

6 WORLD

- Germany will keep supporting Lebanon after UN peacekeepers leave, German Prez says
- Tarique Rahman to take oath as Bangladesh's new Prime Minister today

8 NATION

- Centre resolved to stop infiltrators: Shah
- 'Opposing Vande Mataram treason,' says Adityanath

Governor highlights government achievements in 40-minute speech

Budget session of Assam Assembly gets underway



GUWAHATI, Feb 16: Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya said in the state assembly on Monday that the government has been working towards inclusive, responsible and region-balanced development, emphasising that progress is not measured only by intent but also by consistent action and delivery on the ground.

He said the government has been taking action against illegal foreigners, drugs, encroachment and corruption; and has been accelerating development and providing jobs.

Addressing the House on the first day of the Budget session, Acharya said the state has achieved considerable progress in internal security, law enforcement and justice delivery in the last five years.

This will be the last assembly session under the current government, with elections likely to be held in March-April.

The governor delivered his 40-minute speech amid a din as opposition MLAs raised slogans, displayed placards and squatted in the Well of the House for almost the entire duration.

He said 1,517 people, including

Noisy scenes mark Day 1 of Assembly session

GUWAHATI, Feb 16: The Budget session of the Assam Assembly got off to an uproarious start on Monday as opposition members protested during the governor's speech, storming into the Well of the House and raising slogans.

The opposition MLAs created noisy scenes for almost the entire length of the 40-minute speech delivered by Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya.

They tried to hurl copies of the speech towards the podium, but the booklets were promptly taken away by the marshals, engaged in security of the House.

In the last session of the assembly under this government before the election, the vote-on-account will be presented on Tuesday.

As the governor elaborated on development work under the current regime, five minutes into his speech, Congress, AIUDF, CPI(M) and the lone Independent MLA trooped into the Well of the House to register their protest.

Leader of Opposition Debabrata Saikia led the MLAs, with his Congress colleagues carrying the copies of the speech in their hands.

AIUDF MLAs marched into the Well with placards which had photos of a recent controversial purported video of Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma. While the

Bhupen Borah quits Cong; high command rejects

I apologise to him if he (Borah) felt hurt due to certain issues in the party: Gogoi ● CM says BJP doors open for ex-Cong chief, offers 'safe seat' to contest upcoming polls

GUWAHATI, Feb 16: Former Assam Congress chief Bhupen Borah resigned on Monday, triggering a political storm in the poll-bound state with the party's senior leaders claiming that he has reconsidered his resignation after the intervention of the high command, while Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma publicly invited him to join the BJP.

AICC state in-charge Jitendra Singh claimed that Borah has withdrawn his resignation after party president Mallikarjun Kharge and senior leader Rahul Gandhi spoke to him. Borah, however, said he has sought time from the high command to reconsider his decision.

"The party leadership has discussed the matter with Borah. Rahul Gandhi also spoke to him for 15 minutes," Singh told reporters here outside Borah's house.

"This is our internal matter; we discussed in detail about the issues bothering him and I thank him for agreeing to withdraw his resignation," he said.

Emerging from his residence, Borah, however, said he has sought time from the high command to reconsider his decision.



"My old colleagues and the party's central leadership came to my house, and I respect them. I have sought time till tomorrow morning so that I can talk to my family and take a decision in this regard," he said.

"The decision now is not only mine; I have to discuss it with my family, particularly with my brothers, whose business interests have been affected due to me being in the Congress," Borah said.

He added, "Along with my brothers, I will meet Singh and let him know about my decision (by

tomorrow morning)."

Senior Congress leaders, including Singh, Assam unit chief Gaurav Gogoi, MP Pradyut Bordoloi, leader of opposition in the Assembly Debabrata Saikia and other party MLAs, met Borah at his residence here, after he sent a letter to the party high command earlier in the day, announcing his resignation.

Gogoi said Borah was a "pillar of strength" for the party, and he has always raised his voice against the negative forces active in the state.

Borah is a "true Congressman, a courageous leader with Assamese culture, civilisation and the party ideology of taking everyone together to move ahead deeply embedded in his DNA," he said.

"I apologise to him as a younger brother if he felt hurt due to certain issues in the party," he said.

"This is a complex matter for us. We are also learning one step at a time, and hope that in future, he will guide us so that not only the Congress, but the opposition parties, too, are strengthened", the Deputy Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha said.

Borah had earlier sent his resignation letter to Kharge. In the letter, he claimed that he was being "ignored" by the party leadership and not being accorded his due in the state unit.

Chief Minister Sarma said the BJP's doors were open for Borah and promised to help him get elected from a "safe seat" if he joined.

Sarma said Borah was the "last Hindu leader" in the Congress without a family background -- father or mother not occupying a ministerial post or being an MLA. "His (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Assembly polls: Full ECI team arrives in State

GUWAHATI, Feb 16: A full bench of the Election Commission of India (ECI), led by Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar, arrived in Assam on Monday on a three-day visit to review preparedness for the upcoming 2026 Assembly elections, officials said.

The CEC is accompanied by Election Commissioners Sukhbir Singh Sandhu and Vivek Joshi.

They were received at Guwahati by Assam chief electoral officer Anurag Goel.

Soon after their arrival, the ECI team began a series of engagements with senior state officials, including the chief secretary, home secretary, director general of police, election authorities and police nodal officers. The Commission is holding (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Petitioners asked to move HC

SC refuses accept pleas against Assam CM over 'shooting' video

NEW DELHI, Feb 16: The Supreme Court on Monday refused to entertain petitions seeking action against Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma over a viral video purportedly showing him taking aim and firing with a rifle at members of a particular community.

Expressing strong disapproval of the trend of parties directly approaching the top court, a bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagechi and Vipul M Pancholi asked the petitioners to approach the Gauhati High Court with their grievances.

The top court also asked the chief justice of the Gauhati High Court to expedite the hearing in the matter.

"Why haven't you gone to the

Gauhati High Court? Don't undermine its authority. We will ask parties to use restraint and remain within the boundaries of constitutional morality, but this is becoming a trend just before the polls.

"This is a disturbing trend that every matter ends up here. We have already deprived high courts of environmental and commercial litigations," the bench observed.

As the hearing commenced, CJI Kant observed, "Wherever the elections come, this court becomes a political battleground."

Political parties should fight elections based on "mutual respect and self-restraint", he said.

Senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi, appearing for the petitioners, submitted that Sarma is a habitual and repeat offender, as he

urged the court to entertain the matter.

Singhvi said the case should be entertained under Article 32, as the high court may not be an appropriate remedy since the petitioners are seeking an SIT investigation against the Assam chief minister.

The senior lawyer argued that Sarma made objectionable statements not only in Assam, but in Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh as well, and hence it was a pan-Indian case.

The court, while refusing to entertain the matter, noted in its order, "All these issues can be effectively adjudicated by the jurisdictional high court."

"We see no reason to entertain this (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

CM chairs tripartite meet on eviction of encroachments in Karbi Anglong

Eviction in 17 locations to take place shortly



GUWAHATI, Feb 16: In a significant step to address long-standing land encroachment issues in Karbi Anglong, chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Monday chaired a high-level tripartite meeting at Lok Sewa Bhawan involving the State Government, the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), and representatives of Karbi civil society organisations.

The meeting focused on eviction of illegal occu-

pants from Village Grazing Reserve (VGR) and Professional Grazing Reserve (PGR) lands.

Officials said eviction drives will be launched within seven days at 17 identified locations covering VGR areas and other government land under encroachment.

The chief minister clarified that while immediate action will be taken in VGR areas, some PGR lands remain under a High Court stay order.

Despite this, the KAAC has been directed to cancel all trading licences issued within PGR and VGR boundaries and relocate government offices operating from these reserved lands.

Litsong Rongphar, a leader associated with ongoing protests in Kheroni, said public dissatisfaction over earlier "partial" eviction drives was conveyed to the chief minister.

He added that the government agreed to conduct a fresh and more comprehensive eviction in the Volongkom Aji (Bakulia) area.

The chief minister also chaired a separate meeting with signatory organisations of (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

'Error' forces APSC to cancel published CCE 2024 results

GUWAHATI, Feb 16: In an unprecedented development, the Assam Public Service Commission (APSC) on Monday cancelled the results of the Combined Competitive Examination (CCE) 2024 shortly after they were uploaded on its official website, triggering widespread concern among candidates across the state.

According to an official cancellation notification issued by the Commission, the decision was taken due to an "inadvertent error" detected in the result notified earlier in the day.

The notification stated that the result uploaded vide letter No. 460PSC/CON/Exam-37/2024-2025 dated February 16, 2026, stands cancelled with immediate effect.

The Commission, however, did not specify the nature of the error that led to the cancellation.

It further assured that after careful re-examination, a fresh select list would be uploaded within a short time.

"The result uploaded for Combined Competitive Examination-2024 is hereby cancelled with immediate effect. After careful examination, the Commission will upload the fresh select list within a short time," the notification signed by the Principal Controller of Examinations, APSC, said.

The sudden reversal has sparked anxiety and confusion among thousands of aspirants who had been eagerly awaiting the results of the prestigious examination, considered the gateway to top administrative posts in the

state. Many candidates expressed disappointment over the lack of clarity and transparency regarding the reasons behind the cancellation.

This is being seen as a rare and significant incident in the history of APSC examinations, as results are seldom withdrawn after official publication.

The development has also led to demands from aspirants and civil society groups for greater accountability and timely clarification from the Commission.

APSC officials have so far refrained from offering additional details, stating that the matter is under review.

The revised results are expected to be released after the verification process is completed.

The Combined Competitive Examination (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Garima seeks setting up of fast-track court

Zubeen death case: Discontent looms over slow pace of court proceedings



GUWAHATI, Feb 16: Garima Saikia Garg, wife of Assam's popular singer Zubeen Garg, and Public Prosecutor Ziaul Kamar on Monday expressed dissatisfaction

over the slow pace of his death case being heard by the Kamrup Metropolitan District and Sessions Court.

With several petitions filed before the court by the accused, the entire process has been delayed as the trial is yet to begin.

The celebrated singer died on September 19 last year while swimming in the sea in Singapore where he had gone to attend the 4th edition of the North East India Festival (NEIF). The state government asserted that it was a murder case and arrested seven people in this connection.

"The regular hearing has not started yet. The accused have adopted delaying tactics. They are submitting different petitions," Kamar told reporters outside the court.

Unless all the petitions are disposed (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Cong MLA AR Mandal joins Rajior Dal

GUWAHATI, Feb 16: Three-time Assam Congress MLA Abdur Rashid Mandal on Monday joined another opposition party, Rajior Dal, just months ahead of the state assembly elections.

The development comes hours after state Congress' former president Bhupen Kumar Borah resigned from the party, which was claimed to have been withdrawn by AICC General Secretary (in-charge of Assam) Jitendra Singh.

Mandal, who represents Goalpara West constituency, joined the Rajior Dal in presence of its chief Akhil Gogoi.

"I am happy to join the growing Rajior Dal under Gogoi. I am looking forward to strengthening his hands as a simple worker," Mandal said at (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

52nd Karbi Youth Festival inaugurated at Taralango

Tuliram announces ₹1 lakh for each participating KCS zone

DIPHU, Feb 16: The 52nd Karbi Youth Festival (KYF), a major celebration of Karbi folk culture, was formally inaugurated on its second day at the Rangina Sarpo ground in Taralango on Monday.

Recognised as one of the oldest ethnic festivals in Northeast India, the five-day event blends traditional Karbi dance, music and rituals with modern cultural attractions.

The day's programme began with the colourful "Rongketong" cultural procession, where troupes from various Karbi Cultural Society (KCS) zones marched from their camps to the main venue.

This was followed by hoisting of the KCS flag by president Humsing Bey, performance of the KCS anthem by the central cultural troupe, and a traditional ritual by



Karbi traditional king Longsing Ronghang invoking blessings for favourable weather and a peaceful festival.

Organised by the KCS, the festival provides a platform for Karbi youth to showcase their heritage.

This year, 32 KCS zones from Karbi Anglong, West Karbi Anglong and Karbi communities in districts such as Nagaon, Sonitpur, Kamrup, Hojai, Morigaon and parts of Meghalaya are participating.

Alongside competitions in traditional music, dance and indigenous sports, the festival features modern attractions including a national rock contest, Miss KYF competition, live concerts, strongman events and drama performances.

In his presidential address, Bey highlighted observations of cultural icon Bishnu Prasad Rabha, who described the Karbis as among Assam's early inhabitants.

He emphasised the importance of preserving Karbi language, traditions and oral heritage.

Inaugurating the festival, Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council chief executive member Tuliram Ronghang announced a grant of ₹1 lakh for each participating KCS zone. He also noted that the Jambili Athon, the traditional totem pole symbolising the five Karbi clans, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

OI Chiki script 'powerful symbol' of Santhali identity that must be preserved: Murmu

NEW DELHI, Feb 16: Describing the OI Chiki script as a "powerful symbol" of the Santhali identity, President Droupadi Murmu on Monday said efforts should be made to preserve and promote this century-old script.

Addressing a gathering to commemorate the centenary of the OI Chiki script, Murmu also expressed happiness that the script is growing in the digital medium.

In 1925, Pandit Raghunath Murmu created the OI Chiki script. Since then, it has become a powerful symbol of the Santhali identity.

It was included in the Constitution's Eighth Schedule in 2003.

In her address, Murmu described India as a "garden of multiple languages", stressing the importance of using one's mother tongue in communication.



She also said efforts should be made to preserve and promote the

diversity of India.

A short film on the genesis and evolution of the OI Chiki script was also screened on the occasion.

A special postage stamp and a commemorative Rs 100 coin, along with a souvenir on OI Chikiscript, were also released at the event.

OI Chiki is the official script of the Santhali language, one of India's prominent tribal languages spoken widely across Jharkhand, Odisha, West Bengal, Assam, and Bihar.

Belonging to the Austroasiatic language family, Santhali has historically thrived through oral traditions.

The script consists of 30 letters, designed to accurately represent Santhali phonetics. It has two styles - 'Chapa' and 'Usara'. Union Minister for Tribal Affairs, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Markets rebound nearly 1 pc on buying in power, banking stocks; Sensex jumps 650 pts

MUMBAI, Feb 16: Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty rebounded sharply by nearly 1 per cent on Monday, driven by strong buying in power, banking, and financial stocks amid a mixed trend overseas.

Besides, a largely stable rupee and global crude oil prices amid US-Iran talks supported investors' sentiment, traders said.

Snapping its three-day decline, the 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 650.39 points, or 0.79 per cent, to close at 83,277.15.

The 50-share NSE Nifty advanced 211.65 points, or 0.83 per cent, to settle at 25,682.75.

A total of 2,565 stocks declined, while 1,747 advanced, and 184 remain unchanged on the BSE.

The market capitalisation of BSE-listed firms increased by ₹ 3,11,982.13 crore to ₹ 4,68,58,625.33 crore (USD 5.17 trillion).

"After a range-bound opening, domestic markets edged higher, supported by renewed buying interest in banking and power stocks. The power sector gained on expectations of sustained demand momentum, while improved loan growth and stable asset quality bolstered confidence in banks.

"Meanwhile, stability in the rupee and range-bound crude oil prices ahead of US-Iran talks are offering additional support to domestic equities," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Limited, said.

PowerGrid emerged as the top gainer in the Sensex pack, rising 4.45 per cent, followed by HDFC Bank, Axis Bank, NTPC, ITC, Asian Paints, Bajaj Finserv, Bharti Airtel, Adani Ports, Tata Steel, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Reliance Industries and State Bank of India.

On the other hand, Tech Mahindra, Maruti Suzuki India, Bajaj Finance, Trent, Mahindra &



Mahindra, Titan, Infosys, ICICI Bank, and UltraTech Cement were the laggards.

"PSU bank stocks rebounded after two sessions of decline, supported by increased mutual fund allocation to the sector in January, which rose to a three-year high," Siddhartha Khemka - Head of Research, Wealth Management, Motilal Oswal Financial Services Ltd, said.

BSE Midcap Select Index rose 0.95 per cent, while Smallcap Select Index slipped 0.16 per cent.

Among sectoral indices, Power rose the most by 2.40 per cent, followed by Utilities by 2.15 per cent, PSU Bank by 1.65 per cent, Realty by 1.44 per cent, Bankex by 1.20 per cent, BSE Top 10 Banks by 1.16 per cent, Energy by 1.13 per cent, Capital Goods by 1.05 per cent, and Private Banks Index by 1.04 per cent.

On the other hand, Consumer Discretionary and Auto were the only laggards.

"Market sentiment remained fragile as the recent selling pressure in the technology space continued to weigh on overall confidence. However, notable strength in banking and select heavy-weight stocks from other sectors helped absorb the pressure and triggered a rebound in the index," Ajit Mishra - SVP, Research, Religare

Broking Ltd, said.

The broader Asian markets ended on a mixed note. Hong Kong's Hang Seng benchmark rose 0.52 per cent, while Japan's Nikkei 225 index slipped 0.22 per cent.

Markets in China and South Korea remained closed for the Lunar New Year holidays.

European markets are trading higher in mid-session deals. US equities ended on a mixed note on Friday.

Globally, a continued decline in the US 10-year yield following benign inflation data strengthened expectations of a Fed rate cut later this year, with investors now closely awaiting the upcoming Fed minutes for further direction, Nair said.

Meanwhile, wholesale price inflation extended upward momentum for the third straight month, at 1.81 per cent in January, driven by an uptick in prices of food, non-food articles, and manufactured items on a month-on-month basis, government data showed on Monday.

Wholesale Price Index (WPI)-based inflation was 2.51 per cent in January last year, while in the previous month (December 2025), it was 0.83 per cent.

The rupee settled flat at 90.66 (provisional) against the US dollar in a range-bound trade on Monday.

Foreign institutional investors sold equities worth ₹ 7,395.41 crore on Friday, while domestic institutional investors purchased stocks worth ₹ 5,553.96 crore, according to the exchange data. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, fell 0.24 per cent to USD 67.59 per barrel.

On Friday, the 30-share BSE Sensex tumbled 1,048.16 points to close at 82,626.76, while the 50-share NSE Nifty plunged 336.10 points to settle at 25,471.10. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

Bhupen Borah quits

resignation carries the symbolic message that in the Congress, no one from a normal family can prosper. Congress does not give recognition to people from ordinary families, but I hail from an ordinary middle-class family and the BJP has made me a chief minister. We stay opposite to the politics of blue blood," he told reporters here outside the Assembly.

Sarma said he will go to Borah's residence tomorrow evening, and discuss his plans for the future.

"Borah has not contacted me or the BJP till now and at present, we are not in direct or indirect touch," the CM said. "If he wants to join the BJP, we will welcome him, but even if he does not want to do so, we extend our best wishes to him," he said. Borah was the president of the Assam Congress unit from 2021 to 2025, and was replaced by Gaurav Gogoi last year. He has been a two-time legislator in Assam.

