousands of deaths in the US.

In response, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi earlier this month accused Washington of "meeting good with evil" and said China will continue to retaliate for the United States' "arbitrary tariffs."

Beijing also responded with a report detailing its efforts to control the illegal trade in fentanyl, specifically the ingredients for the opioid that are made in China. (AP)

## At least 44 civilians killed in jihadi attack in Niger, authorities say

**DAKAR (SENEGAL), March 22:** An attack by a jihadi group on a village in western Niger has killed 44 civilians, the country's Interior Ministry said.

The attack took place on Friday afternoon in the village of Fambita in the rural commune of Kokorou, near the tri-state border with Mali and Burkina Faso, the ministry said in a statement. It blamed the attack on the Islamic State in the Great Sahara, or EIGS.

The Associated Press was not able to reach out to the EIGS for comment.

"Around 2 pm, while Muslim worshippers were performing Friday prayers, these heavily armed terrorists surrounded the mosque to carry out their massacre of rare cruelty," the statement read. The gunmen also set fire to a market and houses before retreating, it



added. The provisional death toll is at least 44 civilians, with 13 severely injured, the ministry said. It declared three days of national mourning in Niger, along with its neighbours

Burkina Faso and Mali, has for over a decade battled an insurgency fought by jihadi groups, including some allied with al-Qaida and the Islamic State group.

Following military coups in all three nations in recent years, the ruling juntas have expelled French forces and turned to Russia's mercenary units for security assistance. The three countries have vowed to strengthen their cooperation by establishing a new security alliance, the Alliance of Sahel States.

But the security situation in the Sahel, a vast region on the fringes of the Sahara Desert, has significantly worsened since the juntas took power, analysts say, with a record number of attacks and civilians killed both by Islamic militants and government forces. (AP)

## Sudanese military says it seized key buildings in Khartoum

**CAIRO, March 22:** Sudan's military on Saturday consolidated its grip on the capital, retaking more key government buildings a day after it gained control of the Republican Palace from a notorious paramilitary group.

Brig. Gen. Nabil Abdullah, a spokesperson for the Sudanese military, said troops expelled the Rapid Support Forces from the headquarters of the National Intelligence Service and Corinthia Hotel in central Khartoum.

The military also retook the headquarters of the Central Bank of Sudan and other government and educational buildings in the area, Abdullah said. Hundreds of RSF fighters were killed while trying to flee the capital city, he said.

There was no immediate comment from the RSF. The military on Friday retook the Republican Palace, the prewar seat of the government, in a major symbolic victory for the Sudanese military in its nearly two years of war against the RSF. A drone attack on the palace Friday believed to have been launched by the RSF killed two journalists and a driver with Sudanese state television, according to the ministry of information. Lt. Col. Hassan Ibrahim, from the military's media office, was also killed in the attack, the military said.

At the start of the war in April 2023, the RSF took over multiple government and military buildings in the capital including the Republican Palace, the headquarters of the state television and the besieged military's headquarters, known as the General Command. It also occupied people's houses and turned it into bases for their attacks against troops.

In recent months, the military took the lead in the fighting. It reclaimed much of Khartoum and its sister cities of Omdurman and Khartoum North, along with other cities elsewhere in the country.

In late January, troops lifted the RSF siege on the General Command, paving the way to retake the palace less than two months later.

The military is now likely to try to retake the Khartoum International Airport, only some 2.5 kilometers (1.5 miles) southeast of the palace, which has been held by the RSF since the start of the war. Videos posted on social media Saturday purportedly showed soldiers on a road leading to the airport.

The war wrecked the capital, and other urban cities across the country. (AP)

## 3 people killed in Russian attacks on Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia despite limited truce

**KYIV, March 22:** Russia launched a drone attack on the Ukrainian city of Zaporizhzhia, killing three people and wounded 12, Ukrainian officials said Saturday, despite agreeing to a limited ceasefire.

Zaporizhzhia was hit by 12 drones, police said. Regional head Ivan Fedorov said that residential buildings, cars and communal buildings were set on fire in the Friday night attack. Photos showing emergency services scouring the rubble for survivors.

Ukraine and Russia agreed in principle Wednesday to a limited ceasefire after US President Donald Trump spoke with the countries' leaders, though it remains to be seen what possible targets would be off limits to attack.

The three sides appeared to hold starkly different views about what the deal covered. While the White House said "energy and infrastructure" would be part of the agreement, the Kremlin declared that the agreement referred more narrowly to "en-

ergy infrastructure".

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said he would also like railways and ports to be protected.

The dead in Zaporizhzhia included three members of one family. The bodies of the daughter and father were pulled out from under the rubble while doctors unsuccessfully fought for the mother's life for more than 10 hours, Fedorov wrote on the Telegram messaging app.

The Ukrainian air force reported that Russia fired a total of 179 drones and decoys in the latest wave of attacks overnight into Saturday. It said 100 were intercepted and another 63 lost, likely having been electronically jammed. Officials in the Kyiv and Dnipropetrovsk regions also reported fires breaking out due to the falling debris from intercepted drones.

Russia's Ministry of Defence, meanwhile, said its air defence systems shot down 47 Ukrainian drones. (AP)

## Japan, China and South Korea discuss trilateral cooperation

**TOKYO, March 22:** Foreign ministers from Japan, China and South Korea reaffirmed the importance of denuclearisation on the Korean peninsula and sought trilateral cooperation on common ground in areas like aging, low birth rates, natural disasters and cultural exchange at a meeting that took place at a time of growing tensions.

At a joint news conference after the talks, Japanese foreign minister Takeshi Iwaya said he, his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi and South Korea's Cho Tae-yul agreed on the need to promote mutual understanding and trust, while tackling shared and multi-generational concerns to gain wider support for trilateral cooperation.

Iwaya emphasised his concerns about North Korea's nuclear and missile development and cooperation with Russia as regional threats, and stressed the importance of pursuing the North's full denuclearization under the UN Security Council resolutions.

Iwaya reiterated Japan's condemnation of Russia's war on Ukraine, adding that there is no place in the world for unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force, a subtle message about China's growing assertiveness in the region.

Wang said that China supports the formation of a mutual regional economy and proposed further ef-



orts toward resuming talks on an economic framework for the three countries and promoting an expansion of the 15-nation Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, or RCEP.