The United Opposition Forum, Assam, also appealed to Borah to withdraw his resignation with its spokesperson and Rajgor Dal president Akhil Gogoi saying that the forum will not allow him to leave the opposition camp at any cost. "No one from the united opposition will let him join the BJP even if PM Narendra Modi or Home Minister Amit Shah comes. He was, is and will remain with us. Who will let him go...we will carry him everywhere with us", Gogoi said. Borah is hurt due to some issues in the Congress but their party leaders "are talking to him and we expect the matter to be resolved soon", he added.(PTI)

Noisy scenes

MLAs created noisy scenes, the governor continued with his speech, punctuated by the thumping of desks by treasury benches in acknowledgement of the mention of developmental activities under the current regime.

Speaker Biswajit Daimary, who was sitting beside the governor as he read out his speech, tried to pacify the MLAs and urged them to return to their seats, but to no avail.

Initially displaying the copies of the speech, a section of the opposition MLAs later tried to hurl those towards the governor's podium. The marshals seized the copies and also snatched away other placards and papers being displayed by the MLAs. Over 20 security personnel, including the marshals, were engaged in cordoning off the more than 30 opposition members as they remained in the Well for the entire duration of the speech.

The opposition members raised slogans against the controversial video purportedly featuring the CM and demanding justice for popular singer Zubeen Garg, who died in Singapore on September 19 last year.(PTI)

Governor highlights govt

foreign nationals, convicted foreign nationals and fresh illegal immigrants, have been deported or sent back from May 2021 to 2025.

The Immigration (Expulsion from Assam) Act, 1950, has been enforced in the state, and from May 2021 to 2025, 59,757 cases have been disposed of by Foreigners' Tribunals and 30,264 persons declared as foreigners.

The governor said the state has topped the list in the implementation of new criminal laws.

The total number of crimes saw a reduction by 72 per cent in 2025, when compared to 2021, with crimes against women dipping by 87 per cent during the same period. Crimes against children have also seen a decline, he said. The state registered 14,503 cases under the NDPS Act between 2021 and November 2025, leading to over 23,000 arrests and seizure of drugs with an estimated market value exceeding Rs 2,900 crore.

Acharya also affirmed the government's commitment to a child marriage-free Assam by 2026, with the incidence of marriage among girls aged under 18 years declining by 84 per cent and marriage of boys under 19 years of age dipping by 91 per cent between 2022-23 and 2024-25.

Acharya further said 1.45 lakh bighas (about 48,000 acres) of land have been cleared of eviction, including 1.1 lakh bighas (36,000 acres) of forest land, and 26,713 bighas (8,830 acres) of government khas land, along with land under VGR/PGR and other public categories.

Acharya said that since 2021, 240 successful trap operations have been conducted against government officials, leading to 294 arrests, including 272 public servants and 22 intermediaries. In the preceding decade, only 76 such operations had taken place. The governor said boundary disputes have been settled with Meghalaya in six out of 12 identified areas of differences with a MoU signed in March 2022.

Under another MoU with Arunachal Pradesh signed in April 2023, 243.8 km of the agreed boundary has been taken up for survey and pillar fixation. Further, 140 strategic villages along the India-Bangladesh and India-Bhutan borders have been taken up under Vibrant Village Programme II, reinforcing both security and development objectives," Acharya added. (PTI)

Assembly polls: Full

detailed review meetings on voter list revision, law and order preparedness, deployment of security forces, polling infrastructure, and the availability of electronic voting machines and VVPATs.

Officials said special focus is also being given to preparations for remote and riverine polling stations, particularly in flood-prone and border areas, to ensure smooth conduct of elections.

Discussions are also being held on training of polling personnel, strengthening grievance redressal mechanisms, curbing the influence of money and muscle power, and enhancing voter participation.

During the visit, the Commission will meet district election officers, superintendents of police and representatives of recognised national and state political parties to address their concerns and ensure a level playing field. The ECI delegation is scheduled to address the media on February 18 before concluding the visit.

Elections to the 126-member Assam Assembly are expected to be held in March-April, with the term of the current Assembly ending on May 20.

Petitioners asked to

petition here, and thus we relegate the petitioners to the jurisdictional high court. We request the high court chief justice to grant an expeditious hearing." The top court on February 10 agreed to consider listing a plea of Left leaders seeking action against Sarma.

Referring to the upcoming Assembly polls in Assam, the top court said the problem is that a part of the elections is fought before it. It took note of the submissions of lawyer Nizam Pasha, appearing for a few CPI and CPI(M) leaders, against Sarma and said it will consider listing the plea. (PTI)

Eviction in 17

the 2021 Karbi peace agreement to review implementation of the ₹ 1,000-crore special development package jointly funded by the Centre and the State. Key decisions included convening a joint meeting to finalise development schemes, preparing a self-employment plan for former cadres through the Assam Police Special Branch, and providing assistance to families of martyrs and former members of the six signatory organisations.

The meeting was attended by KAAC Chief Executive Member Tuliram Ronghang, MP Amarsing Tisso, Karbi traditional king Longsing Ronghang, and leaders of various Karbi civil bodies.

In a social media post after the meeting, Sarma said departments have been instructed to ensure expeditious follow-up to maintain governance and fulfil commitments made under the peace accord.

Cong MLA AR

the joining function. He said it is a very big and important day for his life as he has got a "new identity" from now on. An Assam Congress spokesperson told PTI that Mandal has not yet submitted any resignation letter to the party. The Assam Assembly elections for 126 constituencies are likely to take place in March-April this year, with vote counting expected in May. Commenting on the joining, Independent legislator Gogoi said: "Mandal is a very active, aware and experienced MLA. I have seen in the last five years that Mandal is one of the few MLAs raising a voice against injustice and for the unity of Hindus and Muslims."

Along with Mandal, the Chief Advisor of All Tai Ahom Students' Union (ATASU) Dulal Chandra Barua also joined the Rajgor Dal at the programme. "The joining of these two leaders has strengthened our party before the assembly elections. People are united to bid adieu to the BJP. It is the call of the time to give relief to the people by defeating the ruling BJP," Gogoi said. He further claimed that several leaders from the ruling alliance parties BJP and AGP will join the Rajgor Dal in the coming days. "I cannot reveal much at this moment. I can only say that two BJP MLAs from Upper Assam will join the Rajgor Dal," Gogoi said. (PTI)

Garima seeks setting

of by the court, the regular trial cannot start, he added. Garima also expressed unhappiness over the development and appealed to the government to set up a fast track court.

"They (accused) are delaying the process. Also, we have been requesting a fast track court for day-to-day hearings, but it has not been set up yet. I request the government again for it," she added.

NEIF chief organiser Shyamkanu Mahanta, the singer's manager Siddharth Sharma, his two band members Shekhar Jyoti Goswami and Amrit Prabha Mahanta, his cousin and Assam Police DSP Sandipan Garg, and his PSOs Nandeswar Bora and Prabin Baishya are in jail as accused in the case.. (PTI)

'Error' forces APSC

is one of the most important recruitment examinations in Assam, conducted to fill vacancies in various administrative and allied services. Any delay or uncertainty in the process directly impacts the future of thousands of candidates who prepare for years to clear the examination.

OI Chiki script

Jual Oram, Union Culture Minister, Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, and Union Culture Secretary, Vivek Aggarwal, were present at the event, Murmu also felicitated several persons who worked to promote the OI Chiki script.

"In 1925, Pandit Raghunath Murmu invented the OI Chiki script. Since then, it has been used for the Santhali language. Now, this script is a powerful symbol of the Santhali identity worldwide. It is also an effective means of fostering unity among the Santhal community," the president said.

On December 29 last year, Murmu participated in a centenary celebration of the script in Jamshepur, Jharkhand. In her address then, Murmu said that apart from getting education in any other language, learning the mother tongue, Santhali in the OI Chiki script, is also important for the overall development of the community. (PTI)

Tuliram announces ₹1

has been featured on a postal stamp. Several individuals were honoured during the inaugural function, including Rumila Terangpi and Kache Teronpi for winning gold at the International Masters Games 2025, Sabina Teronpi for receiving the National Handicraft Award, Binong Teron for contributions to education, and Choran Aboha for promoting traditional Karbi cuisine.

Officials said the festival continues to play a vital role in preserving and promoting Karbi identity while bringing together communities from across the region.

IIFL Finance to raise up to ₹2,000 crore via bonds; offers yields up to 9%

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 16: IIFL Finance Limited has announced a public issue of secured redeemable non-convertible debentures (NCDs) to raise up to ₹2,000 crore, offering investors yields of up to 9 per cent per annum.

The issue will open on February 17, 2026, with a base size of ₹500 crore and a green-shoe option to retain oversubscription up to ₹1,500 crore.

The company said the funds will be utilised for business expansion and capital augmentation.

The NCDs will be available in tenors of 24 months, 36 months and 60 months, with interest payment options including monthly, annual and cumulative payouts.

The proposed issue has been rated CRISIL AA/Stable and BWR AA+(Stable), indicating a high degree of safety regarding timely servicing of financial obligations and low credit risk.

IIFL Finance founder and managing director Nirmal Jain said the fundraising will support the company's efforts to expand credit access and diversify funding sources, adding that the NBFC serves over 4.6 million customers across India.

As of December 31, 2025, the company reported consolidated assets under management of ₹98,336 crore.

It maintained strong asset quality with gross non-performing assets at 1.60 per cent and net NPAs at 0.75 per cent of its consolidated loan book.

For the third quarter of FY26, IIFL Finance reported a profit after tax of ₹501.3 crore, registering a 514 per cent year-on-year increase, while profit for the nine months of FY26 stood at ₹1,193.5 crore, up 265 per cent year-on-year.

The company has a network of 4,761 branches and a workforce of 36,786 employees across the country as of December 31, 2025.

The NCDs will carry a face value of ₹1,000 each, with a minimum investment of ₹10,000.

The issue is scheduled to close on March 4, 2026, with provisions for early closure, and allotment will be on a first-come, first-served basis. The bonds are proposed to be listed on the BSE and NSE.

Samsung to unveil next Galaxy AI phone at Unpacked event on Feb 25

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 16: Samsung Electronics will host its next Galaxy Unpacked event on February 25 in San Francisco, where the company is expected to unveil a new Galaxy S series smartphone focused on advanced artificial intelligence features.

The event, scheduled to begin at 11.30 pm IST, will be streamed live on Samsung's official website, Samsung Newsroom India and its YouTube channel.

According to the company, the upcoming Galaxy device is designed to simplify everyday inter-

actions through deeper AI integration, with features aimed at reducing friction in routine tasks and delivering a more personalised and adaptive mobile experience.

Samsung said the launch will mark a new phase in its AI strategy, highlighting a shift toward making smartphone intelligence more intuitive, seamless and user-centric from the moment the device is in hand.

Users can register on Samsung's official Unpacked page to receive teasers, updates and information on exclusive pre-launch benefits ahead of the February 2026 event.

Tax Bar Association holds study meet on Income Tax Act, 2025 and Union Budget 2026



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 16: The Tax Bar Association, Guwahati recently organised a study circle meeting at The Ornate Hotel, Ulubari, on the topic "Income Tax Act, 2025 and Union Budget 2026."

Study Circle Committee chairman CA Rakesh Kumar Agarwala delivered the welcome address, while the session was chaired by association president CA Pankaj Khandelia.

In his remarks, Khandelia highlighted the importance of the topics and expressed hope that the meeting would help participants better understand issues significant for taxpayers as well as professionals.

He also informed that, as in previous years, the association had submitted a pre-budget memorandum to the Union finance minister,

some suggestions from which were incorporated in the Union Budget 2026. Speaker CA Somesh Bose explained the changes introduced in the new Income Tax Act, 2025, and presented a detailed comparison between the old and the new provisions.

CA Anil Kumar Agarwala elaborated on key changes announced in the Union Budget 2026 through a presentation.

During the programme, CA Mannu Kashlival, chairman of the Newsletter and Publication Committee, released the first e-newsletter of the association for 2025-26.

CA Mantu Kumar Agarwala, chairman of the Membership Development Committee, also welcomed newly enrolled members by presenting membership certificates and kits.

A large number of chartered accountants, company secretaries, cost accountants, advocates and tax consultants attended the meeting and participated in an interactive discussion session.

The meeting concluded with a vote of thanks delivered by secretary CS Chandra Shekhar Sharma.

Old Bridge Mutual Fund launches Flexi Cap Fund; NFO open till Feb 23

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 16: Old Bridge Mutual Fund has launched the Old Bridge Flexi Cap Fund, an open-ended dynamic equity scheme that will invest across large-cap, mid-cap and small-cap stocks to offer investors a diversified portfolio capable of navigating market cycles.

The New Fund Offer (NFO) for the scheme will remain open until February 23, 2026. The fund is priced at an initial offer of ₹10 per unit, with a minimum investment of ₹5,000 for lump-sum applications and ₹1,000 for systematic investment plans (SIPs).

The scheme will follow a bottom-up, business-focused investment approach, with capital allocation driven by business quality and long-term growth prospects rather than fixed allocation across market capitalisation segments. The strategy also allows flexibility to dynamically adjust exposure across market segments based on changing risk-reward conditions.

The fund will be managed by Kenneth Andrade, founder and chief investment officer of Old Bridge Asset Management Pvt Ltd, who has over three decades of experience in the Indian capital markets.

Mangalore for operations.

FROM DISASTER TO INNOVATION

Raj's foray into agricultural technology stems from personal loss. In 2013-14, severe drought destroyed his entire 5,000-acre crops of ginger in Chikkamagaluru district, causing massive losses at Panama Nature Fresh Pvt Ltd, which he established in 2014 with advance payments to farmers.

"My entire crop failed due to drought. I had given five years of money upfront to the farmers," Raj said. "If any other entrepreneur was there, he would have committed suicide."

Government loan waivers covered farmers but not agricultural entrepreneurs, prompting Raj to invest in R&D for indoor farming in 2016. The company received its first patent from Australia in 2021.

Founded in 2004, Panama Corporation began as a minerals trading company, sourcing 35 categories of minerals across more than 70 countries. The firm developed logistics networks across Asia, Africa, Europe and the Americas.

Panama Agri Innovations, the group's technology arm, develops AI-assisted hydroponic systems for high-value crops, including saffron, Himalayan mushrooms and medicinal botanicals. (PTI)

Indian entrepreneur to invest ₹214 cr on AI-powered hydroponic farming

NEW DELHI, Feb 16: An Indian entrepreneur who lost his entire crop to drought a decade ago is investing ₹ 214 crore in artificial intelligence-enabled hydroponic farming to grow high-value spices and medicinal plants in Karnataka.

Vivek Raj, founder and CEO of Mangalore-based Panama Hydro-X, said the company has developed four patented AI technologies after spending ₹ 146 crore on research and development over several years.

The technologies include systems that can detect crop diseases before physical symptoms appear and provide optimised artificial lighting for photosynthesis, Raj, who was here for the AI Impact Summit 2026, told PTI in an interview.

"We have got good results during the trial period and received patents for our AI technologies from the UK, Germany and Australia," said Raj, 40, who has a personal net worth of USD 700 million. "We will go for large-scale implementation."

Panama Hydro-X, a limited liability partnership funded by Raj's Panama Corporation, has acquired 16 acres (6.5 hectares) of farmland in Moodbidri in Karnataka, where it will build hydroponic farming infrastructure by end-2026. The first commercial harvest is expected

in June 2027.

The venture plans to allocate five acres each for saffron and ginger, with the remaining six acres for nine medicinal plants, including turmeric and ashwagandha. Saffron and ginger will be exported to cosmetics and pharmaceutical companies, while medicinal crops will be sold domestically, Raj said.

THREEFOLD YIELD INCREASE

During trials, AI-enabled hydroponic farming produced 1,200 bags of ginger per acre compared with 400 bags from traditional outdoor farming, with each bag weighing 60 kg, Raj said. The technology also enables three annual crop cycles instead of one.

The company's four patents cover an AI-enabled smart farming monitor, a hydroponic saffron disease detection system, a Diffused Concurrent Convolutional Neural Network (DCCNN) that uses cameras to detect leaf colour changes, and a smart LED farming system.

"One thing I can guarantee is the crop will not die," Raj said, though he added the company would not license the technologies immediately, preferring to first demonstrate commercial success.

Panama Hydro-X, registered in India and the United States, plans to hire 37 engineers in

Boost to rural connectivity as RCC bridges replace dilapidated wooden structures under ARBP in Kokrajhar district

Rabi Ram Narzary lays foundation stones for six bridges in Kokrajhar



HT Correspondent
GOSSAIGAON, Feb 16: MLA and BTC Executive Member Rabi Ram Narzary on Monday laid the foundation stones for six RCC bridges in the 2 No Dotma Legislative Assembly Constituency in Kokrajhar district.

The bridges will replace several dilapidated wooden structures located in the 5 No Saraibil Council

Constituency under Gossaigaon subdivision, as well as in parts of Kachugaon and Dotma.

The projects aim to improve road connectivity and ease long-standing transportation difficulties faced by local residents.

Under the Assam Resilient Rural Bridges Programme (ARRBP) for the financial year 2025-26, the foundation stone of

a bridge over the Pagla river on the 1 No Hatigarh-2 No. Hatigarh road was laid.

Another bridge over the Pagla river connecting Rajadabri to National Highway-27 under the Kachugaon PWD Sub-Division was also inaugurated.

Foundation stones were also laid for bridges connecting Joylaigaon to Kopargaon (Angti-

hara), Sinslibari to Patakata road, Bhaoraguri-Kachugaon road to Narenguri link road, and Chekadani to Narenguri road. Speaking on the occasion, Narzary said replacing old wooden and bamboo bridges with permanent RCC structures would significantly improve communication and benefit students, patients, farmers and traders.

He expressed hope that the projects would provide much-needed relief to residents who have long faced transportation challenges.

He also assured that the State Government and the BTC administration would jointly work to accelerate development in the region and announced that foundation stones for a total of 20 bridges and pucca roads would be laid over the next three days. BTC Executive Member Mrityunjay Narzary, who was present, said the bridges and roads would be constructed using CC blocks to ensure durability.

Among others present were Boni Prasad Bodo, president of Kachugaon Block, Aftab Uddin Sheikh, president of Saraibil Council Committee, and several local leaders and citizens.

₹ 9.27 crore project launched to clean Yamuna canal in Sivasagar



HT Correspondent
SIVASAGAR, Feb 16: Sivasagar MLA Akhil Gogoi recently inaugurated a major project for cleaning the Yamuna canal around the historic Sivasagar Borphukhuri, to be undertaken at an estimated cost of about ₹ 9.27 crore under the State Disaster Management Fund (SDMF).