Wang said trilateral cooperation in a range of areas including technology, climate exchange and other issues will "serve as key driving force for East Asian cooperation."

The meeting on Saturday focuses on plans for a trilateral leaders' summit later this year amid growing political and economic uncertainty at home and challenges from US President Donald Trump.

The three-way meetings are an accomplishment for Japan, which has historical and territorial disputes with both China and South Korea. Iwaya said he hoped to accelerate efforts toward achieving a

leaders' summit in Japan later this year. An earlier trilateral meeting was held in South Korea last year.

Cho, whose country chaired their leaders' first summit after a four-and-half-year hiatus due to the pandemic, said the ongoing global crisis makes trilateral cooperation more important than ever.

Later Saturday, delegations from Japan and China met separately to hold their first high-level economic dialogue since April 2019, attended by dozens of officials from economy, transportation, environment, health and labor as well as the finance ministries.

In his opening remarks, Wang said expanding cooperation into new areas and strengthening of communication are key to promoting comprehensive and mutually strategic relations between the two countries. (AP)

## Negotiating with Afghan Taliban only way to ensure lasting peace in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: Gandapur

**PESHAWAR, March 22:** The chief minister of Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province has said that negotiating with the Taliban-led Afghan government is necessary for establishing lasting peace in the region, as he offered to take charge of talks.

Talking to journalists at an iftar party in Islamabad on Friday evening, CM Ali Amin Gandapur claimed that he had drafted a negotiation plan involving tribal elders from all agencies and sent it to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Interior.

However, two and a half months later, he is yet to receive a response, he added.

He also claimed he could bring the Taliban to the negotiation table, provided the concerned authorities assigned him this task, as dialogue is the only viable solution.

"Sit with the Taliban across the table, hold talks with them, it is the only solution," Gandapur said. He asserted that the Taliban would not refuse to negotiate with tribal elders. He said that Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI-F) chief Maulana Fazlur Rahman no longer holds influence over the Taliban.

Gandapur, a key leader of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), expressed confidence that he could hold discussions with Afghan Taliban's supreme leader Hibatullah Akhundzada any day but clarified that no contact had been established with the outfit yet. "I will hold talks with Akhundzada," the Express Tribune newspaper quoted him as saying. "Right now, I have no contact with the Taliban, but if I am sent, we will make it work," he added.

The chief minister also asserted that no political dialogue could take place without the release of PTI founder Imran Khan, stressing that the country's political stability was contingent upon the release of the former prime minister.

He insisted that political stability in Pakistan could be achieved only by releasing the PTI founder as conditions were normal before the Khan-led government was ousted and



claimed that terrorism and instability have since escalated.

Gandapur highlighted the importance of public support in combating terrorism, stating that no battle could be won without the people's backing.

Reiterating the need for negotiations with Afghanistan, Gandapur underlined that Pakistan shares thousands of kilometres of border with Afghanistan. He criticised opposition to his calls for dialogue.

He also emphasises the need for a national dialogue to bring stability and improvement to the country.

Pakistan and Afghanistan share a 2,500-kilometer porous border, with multiple crossing points that play a crucial role in trade and people-to-people exchanges.

In recent months, tensions along the border have escalated, particularly in areas like Kurram, which has witnessed prolonged instability. Owing to the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's security situation including the months-long turmoil in the Kurram region, Gandapur in September 2024 put out a proposal of holding direct talks with Afghanistan to address terrorism concerns for lasting peace in the restive bordering regions.

In September last year, he floated the idea of direct talks with the Afghan government to address terrorism-related issues. (PTI)

## Hegseth to fly to Philippines, Japan in first visit to Asian treaty allies at odds with China

**MANILA, March 22:** US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth is scheduled to visit the Philippines, the first stop in his first trip to Asia next week, for talks that will include increasing deterrence against aggression in the disputed South China Sea, a Philippine official said on Friday.

Hegseth will be in Manila on March 28-29 to meet his Philippine counterpart, Gilberto Teodoro, and President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. Talks will touch on increasingly assertive actions by Beijing in the South China Sea and "more significant support" to Philippine security forces by the Trump administration, Philippine Ambassador to the US Jose Manuel Romualdez told The Associated Press.

In the US, chief Pentagon spokesman Sean Parnell later said Hegseth will visit Hawaii to meet civilian and military leaders in the Indo-Pacific Command then tour US military facilities in Guam and receive briefings on capabilities before flying to the Philippines and Japan. Hegseth would "advance security objectives with Philippine leaders and meet with US and Philippine forces. In Japan, he would participate in a ceremony marking the 80th anniversary of the Battle of Iwo Jima and meet with Japanese leaders and US military forces, Parnell said and added without elaborating that "as always, the secretary looks forward to some great PT (physical training) with the troops!"

"These engagements will drive ongoing efforts to strengthen our alliances and partnerships toward our shared vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific," he said. The trip "comes as the United States builds on unprecedented cooperation with like-minded countries to strengthen regional security."

Trump's "America First" foreign policy thrust has triggered concerns about the scale and depth of US commitment to the region under his new term.

"It's a strong message to China on solid bilateral relations between the US and the Philippines," Romualdez said of Hegseth's upcoming visit.

China claims virtually the entire South China Sea, a major security and global trade route. The Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan also lay



overlapping claims to the resource-rich and busy waters, but confrontations have particularly spiked between Chinese and Philippine coast guard and naval forces in the last two years.

In his first telephone talk with Teodoro last month, Hegseth "reaffirmed the ironclad US commitment to the 1951 Mutual Defence Treaty and its importance for maintaining a secure and prosperous Indo-Pacific", according to a readout provided by Pentagon spokesperson John Ulliot after the February 5 call.

"The leaders discussed the importance of reestablishing deterrence in the South China Sea, including by working with allies and partners," Ulliot said.

"They also discussed enhancing the capability and capacity of the Armed Forces of the Philippines."