Addressing a meeting held at Sivasagar Girls' College, Gogoi said the project will include removal of water hyacinth and weeds, dredging of accumulated mud, construction of fencing along the canal, installation of lighting on both sides, and deployment of machine boats to improve oxygen levels in the water.

He said the work will be jointly implemented by the Water Resources, Public Works Department (PWD) and Public Health Engineering (PHE) departments.

The MLA added that he had secured the funds from the SDMF as previously promised and that work would begin shortly.

Gogoi also stated that public development works worth around ₹ 264 crore have been completed in the

Sivasagar constituency during his tenure so far.

The 3.5-km-long Yamuna garkhawoi (ditch) forms part of the larger Sivasagar Borphukhuri and Sivadol heritage complex.

The canal, historically constructed during the Ahom era and completed in 1734 AD, helps maintain a stable water level in the Borphukhuri, reflecting the advanced hydraulic engineering of the time.

Over the years, however, encroachments and use of the canal as a dumping site have significantly reduced its water-holding capacity.

Earlier attempts to secure central funding for restoration did not materialise.

Officials and residents expressed hope that the new project, if implemented effectively, will improve the condition of the canal and enhance the surroundings of the historic Sivadol and the town.

Among those present at the meeting were Sivasagar Sports Association president Punaram Mili, ATASU president Basanta Gogoi, and several local leaders and citizens.

NTPC Bongaigaon team wins Regional Professional Circle Award

HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, Feb 16: The NTPC Bongaigaon station at Salakati has won the Regional Professional Circle Award (ER-II) for its digital innovation project titled "SAHAYOGEE - Synchronising the Site Digitally."

The award was presented by NTPC Regional Executive Director (ER-II and SR) Arindam Sinha in the presence of senior officials of the region.

The award-winning project was developed and presented by Uddipan Pal, Senior Manager (TMD), and Satyam Boral, Assistant Manager (BMD).

The initiative focuses on strengthening digital integration, accountability and operational efficiency through a user-friendly mobile application.

The SAHAYOGEE platform aims to digitise key site-level activities, including material tracking, equipment history, safety documentation, monitoring of non-moving inventory, inter-departmental material movement, vehicle requisition and consumable usage.

Officials said the system enhances transparency, efficiency and knowledge management at the station.

With this achievement, the



project team will now represent NTPC Bongaigaon at the Corporate-Level Professional Circle Meet, where it will compete at the organisation's highest innovation platform.

NTPC officials said the recognition reflects the station's continued emphasis on innovation, digital transformation and opera-

tional excellence, while encouraging employees to contribute ideas that strengthen systems and processes.

The Professional Circle initiative of NTPC is designed to promote innovation, problem-solving, knowledge sharing and continuous improvement across departments and stations.

Assam Gorkha Sammelan felicitates veteran social worker Khemraj Adhikari on 93rd birth anniversary

HT Correspondent
TEZPUR, Feb 16: The Assam Gorkha Sammelan recently felicitated veteran social worker, advocate and sportsperson Khemraj Adhikari on his 93rd birth anniversary at a ceremony held at Bhupen Hazarika Kalabhumi in Tezpur.

The programme, presided over by the organisation's working president Prem Sharma, began with a group song by children of Chandmani Gorkha Sangha, followed by a peace invocation.

Chief general secretary Lakshmi Sedai welcomed the gathering and outlined the objective of the event.

Ceremonial lamp lighting and cake cutting were also held as attendees extended birthday greetings to Adhikari.

Tezpur MLA Prithiraj Rabha attended as the distinguished guest, while veteran sportsman Dr Biswaranjan Kalita delivered the keynote address.

Former Assam minister and former Sammelan president Padam Bahadur Chauhan released a felicitation volume highlighting Adhikari's life and contributions.

Speakers at the event recalled his long-standing service as an advocate, social worker, sportsman and community leader, noting his role in strengthening the Gorkha community in Assam.

The programme was conducted



under the guidance of retired Army officer Purna Bahadur Chhetri, with Daizy Pokowal and Jharna Mishra Bhattacharya anchoring the proceedings. Sanskrit verses were recited to bless Adhikari, while members of the editorial board and contributing writers of the felicitation volume were also honoured.

Around 15 organisations, including the Assam Gorkha Sammelan, Bharatiya Gorkha Parishad, Nepali Sahitya Sabha and Seva Sadhana Sansha, joined in felicitating Adhikari. The programme concluded with a vote of thanks by Dr Swikriti Adhikari of Tezpur Medical College, his granddaughter.

Born on February 15, 1934, at Burachapari Grazing Reserve, Adhikari has devoted over six

decades to public life.

A graduate of Darrang College, he later earned a master's degree in economics from Gauhati University and an LL.B. degree.

He began his career as a teacher before joining the legal profession, where he became known for providing assistance to economically disadvantaged members of the Gorkha community.

A sports enthusiast in his youth, he also played football and cricket and served in leadership roles in student and district sports bodies.

Adhikari was actively involved in the graziers' movement, chaired the Tezpur Graziers' Samabay Dairy Limited for over a decade, and also served as a municipal commissioner of Tezpur.

Prabha Khaitan Foundation returns to Dibrugarh with 'The Write Circle'

HT Correspondent
DIBRUGARH, Feb 16: The Prabha Khaitan Foundation is set to continue its literary engagement in Dibrugarh with the second edition of The Write Circle, an initiative aimed at bringing authors and readers together for informal and meaningful dialogue.

The session, being organised with the support of Oil India Limited, will be held at Cygnett Inn Dibrugarh and will feature noted author, columnist and public speaker Chandrachur Ghose in conversation with academic and author Dr Kaustubh Deka.

The Write Circle seeks to create an engaging platform where writers and audiences can interact closely and exchange ideas in an open setting.

Chandrachur Ghose is known for his work on history, politics, economics and environmental issues, and is widely recognised for presenting complex socio-political themes with clarity through his books, columns and public lectures.

Dr Kaustubh Deka, who teaches at Dibrugarh University, is an academic and author actively involved in contemporary intellectual discourse in the region, with his writings reflecting deep engagement with social and cultural issues.

Organisers said the evening is expected to offer a stimulating dialogue on contemporary realities and attract literature enthusiasts, scholars and members of the wider community, further strengthening Dibrugarh's growing literary culture.

The Kolkata-based Prabha Khaitan Foundation, established in the 1980s by noted litterateur and philanthropist Prabha Khaitan, has evolved into a major platform promoting literature, art, culture and education across India and abroad. Its initiatives today extend to more than 50 cities and include a range of literary and cultural programmes in multiple languages.

ABSS transforming railway infrastructure across Assam, Northeast

Dozens of stations under redevelopment to enhance passenger amenities, connectivity and local economic opportunities across the region

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Feb 16: The Ministry of Railways' Amrit Bharat Station Scheme (ABSS) is driving a major transformation of railway infrastructure across Assam and the Northeast, with dozens of stations undergoing phased redevelopment to enhance passenger amenities and connectivity.

The scheme focuses on comprehensive, long-term station modernisation through detailed master plans aimed at improving access roads, circulating areas, waiting halls, toilets, lifts and escalators, along with better cleanliness, free Wi-Fi and modern passenger information systems.

Executive lounges, business meeting spaces, landscaping and upgraded station façades are also being incorporated.

Officials said the initiative also promotes local entrepreneurship through 'One Station One Product' kiosks, creating new economic opportunities for local communities.

Under the Northeast Frontier Railway zone, 92 stations have been identified for redevelopment, including 60 across the Northeast.

Of these, 50 stations are located in Assam, four in Tripura and one each in Sikkim, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram and Nagaland, making Assam the largest beneficiary in the region.



Haibargaon railway station became the first completed Amrit Bharat station in Assam and was inaugurated in May 2025. Developed on the theme "Virasat Bhi Vikas Bhi," the redeveloped station blends modern amenities with Assamese cultural elements and includes Divyangjan-friendly infrastructure.

Significant progress has been reported across multiple railway divisions in Assam.

Under Alipurduar Division, Fakiragram has achieved 88 per cent physical progress, Kokrajhar 78 per cent, Dhubri 80 per cent and Gauripur 82 per cent. In Rangiya Division, Majbat station has reached 98 per cent completion and Viswanath Chariali 97 per cent.

Chaparmukh station under Lumding Division has recorded 85 per cent progress, while North Lakhimpur station and Simaluguri Junction under

Tinsukia Division have each achieved 65 per cent progress. Mendipathar station in Meghalaya has reached 73 per cent completion.

Officials said the upgraded stations are expected to improve ease of travel, generate employment and business opportunities, and emerge as hubs of socio-economic activity, reflecting the government's push for inclusive and future-ready development across Assam and the Northeast.

Maha Shivratri puja draws devotees in Demow

HT Correspondent
DEMOW, Feb 16: Maha Shivratri celebrations began in Demow on February 15 night, with large numbers of devotees visiting temples across the town to offer prayers to Lord Shiva. Since Sunday morning, devotees thronged the Demow Raichai Sarbanjanin Shiva Mandir and other local temples to perform rituals and seek blessings.

Many also travelled to the historic Shiva Douli in Sivasagar to offer prayers on the auspicious occasion.

At the World Peace Retreat Centre premises in Demow's Barua Changmai Gaon, a 40-foot-tall temporary Shivaling was installed on February 14 as part of the celebrations. The venue also featured symbolic displays of the 12 sacred Jyotirlingas of India — Somnath, Mallikarjun, Mahakaleshwar, Omkareshwar, Vaidyanath, Bhimashankar, Rameshwar, Grishneshwar, Kedarnath, Tryambakeshwar, Vishwanath and Nageshwar.

Visitors at the retreat centre were able to view an art gallery, a live depiction of Shiva-Shankar, and a healing garden. The special arrangements and exhibitions concluded on February 16.

Hamukjaan villagers stage 'No Road, No Vote' protest in Ledo

HT Correspondent
MARGHERITA, Feb 16: Residents of Hamukjaan village in Ledo under the 83rd Margherita Legislative Assembly Constituency staged a protest on Monday demanding urgent road development and basic infrastructure, raising slogans of "No Road, No Vote."

Villagers said they have been facing se-

vere neglect for decades, with poor road conditions, lack of proper drainage and inadequate sanitation facilities continuing to affect daily life.

They alleged that the situation worsens during the monsoon, when waterlogging and muddy pathways make movement extremely difficult and disrupt access to schools, healthcare services and markets.

No. DWCD(BTC)/299/2025-26/5, Dated Kokrajhar, the 16th February '2026.

PRESS NOTICE INVITING TENDER

Tender No. DWCD/BTC/29/2026

The Joint Director cum CHD, Women & Child Development, BTC, Kokrajhar invites online bids from eligible Suppliers / Firms for Supply of office equipments in various offices under Women & Child Development Deptt., BTC under SOPD-G fund, FY 2025-26.

Details may be seen at website <http://assamtenders.gov.in> and also in the office of the undersigned during office hours.

Sd/-

Jt. Director cum CHD,
Women & Child Development,
BTC, Kokrajhar.

IPR(BTC)/C/2025-26/4036

QUOTE OF THE DAY

It's always too early to quit.
-Norman Vincent Peale

BNP's victory and India

The landslide win of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) in the national elections in Bangladesh held on February 12 is a positive development in the geopolitics of not only South Asia, but also augurs well for the bilateral relationship between India and its eastern neighbour. BNP getting more than two-thirds of the total 300 seats in the new parliament by defeating the main rival Jamaat-e-Islami, known for its fundamentalist stance, is a big relief for the Hindu minorities in Bangladesh, as also the Narendra Modi-led government in India. There are major lessons from the February 12 elections which may have termed "historic" since the July Revolution of 2024 which led to the ouster of the Sheikh Hasina government on August 5, 2024. This was mainly engineered by students. The students body formed their party, National Citizens Party (NCP) and fought elections in alliance with the Jamaat-e-Islami. There were only two major alliances. Of course, it must be recalled that the Awami Party, the erstwhile ruling party for most of the years since 1972, was banned from participating from the 2026 general elections.

The elections were held free and fair. The voting percentage crossed 60 per cent and the people voted with enthusiasm as if they were enjoying a festival. The EU observers were happy that the elections were held impartially. There were few clashes even though there was tense rivalry between the two contending groups during the poll campaign. The BNP has been able to get the support of the people on the basis of its moderate approach and its emphasis on giving a stable government. The people were fed up with continuous turmoil which was affecting their livelihood. Tarique Rahman, the current BNP supremo and the son of the late former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, has shown maturity so far. Despite thumping victory, he has appealed to his supporters not to hold any victory parade. This is a welcome move to avoid clashes with Jamaat supporters, who are talking of polling irregularities.

For India, Tarique Rahman as the Prime Minister is the best possible option to improve bilateral relations, which got derailed under the interim government of Dr. Muhammad Yunus, following the ouster of the Awami League government in August 2024. Indian policy makers made a lot of mistakes in dealing with Bangladesh in the last 18 months. The latest was the BCCI decision at the instance of the BJP to ask KKR to disallow the Bangladeshi cricketer Mustafizur Rahman to play in the IPL. Until then, anti-India sentiments were at a low ebb. The election campaign was on. This mistake could have been avoided by India. But, it was done aggravating the anti-India mood in Bangladesh, spanning all political parties.

SC hearing on Sabarimala in April to impact Assembly Polls

By: Dr Gyan Pathak

With the Supreme Court scheduling the petitions challenging its 2018 Judgment allowing women to enter into the Sabarimala temple in Kerala for hearing before a nine-judge constitution bench from April 7 to 22, it is most likely to impact elections not only in Kerala but all 5 states and UTs, because the time of hearing is overlapping with the elections to be held around this time, and also on account of hearing of similar petitions clubbed with it, including the right of Muslim women to enter mosques, Parsi women who married out of their faith to enter their religious place or worship, and the female genital mutilation practiced by the Dawoodi Bohra Shia Muslim community.

Before going into detail how it could be a turning point in Constitution law as well as politics in the country, we need to take into consideration first what is Sabarimala case of Kerala. The Sabarimala Temple in Kerala traditionally barred menstrual age women aged roughly 10-50 from entering, a custom rooted in devotees' belief in Lord Ayyappa's celibacy. In 2018, the Supreme Court struck down this exclusion as unconstitutional, allowing women of all ages to enter the shrine. That led to large protests, strikes and sustained political controversy in the state.

Left Democratic Front (LDF) led by Communist Party of India (Marxist) CPI(M) has supported the Supreme Court verdict and implementation of women's entry, seeing it as part of gender equality and reform. However, ahead of 2026 polls, the government have become more cautious and ambiguous, emphasising pilgrim welfare, consensus and harmony rather than taking a firm ideological or legal position. Leaders have suggested party and government positions may not be identical, and have avoided clear public endorsement until the Supreme Court hearing. LDF is clearly trying to repair trust with conservative Hindu communities, that opposed 2018 verdict, even hosting events like a Global Ayyappa Sangamam to broaden appeal. LDF is reposition itself, but the government will have to take a firm stand in the Supreme Court.

As for the chief opposition in the state United Democratic Front (UDF) is concerned, state congress leaders have criticised the LDF government for ambiguity and demanded it clarify whether it will uphold or withdraw support for the 2018 verdict in the Supreme Court context. Some Congress leaders frame their own position as standing by "traditions and sentiments of devotees", appealing to voters who oppose changes to Sabarimala customs. At the national level Congress has had mixed or shifting positions on this issue, sometimes supporting constitutional equality and at other times seeking to align with local sentiment. They are trying to take advantage by highlighting LDF's ambiguity or weaknesses on the issue.

National Democratic Alliance (NDA), especially BJP have strongly opposed the 2018 verdict and campaigned against women's entry, treating the issue as central to protecting Hindu tradition. This stance has been used to mobilise Hindu cultural sentiment, especially among communities that felt alienated by the implementation of the judgment. Though BJP has little base in Kerala, the party is emphasising this issue to consolidate its social base among Hindus. Indian Union Muslim League, an ally of UDF, has opposed the Supreme Court verdict on Sabarimala and generally supports preservation of age-old religious customs. Its position dovetails with the sentiments of conservative religious voters in the state, and that messaging influences UDF dynamics.

Since the timing of the Supreme Court hearing is politically sensitive, parties may tailor their messaging to either support tradition to appeal to conservative and religious voters, or champion constitutional principles to appeal to progressive voters. It will polarise voters on religious ground and communities may shift their allegiance to political parties.

The most important thing is that the nine-judge constitution bench review will not be confined to one Sabarimala temple, but it would examine the broader constitutional question about the scope of religious freedom under Article 25-26, the essential religious practices doctrine, and how these interact with equality under Article 14-15 and dignity of women. Therefore, the outcome will be potentially significant, and will impact not on Hindus but Muslims, Parsi, and other women also. It is at this point, the hearing could mark a turning point in Indian constitutional law, and may redefine the constitutional balance between faith and fundamental right.

Given the posturing of the political parties, CPI(M) is likely to claim vindication of its 2018 stand. At national level, the Left could express support for constitutionalism, but in states with strong conservative religious bases, it may tread cautiously to avoid backlash. Congress is likely to adopt a calibrated position - Publicly talking for gender justice and will avoid direct confrontation with religious establishments. Congress may try to reclaim "constitutional protector" space without appearing anti-faith. (IPA Service)

India's growing influence and strategic importance in global politics

Observing the recent trends in global politics reveals a profound and transformative shift in the international balance of power, where India has successfully established itself as a central force. Previously, India's role in the competition among the world's major powers was confined merely to that of a spectator or a minor partner, but in the current context, this perception has completely changed. Today, it has become almost impossible to imagine any significant diplomatic decision or a lasting resolution to geopolitical issues without India's active participation. This transformation is not a sudden occurrence; rather, it is the natural outcome of a continuous process spanning several decades, driven by thoughtful foreign policy and internal economic reforms. As the world order moves toward multipolarisation, India's rise brings a new message of hope not only for South Asia but for the entire globe.

The foundation of India's new-found confidence lies in its vast population—which is not merely a matter of numbers but a creative human resource—along with a robust democratic framework and a rapidly advancing economy. India's progress in world politics signals the end of Western dominance and points toward a new world order in which the Asian continent is poised to assume leadership.

India's increasing influence in the global economy and its rapid expansion have become one of the decisive factors in today's geopolitics. At a time when many advanced and powerful economies are grappling with recession or slowed growth, India has consistently maintained a stable and promising growth rate. This economic resilience has positioned India not only as a massive market but also as a reliable alternative centre in global production and supply chains. Foreign investors and multinational corporations have begun prioritising India as an alternative to China, naturally enhancing its importance. Extensive development of domestic infrastructure, the remarkable spread of the digital economy, and the entrepreneurial mindset emerging among the younger generation have strengthened India's economic base. When a nation's economy grows strong, its foreign policy becomes more independent and powerful. India has precisely used its economic strength as a diplomatic tool to establish relations with various countries on an equal footing. By providing financial assistance, extending loans, and offering immediate relief during disasters or natural calamities to poorer and developing nations, India has built an image of itself as a donor and genuine partner in the world. This economic capability has placed India in a position where it can advocate for its interests and global welfare without appeasing anyone. Every ripple in the global economy affects India, and India's economic policies, in turn, influence global markets; this mutual interdependence proves that India has now become indispensable in the world order.

The most striking aspect of India's emergence as the voice of the "Global South"—the developing and poorer nations of the world—represents a significant development in global politics. For a long time, the problems and opinions of these countries were ignored by advanced nations. However, India has taken leadership of these nations and powerfully presented their issues on the world stage. On matters such as the impact of climate change, debt burden, food crises, and energy security, India has consistently spoken on behalf of developing countries. India has always believed that global development should not remain confined to a few wealthy nations; rather, its benefits must reach every corner of the planet. The efforts India has made in various international forums to in-

clude smaller countries from Africa, Latin America, and Asia are commendable. Instead of trapping other nations in debt, India has offered cooperation in human resource development, technology transfer, and education. This selfless collaboration has established India as a true friend to these countries. In demanding reforms in international institutions such as the United Nations, India has also gained the support of these nations. Under India's leadership, the Global South has now emerged as an organised force in world politics, capable of challenging the old world order. For India, this leadership is not merely



India's foreign policy is its "strategic autonomy"—the ability to take decisions independently without aligning with any particular camp. Evolving from the policy of non-alignment adopted during the Cold War era, India has now embraced the principle of "multi-alignment." This means India has succeeded in maintaining cordial relations even with mutually antagonistic countries simultaneously. Thanks to this strategic positioning, India has built close ties with the United States in technology and defence, while preserving its longstanding friendship with Russia. Similarly, amid conflicts in West Asia, India maintains balanced and positive relations with both Israel and Arab nations. While most countries in the world are compelled to choose one side, India prioritises its national interests and adopts an independent stance. This position has projected India as a credible mediator in resolving global conflicts. The world now perceives that India's opinions are not influenced by external powers and that it always stands for justice and peace. This independent foreign policy has added a new dimension to India's sovereignty and increased global respect for the country. It has demonstrated that even as a developing nation, India's role in shaping world policies is no less than that of any superpower. Many analysts argue that in today's divided world, only India possesses the capacity to engage with everyone and bring all parties to the same table.

India's emergence as the voice of the "Global South"—the developing and poorer nations of the world—represents a significant development in global politics. For a long time, the problems and opinions of these countries were ignored by advanced nations. However, India has taken leadership of these nations and powerfully presented their issues on the world stage. On matters such as the impact of climate change, debt burden, food crises, and energy security, India has consistently spoken on behalf of developing countries. India has always believed that global development should not remain confined to a few wealthy nations; rather, its benefits must reach every corner of the planet. The efforts India has made in various international forums to in-

clude smaller countries from Africa, Latin America, and Asia are commendable. Instead of trapping other nations in debt, India has offered cooperation in human resource development, technology transfer, and education. This selfless collaboration has established India as a true friend to these countries. In demanding reforms in international institutions such as the United Nations, India has also gained the support of these nations. Under India's leadership, the Global South has now emerged as an organised force in world politics, capable of challenging the old world order. For India, this leadership is not merely

DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

a tool for expanding political influence; it is a moral responsibility that paves the way for establishing equality and justice in the world.

India's enhanced capabilities and self-reliance in defence and security have shaped it into a trusted military power. Previously known only as an importer of weapons, India has now achieved unprecedented success in manufacturing and exporting arms through indigenous technology. This shift has added a new dimension to India's military strength while reducing dependence on other countries. India's role has become particularly crucial in ensuring security in the Indian Ocean region. A large portion of global trade passes through these maritime routes, making the security of this area essential not only for India but for the entire world. The Indian Navy has drawn global attention through its efficiency in combating piracy, disaster mitigation, and security surveillance in this region. India has also taken a leading role in building global opinion against terrorism and advocating stringent measures. India has made it clear that terrorism is not merely one country's problem but an enemy of humanity, and everyone must unite to fight it. This strong stance has helped form a united front against terrorism on the international stage. In any security crisis arising anywhere in the world today, India's cooperation is given high importance. India's military modernisation and strategic partnerships help maintain the balance of power in Asia, preventing any single power

from achieving unchallenged dominance.

The digital payment system developed in India, known as UPI, along with its digital identity and public service delivery models, has initiated a revolution worldwide. What even wealthy nations have not fully accomplished, India has implemented at very low cost and on a massive scale. Most importantly, India has shown eagerness to share this technology with other developing countries rather than keeping it confined within its borders. This "digital diplomacy" has elevated India's "soft power" to a unique level. In the field of space research too, India's successes have astonished the world. Launching missions to the Moon and Mars at remarkably low cost and deploying artificial satellites demonstrate India's recognised expertise. By building satellites for neighbouring countries and providing space technology support, India has taken regional cooperation to a new level. This technological capability positions India as a frontrunner in the economy and security of the future. India's approach of using science and technology for human welfare sends a positive message to the global community that technology can be used not only for profit but also for service.

India's leadership in addressing global challenges such as environmental protection and climate change has established it as a responsible world power. Although developed nations bear responsibility for pollution caused by industrialisation, India's proactive interest and approach toward solutions remain unparalleled. The international initiatives India has taken to promote solar energy and renewable sources have received widespread appreciation worldwide. Without slowing its development pace, India has presented before the world a model of how an environmentally friendly lifestyle can be adopted. By blending the Indian cultural tradition of harmonious coexistence with nature into modern policies, India has outlined a sustainable future. The alliances India has formed with various countries for disaster-resilient infrastructure have become a ray of hope for small island nations. India has consistently advocated for climate justice, urging wealthy nations to acknowledge their historical responsibilities and provide necessary assistance to poorer countries. In the area of food security too, India has assisted the world. During global food crises, India has exported food grains to various countries, demonstrating humanitarian values. India's role here is not merely political but entirely rooted in human values, earning it a place in the hearts of people worldwide.

The contribution of the Indian diaspora behind India's massive rise is undeniable. Indians scattered across nearly every country have secured important positions in those nations' economies and societies through their skills, hard work, and talent. Today, individuals of Indian origin occupy top positions in the governments and major multina-

tional companies of many leading countries. These successful diaspora members serve as a living bridge between India and the rest of the world. They promote Indian culture, values, and thought processes on the global stage while indirectly safeguarding India's interests. The worldwide acceptance of yoga, Ayurveda, and Indian spiritual philosophy is further evidence of India's growing soft power. These cultural ties deepen and make political relations more trustworthy. When people of two countries share spiritual connections, building governmental friendship becomes easier. India regards this human resource as a strategic asset and maintains strong ties with them. This global Indian community functions as an invisible yet powerful force in expanding India's global influence.

Of course, along with India's increased importance in world politics come certain challenges and responsibilities. India's long-standing effort to secure permanent membership in the United Nations Security Council has not yet fully succeeded, although most countries in the world support it. Reforming the old world order is a difficult task, hindered by entrenched interests. Nevertheless, India continues to advance in this direction with patience and diplomatic skill. Additionally, border disputes with neighbouring countries and regional instability sometimes attempt to obstruct India's global objectives. However, India adheres to the policy of resolving these issues through dialogue and peace. Ensuring energy security and creating employment for its vast population remain critical concerns for India. Without a strong domestic economy, extending influence globally becomes difficult; therefore, India must maintain a balance between internal development and its global role. Despite all these challenges, India's journey has not halted. On the contrary, every challenge has made India stronger and more experienced. The world now understands that the future depends on India's development and stability.

In conclusion, India's growing importance in world politics has shown the world that democracy and development can progress together, and power can be used not only to suppress others but also to assist them. Under India's strong leadership, the dream of building a peaceful, prosperous, and just world is moving toward realisation. India's ancient philosophy of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam"—meaning "the entire world is one family"—has gained new relevance in today's divided world. India seeks to position itself as a "friend to the world" and a partner in global progress. This cooperative attitude and constructive vision will shape India into an indispensable leader of the future world. There is no doubt that India's triumphant journey will play a key role in reshaping the global map in the days to come. (The author is the recipient of the 'Yuba Lekhak Sanman - 2025' from the Government of Assam)

After the BNP sweep: New Delhi's Dhaka dilemma

By: Dipak Kurmi

The resounding victory of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party in Thursday's parliamentary elections marks a watershed in Bangladesh's political evolution, signalling both the end of the Awami League's prolonged dominance and the re-emergence of a political force that has spent years in opposition. Party chairman Tarique Rahman is now poised to assume the office of prime minister, inheriting a nation reshaped by upheaval since the mass student-led uprising of July 2024. That mobilisation, fuelled by public discontent over governance, economic distress, and allegations of repression, irreversibly altered the country's political equilibrium. Riding a wave of organisational resurgence and electoral promises that resonated deeply with a fatigued electorate, including loan interest waivers for farmers, two million jobs for the youth, free education for women, and a zero-tolerance policy toward violence against minorities, the BNP secured a decisive mandate. Its return to power is thus not merely an alternation of parties but a structural inflection point in Dhaka's domestic and external orientation.

The domestic implications of this transition are profound. The BNP must transform campaign rhetoric into credible governance while addressing the deep fractures left by political polarisation. The pledge of economic relief to farmers and job creation for young people speaks directly to Bangladesh's demographic and developmental anxieties. Youth unemployment has been rising even as growth moderates, and the once buoyant garment sector faces uncertainties stemming from global demand fluctuations and compliance pressures. Inflationary pressures and foreign exchange constraints have compounded these vulnerabilities. Delivering on International Monetary Fund reform commitments, restoring investor confidence, and stabilising the currency will require disciplined fiscal management and institutional reform. Economic fragility, if unaddressed, could circumscribe foreign policy choices and render Dhaka susceptible to external leverage from powerful bilateral partners or multilateral lenders.

Yet the BNP's victory carries ramifications

that extend well beyond domestic policy. It heralds the onset of a recalibrated foreign policy, one likely to be guided by the imperatives of strategic autonomy and diversified partnerships. For India, which shares a 4,000-kilometre land border with Bangladesh, the stakes are particularly high. Bilateral cooperation has long been integral to curbing cross-border insurgency, denying sanctuary to anti-India militant groups, and stabilising the sensitive eastern and north-eastern frontiers. The geography of proximity makes estrangement costly and collaboration indispensable. Nevertheless, ties have frayed in recent years, marked by unease over the treatment of minorities and episodic flashpoints such as the Board of Control for Cricket in India's decision to expel Mustafizur Rahman from the Indian Premier League, a move that inflamed public sentiment in Bangladesh and deepened mutual distrust. Symbolic disputes in South Asia often acquire disproportionate resonance, reflecting underlying sensitivities about dignity and reciprocity.

India's scepticism towards the BNP has historical roots. During its previous tenure, the party's alliance with Jamaat-e-Islami and allegations of cross-border insurgent activity generated apprehension in New Delhi. The 2004 seizure of ten truckloads of sophisticated weapons believed destined for the United Liberation Front of Assam remains etched in India's strategic memory as a cautionary episode. Such events reinforced perceptions that BNP administrations were less attentive to India's security concerns. However, the party's return to power does not automatically portend hostility. Electoral pledges from Tarique Rahman have emphasised continued cooperation on counterterrorism, progress toward resolving the Teesta water-sharing dispute, and protection of Hindu minorities based on principles of equality and mutual respect. These signals suggest an attempt to recalibrate the tone of engagement, projecting India not as a hegemonic overseer but as a partner in sovereign parity.

The Teesta issue, long emblematic of the complexities of federal politics and transboundary water management, will test this recalibration. Progress requires political will not only in Dhaka

but also in New Delhi and the Indian state of West Bengal. A mutually acceptable settlement could unlock broader goodwill and symbolise a renewed commitment to equitable resource sharing. Equally consequential is the commitment to safeguard minority communities, particularly Hindus, whose security reverberates across borders. Any communal violence would strain bilateral ties and undermine Bangladesh's social cohesion. The BNP's zero-tolerance promise, therefore, is both a domestic imperative and a diplomatic necessity.

While seeking pragmatic engagement with India, the BNP is expected to maintain close defence ties with the People's Republic of China and pursue rapprochement with Pakistan. This triangulation reflects a broader strategy of diversified alignments rather than exclusive fidelity to any single power. China's expanding economic and military footprint in Bangladesh pre-emptively shapes the transition and encompasses infrastructure financing, defence cooperation, and trade integration. For Dhaka, Chinese engagement offers leverage and developmental opportunity; for India, it raises concerns about strategic encirclement in the Bay of Bengal. Simultaneously, outreach to Pakistan, long a sensitive dimension of Bangladesh's identity politics, underscores the enduring interplay between historical memory and contemporary diplomacy. The BNP's approach appears calibrated rather than ideological, privileging flexibility over alignment.

One of the most delicate bilateral irritants remains the continued presence in India of Sheikh Hasina, who has been convicted and sentenced to death in absentia for ordering the 2024 crackdown that reportedly killed up to 1,400 protesters. Bangladesh's interim government had demanded her extradition in unusually strong terms, and with the BNP now in office that demand is likely to intensify. Hasina's fate may become a litmus test of New Delhi's willingness to engage the new dispensation on its own terms. India will have to weigh legal frameworks, humanitarian considerations, and strategic calculations in responding to such requests. Mishandling this issue could inflame nationalist sentiment in Bangladesh or expose India to

charges of interference.

Domestically, the BNP must navigate the tension between its historical ties with Islamist groups and its pledge of inclusive governance. The party's electoral majority insulates it from dependence on hardline partners, yet societal religiosity has deepened over decades. Ensuring the safety of minorities while maintaining political cohesion will test the government's resolve and administrative capacity. Failure to prevent communal violence would not only undermine domestic stability but also reverberate in India, where public opinion remains acutely sensitive to developments affecting Hindu communities across the border. The management of identity politics, therefore, is inseparable from foreign policy.

For India, the appropriate response to Bangladesh's transition demands restraint and strategic patience. Moral posturing, overt partisanship, or any appearance of favouring one political formation over another would erode trust. Instead, New Delhi should emphasise institutional continuity, deepen security cooperation, expedite resolution of outstanding issues such as water sharing, and signal respect for Bangladesh's sovereignty equality. Engagement must be anchored in mutual benefit rather than asymmetry. Economic interdependence, shared security imperatives, and cultural affinities provide durable foundations that can withstand political oscillations if handled with sensitivity.

Bangladesh now stands at a calibrated crossroads. The BNP's ascent reshapes the domestic power structure and recalibrates the country's diplomatic posture, yet it does not predetermine antagonism or alignment. Much will depend on how Tarique Rahman balances promises of reform with the realities of governance, and how India responds to a neighbour seeking both partnership and autonomy. In this evolving landscape, prudence, imagination, and mutual respect will be indispensable. The choices made in Dhaka and New Delhi over the coming months will determine whether this moment of political transition becomes a source of renewed cooperation or a prelude to strategic estrangement. (The writer can be reached at dipakkurmipltd@gmail.com)

Medical Myths: IBS myths and facts

By: Annie Lennon

Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) is a chronic gastrointestinal disorder that affects around 11% of adults worldwide.

Symptoms include:

- Abdominal pain
- Excess gas
- Bloating
- Sudden, urgent need to use the bathroom
- Changing bowel habits.

While relatively common, IBS is often misunderstood. To help us dispel some prevalent myths about this condition, we spoke with Dr Ashkan Farhadi, a gastroenterologist at MemorialCare Orange Coast Medical Center in Fountain Valley, CA, and Dr Mollie J. Jackson, a gastroenterologist at the University of Kansas Health System.

1. We know what causes IBS

Dr Farhadi told Medical News Today that although research is uncovering more about IBS, we still do not know what causes it.

While certain foods such as dairy products or spicy foods may trigger symptoms, they do not cause the condition. He noted, however, that post-infectious IBS can be caused by bacteria such as *Campylobacter jejuni*.

2. Stress causes IBS

In recent years, research has suggested that levels of mental stress influence gut bacteria composition and play a key role in IBS via the gut-brain axis.

Dr. Farhadi says, however, that people with and without IBS generally face similar amounts of stress, meaning that it may be how people manage stress — rather than stress alone — that influences whether or not they may experience IBS symptoms.

"In my book on IBS, [I wrote about a study showing] that when a person is stressed, numbers of mast cells in their gut in-

crease. So stress doesn't just increase the release of hormones and mediators in the gut; it also changes the anatomy of the gut in a way that makes it more sensitive to stress," he explained.

"This means that even if you come out of that stressful period, your gut is not the same gut you had before. IBS symptoms triggered by stress can thus linger even though the stress is gone. And this is very common in patients with IBS," he added.

Dr. Farhadi also mentioned a study he conducted that found that subjective perception of well-being is linked to fewer symptoms of IBS.

Previous research has also suggested that psychological, social, and genetic factors may all play a role in the development of IBS symptoms.

3. Doctors only diagnose IBS via 'fancy tests'

"IBS can be diagnosed without fancy tests," Dr. Farhadi told us. "With the right clinical criteria, doctors can diagnose IBS with 97% accuracy in 5 years. No other test in the medical field has that kind of accuracy."

"We diagnose IBS based on the Rome IV criteria: Patients with IBS should report symptoms of abdominal pain at least once weekly — on average — in association with a change in stool frequency, a change in stool form, and/or relief or worsening of abdominal pain related to defecation," explained Dr. Jackson.

"There are subtypes of IBS, and you may have predominantly diarrhea, constipation, or a mixed pattern. Patients often also experience bloating, but his symptom is not needed in making the diagnosis," she added.

4. IBS is curable

There are different ways of treating IBS, including a mixture of prescription medication and

lifestyle changes tailored to each person's individual situation.

"I can assure you in the overwhelming majority of cases, management is very cheap and simple: fiber, probiotics, reassurance, and exercise," said Dr. Farhadi.

When it comes to medication, according to Dr. Farhadi, it can be a "trial and error" experience. However, it can help relieve the symptoms caused by IBS, alongside other interventions.

"Ultimately, there is no cure for IBS," Dr. Farhadi noted, and sometimes medication may "only [work] like a bandaid for symptom relief. I have to repeat prescriptions for medications like management of bacterial overgrowth with antibiotics. Ultimately, there is no cure for IBS."

5. IBS is uncommon, does not affect quality of life

"IBS is often a chronic, debilitating, and common disorder of the gut-brain interaction," said Dr. Jackson.

Its "prevalence in North America is 10-15% and is associated with increased health care costs," she emphasized, adding that "It can significantly affect patients' quality of life."