After major territorial faceoffs between Chinese and Philippine forces in the disputed waters, the previous Biden administration had repeatedly warned that the US is obligated to help defend the Philippines under the treaty if Filipino forces, ships and aircraft come under an armed attack in the Pacific, including in the South China Sea. Beijing has warned Washington, in return, to stay out of what it calls a purely Asian dispute and stop actions that endanger regional harmony and stability. Hegseth's visit to the Philippines comes a month before the longtime treaty allies hold the "Balikatan", Tagalog for shoulder to shoulder, their largest annual combat exercises that include live-fire drills, that in recent years have been held near the South China Sea and the sea border between the Philippines and Taiwan. (AP)



# Bulldozer will roll if needed: Fadnavis

'Will recover Nagpur violence damage cost from rioters'

**NAGPUR, March 22:** Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis said on Saturday that the bulldozer will roll if necessary when asked if perpetrators of violence in Nagpur will face the "Uttar Pradesh style" action.

Addressing the media, he said the government would recover the cost of property damaged during the violence from rioters, and if they failed to compensate, their properties would be seized and sold to recover the losses.

Replying to a query whether "bulldozer action" will be initiated against rioters in Nagpur on the lines of Uttar Pradesh, Fadnavis said, "The Maharashtra government has its own style of working...bulldozer will roll when necessary".

"Wherever wrong things are happening, they will be crushed. Nobody (perpetrators) will be spared," he added.

He emphasised that strict action would be taken against those who attacked police officers during the unrest.

Fadnavis stressed that the incident cannot be termed "intelligence failure", but the intelligence (gathering) could have been better. "Police will be alert. We won't tolerate any kind of disturbance".

He said 104 individuals have been identified so far, following



an analysis of CCTV footage and video recordings. Action has been initiated against 92 people, including 12 minors, as per the law.

The violence erupted on March 17, after rumours spread that a 'chadar' with religious inscriptions had been burnt during protests led by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) demanding the removal of Aurangzeb's tomb in Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar.

The clashes resulted in widespread stone-pelting and arson across several parts of the city, leaving 33 police personnel, including three Deputy Commissioners of Police-rank officers, injured.

Fadnavis said Prime Minister

Narendra Modi's scheduled visit to Nagpur on March 30 would proceed as planned, unaffected by the violence.

"The cost of properties damaged during Nagpur violence will be recovered from rioters and the failure to pay would lead to the seizure and selling of their properties to recover losses.

"My government will not rest until those responsible for attacking the police are found and dealt with sternly," said Fadnavis, who also heads the Home Ministry.

He said the situation in Nagpur is calm now, and efforts are underway to relax the curfew imposed in certain areas. "Rioters broke out only in parts of the city, while 80

per cent of Nagpur wasn't impacted," he added.

Fadnavis stated that the distribution of compensation for victims would begin soon and that 68 social media posts that aggravated the situation had been identified and deleted.

He said those who circulated inflammatory content would be charged as co-accused for their role in inciting violence.

Fadnavis further said it was too early to comment on a foreign or Bangladeshi link to the riots as the probe is underway.

"However, the Malegaon connection can be seen (in violence) as one of the accused belongs to a political party from Malegaon who could be seen helping rioters," he said without taking the name of Minority Democratic Party leader Fahim Khan, arrested for sedition.

Fadnavis said those who circulated inflammatory posts on social media that aggravated the situation would be made co-accused in the riots case because they facilitated in instigating people.

"68 such social media posts have been identified and deleted," he added.

When asked if rioters behaved indecently with a female police constable, the chief minister said he had spoken with the police

commissioner (who told him) that the purported incident didn't take place.

"Rioters had thrown stones at female police constables," he admitted.

Notably, an FIR had stated that a group of rioters allegedly touched a woman constable inappropriately and tried to disrobe her during the violence.

Responding to speculation that the riot in his hometown was orchestrated to target him politically, Fadnavis said, "It is foolish to say such things. There is no political angle to the violence".

During his first visit to Nagpur after the violence on Friday, the chief minister assessed the situation and chaired a meeting with senior police and administrative officers at the police commissionerate.

When asked if Congress was politicising the issue by dispatching a committee to visit the violence-hit areas, Fadnavis pointed out that one of the members of the visiting panel is an accused in the Akola violence case.

"If rioters are coming to enquire about riots, it is akin to appeasement politics," he added.

Nagpur Police had said 105 persons have been held so far in connection with the violence including Fahim Khan. (PTI)

## Stalin for legal fight as well, Pinarayi likens exercise to 'sword of Damocles'



**CHENNAI, March 22:** Tamil Nadu's ruling DMK backed first Joint Action Committee (JAC) meeting over Lok Sabha delimitation saw a political consensus emerge to bat for 'fair delimitation', to not lose representation and to fight against having population as the yardstick to determine the number of seats.

At the meeting held here on Saturday, TN Chief Minister M K Stalin made it clear the fight is likely to be taken forward through the legal route also.

In the meeting, Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan said the delimitation of LS seats was hanging like the "sword of Damocles," and alleged the BJP government was going ahead on the issue without any consultation.

He said "This sudden move is not driven by Constitutional principles or democratic imperatives," but by narrow political interests. Delimitation, if done after Census will lead to an increase in seats for northern states, a reduction for southern states. Such a cut in seats for the south and an increase for the north will suit the BJP as it holds greater influence in the north.

Addressing the meeting here, CM Stalin favoured setting up an expert panel to draw up the political and legal action plan. He proposed christening the panel as 'Joint Action Committee for fair delimitation' and sought ideas to initiate legal action, by taking forward political fight.

"We are not against delimitation, we are for fair delimitation," he said, adding, "continuous action is very essential to establish rights."

On the JAC, he said it was very essential to create awareness among people, and to urge Centre. Stalin was for a united fight to win; and said "Our representation must not decline."

Karnataka Dy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar alleged that the Centre planned to reduce the Parliamentary representation of southern states. Punjab CM Bhagwant Mann alleged the BJP wanted to increase seats in states where it wins and reduce in states where it loses. In Punjab, the BJP does not win. "They do not have a single set out of the (present) 13," Mann further claimed that "south is facing loss," and asked if the southern states were being punished for reducing population.

Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy alleged that if BJP carried out delimitation exercise based on population, south India will lose its political voice, and "north will make us secondary citizens."

Further, Reddy asserted "South will not accept population-based delimitation." Also, Reddy asked

the Centre to not increase Lok Sabha seat numbers during delimitation.