"One study highlighted the negative impact of IBS with patients reporting that they would give up 10-15 years of their life expectancy for an instant cure for their condition."

6. All types of exercise help IBS

While Dr. Farhadi agreed that some kinds of exercise do help IBS, he said that not all exercise is the same.

"Competitive exercise doesn't relieve stress — it produces stress. The same is true for weight-lifting in the gym if you have to pay a lot of attention to what kind of weight you're lifting, how you're pulling this

muscle, and how you're pushing that muscle," he noted.

He also said that many runners have what is known as "runner's run," or diarrhea after running for long periods. Thus, he warned, it is very likely that long periods of running can cause IBS symptoms to flare.

7. Meditation helps

While some studies suggest that meditation may help relieve symptoms of IBS, research is ongoing.

"We are continuing to understand the brain-gut-microbiome axis and how it plays a role in IBS," said Dr. Jackson. "Gut-directed psychotherapies have been shown to be beneficial in improving IBS symptoms."

"Meditation and mindfulness have shown to help stimulate changes in the brain and how we process thoughts, sensations, and emotional responses, and this may positively affect how we perceive and interpret signals from the gut, thus improving IBS symptoms," she added.

That said, different kinds of meditation may work differently for different people. While it may not work for everyone, Dr. Farhadi recommends "mindless meditation," which includes walking for 30 minutes per day on the same route until it gets so boring that one stops paying attention to their surroundings.

"That's a meditative walk — you do meditation and walk together. It's a stress reliever to reboot your system. But it needs a lot of practice. After 1 year, you may get into that zone for 1 minute out of the 15 you're trying to do," he said.

8. Cutting out lactose helps

A recent review found that, although many patients with IBS report milk intolerance, there is no conclusive link between IBS and lactose intolerance.

As around two-thirds of the



world's population is lactose intolerant, it is reasonably likely for someone to be lactose intolerant and have IBS. This means that cutting out dairy products may help relieve gastrointestinal symptoms.

"Many patients with IBS associate their symptoms with eating and try to ease their symptoms by avoiding certain foods," said Dr. Jackson. "An elimination diet involves removing multiple foods out of your daily diet and then slowly reintroducing them to help identify trigger foods."

"The most studied diet for IBS is the low FODMAP diet. FODMAP foods can lead to increased gas and distension and the triggering of meal-related symptoms in patients with IBS. Dairy is a high FODMAP food, and for some/may be a dietary trigger, but this is not universally true," she explained. "Food choices can be overwhelming and if available, a gastrointestinal dietitian can help guide you in this process," she added.

9. Natural treatments work for IBS

Natural remedies such as peppermint oil and cardamom have shown some promise in relieving symptoms of IBS and gastric ulcers. However, research into natural remedies is limited, so they may not be universally helpful.

"Black cardamom seeds and spearmint are muscle relaxants for the gut, and so they could reduce symptoms," said Dr. Farhadi. "People can try these natural remedies and others as long as they are not really strong chemicals. Many herbal remedies have been around for thousands of years, and people are using them with no problem," he added. Nevertheless, it is always recommended to check with a doctor before taking on any new line of treatment.

10. Fasting relieves IBS

"Imagine you have an engine, and the engine has a problem. Now you turn it off. Or course, you may not have any problems as long as it's off, but how long can you keep it off?" said Dr. Farhadi.

"So, if you reduce the number of times you eat from perhaps three to two times per day, you

may reduce the number of symptoms you experience per day. It may help, but it isn't necessarily the way to go," he explained.

"Fasting, however, is good for other things — such as weight loss and memory," he added.

11. Fiber helps IBS

If a patient has chronic constipation, Dr. Farhadi said that fiber could help. However, if overdone, fiber can lead to bloating from excess gas in the gut.

To avoid this, Dr. Farhadi recommended consuming fiber via a pinch of water-soluble fiber psyllium — a prebiotic — on a spoon of Greek yogurt, which is a probiotic.

12. There is an IBS diet

"There's no specific diet for IBS," said Dr. Farhadi.

"Diets are not only individualized; they are dynamic. One person may be able to drink coffee when on vacation yet experience problems with it during finals. As there is no specific diet for different individuals, there is no specific diet for individuals at all times," he advised. (Courtesy: Medical News Today)

Zimbabwe's quiet cricketing revival

By: Satyabrata Borah

Zimbabwe beating Australia at a T20 World Cup is not just a line in a scorecard. It is a reminder that cricket, for all its power structures and hierarchies, still has room for stories that defy rankings, money, and reputation. It is also a quiet but firm statement that Zimbabwe, a nation many had written off in cricketing terms, still counts.

For years, Zimbabwe cricket has existed on the margins of the global game. Once a competitive and respected side capable of unsettling the best, it slowly faded from the spotlight. Administrative chaos, political interference, financial struggles, and a steady exodus of talent combined to weaken the sport at its roots. There were moments when it felt like cricket in Zimbabwe was surviving more out of habit than hope. International fixtures became rare, players trained with limited resources, and fans learned to expect disappointment rather than miracles. In that context, Friday's victory over Australia carries emotional weight that statistics alone cannot explain.

Australia are not just another opponent. They are a symbol of cricketing excellence, depth, and dominance. Even in the unpredictable world of T20 cricket, Australia carry an aura that commands respect. To beat them on a World Cup stage is to announce your presence in the loudest possible way. For Zimbabwe, this win was not built on bravado or trash talk. It came from discipline, belief, and a collective refusal to be intimidated. The players did not behave like underdogs grateful for a chance. They played like professionals who believed the contest was fair and the outcome open.

What made the victory particularly striking was the calm with which Zimbabwe approached the game. There was no sense of desperation, no reckless attempt to manufacture heroics. Instead, there was a quiet confidence that came from preparation and trust in each other. The bowlers stuck to plans, the fielders chased every ball as if it mattered, and the batters showed patience in moments that demanded it. This was not chaos cricket. It was controlled, thoughtful, and brave.

That composure did not appear overnight. It is the product of players who have learned to endure without constant validation. Zimbabwean cricketers grow up knowing that opportunities will be limited and recognition scarce. Many play without the safety net of lucrative leagues or central contracts that guarantee comfort. They play because they love the game and because representing their country still means something deeply personal. This kind of motivation does not always produce immediate results, but when it does, it often produces performances rich in character.

Cricket could easily have been a lost sport in Zimbabwe. There were years when it seemed inevitable. The infrastructure weakened, domestic competitions struggled, and young players looked elsewhere for careers. Some of the country's most promising talents moved abroad, choosing stability over uncertainty. Fans who once filled grounds learned to lower expectations. In such an environment, even surviving as an international team felt like an achievement. That is why Friday's win matters beyond the points table. It validates the stubborn decision to keep going when walking away might have been easier.

The beauty of cricket lies in its capacity to allow such moments. Unlike sports where physical dominance alone decides outcomes,

cricket rewards planning, nerve, and adaptability. In T20 cricket especially, reputations can evaporate within a few overs. Zimbabwe understood this and played accordingly. They did not try to outmuscle Australia. They thought them. They exploited pressure, waited for errors, and seized momentum when it appeared. This is how belief turns into performance.

For the players, this victory will linger long after the tournament ends. It will shape how they see themselves. Confidence in sport is often fragile, but it can also be contagious. One significant win can change dressing room conversations, training intensity, and personal ambition. Players who once hoped merely to compete will begin to believe they



can win consistently. Young cricketers watching from home will see a future worth chasing. In countries where sport struggles for resources, such belief can be as valuable as funding. This result also challenges the broader cricketing community to reconsider how it treats teams outside the traditional power circle. Zimbabwe, like several other nations, has suffered from a lack of regular high quality competition. When teams are starved of exposure, they are expected to perform miracles without preparation. Friday's win exposes the unfairness of that expectation. It shows that when given chances, these teams are capable of learning, improving, and competing. The gap between elite and emerging nations is not always about talent. It is often about opportunity.

Australia, to their credit, will likely see this loss as a lesson rather than a humiliation. In modern cricket, complacency is punished quickly. But for Zimbabwe, the emotional meaning is entirely different. This is not just about beating Australia. It is about reclaiming dignity. For years, Zimbabwe cricket has been spoken about in the past tense, remembered for what it once was rather than considered for what it could still become. This victory pulls the conversation back into the present. There is also something deeply human about the way Zimbabwe achieved this win. It was not driven by a single superstar performance that could be dismissed as a fluke. It was collective. Everyone contributed in some way, whether through a tight over, a sharp catch, or a steady partnership. Such wins feel honest. They feel earned. They remind fans why they fall in love with sport in the first place.

Cricket's global health depends on stories like this. When only a handful of teams dominate tournaments, interest narrows. Predictability dulls excitement. Upsets reintroduce uncertainty, and uncertainty is where sport thrives. Zimbabwe's victory is therefore not just good for Zimbabwe. It is good for cricket. It reaffirms that the World Cup is not merely a procession for favourites but a stage where effort and belief can still disrupt order.

For Zimbabwean supporters, many of whom have endured years of frustration, this moment will be cherished. It is a reminder that patience can be rewarded. That staying

loyal, even when success seems distant, is not foolish. It also brings a sense of national pride that sport uniquely delivers. In a country facing complex social and economic challenges, such moments offer rare collective joy.

The challenge now is sustainability. One victory, however famous, does not solve structural problems. Zimbabwe cricket still needs investment, transparent administration, and long term planning. Players need regular competitive fixtures to maintain growth. Young talent needs pathways that do not depend on individual sacrifice alone. But what this win does is create momentum. It provides a reference point, proof that progress is possible. If handled wisely, Friday's result can become a foundation rather than an isolated memory. It can strengthen arguments for more inclusion, more fixtures, and more respect. It can encourage administrators to build rather than merely survive. And it can inspire players to aim higher, knowing that the gap between them and the best is not unbridgeable.

In cricket, belief often arrives before consistency. Zimbabwe's victory over Australia is a belief moment. It says that the sport still counts in Zimbabwe, that effort has not been wasted, and that silence and hard work can sometimes speak louder than hype. It reminds the world that cricket's soul does not live only in packed stadiums and billion dollar leagues. It also lives in teams that refuse to disappear.

Zimbabwe's match against Australia will be remembered not just for the result but for what it symbolised. A team that could have faded chose instead to fight quietly. A sport that could have slipped away found new meaning. And cricket, in all its unpredictability, proved once again that it still has room for hope.

Rafi's unsung hero: Umesh Makhija's legacy

By: Dr. Vinod Chandrashekar Dixit

The immortal melody of Mohammed Rafi still echoes in our hearts, and his legacy continues to inspire generations. The song "Mein Zindagi kaasathinbhaatachalaagaya" is a poignant reminder of the legendary singer's timeless impact. Mohammed Rafi left the world on 31st July 1980, but his love still lives on in the hearts of his fans.

In Ahmedabad, a devoted fan, Umesh Makhija, has taken his admiration to an extraordinary level by building a temple in his house dedicated to Mohammed Rafi. Makhija's love story with Rafi's music began more than 60 years ago, and since then, he's collected over 4,000 songs sung by the maestro, including rare tracks in various languages. His treasure trove of memorabilia includes Rafi's glasses, pocket watch, shaving blades, ties, blankets, and even visiting cards.

Makhija's devotion is not just about collecting rare items; it's about celebrating Rafi's legacy and sharing it with others. He says, "There are many fans of Mohammed Rafi Sahab, but I am his devotee. I consider myself very fortunate that Rafi Sahab entered my life." Every day, people visit his temple, and on Rafi's birthday, the celebration is a grand affair. Makhija's temple is a testament to Rafi's enduring impact on Indian music and culture.

The temple is a treasure trove of Rafi's memorabilia, with a room filled with his songs, photos, and rare items. As you enter, you'll see a bed with Rafi's songs written on it, and on the pillows, the first song he sang and the last song he recorded are inscribed, along with his date of passing. The clock in the room is stopped at 10:29, the exact time Rafi Sahab passed away on July 31, 1980. Makhija's mobile numbers end with Rafi's birth (24 12 24) and death (31 7 80) dates.

His 110 carries the numberplate '1067', matching Rafi's iconic black Fiat.

Rafi's impact goes beyond his music; he was a humanitarian, a kind soul, and a true legend. His versatility, command over different genres, and modulating techniques have assured him an immortal place in South Asia's music history and worldwide. He sang for numerous films, including 'Ganga Jumna', 'Chaudhvin Ka Chand', and 'Sasural'. His duets with Lata Mangeshkar are still widely popular, and his solo tracks like 'Babumoshai Zindagi Ke Mat Phool' remain timeless classics.

Makhija's dedication to Rafi's legacy is inspiring, and his efforts to keep the singer's memory alive are commendable. He has made it his life's mission to share Rafi's music with the world and to ensure that his legacy continues to inspire future generations. Makhija's love for Rafi is contagious, and his temple has become a pilgrimage site for fans who want to pay homage to the legendary singer.

As we remember Mohammed Rafi on his passing anniversary, let's celebrate his life, his music, and the love he shared with the world. Let's also acknowledge the efforts of fans like Umesh Makhija, who are working tirelessly to keep his legacy alive. Rafi's music is a treasure that we'll cherish forever, and his life was a symphony of kindness, humility, and passion. Umesh Makhija, a true devotee of Mohammed Rafi, has shown us what it means to love and cherish the legacy of a legend. His temple, filled with Rafi's memorabilia, is a testament to the enduring impact of the singer's music. As we remember Mohammed Rafi, let's pledge to keep his music alive, just like Umesh Makhija continues to do so with unwavering dedication. (The author is a freelance journalist and cartoonist)

When your gut knows first

Gut feeling is a silent pattern recognition built from experience. When life is less noisy and the mind is clear, intuition becomes a reliable early warning system. Bliss Lifestyle improves this wisdom of intuition.

We often think decisions are made by logic alone. Data, charts, reports, and expert opinion appear to guide our choices. Yet many important decisions are first sensed quietly, before they are reasoned out. That inner signal is commonly called gut feeling. It rarely shouts. It simply taps. Most people misunderstand intuition. They treat it either as superstition or as impulse. It is neither. Gut feeling is a compressed experience working below the level of conscious thought. The brain notices patterns long before it forms sentences about them. The body receives that signal as discomfort, caution, or a gentle push to act.

Consider a familiar situation. You read that in the share market, an asset class has risen too fast, and a correction may come soon. You

observe price behavior for days. You sense overheating. No alarm bell rings, yet a quiet alert forms inside. "Act now." If ignored, the moment passes. Later events confirm that the signal was valid. The regret is not about loss. It is about delayed trust. This happened to me recently when the Silver prices dropped drastically, and I could not take action despite my gut feeling. This is how intuition operates in real life. It is pattern memory speaking softly. Experienced pilots, doctors, editors, traders, and negotiators often rely on this faculty. They may not always explain it immediately, but they sense when something is off. Years of exposure train the nervous system to detect deviations faster than conscious analysis can. Gut feeling works best when the mind is not overloaded. Noise blocks subtle signals. Constant distraction, emotional agitation, and hurry reduce intuitive clarity. A restless lifestyle weakens internal listening. A calmer routine strengthens it.

This is why reflective traditions emphasize pause.



Talking Points

Narvijay Yadav

When life has space, perception sharpens. When the body is not under constant stress, internal signals become easier to read. A balanced rhythm of work, rest, and silence improves intuitive accuracy. This connects naturally with the Bliss approach to living, where mental clutter is reduced so awareness can function fully. There is, however, an important distinction to maintain. Fear is not intuition. Greed is not intuition. Urgency is not intuition. Emotional reactions are loud and dramatic. True gut sig-

nals are usually simple and steady. They do not create panic. They create clarity.

Intuition should not replace discipline. It should inform it. The best decisions emerge when inner signals and rational checks work together. A useful method is to pause when the inner alert appears, review the facts quickly, and act if both align. This converts intuition from a vague feeling into a structured tool. Professionals often develop trigger rules to support this process. If a defined condition appears, ac-

tion follows without delay. This prevents hesitation from killing timing. Execution improves because debate reduces. Experience sets the trigger. Discipline executes it. Life offers many such moments beyond markets and money. Choosing partnerships. Accepting roles. Avoiding risks. Trusting people. Leaving unhealthy environments. In each case, the first signal is often internal. Analysis comes later. Children use intuition naturally. Adults train themselves out of it by overvaluing external validation. Maturity is not the loss of intuition. It is the refinement of it.

Listening inward is not a weakness. It is intelligence built over time. When the body signals, pause and check. When patterns repeat, learn them. When intuition proves right, remember the lesson. Over time, this inner advisor becomes more reliable. The mind thinks. Experience calculates. The gut signals. Wise living learns to hear all three. Bliss On. (The writer is the founder of BlissMedia. Views are personal.)

'I am in Geneva with real ideas to achieve a fair and equitable deal'

Germany will keep supporting Lebanon after UN peacekeepers leave, German Prez says

BEIRUT, Feb 16: Germany moved to assure Lebanon on Monday that it will support the Lebanese government even after pulling out German troops deployed as part of UN peacekeepers along the Lebanon-Israel border when their mission ends later this year.

German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier made the announcement during a news conference at the presidential palace near Beirut. Germany's navy, he said, is already training Lebanese troops as they boost their presence in the country's south following the 14-month war between Israel and the Lebanese militant Hezbollah group. The mission of the multinational UN peacekeeping force in southern Lebanon, known as UNIFIL, concludes at the end of 2026, nearly five decades after it was deployed. The force has played a significant role in monitoring the security situation in the region, including during the Israel-Hezbollah war last year. Over the past months, Beirut has said that Lebanon will need a follow-up force to fill the vacuum in southern Lebanon once the UN peacekeepers leave.

"After the end of UNIFIL's mission, Germany will stay by the side of your country to boost state authority," Steinmeier said, without elaborating. It remains unlikely German troops — tasked with preventing arms smuggling by sea and



helping the Lebanese army monitor the country's sea border — would remain in Lebanon. UNIFIL currently numbers about 7,500 peacekeepers, including 179 Germans.

"The Lebanese armed Forces are, of course, the backbone of stability in Lebanon and this means that after UNIFIL's mission we have to think how to strengthen" the army, Steinmeier said.

Steinmeier added that the process of disarming Hezbollah — which was part of a November 2024 US-brokered ceasefire that halted the fighting — should move ahead and that Israel should fully withdraw from Lebanese territory.

Lebanese President Joseph Aoun said Lebanon paid a high price for the Hezbollah-Israel war, which Hezbollah started by firing rockets

into Israel a day after the militant Palestinian group Hamas attacked southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, triggering the war in Gaza. Israel expanded its attacks that included bombardment and a ground operation in September 2024, severely weakening Hezbollah. The Israel-Hezbollah conflict killed more than 4,000 people in Lebanon, including hundreds of civilians, and caused an estimated USD 11 billion in damage and destruction, according to the World Bank. In Israel, 127 people died, including 80 soldiers. "We were forced to live through violent conflicts we did not choose and we bore their burdens. We are no longer able to do so," Aoun said of the Israel-Hezbollah war.