Senior BRS leader from Telangana and former minister, K T Ramarao said delimitation based on population was "extremely unfair."

CM Stalin in a social media post said: "Today will be etched in history as the day when states that have contributed to our nation's development came together to safeguard its federal structure by ensuring #FairDelimitation. I warmly welcome all Chief Ministers and political leaders to this meeting, united in our commitment to #FairDelimitation."

Meanwhile, the BJP's Tamil Nadu unit staged black flag demo against the meet, with party leader K Annamalai dubbing the discussions as 'drama.'

His party colleague and former Governor, Dr Tamilisai Soundararajan alleged the concerned CMs who attended the meeting did so to hide the misgovernance in the respective states.

"There are so many corruption charges in Telangana, Kerala. Their own people will be against their CMs attending this event," she claimed while speaking to PTI Videos.

"Instead of calling this a delimitation meeting, it can be called corruption hiding meeting," she added.

Annamalai said the blackflag agitation was being held to protest against Chief Minister M K Stalin for 'compromising' on state's rights in key issues including the Mullaiperial and Cauvery water disputes with neighbouring Kerala and Karnataka, respectively.

Besides the Mullaiperial issue with Kerala, "how waste-medical, human and animal, from Thiruvananthapuram is being dumped in Tamil Nadu, whether it be Tenkasi or Coimbatore. This is happening after the Communist government came to power," he alleged.

Why was Stalin not raising these issues with Vijayan or the Meke-datu reservoir war with Shivakumar, he asked. The project envisages construction of a balancing reservoir across river Cauvery in Meke-datu in Karnataka.

"Stalin has visited Kerala four times (as CM), but the said issues have not been taken up (with Vijayan). But they are discussing a matter that is not an issue at all--a result of their own imaginations," he said about delimitation.

"All our rights have been sacrificed by CM Stalin, so this black-flag protest," Annamalai said. "This (meet on delimitation) is not just a drama; no state including Tamil Nadu is going to be affected by delimitation, won't lose a single seat on pro-rata basis. They will be in same position," the former IPS officer told reporters. (PTI)

## Delimitation shouldn't diminish representation of any state in LS, RS, says Jagan to PM

**AMARAVATI, March 22:** Former Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy appealed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to carry out the delimitation exercise in such a manner that no state would suffer any reduction in representation in the Lok Sabha or the Rajya Sabha, especially in terms of the share of total number of seats in the House.

In a letter to the Prime Minister dated March 21, a copy of which was shared with the media on Saturday, the YSRCP chief highlighted that the gravity of the delimitation issue has the potential to disrupt the social and political harmony of the country.

"Request for the delimitation exercise to be conducted in such a manner that no state would have to endure any reduction in its representation in the Lok Sabha or the Rajya Sabha, in terms of its share in total no. (number) of seats in the house," said Jagan Mohan Reddy.

The opposition leader emphasised that the Constitution should be amended in such a fashion that no state would have to encounter any reduction in its representation in the House of the People.

Calling delimitation exercise a matter of utmost importance for the entire nation with the potential to have far-reaching impact, he said it not only affects the political representation of some states in policy and law-making but also affects the deep sentiments of vast sections of India's population.

"Sir, in light of this, I strongly emphasize the need for extreme caution while initiating the delimitation exercise," said Jagan Mohan Reddy, adding that the imbalance in population control between different states is a major issue.



His letter comes at a time when several parties are convening in Chennai at the invitation of Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Stalin to brainstorm on the delimitation exercise.

The 84th Constitutional amendment had extended the existing embargo for the delimitation process, which would rearrange the number of seats in the Parliament for states, till 2026.

YSRCP Parliamentary leader YV Subba Reddy forwarded Jagan Mohan Reddy's letter to the PM, to DMK party leaders, emphasising the need for a fair and balanced approach in the delimitation process.

However, YSRCP did not mark its attendance at the all-party meeting on delimitation organised by DMK, though two DMK leaders, Tamil Nadu Public Works Minister EV Velu and DMK Rajya Sabha

member P Wilson, had personally called on Jagan Mohan Reddy and invited him recently.

Further, Jagan Mohan Reddy underscored that an assumption that the delimitation exercise would follow a likely census in 2026 has caused 'severe anxiety for several states', especially southern states, which fear that their representation would be diminished.

Though the 42nd and 84th Constitutional amendments had frozen the delimitation exercise with the hope that states would demonstrate a similar level of success with respect to family planning, the YSRCP chief observed that the 2011 census had proved it wrong.

"The share of the southern states in the country's population has reduced over the 40-year period between 1971 and 2011. We believe that the share has reduced even further over the last 15-year period," he said, noting that the southern states sincerely followed population control programmes.

Consequently, Jagan Mohan Reddy drew the attention of Modi to the potential erosion of southern states' participation in national policy-making and legislative process if the delimitation process is conducted on the basis of population as it stands today.

Hence, the YSRCP supremo noted that Modi's leadership and guidance at this crucial juncture is most vital and an assurance from the PM would contribute greatly to allaying the fears of several states. (PTI)

## Administration of Fadnavis, Aurangzeb similar, says Sapkal

**PUNE, March 22:** Maharashtra Congress chief Harshvardhan Sapkal on Saturday reiterated that the administration of Devendra Fadnavis was similar to that of Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb.

The statement had earlier provoked a strident attack from the ruling alliance, which had accused Sapkal of insulting Fadnavis. They had raised the issue in the legislature and had sought legal action against the Congress leader.

Speaking to reporters, Sapkal also slammed the state government for deteriorating law and order and said Maharashtra needs a full time home minister. Currently, the home portfolio is handled by CM Fadnavis.

"Beed sarpanch Santosh Deshmukh was murdered, a woman was raped in Pune and there was violence in Parbhani. There is no police system left in Beed. The state is under Tughlaqi rule. I stand by my statement that the administration of Fadnavis and that of Aurangzeb is similar," Sapkal said. Speaking about Pune, the state's second largest city and a premier commercial and industrial hub of the country, Sapkal said some people are disturbing its culture.

He also alleged sizable quantities of drugs coming to Pune are from Gujarat but the police is not probing this link. "The home department is not paying attention to the city. Maharashtra doesn't have a fulltime home minister. Fadnavis should resign as the state needs a fulltime home minister," the Congress leader said.