Aoun also said he had asked Steinmeier to have Germany assume a "main role" after UNIFIL, without elaborating what that would entail, and to also ask Israel to abide by the ceasefire and withdraw from Lebanon. He made no mention of Hezbollah's withdrawal from southern Lebanon. (AP)

Iran meets UN nuclear watchdog in Geneva ahead of a second round of US talks

Geneva, Feb 16: Iran's top diplomat met with the head of the UN nuclear watchdog agency on Monday, ahead of a second round of negotiations with the United States over Tehran's nuclear programme.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi met with Rafael Grossi, director-general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, and said he would also meet with Foreign Minister Badr al-Busaidi of Oman, which is hosting the US-Iran talks in Geneva on Tuesday. "I am in Geneva with real ideas to achieve a fair and equitable deal," Araghchi wrote on X. "What is not on the table: submission before threats."

As US President Donald Trump ordered an additional aircraft carrier to the region, Iran on Monday launched a second naval drill in weeks, state TV reported. It said the drill would test Iran's intelligence and operational capabilities in the Strait of Hormuz, the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman.

Iran's drills take place against the US military buildup

Just before the talks, Iran announced its paramilitary Revolutionary Guard started the drill early Monday morning in the waterways that are crucial international trade routes through which 20 per cent of the world's oil passes.

Separately, EOS Risk Group said sailors passing through the region received by radio a warning that the northern lane of the Strait of Hormuz, in Iranian territorial waters, likely would see a live-fire drill Tuesday. Iranian state TV did not mention the live fire drill.

This is the second time in recent weeks sailors have received warning about an Iranian live fire drill. During the previous exercise, announced at the end of January, the US military's Central Command issued a strongly worded warning to Iran and the Revolutionary Guard. While acknowledging Iran's "right to operate professionally in international airspace and waters," it warned against interfering or threatening American warships or passing commercial vessels. On February 4, tensions between the Iranian and US navies rose further after a US Navy fighter jet shot down an Iranian drone that was approaching the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln in the Arabian Sea. Iran also harassed a US-flagged and US-crewed merchant vessel that was sailing in the Strait of Hormuz, the US military reported. (AP)

Tarique Rahman to take oath as Bangladesh's new Prime Minister today



DHAKA, Feb 16: Tarique Rahman will take oath as Bangladesh's new Prime Minister on Tuesday after leading his party to a forceful victory in the crucial general elections.

Breaking with a long-standing tradition, the swearing-in ceremony of the 60-year-old Bangladesh Nationalist Party Chairman would be held at the South Plaza of the Parliament Complex instead of Bangabhaban. President Mohammed Shahabuddin will administer the oath to the new cabinet members at the South Plaza of the Jatiya Sangsad on Tuesday afternoon, state-run BSS news agency reported on Monday.

"The Parliament Secretariat is set to hold the oath-taking ceremony of the new cabinet members at 4:00 pm tomorrow. Earlier, the Parliament Members (MPs) will be sworn in at 10:00 am at the South Plaza of the Jatiya Sangsad Complex," Secretary of the Jatiya Sangsad Secretariat Kaniz Maula told BSS earlier.

BNP has called a parliamentary party meeting at the Parliament Building at 11:30 am to elect the parliamentary party leader.

"As the leader of the majority party, our party chairman, Tarique Rahman, will be the Prime Minister," said Salah Uddin Ahmed, a member of the standing committee of the BNP.

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla will represent India at the swearing-in ceremony of Rahman. Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri and Secretary-General of Lok Sabha Utpal Kumar Singh are also likely to accompany Birla, people familiar with the matter said.

According to the Election Commission (EC), the BNP has bagged 209 out of 297 seats, while right-wing Jamaat-e-Islami secured 68 seats. After his party's victory, Rahman visited the homes of his

political rivals, including Jamaat-e-Islami chief Shafiqur Rahman and National Citizen Party (NCP) Convener Nahid Islam, where he exchanged greetings and held cordial discussions.

Rahman would become the prime minister for the first time. He will replace the interim government chief Muhammad Yunus, under whose tenure Dhaka's relations with New Delhi witnessed a significant downturn.

Bangladesh held the significant 13th parliamentary election on February 12 after a period of tumultuous political vacuum, instability and fragile security situation, including widespread attacks on minorities after the student-led protests brought down the 15-year rule of Sheikh Hasina in August 2024.

Hasina's Awami League party was barred from contesting the polls, which recorded 59.44 per cent voter turnout.

Four candidates from minority communities, including two Hindus, all from the BNP, won in the elections. Goyeshwar Chandra Roy, a member of the BNP's highest policy-making standing committee, and Nitai Roy Chowdhury, one of the vice presidents of the party, won their seats.

The third minority MP-elect is Saching Prui, a senior BNP leader and follower of the Buddhist faith, while the fourth minority candidate, Dipen Dewan, belongs to the Buddhist majority Chakma ethnic minority group.

Hindus comprise approximately eight per cent of the population in the Muslim-majority country of 170 million people.

Maldives President Mohammed Muizzu, Turkish Undersecretary Beris Ekincl and Sri Lanka's Minister of Health and Mass Media Dr Nalinda Jayatissa would be among those attending Rahman's oath ceremony. (PTI)

PM Modi to visit Israel on Feb 25-26

JERUSALEM, Feb 16: Prime Minister Narendra Modi will travel to Israel on a two-day visit from February 25 to 26, sources said on Monday. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu first broke news of Modi's visit while addressing the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organisations on Sunday. "Parliament address on the anvil. Who's coming here next week? Narendra Modi," Netanyahu told the gathering.

"Tremendous alliance between Israel and India, and we are going to discuss all sorts of cooperation. Now, you know, India is not a small country. It has 1.4 billion people. India is enormously powerful, enormously popular," he stressed. A source here told PTI that PM Modi's visit is "likely to be short from February 25 to 26", but "its impact is deep given the popularity Modi enjoys not only in Israel but around the world". While the programme around the visit is being worked out, PM Modi is expected to address the Israeli Knesset (parliament). Modi is likely to touch upon all issues of bilateral and regional interest during his two-day visit.

This would be his second visit to Israel, the first being in July 2017, which was also the first ever by an Indian Prime Minister to the Jewish state. The high-profile visit of the Indian Prime Minister comes on the heels of several other high-level ministerial exchanges from both sides. Minister of Tourism Haim Katz, Minister of Economy and Industry Nir Barkat, Minister of Agriculture and Food Security Avi Dichter, and Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich visited India last year as the strategic partners built up momentum to sign a Free Trade Agreement (FTA).

The two countries signed a Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT) during Smotrich's visit and then a Terms of Reference (TOR) leading to FTA during the visit of Minister of Commerce and Industry Piyush Goyal to Israel in November.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar visited Israel in December when he called upon Netanyahu, President Isaac Herzog, Foreign Minister Gideon Sa'ar and Barkat.

In November, India and Israel inked a landmark agreement to enhance defence, industrial, and technological cooperation, enabling the sharing of advanced technology to promote co-development and co-production.

The Joint Working Group (JWG) of Israel and India met in Tel Aviv in November for their annual meeting, led by the Israel Ministry of Defence (MOD) Director General Maj. Gen. (Res.) Amir Baram and Indian Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh.

"This strategic dialogue with India takes place at a critical juncture for both countries. Our strategic partnership is based on deep mutual trust and shared security interests. We view India as a first-rate strategic partner and are determined to continue deepening cooperation in the fields of defence, technology, and industry," Baram had said after the meeting.

The teams had also deliberated on various issues of common concern, including shared challenges of terrorism. (PTI)

Iran meets UN nuclear watchdog in Geneva ahead of a 2nd round of US talks

GENEVA, Feb 16: Iran's top diplomat met with the head of the U.N. nuclear watchdog agency on Monday, ahead of a second round of negotiations with the United States over Tehran's nuclear program.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi met with Rafael Grossi, director-general of the International Atomic Energy Agency, and said he would also meet with Foreign Minister Badr al-Busaidi of Oman, which is hosting the US-Iran talks in Geneva on Tuesday.

"I am in Geneva with real ideas to achieve a fair and equitable deal," Araghchi wrote on X. "What is not on the table: submission before threats."

Iran open to compromise in exchange for sanctions relief

On Sunday, Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Majid Takht-Ravanchi signaled that Tehran could be open to compromise on the nuclear issue, but is looking for an easing of international sanctions led by the United States.

"The ball is in America's court. They have to prove they want to have a deal with us," Takht-Ravanchi told the BBC. "If we see a sincerity on their part, I am sure that we will be on a road to have an agreement."

"We are ready to discuss this and other issues related to our program provided that they are also ready to talk about the sanctions," he added. Oman hosted a first round of indirect talks between the US and Iran on Feb. 6.

The US is also hosting talks between envoys from Russia and Ukraine in Geneva on Tuesday and Wednesday, days ahead of the fourth anniversary of the all-out Russian invasion of its neighbor.

Similar talks last year between the US and Iran about Iran's nuclear program broke down after Israel launched what became a 12-day war on Iran, that included the US bombing Iranian nuclear sites.

US keeps military pressure high
US President Donald Trump initially threat-

ened to take military action over Iran's bloody crackdown on nationwide protests last month, but then shifted to a pressure campaign in recent weeks to try to get Tehran to make a deal over its nuclear program.

Trump said Friday the USS Gerald R. Ford, the world's largest aircraft carrier, was being sent from the Caribbean to the Mideast to join other military assets the US has built up in the region. He also said a change in power in Iran "would be the best thing that could happen."

Iran has said if the US attacks, it will respond with an attack of its own.

The Trump administration has maintained that Iran can have no uranium enrichment under any deal. Tehran says it won't agree to that. Iran has insisted its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes. However, its officials increasingly threaten to pursue a nuclear weapon. Before the June war, Iran had been enriching uranium up to 60% purity, a short, technical step away from weapons-grade levels. (AP)

Delhi summit 'important moment' to unlock full benefits of AI, says UK Deputy PM

LONDON, Feb 16: The UK's focus during the AI Impact Summit starting in New Delhi on Monday will be on championing how artificial intelligence can supercharge growth, unlock new jobs, improve public services and deliver benefits for people across the globe, the British government has said.

Led by Deputy Prime Minister David Lammy and AI Minister Kanishka Narayan, the UK delegation is keen to highlight how AI can improve everyday life in every corner of the world and make the case for AI

as an engine of renewal that can help doctors diagnose faster, teachers personalise learning, councils deliver services in minutes and businesses create the next generation of good jobs.

"This summit is an important moment in determining how we can work together with our international partners to unlock the full benefits and potential of AI, while baking in robust and fair safety standards that protect us all," said Lammy, in a pre-summit statement. (AP)

Rubio meets Orbán in Budapest as US, Hungary are to civilian nuclear pact

BUDAPEST (HUNGARY), Feb 16: US Secretary of State Marco Rubio was in the Hungarian capital on Monday for meetings with Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and his government during which they plan to sign a civilian-nuclear cooperation agreement heralded by US President Donald Trump.

Trump has been outspoken in his support for the nationalist Orbán in the Hungarian leader's bid for reelection in two months. Orbán and his Fidesz party are facing their most serious challenge in the April 12 vote since the right-wing populist retook power in 2010. The stop in Hungary's capital follows Rubio's visit to Slovakia on Sunday, after he previously attended the Munich Security Conference in Germany.

Led by Euroskeptical populists who oppose support for Ukraine and vocally back Trump, Slovakia and Hungary represent friendly territory for Rubio as he pushes to shore up energy agreements with both Central European countries.

Widely considered Russian President Vladimir Putin's most reliable advocate in the European Union, Orbán has maintained warm relations with the Kremlin despite its war against Ukraine while currying favour with Trump and his MAGA movement.

Many in MAGA and the broader conservative world view Hungary as a shining example of successful conservative nationalism, despite the erosion of its democratic institutions and its status as one of the EU's poorest countries.

In a post on his Truth Social site earlier this month, Trump endorsed Orbán for the coming elections and called him a "truly strong and powerful Leader" and "a true friend, fighter, and WINNER."

Trump has praised Orbán's firm opposition to immigration, exemplified by a fence his government erected on Hungary's southern border in 2015 as hundreds of thousands of refugees fled Syria and other countries in the Middle East and Africa. Other US conservatives admire Orbán's hostility to LGBTQ+ rights. His government last year banned the popular Budapest Pride celebration and allowed facial recognition technology to be used to identify anyone participating despite the ban. It has also effectively banned same-sex adoption and same-sex marriage, and disallowed transgender individuals from changing their sex in official documents.

Orbán has remained firmly committed to purchasing Russian energy despite efforts by the EU to wean off of such supplies, and received an exemption from US sanctions on Russian energy after a November meeting in the White House with Trump. Apparently trusting that his political and personal affinity with the US leader could pay even greater dividends, Orbán and his government have sought to woo Trump to Hungary before the pivotal April 12 elections — hoping such a high-profile visit and endorsement would push Orbán, who is trailing in most polls, over the finish line. (AP)

India, Britain can become world's best places for AI adoption: UK minister

LONDON, Feb 16: The big artificial intelligence laboratories may be found in the US and China, but India and Britain can become the best places in the world for the adoption of AI, UK Minister for AI and Online Safety Kanishka Narayan has said.

The Bihar-born Labour MP from Wales, who is in India to attend the AI Impact Summit, which opened in New Delhi on Monday, believes the technology presents huge benefits across the services, healthcare and life sciences sectors. Narayan's core message during last year's two-city tour this week, covering Bengaluru and Delhi, will be to highlight that both countries are pursuing the same objective of ensuring the "exceptional" economic opportunity of AI is tapped into responsibly.

"A lot of the big AI labs are in the US or in China. The opportunity for the UK and India is to become the best places in the world for the adoption of AI; not necessarily just the invention of AI," Narayan told PTI in an interview. "I think that's a really important and big area. I'm thinking adoption in areas like services, in areas like healthcare. India has got a huge population and a large-scale, innovative healthcare sector as well. The UK has a world-leading life sciences sector anchored by the NHS (National Health Service) — huge exchanges to be done in learning there, in particular."

"The second thing is how we think about the next iteration of R&D in AI... with a focus on front-



tier AI and semiconductors. And then the third is shaping responsible AI, because I think we have a great opportunity as two countries grounded in similar values to make sure that AI works for everyone. How we develop those standards on assurance, on governance, on responsible use of AI is a really important part of it," he said.

The 36-year-old, who has the distinction of being the first Welsh member of Parliament of Indian heritage, will be pitching the UK as a prime location for Indian AI firms to invest and expand.

"The UK should be on top of their mind because it is one of the top three AI places in the world. We have, both in terms of research quality and volume of startups, more unicorns than France and Germany combined; by far the biggest tech ecosystem in Europe. We are among the global top three — the US, China and then the

aganda glorifying troops deployed to fight in Russia's war against Ukraine, such as establishing a memorial wall and building a museum. Analysts see it as an effort to bolster internal unity and curb potential public discontent. Kim in recent months has sent thousands of troops and large quantities of military equipment, including artillery and missiles, to fuel Russian President Vladimir Putin's war on Ukraine, as the leaders align in the face of their separate confrontations with Washington. (AP)

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'The judicial commission will also examine the larger issues surrounding illegal mining'

Judicial panel probing mine blast to identify lapses, suggest reforms: Meghalaya CM

SHILLONG, Feb 16: Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma on Monday said the judicial commission constituted to probe the recent coal mine blast will not only examine the circumstances that led to the explosion but also identify lapses by authorities or individuals and recommend administrative and institutional reforms to prevent a recurrence of such incidents.

Noting that 33 people died in the blast at an illegal coal mine in Thangsku area in East Jaintia Hills district on February 5, Sangma, in a statement in the assembly, said the judicial panel will also suggest rehabilitation measures for people dependent on coal mining and examine whether the state should seek constitutional exemptions or modifications to central mining laws under provisions of the Sixth Schedule.

The chief minister said the government is committed to curbing illegal mining while promoting scientific mining practices, noting that three projects have already received approvals and 20 more proposals are at advanced stages of clearance with the Centre. "The judicial commission will not only investigate the February 5 incident but also examine the larger issues surrounding illegal mining and propose long-term solutions, which will be placed before this House," Sangma said.

The CM said the crackdown on illegal coal mining has been intensified, with the mobilisation of five enforcement teams, supported by gazetted officers, armed battalion personnel and mining officials to



conduct raids.

He informed the House that 62 FIRs related to illegal coal extraction have been filed so far, including 57 after the incident, along with five FIRs for illegal transportation of coal and two related to seizure of explosives.

Authorities have seized 15,224.72 metric tonnes of coal and dismantled six cranes used in illegal mining operations, while six vehicles involved in illegal transportation

have also been confiscated, he said, adding drone surveillance has been intensified to monitor mining activities.

The chief minister said prohibitory orders under Section 163 of the BNSS were promulgated around mining areas in East Jaintia Hills to prevent obstruction of enforcement operations and deter illegal activities.

Sangma said a large-scale search and rescue operation involving multiple agencies was launched after the blast. While 18 bod-

ies were found on the first day, four were recovered on February 6 and two on February 7. Several other injured persons succumbed later.

Relief measures have been initiated, with Rs 24 lakh disbursed to the next of kin of eight deceased persons so far, while the process of payment of ex gratia to the other affected families was underway, the chief minister said.

The search and rescue operation was formally called off at 5 pm on February 9 after consultations with all agencies involved.

Sangma said a suo motu FIR was registered at Kliehriat police station under sections of the BNS, MMDR Act and Explosive Substances Act.

According to preliminary investigation, the blast was likely caused by the use of explosive substances during illegal mining operations, he said, adding that unstable underground conditions and the presence of machinery posed significant risks to both trapped miners and rescue personnel.

A special investigation team (SIT) headed by the DIG (Eastern Range) was constituted on February 12 to probe the incident, and seven persons have been arrested in connection with the case.

The state government has constituted a judicial inquiry commission under the Commission of Inquiry Act, 1952, headed by retired Justice R S Chauhan, with retired IPS officer H Nongpluh and retired IAS officer Peter Dkhar as members. The panel has been given six months to submit its report. (PTI)

BJP ally IPFT urges

Tripura CM not to interfere in Kokborok script debate

AGARTALA, Feb 16: The choice of script for Kokborok language should rest solely with its native speakers, a senior leader of the Indigenous People's Front of Tripura (IPFT), an ally of the BJP-led coalition government in Tripura, said on Monday.

The remark comes amidst escalating political differences within the alliance, particularly between Tipra Motha Party (TMP) and the BJP, over adoption of Roman script for Kokborok.