Asked about former MLA Ravindra Dhangekar quitting the Congress and joining the Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena, Sapkal said, "A person who got three opportunities to contest (assembly bypolls, Lok Sabha and assembly polls in 2024) still went after power. There is no importance of ideology left." (PTI)

## BJP leaders meet family of HPPCL engineer, press for CBI probe

**SHIMLA, March 22:** Leader of Opposition in Himachal Pradesh Assembly Jai Ram Thakur along with other BJP leaders on Saturday met the grieving family members of chief engineer of HPPCL Vimal Negi and said a CBI probe would put a full stop to all the questions surrounding his death.

Negi's family members, who have alleged foul play, have demanded an impartial inquiry into his death, Thakur said.

The official went missing on March 10 and his body was found in Bilaspur on Tuesday. The relatives of the deceased sat on a dharna outside the office of Himachal Pradesh Power Corporation Limited (HPPCL) in Shimla with the body on Wednesday.

Negi's wife had alleged that it was "not a suicide but murder" and alleged that her husband was pressured, denied holidays and harassed by seniors even though he was unwell.

Thakur, who along with state BJP chief Rajiv Bindal and other BJP leaders met Negi's family in their native village in Kinnaur district on Saturday, said that the family maintained that "the loss is done but the enquiry should be impartial and CBI probe would put a full stop to all the questions".

The family members alleged that three people, including the Managing Director, Harikesh Meena, and Director (electrical) Dush Raj, pressured Negi to "do wrong" due to which Negi was under acute tension and compelled to take this extreme step. Meena has been transferred and Dush Raj placed under suspension. The police registered a case under sections 108 (abatement to suicide) and 3 (5) joint criminal liability of BNS on Wednesday.

Thakur said that family members of the deceased engineer and employees of HPPCL want a fair investigation into the case and added that there are questions on the functioning of HPPCL as "one person superseded five others to become director". (PTI)

## Kharge targets govt on 'Make in India' scheme

**NEW DELHI, March 22:** Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Saturday targeted the Modi government on the 'Make in India' scheme and claimed the BJP's promise of making India a global manufacturing hub remains unfulfilled.

"Modi Govt's 'Make in India' is a classic case of giving importance to publicity rather than delivery. In its 2014 Manifesto, the BJP made 10 promises to make India a "Global Manufacturing Hub", none of which have been fulfilled," he said in a post on X. The Congress president claimed that the situation has become "worse", with a "massive decline" of employment in manufacturing and share of manufacturing in the GDP.

"PSUs are being sold. MSMEs are suffering. Bureaucratic hurdles are the order of the day. Indian entrepre-

neurs are moving abroad and setting up companies there, instead of preferring India. Exports are in a free fall," he alleged.

Posting two pointed questions, Kharge asked, "Has the Modi Govt wound up the Phase 1 of the much-hyped PLI Scheme worth ₹ 1.97 lakh crore, after 12 out of 14 identified sectors failed to take off? Why has the share of merchandise in India's total exports fallen to its lowest level in at least 50 years under Modi Govt?" The Congress president said it is a fact that it accelerated the fastest in Indian history under the Congress-led UPA.

"Perhaps, Modi ji would now realise that the real 'Aatmnirbhar Bharat' was under the Congress," he said in his post. (PTI)

## Delhi Assembly Speaker nominates 14 MLAs to MCD

**NEW DELHI, March 22:** Assembly Speaker Vijender Gupta has nominated 14 MLAs to the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), boosting the BJP's aspirations of running a triple-engine government by winning the mayoral elections next month.

Of the 14 MLAs, 11 are from the BJP and three from AAP. The nominated MLAs vote in the elections for the post of Mayor and Deputy Mayor, due in April.

In a statement, Gupta said that the nominated MLAs would assist the municipal corporation in budget formulation, civic administration and urban governance.

The BJP MLAs nominated to the MCD are Anil Sharma, Chandan Choudhary, Jitender Mahajan, Karnail Singh, Manoj Kumar Shokeen, Neelam Palwalan, Pardaym Singh Rajput, Raj Kumar Bhatia, Ravi Kant, Sanjay Goyal and Tarvinder Marwah, according to an official notification.

The AAP MLAs include Praveesh Ratn, Surendra Kumar and Ram Singh Ne-taji. The AAP had won the last mayoral election held in November 2024 by three votes.

Meanwhile, the BJP, which won a resounding victory in the assembly polls last month, is eyeing a "triple-engine government" in Delhi by securing the post of Mayor.

A senior Delhi BJP functionary said, "With the nomination of 11 party MLAs to the MCD, the chances of winning the post of Mayor are now all the more certain. Especially as we are already receiving feelers from many AAP councillors who want to join the BJP."

A triple-engine government -- BJP rule at the Centre, Delhi and MCD -- will ensure faster work to serve the people, he added.

The BJP won 48 of the 70 seats in the assembly polls held in February, uprooting the government of AAP, which managed to secure only 22 seats.

According to officials, three of AAP's 121 councillors in the MCD won the assembly polls while eight of the BJP's 120 councillors were elected to the House. In the 2022 MCD polls, AAP had won 134 wards, the BJP 104, the Congress nine and Independents three.

The BJP leaders asserted that the party's vote tally, including Delhi's seven Lok Sabha MPs; chances of AAP councillors switching sides, and 11 party MLAs as nominated members make it clear that BJP will win the Mayor post.

The BJP became the single largest party in the MCD on February 15, after three AAP councillors switched over to it. Anti-defection law is not applicable on deserters in civic bodies. (PTI)

## J'khand to conduct study on 'reduced' central grants, its impact on schemes



**RANCHI, March 22:** The JMM-led dispensation in Jharkhand on Saturday alleged that the Union government has slashed its grants for several centrally sponsored schemes, which impacted the state's development.

Replying to a question of Congress MLA Pradip Yadav in the assembly, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Sudivya Kumar said that the government would soon conduct a comprehensive study over grants-in-aid and loans provided by the Centre to the state and their impact on various centrally sponsored schemes and other aspects.

The Congress' Poreyabhat legislator asked the government whether grants on the centrally sponsored schemes were slashed in the state in previous financial years.

The government, in its written reply, said that the state received ₹ 8,828.89 crore in 2022-23, ₹ 9,980.63 crore in 2023-24 and ₹ 5,736.27 crore till January of the current financial year of 2024-25 as grants from the Centre for centrally sponsored schemes in Jharkhand.

"There has been a decline in central tax and grants-in-aid provided to the state. The Centre's

step-motherly approach has impacted Jharkhand's development," Kumar claimed in the House.

The Jharkhand minister said that an assessment would be carried out to ascertain the impact on various centrally sponsored schemes and people in light of the "reduction of central grants".

Yadav claimed that neighbouring Bihar received ₹ 1.65 lakh crore as central tax and grants in 2023-24, while Jharkhand got a meagre ₹ 46,000 crore during the period.

He demanded a study on the central grants comparing the figures of Jharkhand with neighbouring states.

In response, Kumar said, "The government will carry out a comprehensive study over central loans and grants provided to Jharkhand and its neighbouring states. A comparative assessment will also be conducted over the reduction of funds for Jharkhand. Thereafter, a report will be made public."

Gandey MLA Kalpana Soren, wife of Chief Minister Hemant Soren, also wanted to know about loans that were received from the Centre.

Kumar said the state received ₹ 20,825 crore as loan from 2008-09 to 2013-14, ₹ 42,956 crore between 2014-15 and 2018-19 and ₹ 9,593 crore in 2019-20 from the Centre.

He said that the state received ₹ 2,002 crore till January 2025 as loans from the central government. "Jharkhand's financial management has been one of the best in the country in the past six years," he claimed. (PTI)



# Lewis Hamilton wins Chinese F1 Sprint race for his first Ferrari victory

SHANGHAI, March 22: Lewis Hamilton has won his first race for Ferrari, securing Saturday's Sprint victory from pole position following an early duel Red Bull Racing's Max Verstappen at the Chinese Formula 1 Grand Prix.

Hamilton got a great start to take the lead into turn one, and managed the gap to Verstappen, until the Dutchman was passed for second on lap 15 by McLaren's Oscar Piastri into the back straight's hairpin. Ferrari's new recruit was then able to stretch his legs all the way to his maiden Sprint win, with the Brit coming home almost 6.9 seconds

ahead of Piastri – for eight points (nine overall) and a three-place jump to seventh in the standings.

"The last like five laps or something I was in a really pretty comfortable position. It's hard to put into words what it feels like," Hamilton said.

"Obviously it's a Sprint race, is not the main race, but even just think to get that – it's just a good stepping stone to where I'm working towards."

Hamilton is still enjoying every new moment with the Scuderia, despite having secured a record-equaling seven titles and 104 wins, with the Chinese

Sprint – and his romp to the win – all about managing the tire wear.

"I got in the car extra early because I just wanted to be present and enjoy it, because I hadn't been there for a while," he said.

"(I got a) good start and challenging race. It is generally really close between all of us. But the tire degradation today was pretty huge I think for everybody, so I think for me it was just try to manage that early on."

Hamilton arrived in Shanghai after a disappointing season-opening race last weekend in Australia, where he finished 10th in his debut race for Ferrari.

Piastri was happy to jump Verstappen and take second, but disappointed to not be the one to take the win from pole position – given McLaren's pace advantage.

"(It was) Tough," Piastri said. "(It was) probably one of the more difficult ones in terms of tire degradation, so I knew I had to try and be patient."

McLaren eyeing strong qualifying pace The pressure is now on McLaren to recover in Saturday afternoon's qualifying to what it hopes is its rightful place at the front of the grid.

"The difference between qualifying and the race, in terms of what you want from the car and what the tires need, seems to be quite big," Piastri said.

"I think the pace we had in the car yesterday was good. I think we just in hindsight would have done a few things a bit differently in qualifying. But I think the pace is there and there's plenty of confidence going this afternoon."

Verstappen was again happy to finish in the top three, with the reigning World Champion picking up seven points to take his total haul to 24 – two behind leader, McLaren's Lando Nor-

ris, who had a scrappy race to finish eighth.

"Midway, (I) really started to feel that the degradation was kicking in," Verstappen said. "It just seemed a little bit more aggressive for us than maybe the cars around us. But I think that just comes from maybe not having the base pace, you try to hang in there, and you naturally just destroy your tires a bit more. "To be in the top-three I think is still a good result for us. And maybe we started a bit more ahead than I think we should have anyway so pretty pleased." (AP)

## CSK lean on spin strength against depleted Mumbai Indians in their IPL opener



CHENNAI, March 22: Chennai Super Kings will lean on their formidable spin strength under favourable conditions at the Chepauk as well as recent record against Mumbai Indians when the two sides face each other in their Indian Premier League (IPL) campaign opener here on Sunday.

Five-time winners CSK augmented their spin attack in the IPL mega auction last year by including Ravichandran Ashwin, Noor Ahmad Shreyas Gopal and Deepak Hooda, with India veteran Ravindra Jadeja also in the mix.

CSK's pre-season moves indicate how the spin-friendly conditions at the MA Chidambaram Stadium here could be a major factor in their game plan. Starting their season against an equally formidable opponent in Mumbai Indians, this strategy could well deliver the goods right from the beginning.

For CSK, MS Dhoni will be the cynosure of all eyes once again, having remained with the team since the inception of the IPL in 2008.

On the other hand, the absence of India bowling spearhead Jasprit Bumrah could be acutely felt in the MI ranks as the right-arm

pacer remains on a comeback trail from a back-related issue which has kept him sidelined so far this year.

Bumrah is expected to miss the initial stages of this IPL and his absence will leave MI without their lethal weapon in the death overs, presenting the management with a headache to work with other options and strategies.

MI will also be without regular skipper Hardik Pandya for this clash as the India all-rounder serves a one-match ban for the side's slow over-rate in their final league match last year.

But for a team which has no dearth of leadership options, MI will have India T20I captain Suryakumar Yadav leading them in their tournament opener and important away clash.

CSK face a healthy selection conundrum for the opening slot with one among the two Kiwis, Rachin Ravindra and Devon Conway, set to partner skipper Ruturaj Gaikwad at the top.

The middle order is set to feature the likes of Rahul Tripathi, Shivam Dube, Hooda and Vijay Shankar, followed by Dhoni and Jadeja.