Talking to the reporters, IPFT general secretary Swapan Debbarma said Chief Minister Manik Saha speaks Bengali as it is his mother tongue.

"He should avoid issuing needless statements on this matter. The question of which script suits Kokborok best must be settled by those who use the language in their everyday lives", he said.

Debbarma said views offered by individuals, who are not properly acquainted with the language, amount to avoidable interference and the CM must also understand that it is not necessary for him to comment on every issue.

In recent political speeches, Saha has opposed the use of the Roman script and argued in favour of developing own script.

Debbarma also referred to the Left Front's decline in the state's tribal belts, linking it to the party's opposition to the Roman script.

"The Left lost its hold in the hilly areas because it resisted the Roman script without offering any valid grounds. The ruling party should therefore remember that political authority does not last forever," he said.

He added the CM's stand might reflect a personal view, noting that no formal policy decision had been announced either by the BJP or the state government.

"It may simply be the CM's individual standpoint. While he is entitled to his perspective, neither the BJP nor the government has issued any official policy decision on the script so far. For the board examinations beginning in the next few days, students remain free to write their answers in either Roman or Bengali script for Kokborok subject," Debbarma said. (PTI)

Wanki Lowang appeals to shun practice of age-old jhum cultivation



HT Correspondent

DIBRUGARH, Feb 16: Arunachal Pradesh forest minister Wanki Lowang on Monday made a fervent appeal to the people of the state to go for massive plantation drive and shun the practice of age-old jhum cultivation in order to deal with one of major problem - water crisis - across the state.

Rampant felling of trees had resulted in water crisis across our state, and I am afraid if the situation continues, we are going to face a major crisis in the days to come.

Lowang said this during his speech as chief guest of the 51st Central Oriah Celebration held at the General Ground in Longing on Monday.

Lowang also stated that the Oriah festival provides an opportunity to the people to pay rich tribute towards nature and thanked the organizers for organizing the festival in such a grand way.

MLA Thangwang Wangham, as the chief patron, also wished the people in his speech and appealed to the people to keep up their age-old traditional and cultural values so that the newer generation could learn from it.

Earlier, the welcome address was delivered by Wangnyem Wangsu, President of the Celebration Committee. The guests were welcomed beating of the log drum, which is known as kham in Wancho language.

The traditional group dance by women groups dressed in their beautiful traditional attires from Ni-

aunu and Zedua was a treat to watch by the crowd, which included some foreigners too.

Arunachal Pradesh Governor Lt. General K.T. Parinaik (Retd), too extended his warm greetings to the people of Arunachal Pradesh in general, and to Wancho brethren in particular on the joyous occasion of Oriah Festival.

He wished that the vibrant festival strengthen emotional bonds, reinforce the spirit of brotherhood, and usher in peace, prosperity, and harmony in our society.

In his message, the Governor said that festivals are jubilant expressions of joy, compassion, and our shared humanity.

Tribal festivals, in particular, keep alive age-old legends, traditions, and ancestral wisdom, passing them on to future generations.

The Oriah Festival, celebrated to seek the blessings of Almighty Rangwa for a bountiful harvest, fills the Wancho community with hope and pride while safeguarding its rich cultural heritage.

It nurtures respect for elders, strengthens bonds within and across communities, and brings people together in a spirit of unity to protect, celebrate, and rejuvenate the vibrant traditions of the Wancho people.

On this auspicious occasion, I pray that Almighty Rangwa bestows His choicest blessings upon all, bringing happiness, good health, and prosperity to every home, the Governor said in his message.

Dibang project vital for regional growth, energy security: Arunachal minister

ITANAGAR, Feb 16: Arunachal Pradesh minister Passang Dorjee Sona has said the 2880 MW Dibang Multipurpose Project will play a crucial role in accelerating regional development, creating employment opportunities and strengthening India's renewable energy capacity, while assuring full support from the state government for its timely completion.

Sona made the remarks during an inspection of the project site in Lower Dibang Valley district on Sunday, where he led a high-level state government team to review the progress of ongoing construction, officials said.

Sona, the tourism and rural works minister, was accompanied by Roing MLA Mutchu Mithi, Dambuk MLA PuiNyoy Apum, Tourism Secretary Ramphoa Ngowa, the deputy commissioner, and other senior officials of the district.

The team inspected various components of the strategically significant project, which, upon completion, will be one of India's largest hydropower projects.

NHPC executive director and project head Narendra Kumar briefed the visiting delegation on



the status of key works, including dam construction, infrastructure development and the creation of associated facilities required for smooth execution.

He also appreciated the continued cooperation and support extended by the state government.

Expressing satisfaction over the scale and pace of construction, Sona observed that the project holds immense importance for the socio-economic progress of the region.

He said it would not only boost power generation but also generate local employment and improve connectivity and infrastructure in surrounding

areas. The minister reiterated the government's commitment to extending all necessary assistance to ensure successful implementation of the project.

The 2880 MW Dibang Multipurpose Project, being developed by NHPC on the Dibang River in Lower Dibang Valley district, is envisioned as a major hydroelectric and flood moderation initiative in the Northeast.

Once completed, it is expected to significantly enhance hydropower generation capacity in the region and contribute to India's clean energy goals, officials said. (PTI)

Two women militants arrested in Manipur

IMPHAL, Feb 16: Security forces have arrested two women militants belonging to different banned outfits for their alleged involvement in extortion in Manipur, police said on Monday.

The arrests were made in Imphal West and East districts on Sunday, a police statement said.

Twenty-nine-year-old Sanasam Ongbi Santikumar Devi, an insurgent of the United National Liberation Front (Koireng) outfit, was nabbed from Nongpok Inghkol area in Imphal East district. Another woman militant, identified as Mutum Joshika Chanu (19), of Kangleipak Communist Party (Apunba) outfit, was apprehended from her residence at Lamdeng in Imphal West district, it added. (PTI)

CM Khandu launches organic red rice from Tawang, highlights heritage farming



ITANAGAR, Feb 16: Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu on Monday launched 'Rakta' rice, organic red rice from Tawang district, describing it as a symbol of traditional farming wisdom, heritage preservation and sustainable agriculture in the state.

"Launched Rakta Rice, a premium organic indigenous red rice from Tawang, Arunachal Pradesh," Khandu said in a post on X, underlin-

ing that the initiative brings local agricultural practices to a wider platform.

Emphasising its cultural and nutritional value, he said the product is not just a food item, but a representation of the state's identity and traditional knowledge systems.

Highlighting its origin and significance, the chief minister said the rice is produced and marketed by Rakta Organic, an initiative of Pema Tsewang of

Grengkhar village.

"The initiative brings our traditional high-altitude farming wisdom to a wider market," Khandu said, while pointing to its potential to generate livelihood opportunities while promoting local entrepreneurship.

Describing the larger significance of the initiative, the chief minister said the product stands for more than commercial success.

"More than a food product, it represents preservation of traditional seed varieties and the agricultural heritage of our people," he said, stressing the importance of protecting indigenous crops and promoting sustainable farming practices in the state.

Red rice has traditionally been cultivated in the high-altitude valleys of Tawang by the Monpa community using age-old methods adapted to the cold climate and mountainous terrain, officials said. (PTI)

Centre sets up 5G lab at NIT Meghalaya to boost innovation

SHILLONG, Feb 16: The Centre has set up a 5G laboratory at the National Institute of Technology in Meghalaya's East Khasi Hills as part of a nationwide initiative of the department of telecommunications to strengthen the regional innovation ecosystem, officials said on Monday.

With this, eight such laboratories have been established across the northeastern region to accelerate next-generation telecom technologies, according to an official statement.

The labs will provide students and researchers hands-on exposure to advanced systems such as 5G networks, Internet of Things (IoT), Artificial Intelligence (AI), edge computing and other emerging digital applications.

The lab is expected to play a key role in skill development, research and creation of solutions tailored to the needs of the region, it

added.

The initiative aligns with the Centre's Digital India and Atmanirbhar Bharat vision, focusing on building domestic capabilities in next-generation communication technologies and enhancing youth participation in advanced research, the statement added.

The applications developed through these labs are expected to support sectors such as healthcare, education, agriculture, smart infrastructure and disaster management, which are considered critical for the region's development.

Officials added that the lab at NIT Meghalaya is likely to encourage collaboration between academia and industry, enabling experimentation with real-world 5G applications and fostering innovation-driven growth in the state. (PTI)

Meghalaya on track to triple its economy by 2032: Guv

SHILLONG, Feb 16: Meghalaya Governor C H Vijayashankar on Monday said the state is on course to triple its economy by 2032, as he called for a collective commitment from legislators to ensure growth translates into better service delivery, sustainable infrastructure and wider opportunities.

In his inaugural address during the assembly's budget session, Vijayashankar also pointed to a 9.66 per cent real GDP growth and sustained post-pandemic expansion.

The state budget for 2026-27 is scheduled to be presented on February 20, assembly officials said. The session will continue till February 27.

Vijayashankar said Meghalaya has emerged as the second fastest-growing state in the country, and the only one to maintain an average growth rate of around 10 per cent for three consecutive years after the COVID-19 pandemic.

The governor said the state's economy has nearly doubled from ₹ 29,508 crore in 2018 to about ₹ 59,626 crore in 2025, reflecting the resilience and potential of its people.

Vijayashankar said the government's 'Vision 2032' roadmap, backed by the Meghalaya Excellence Framework, aims to place the state among the top 10 in the country in per capita



income and performance on Sustainable Development Goals.

On governance and law and order, he said recruitment for nearly 3,000 police vacancies is nearing completion and infrastructure upgrades are underway.

He also referred to the inauguration of the Counter Insurgency and Jungle Warfare School in Baghmara, and progress in erecting boundary pillars along the Assam-Meghalaya border following an inter-state agreement.

The address highlighted infrastructure projects worth over ₹ 12,000 crore across sectors, including roads, power,

agriculture and tourism. Private investment exceeding ₹ 1,800 crore has been mobilised, with a target of over ₹ 8,000 crore by 2032, he said.

The governor also cited the proposed ₹ 22,000-crore Shillong-Silchar greenfield high-speed corridor, expansion of the Shillong airport and ongoing heliport projects. More than 2,960 km of roads have been developed since 2018, while rural road works under PMGSY have connected hundreds of habitations, he said.

Vijayashankar said 97 per cent of villages now have mobile network coverage, and over 6,900 villages are

connected with broadband.

In the social sector, he said over 83 per cent of rural households have tap water connections under the Jal Jeevan Mission, and healthcare infrastructure has expanded with the launch of the Shillong Medical College in 2025.

Per capita health expenditure stands at ₹ 7,690, more than double the national average, while education spending has risen to ₹ 3,654 crore under Mission Education, he said.

Tourism footfall has also risen nearly 60 per cent since 2022, with homestay initiatives generating employment, the governor said.

Sports infrastructure is being expanded ahead of the 2027 National Games, with facilities under development across districts, he said.

On environmental sustainability, Vijayashankar said community-led initiatives such as GREEN Meghalaya are protecting over 51,000 hectares of forest. Efforts are also underway to transition to scientific mining practices following the ban on rat-hole coal mining.

He also informed the House that a judicial inquiry commission has been set up to probe the recent blast at an illegal coal mine in East Jaintia Hills, which claimed the lives of at least 33 people. (PTI)

'Naxal violence to be vanquished by March 2026' Centre resolved to stop infiltrators: Shah

NEW DELHI, Feb 16: Union Home Minister Amit Shah asserted on Monday that the Naxal violence in several states is breathing its last and would be eliminated by March 2026.

Shah, addressing the Delhi Police Raising Day function here, also highlighted the Centre's resolve to develop a security system so strong that not even a single infiltrator can cross the borders.

The last 12 years, since 2014 under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, have been a "golden era" in the history of the country's internal security, Shah emphasised in a statement.

The country faced three problems before 2014, including militancy in Jammu and Kashmir, Left-wing extremism, and the violence in the Northeast, he pointed out.

Naxalism, which spread across 11 states, has always been a major challenge to the country's internal security, Shah said, adding that,



"We are very close to completely eradicating Naxalism, and we will certainly succeed in making the entire country free from Naxal violence by March 31, 2026."

In the Northeast as well, over 10,000 youth have laid down their arms and joined the mainstream, and through over 12 peace agree-

ments, the Centre has done significant work in establishing peace, he stated.

In the coming times, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) will weave a network of CCTV cameras across the country to establish a new security system, Shah noted. "The entire focus of the MHA

will remain on modernising the security system at every land border of the country, making the nation free from infiltrators, and full implementation of the three new Nyay Samhitas (criminal laws)," he said.

Shah lauded the Delhi Police on its Raising Day function for discharging its responsibilities with "excellence and success", highlighting the importance of the city's security meeting the highest global standards.

Shah laid the foundation stones of various projects of the Delhi Police, including an integrated headquarters of its Special Cell. He also inaugurated the first phase of the Safe City Project, involving a modern command control centre with 21,000 CCTV cameras, out of which 10,000 went live in the initial phase.

Shah added that the Safe City Project will significantly enhance Delhi's security in the coming days. (PTI)

'Opposing Vande Mataram treason,' says Adityanath

LUCKNOW, Feb 16: Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Monday said "opposing" Vande Mataram and making "insulting remarks" against national symbols was no less than treason.

He accused the Samajwadi Party and Congress of misleading people in the name of the Constitution and disrespecting the National Song.

Speaking in the Legislative Council during the Budget Session, Adityanath said the state takes pride in its heritage and believes that development rooted in legacy lays the foundation of a bright future.

However, he said, if anyone glorifies "invaders" who "attacked the soul of India" and tried to shackle its faith for political gains, "the new India and the new Uttar Pradesh will not accept it." "You see how statements are made in support of anti-national elements or derogatory comments are passed against symbols of national pride. This is nothing short of treason," he said. Adityanath said the National Song, which was accorded recognition by the Constituent Assembly on January 24, 1950, symbolises India's pride and honour. He said every Indian has a duty to respect national symbols, including the Tricolour, the national anthem, the national song and national icons.

The Centre is celebrating the 150th year of Vande Mataram and recently issued fresh codes related to it. Adityanath said he was grateful to Prime Minister Narendra Modi for issuing a notification making the National Song mandatory at public functions, and said opposing Vande Mataram was an insult to the Constitution and its makers, including B R Ambedkar. "I want to ask the Samajwadi



Party and Congress — on one hand you mislead the public in the name of the Constitution, and on the other, your members say they will not stand for Vande Mataram. What does it mean? You want to live in India but have a problem with the national anthem and national song? This cannot be accepted," he said. Responding to the discussion on the Governor's address, he said 51 members from across parties enriched the debate with their valuable suggestions and upheld its dignity, and thanked them for their contributions.

"The governor's address is a document outlining the government's achievements and future action plans, and is constitutionally presented annually in the Assembly by the governor and in Parliament by the President," he said.

Referring to the Opposition, particularly the Samajwadi Party, he alleged that the "indecorous and inappropriate conduct" not only disrespected a constitutional office but also amounted to an affront to

a woman holding a high post.

He said that it was the collective responsibility of all members to respect constitutional arrangements and offices and not indulge in conduct that sends a wrong message to future generations. Adityanath said the transformation witnessed in the country over the past 11 years had laid a strong foundation in Uttar Pradesh over the last nine years. He said over the period the state emerged as a "Triveni of technology, trust and transportation." He said his government replaced the "policy paralysis, administrative instability and anti-development mindset" that prevailed before 2017 with discipline, decisive leadership, clear policy, and honest intent.

According to him, welfare schemes, employment generation drives, investment promotion and social security measures under the BJP's "double-engine government" established Uttar Pradesh as an attractive investment destination and one of the safest and most self-reliant states. (PTI)

Rahul tutored by NGOs that good days will come for Cong: Rijiju

TAWANG, Feb 16: Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju on Monday claimed that Congress leader Rahul Gandhi is not interested in the smooth functioning of Parliament, and some NGOs have tutored him that "good days" will come for his party and that is why he has been stalling the House.

Rijiju also said that the government is not going to take any more extra steps to "placate" the Congress to defuse the situation in Parliament as he had made "many attempts" so that the House functions properly, but in vain.

"Rahul Gandhi is not interested in running the House. He is interested in making issues. Rahul Gandhi was tutored by some NGOs that your days will come. But their days won't come. In the next elections, their tally (in the Lok Sabha) will further go down," he told PTI in an interview here.

Rijiju, who is on a visit to his Lok Sabha constituency Arunachal West, said the ruling alliance has no problem with the opposition stalling the House as he had made many attempts to defuse the situation, including speaking to senior Congress leader K C Venugopal and a few others.

"We are not going to do anything extra to placate the Congress. The Congress is frustrated because the party is losing election after election. They are desperate to change the situation," he said.

The Union minister claimed there was pressure on the Congress from the smaller parties in Parliament to not stall the House because they lose out their time to speak.

"All opposition is not with the Congress. Smaller parties are not being able to utilise their respective party time. Smaller parties are unhappy with Rahul Gandhi. Some of them have not even signed the motion against the Speaker," he said.

Rijiju said some members of other political parties kept telling him that they wanted the House to function.

Most days of the first part of the Budget Session in the Lok Sabha witnessed disruptions and adjournments after Gandhi was disallowed by the Chair from quoting an article based on excerpts of former Army chief M M Naravane's "unpublished memoir", which has references to the India-China conflict of 2020. (PTI)

Despite Cong flak, Aiyar sticks to claim of Pinarayi Vijayan's return

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, Feb 16: Unfazed by Congress leadership's criticism, Mami Shankar Aiyar reiterated his claim that the Pinarayi Vijayan-led LDF will retain power in Kerala, drawing a sharp rebuke from senior leader Ramesh Chennithala, who dismissed Aiyar's remarks as "unwarranted".

"As a Congressman, I want the UDF to win. As a Gandhian, I am obliged to tell the truth, irrespective of what I wish. I am not a voter in Kerala, but I think he is going to get another term," Aiyar, a senior Congress leader, told PTI Videos, referring to Chief Minister Vijayan.

Attacking Aiyar, Chennithala said, "AICC has clarified that he is no longer in the Congress. He can say anything." His comments on the Kerala government were unwarranted, the Congress Working Committee member said.

Aiyar's remarks come a day after he drew sharp flak from the Congress leadership for predicting Vijayan's return as Chief Minister. Kerala is set to go to the polls in the next couple of months.

Although the former Union Minister said his remarks were blown out of proportion by the media, Aiyar reiterated his view that the LDF government would return to power as it was doing outstanding work.

"I made the speech after hearing Mary Joseph, who is the Principal Secretary of the Planning Board. She listed the achievements. I made the speech after hearing V K Ramachandran (Planning Commission Deputy Chairman), who reinforced everything that Mary Joseph said," he said.