Among the favourable factors is

CSK's recent record of four wins in their last five matches over Mumbai Indians including three victories in last as many games.

Pandya's appointment as MI skipper, replacing Rohit Sharma, heavily marred the five-time IPL winners' campaign last season where they had finished at the bottom. The squad looks well settled now after the turmoils of last season.

Even though Ishan Kishan's exit has left a void at the top, the explosive South African wicketkeeper Ryan Rickelton can be expected to match Rohit's firepower at the top, followed by India batting mainstays Suryakumar and Tilak Varma in the middle.

While MI will have to wait to field their desired fast bowling attack which comprises a mix of veterans in Trent Boult, Deepak Chahar and Reece Topley and Bumrah, the presence of Corbin Bosch makes things interesting as to how their think tank is able to use their resources optimally.

Former CSK frontman Mitchell Santner's experience and knowledge of conditions at Chepauk is likely to come in handy along with Karn Sharma and Mujeeb Ur Rahman.

Sunday's contest between CSK and MI could also give some impressions of how the ball-change rule in the second innings plays out.

Teams (from): Chennai Super Kings: Ruturaj Gaikwad (c), MS Dhoni (wk), Devon Conway, Rahul Tripathi, Shaik Rasheed, Vansh Bedi (wk), C Andre Siddharth, Rachin Ravindra, Ravichandran Ashwin, Vijay Shankar, Sam Curran, Anshul Kamboj, Deepak Hooda, Jamie Overton, Kamlesh Nagarkoti, Ramakrishna Ghosh, Ravindra Jadeja, Shivam Dube, Khaleel Ahmed, Noor Ahmad, Mukesh Choudhary, Gurjapneet Singh, Nathan Ellis, Shreyas Gopal, Matheesha Pathirana.

Mumbai Indians: Hardik Pandya (c), Rohit Sharma, Suryakumar Yadav, Robin Minz, Ryan Rickelton (wk), Shrijith Krishnan (wk), Bevon Jacobs, Tilak Varma, Naman Dhir, Will Jacks, Mitchell Santner, Raj Angad Bawa, Vignesh Puthur, Corbin Bosch, Trent Boult, Karn Sharma, Deepak Chahar, Ashwani Kumar, Reece Topley, VS Penmetala, Arjun Tendulkar, Mujeeb Ur Rahman, Jasprit Bumrah.

Match starts at 7:30PM IST. (PTI)

## Guwahati wins women's T20 Cricket C'ship

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, March 22: Guwahati emerged as the champion of the invitational women's T20 cricket tournament, organised by Nagaon Sports Association under the aegis of the Assam Cricket Association, at the Nurul Amin Stadium on Saturday here.

In the final match, Guwahati defeated Nagaon by 25 runs. Batting first, Guwahati scored 106 runs in 20 overs, losing six wickets. Hiramoni Saikia top-scored with 31 runs, while Sneha Sinha and Baibhavi Das contributed 22 and 15 runs, respectively. In reply, Nagaon managed to score only 81 runs in 20 overs, losing eight wickets. Divya Rani Bara and Bhagyashree Kashyap scored 22 and 16 runs, respectively. Aparna Nandi of Guwahati took four wickets, while Sneha Sinha took two wickets.

Aparna Nandi was adjudged the player of the match in the final. The tournament's best player award was given to Sneha Sinha of Guwahati, who scored 120 runs and took seven wickets throughout the tournament.

Sneha Sinha also received the best batter award. Dipashikha Baruah of Nagaon took the best bowler award with seven wickets. The prize distribution ceremony was attended by several dignitaries, including Tapan Kumar Das, among others.

## 5th Inter-District Beach Volleyball Tournament begins in Dhubri

HT Correspondent

DHUBRI, March 22: The much-anticipated 5th inter-district beach volleyball men's and women's competition commenced on Saturday at the old ferry ghat in Ward No. 1 of Dhubri. The tournament is being organised under the aegis of the Assam Volleyball Association in collaboration with the Dhubri District Sports Association.

The opening match saw an exciting clash between the teams from South Kamrup and Tamulpur districts, setting the tone for an action-packed tournament. Several districts from across Assam have sent their teams to participate in the event, reflecting the growing popularity of beach volleyball. The inauguration ceremony was graced by the presence of Putul Baruah,

Secretary of the Assam Volleyball Association, along with members of the Dhubri District Sports Association and several local dignitaries. Their presence added to the enthusiasm and spirit of the participants and spectators. Speaking at the event, Putul Baruah emphasized the importance of promoting beach volleyball in Assam and expressed hope that such competitions would encourage young talent and boost the sport's popularity across the state. The tournament is expected to witness intense competition over the coming days, with teams vying for top honors. The event has already generated considerable excitement among sports enthusiasts and locals, who have gathered to witness the thrilling matches by the riverside.

## Women's swimming series begins at Jorhat

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, March 22: The ASMITA Khelo India Junior Women's Swimming Series 2024 Round 2 (East Zone) competition began at the Jorhat Aquatic Complex on Saturday. The national-level event is being organised by the Assam Swimming Society in collaboration with the All India Swimming Association and the Jorhat Swimming Society. A total of 100 swimmers are participating in this two-day-long competition. The event was formally inaugurated by Raktim Saikia, President of the Jorhat Swimming Society. On the first day, Assam secured 30 medals, while West Bengal won 25 medals, and Tripura claimed 1 medal.

## We support T20 leagues in new territories but nothing on table yet in Saudi Arabia: IPL chairman

NEW DELHI, March 22: Nearing two decades of existence, brand IPL has become stronger than ever and doesn't see any threat from the growing number of T20 leagues globally, its chairman Arun Dhimal said on Saturday as he steered clear of the speculation swirling around an event backed by Saudi Arabia.

Speaking to PTI as the league enters its 18th edition, Dhimal said the BCCI supports the rise in number of T20 leagues globally, especially in uncharted territories like Saudi Arabia, Europe and the USA. He feels the growth will eventually help the game ahead of the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics where cricket will be played. "There is no point discussing something on the basis of speculation. There is nothing on the

table for discussion with everyone (all stakeholders). And as far as my knowledge goes, there is no infrastructure as of now in Saudi Arabia that can cater to a tournament of this scale. "So, there is no point discussing speculative stories," said the IPL chairman. Plenty has been reported in international media about the oil-rich Saudi Arabia foraying into cricket over the last two years but nothing concrete has come out of those speculations.

Having said that, Saudi Arabia has been a sponsor in the IPL and hosted the mega auction last year.

Now there is fresh chatter around a tennis Grand Slam styled league funded by the Arab giant but concrete details are yet to emerge.

The IPL is expected to be at val-

ued at over USD 12 billion and in terms of per match, it is the second most valued sporting league in the world, only behind the NFL in the United States.

In that context, no other cricket league poses a threat to the IPL. In fact, IPL owners have been expanding their footprint with investments in leagues organised by foreign boards including CPL, SA20, MLC, ILT20 and most recently The Hundred in the UK.

"The idea of getting cricket into the Olympics is that the game grows through the length and breadth of the globe. It is good that more leagues are taking shape and we don't see anybody as a threat," said Dhimal. "We would want to make sure that more and more games hap-

pen across the different territories, the newer territories. Whether it is Saudi, America, Europe, it doesn't matter. Nobody can stop anybody and we would not want to stop anyone. "We would only focus on strengthening our tournament and our property." In the run-up to this year's IPL, England star Harry Brook was handed a two-year ban for pulling out of his contract with Delhi Capitals, causing quite a flutter. Dhimal defended the sanction which led to quite a debate.

"Teams pick players auction with a particular strategy in mind. In case a player withdraws from the tournament without a genuine reason, it changes the whole gameplan of the impacted and also affects the tournament," said Dhimal, clarifying

that the two-year suspension will include the season that a player has withdrawn from.

On the varied opinions around the Impact Player Rule, Dhimal added: "The response we got from fans and broadcasters was very positive. It has elevated the standard of the game. Keeping that in mind, we have extended it till 2027. "As far as the debate around development of Indian all-rounders are concerned, IPL has raised benchmark for quality bowlers and batters and this would ensure a raise in benchmark for quality all-rounders as well."

Revoking a five-year-old ban on saliva and introducing new technologies this season are in line with IPL's vision to improve every season, said Dhimal. (PTI)



NEW DELHI, March 22: Their immediate target is to end their title drought in the Indian Premier League (IPL), but head coach Ricky Ponting has also set the goal of becoming the best-ever Punjab Kings team.

With Ponting taking over as the head coach and last year's IPL winning captain Shreyas Iyer becoming the skipper, Punjab Kings hope for a strong turnaround in their fortunes as they hunt for a maiden title win.

Punjab Kings will take on Gujarat Titans in their opening

match on March 25 in Ahmedabad.

"The overall vision for this team is to win the IPL. I told the guys on the very first day when I joined the camp in Dharamshala that we were going to create and become the greatest Punjab Kings team that's played," Ponting was quoted as saying in a release from the franchise.

"That's the journey that we're on and that doesn't happen overnight. You've got to create that," he said.

The Australian batting legend

emphasised on developing a winning attitude, adding that he doesn't want the opposition to take anything away from his side.

"Winning is really an attitude thing. If we turn up to play, the opposition turns up to play, if they want to beat us, then it feels like they're taking something away and I don't want to let anyone take anything away from me or take anything away from my team," he said.

Ponting tipped uncapped Indian players in Delhi's Priyansh Arya and Mumbai duo of Suryansh Shedge and Musheer Khan to come good this season.

"Priyansh Arya, I think is a very special potential opening batsman for us going forward in the tournament. Depending on which way we go with our overseas make-up, he's very exciting. Suryansh Shedge is also someone who has been very impressive in our training so far," he said. "When I talk about energy and fun, another player that I am impressed with, is Musheer Khan. He's brought a lot to the group already. He has got an infectious attitude, and around the training ground and around the team so far, he's been someone that I've really enjoyed working with." (PTI)

## Formidable SRH to start favourite against RR



HYDERABAD, March 22:

Equipped with a balanced squad that features a formidable batting line-up and experienced bowlers, last edition's runners-up Sunrisers Hyderabad will start as favourites in their opening Indian Premier League (IPL) match against Rajasthan Royals here on Sunday. Sunrisers have some of the most explosive batsmen in their line-up in Travis Head, Abhishek Sharma, Ishan Kishan and Heinrich Klaasen, and with a belter of a track likely to offer at the Rajiv Gandhi International Stadium, they would fancy a massive total in the afternoon match of the double-header day.

In fact, if any team can get to the much talked about 300-run total after batting first, it is Sunrisers that is expected to achieve the feat with the firepower they have.

The return of India all-rounder Nitish Kumar Reddy after an injury is also expected to add to the arsenal of the Sunrisers. With the kind of form Abhishek and Head have been having recently, the Sunrisers supporters can expect to see impressive strokes.

In the last T20I he played, Abhishek scored 135 off just 54 balls with a strike rate of 250 against England during the home series in February.

With few established names in the bowling department of the Royals, except England pacer Jofra Archer, there is every possibility that the Sunrisers can eye another 250-plus total if they bat first on Sunday.

Sunrisers posted 250-plus totals three times last season, including 287 against Royal Challengers Bangalore in an away match and 277 against Mumbai Indians at home. The explosive duo of Abhishek and Head scored the highest IPL powerplay total of 125 against Delhi Capitals in the third instance when they posted 266.

The experienced pace duo of captain Pat Cummins and Mohammed Shami will man the bowling department along with spinner Adam Zampa -- another seasoned campaigner.

The 2016 winners Sunrisers look far better placed than Royals, who are will miss skipper Sanju Samson due to his finger injury. Samson cannot keep wickets and field and can only bat with protection on his finger. It won't be a surprise if he comes as an Impact Player.

Batter Riyan Parag will be the interim captain for the 2008 champions Royals in their first three IPL matches.

With the release of Englishman Jos Buttler, the Royals' batting line-up has dwindled though they still have the likes of Shimron Hetmyer, Dhruv Jurel, Nitish Rana and Yashasvi Jaiswal. Sunrisers and Royals played two games against each other last season. Sunrisers won both the games and will be confident of maintaining their supremacy over the Rajasthan-based outfit. The first meeting was in the league stage when the Sunrisers prevailed by just one run. (PTI)