Referring to his interaction with Local Self Government Minister M B Rajesh, Aiyar said he was told that Kerala was the only state in the country to have eliminated extreme poverty, achieved through the Panchayati Raj system.

He also said Rajesh spoke about plans to address climate change, which poses a threat to Kerala.

"The fact of the matter is that they have been an outstanding government and the people of Kerala are so intelligent. I cannot see them voting for anyone but the LDF," he said.

Aiyar said that except for the last Assembly election, governments had changed in every poll in



the state. "If they lose two elections in a row, I won't be surprised," he said. He also said that apart from himself, the only Congress leader he respects is Leader of Opposition V D Satheesan.

"He (Satheesan) and I are the only secular socialists in the Congress party. I am not speaking of the higher level but at the ordinary level. We don't compromise on secularism and socialism," he said.

Asked about UDF leaders claiming that the front would return to power with over 100 seats in the Assembly, Aiyar said he is not from Kerala and not a voter in the state. "Why are you asking me about Ramesh Chennithala's estimation of himself? He has twice lost elections. I don't think he has the right," he said.

He also said it was not for Chennithala to expel him from the party. "It is for Mallikarjun Kharge to throw me out of the party. The Congress President has not sent me a letter of expulsion," he said.

Later, addressing a press conference here, flanked by senior CPI(M) leader Thomas Isaac and minister Rajesh, Aiyar attacked other leaders from Kerala, including Shashi Tharoor.

He said he was sure there were differences within the LDF government. "But they are not played out in public. Within the Congress all the differences are played out in public," he said. He said Satheesan is between the right wing of the Congress and the left wing of the Communist party.

"I am not recommending him for chief ministership. There are Congress leaders whom I greatly admire. Then there are others like K C Venugopal whom Rahul

Gandhi admires," he said.

He said he has a low opinion of Congress leaders other than Satheesan. "Promise me that Satheesan will be the Chief Minister, and I am willing to withdraw my remark that Pinarayi will be the next CM," he said.

Criticising the Thiruvananthapuram MP, Aiyar said, "I have never met a more unprincipled careerist than Shashi Tharoor who, because Congress did not make him the foreign minister, is now trying to become Modi's foreign minister. The Congress party was built on principles, not on opportunism."

Aiyar said he is a thorough Congressman and is not joining any other party.

"If the Congress sends me out, I will find my voice," he said.

He said he does not need the Congress party as it does not need him. He said he once attempted to join the Samajwadi party that was formed after socialism.

"I was told that if I did what I did in Congress, Mulayam Singh would murder me. So no party wants me because I have a voice of my own," he said. He also attacked Prime Minister Narendra Modi on 2002 Gujarat riots.

Speaking on Panchayati Raj, Aiyar said its effective implementation had been carried out by southern states such as Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Telangana. "That is why southern states, on many measures of economic and human development, are ahead of states through which the Ganga flows, like Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, ruled by the BJP and dragging us down," said Aiyar who held the key portfolio in various Congress governments. (PTI)

PM Modi 'surrendered' before Trump: Cong

NEW DELHI, Feb 16: The Congress on Monday alleged that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has "surrendered" before US President Donald Trump in agreeing to the India-US interim trade deal, which, it claimed, will "devastate" the livelihoods of crores of farmers across states. Slamming the Centre, Congress general secretary Randeep Surjewala said trade agreements should not become a path to slavery by "sacrificing a country's sovereignty".

"Trade agreements are the path to economic progress. The very foundation of trade agreements is mutual public interest on equal terms. Trade agreements should not be a path to slavery by sacrificing a country's sovereignty. National and public interests cannot be sacrificed under the guise of trade agreements," Surjewala said at a press conference. Tagging Surjewala's statement at the presser, Congress general secretary in-charge communications, Jairam Ramesh, said the former explained how this trade deal will "devastate" the livelihoods of millions of farmers across states.

"The prime minister has completely surrendered before President Trump - just as he did on May 10, 2025, when he abruptly and unexpectedly halted Operation Sindoor," Ramesh said on X. Through the US-India trade agreement, the Modi government has sacrificed the interests of India's farmers and farms, Surjewala alleged at the presser.

"India's energy security was openly compromised. Serious questions have been raised about India's digital autonomy and data privacy. Instead of standing firmly in defence of India's interests, a helpless government compromised India's sovereignty and self-reliance," he claimed. People are asking whether it is a "majboor sarkaar" (strong government) or "majboor sarkaar" (compelled government), an "Aatmanirbhar Bharat" or "America-nirbhar Bharat", he claimed. Surjewala also said that importing American agricultural and food products into India's agricultural market is a "direct attack" on farmers' livelihoods.

"In the very first point of the February 6 Framework Agreement of the US-India trade deal, India agreed that it would open its market to US agricultural and food products without any import duty," he said.

The question is if processed maize, sorghum, soybean, fruits and other products also come to India, won't they have a direct impact on the country's biodiversity and seed purity, Surjewala asked. Has the Modi government opened the doors for GM Crops in India through the back door, he asked. The Congress leader also said that point 5 of the trade agreement clearly states that, considering America's concerns, India will remove its non-tariff trade barriers.

"America gives its farmers an annual subsidy of about ₹1.45 lakh crore. In contrast, in India, a subsidy of ₹ 6,000 is given per farmer family, but ₹ 25,000 is taken back through expensive diesel, fertilisers, electricity, and pesticides. (PTI)

T'gana municipal polls: BJP wins Mayor, dy mayor's posts

HYDERABAD, Feb 16: BJP's corporators -- Kolagani Srinivas and Y Sunil Rao -- were on Monday elected as Mayor and deputy mayor, respectively in Karimnagar Municipal Corporation.

Telangana BJP president N Ramchander Rao said the Bharatiya Janata Party has successfully formed the Mayor and the deputy in the Karimnagar Municipal Corporation, firmly defeating all attempts by Congress and BRS to subvert the democratic verdict. Rao in a post on 'X' said: "With the BJP at the helm in the Karimnagar Municipal Corporation, we are committed to transforming the city towards Viksit (developed) Telangana - Viksit Bharat".

Of the total 66 wards in Karimnagar, the BJP emerged as the single largest party in the municipal corporation elections, bagging 30, while Congress, BRS, AIMM, AIFB (All India Forward Block) and independents won 14, 9, 3, 3 and 7 wards respectively.

Union Minister of State for Home Bandi Sanjay Kumar is MP from Karimnagar Lok Sabha constituency. In a post on 'X', he said: "History created in Karimnagar. For the first time, a BJP Mayor took oath in the city. Congratulations to Shri Kolagani Srinivas garu on becoming the first BJP Mayor of Karimnagar and Shri Y Sunil Rao garu as Deputy Mayor."

Today is not just a political victory, it is an emotional moment. "It feels like a dream that many of us carried quietly for years. I bow my head to the voters who placed their trust in Hon'ble PM Shri Narendra Modi ji's vision and chose development with dignity," he said. (PTI)

Akhilesh alleges mass deletion of SP supporters' names in SIR

LUCKNOW, Feb 16: Alleging large-scale irregularities in the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, Samajwadi Party (SP) president Akhilesh Yadav on Monday demanded action against those responsible and sought greater transparency in the process.

Addressing a press conference at the party office here, Yadav said the SP would seek time from the Election Commission and submit a memorandum on Tuesday, urging it to clarify under which rules FIRs should be registered and action taken if anyone is found guilty of wrongdoing.

Questioning why the poll panel had not acted so far, Yadav asserted that after meeting the Commission, the party would also raise the issue in the Assembly.

The former UP chief minister demanded that the process of deleting names through Form 7 should be initiated only by the booth level officer (BLO) and not from any other source. He also sought that details, including the Assembly constituency, booth number and the person who submitted Form 7, be made public.

The SP chief also alleged that names of party supporters were being deleted through fraudulent means and that the Election Commission had provided them with "very little" information.

He claimed that in Sakaldaha, 16 voters' names were deleted after alleged forged signatures were submitted in the name of an SP MLA. An analysis of those voters would show they belonged to the PDA (backwards, Dalit and minority) communities, he al-

leged. Claiming that at booth no 365 in the Babaganj Assembly constituency, nearly 100 voters were deleted through forged signatures, Yadav read out the names of several voters, their booth numbers and details of the Form 7 applications allegedly used to remove them.

The SP chief said the party had been presenting data for several days regarding wrongful deletions, but no action had been taken so far.

He also cited the case of a man named Nandlal, alleging that, though the man used a thumb impression, signatures were obtained from him by BJP workers for filing Form 7. Yadav questioned whether any action had been taken against officials concerned in the district.

Alleging similar instances elsewhere, Yadav claimed that in Bhojipura, even a booth-level agent of the SP had his vote deleted.

He further alleged that a "secret meeting" of the Bharatiya Janata Party had decided to target constituencies won by the SP and have voters' names deleted there, a plan he claimed was being implemented at the Assembly and booth levels.

He alleged that an unnamed BJP leader had claimed that 3 lakh votes were deleted in Kannauj and that more were to be removed in other districts.

Yadav also alleged that in Ballia's Sikandarpur Assembly constituency, represented by SP MLA Mohammad Ziauddin Rizvi, the MLA's wife's vote had been deleted. (PTI)

Your decisions can shape India's emergence as a stronger trading partner: President to probationers

NEW DELHI, Feb 16: Underscoring the time of profound global transformation when new rules are reshaping interaction among nations, President Droupadi Murmu on Monday told the Indian Trade Service (ITS) officer trainees their decisions can shape India's economic trajectory for decades to come and asked them to balance openness with protection of core priorities.

Addressing probationers of the ITS, Indian Audit and Accounts Service (IA&AS) and Defence Aeronautical Quality Assurance Service (DAQA), who called on her at Rashtrapati Bhavan, the President said the service they joined gives them an opportunity to serve the nation through every decision and action during their careers.

Murmu told ITS officer trainees to remember that each policy they implement, each trade barrier they address, each agreement they support, will contribute to India's emergence as a stronger and globally more respected trading partner. "You have joined the service at the time of profound global transformation. Digital trade, sustainability requirements, and new global rules are reshaping how nations interact. You stand at a unique intersection: where law meets enterprise, negotiation meets strategy, and where your decisions can shape India's economic trajectory for decades to come," she said.

Asking the probationers to keep national in-



terest as guiding compass and balance openness with protection of core priorities, the President said they will contribute to attracting investment, creating jobs, and fostering environments where Indian businesses can innovate, expand, and compete globally. "I understand that your training at the Indian Institute of Foreign Trade has given you the analytical sharpness and global perspective essential for understanding today's complex trade environment," she said.

In her address to the officer trainees of the IA&AS, the President said that the impact and value addition of the framework of accountability on the governance system is enhanced when there is synergy between the Executive and Audit institutions. "An effective partnership between Audit and

Executive helps to enhance the efficacy of public spending and helps in achievement of desired outcomes," she said. Emphasising that the institution of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India performs a very important function of ensuring accountability of the executive to the legislature, she said the probationers must always strive to uphold the traditions and values of the Constitution and the service.

She told DAQA officer probationers that quality assurance is the "backbone of the entire value-chain" of defence production and their commitment is important for making Atmanirbhar Bharat in defence sector. Murmu said the DAQA trainees are entering in a domain where they must work with precision and vigilance to contribute to national security.

"India is rising as a global power. Our defence production is accelerating. Indigenous aerospace innovation is expanding...You should come up with innovative approaches to contribute to the transformation of our Armed Forces into a technologically-advanced combat-ready force capable of multi-domain integrated operations," she said.

The President said the DAQA probationers will play a critical role in safeguarding country's defence aerospace capabilities and strengthening the operational readiness of Armed Forces. (PTI)

Andhra, Gates Foundation partnership will transform state's development: CM Naidu

AMARAVATI, Feb 16: Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Monday said that the partnership with Gates Foundation will transform the state's development.

Addressing a meeting with Microsoft founder Bill Gates in the presence of ministers and senior officials at the secretariat here, the chief minister expressed happiness over the Gates Foundation extending cooperation for various projects in the southern state.

Naidu also gave a presentation on Swarna Andhra 2047 (golden Andhra) vision, government policies and programmes.

"Today, at the Secretariat in Amaravati, I presented my vision for Swarna Andhra 2047, where our ministers and secretaries also interacted with

him (Gates). We discussed our priority sectors and explored avenues for collaboration with the Gates Foundation to empower our people and enhance their quality of life," Naidu said in a post on 'X'.

Calling Gates' visit to the greenfield capital city of Amaravati "historic", he said it will give a shot in the arm for the development of the southern state. Andhra Pradesh has "all" the resources but needs income now. "With the cooperation of Gates, we will achieve better results in various realms, he said, and added that, "The partnership with Gates Foundation will transform the development of the state."

Observing that the "speed of delivering governance" is the policy of the Andhra Pradesh government, Naidu said technology is being used

widely for this. Amaravati will emerge as a quantum valley, Visakhapatnam as data and AI city, Kakinada green hydrogen valley and Orvakal drone city. The CM said Lekpakshi village in Rayalaseema region will be transformed into an electronic and aero city, while Tirupati into an electronics and space city.

According to Naidu, the southern state has deployed AI in 10 fields and 30 government wings, among other initiatives in various departments.

Recalling his first meeting with Gates back in 1997 as the CM of united Andhra Pradesh and convincing him (Gates) to set up a Microsoft office in Hyderabad, Naidu noted that from that time the IT sector witnessed rapid growth in Hyderabad. Appreciating Naidu's vision, Gates said that

the former is "ahead in thinking amongst global leaders", a release quoting him said.

"India is ahead in digital revolution and both the Prime Minister (Narendra Modi) and the Chief Minister are playing (a) key role in digital revolution," he added.

Observing that the Gates Foundation is according priority to the health sector, the tech czar said the majority of its projects are on health. AI will also be more useful in bringing reforms in the education sector.

He appreciated the efforts of the Andhra Pradesh government in introducing technology in the agricultural sector for the benefit of farmers.

Recalling his association with Naidu, Gates described the former as his "good old friend", ob-

serving that when he was "trying to explain the world on digital governance, Naidu had implemented it," the release said.

Gates said Naidu promoted IT and majority of IT experts came from Hyderabad and Microsoft has majority of its experts from the Telugu states.

Later, Gates and Naidu visited a banana orchard at the picturesque Undavalli village by the banks of the Krishna river and the CM's residence. Gates observed natural farming and the use of AI and drones in agriculture, the release said.

Earlier, Naidu showcased several initiatives of the state government to the Microsoft founder, including WhatsApp governance, Sanjeevani project, greenfield capital city Amaravati, date lake and others. (PTI)

'Nations possessing indigenous critical technologies will remain safe, secure'

Speed up next-gen aero engine development: Rajnath tells scientists

BENGALURU, Feb 16: Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Monday called for expediting the development of next-generation aero engines, saying the country was running short of time.

Noting that even developed nations typically take 25-30 years to develop next-generation engines, he urged Indian scientists to compress timelines in view of the nation's strategic needs.

"We must assume that 20 years have already passed and we now have only 5-7 years left," Singh said, describing it as a call to action aligned with national aspirations.

According to an official statement, the Union Minister visited Defence Research and Development Organisation's (DRDO) Gas Turbine Research Establishment (GTRE) in Bengaluru, and reviewed the status of ongoing projects relating to indigenous military gas turbine engine development.

He was briefed on the establishment's projects on the anvil, interactions with the Indian industry, academia and R&D institutes, and the support provided to the defence forces.

He also visited the exhibition showcasing various indigenous engines and their parts and witnessed the full afterburner engine test of the Kaveri engine.

Interacting with scientists and officials at the DRDO, Singh underscored the critical importance of achieving self-reliance in aero engine technology in the present



rapidly evolving geopolitical landscape. He also stated that every effort is being made to prioritise the development of aero engines in India, the statement said.

"Supply chains are breaking and new ecosystems are developing. Nations possessing indigenous critical technologies will remain safe, secure, and sustain themselves," he stated.

Acknowledging GTRE's efforts in this critical technology domain, Singh exhorted the lab to strive and focus on next generation engines by building a nationwide robust ecosystem, while achieving self-reliance in aero engines.

"We are rapidly moving towards the design and development of the Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA). We have made numerous attempts in the past to achieve expertise in the field of

aero engines. Now, the time has come to complete those efforts," the Minister pointed out. He stressed that India cannot limit itself to only fifth generation engines and must begin the development of sixth generation, advanced technologies as soon as possible.

"Research on sixth generation advanced technologies is the need of the hour. The use of Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning and new materials is increasing. We must stay ahead of the curve."

Singh described aero engine development as an "extremely complex endeavour", integrating thermodynamics, material science, fluid mechanics and advanced mechanical engineering.

Referring to 'Operation Sindoor' to avenge the killing of tourists in Pahalgam in Jammu and

Kashmir, Singh said the defence forces demonstrated India's growing self-reliance in the defence sector during the operation.

Whether it was communication systems, surveillance equipment, or attack weapons, everything was indigenous.

According to him, the indigenous weapon system boosted the morale of Indian soldiers and instilled pride among citizens.

In view of the evolving challenges, it is imperative to focus more on indigenous methods and provide the Indian forces with world-class systems and equipment. Singh praised GTRE for the joint study with the UK for aero engine development, saying the process has been initiated with France as well for aero engines under the National Aero Engine Mission.

"Both France and UK are very advanced in aero engine technology. These collaborations will not only provide us with the opportunity to learn new technologies, but also help us understand the challenges they have faced over the past decades," he said.

The Minister called for capitalising on the opportunities India provides and made a special mention of the free trade agreement between India and the European Union pending for 18 years, which has now been completed.

This trade agreement is an acknowledgement of India's growing economic and political power, he added. (PTI)

9-judge SC bench to hear pleas on religious discrimination against women

NEW DELHI, Feb 16: The Supreme Court on Monday said a nine-judge bench will on April 7 commence the final hearing on petitions relating to discrimination against women at religious places, including Sabarimala Temple, and on the ambit and scope of religious freedom practised by multiple faiths.

In September 2018, a five-judge Constitution bench, by a 4:1 majority verdict, had lifted the ban that prevented females between the ages of 10 and 50 from entering the Ayyappa shrine at Sabarimala in Kerala and held that the centuries-old Hindu religious practice was illegal and unconstitutional.

Later on November 14, 2019, another five-judge bench headed by then CJ Ranjan Gogoi, by a majority of 3:2, referred the issue of discrimination against women at various places of worship to a larger bench.

The bench had then framed broad issues on freedoms across religions, saying they cannot be decided without any facts of the particular case.

Besides the Sabarimala case, the verdict also referred issues of entry of Muslim women into mosques and dargahs and of Parsi women, married to non-Parsi men, to the holy fire place of an Agiary, to the larger bench.

On May 11, 2020, another bench held that its 5-judge bench had the power to refer the questions of law to a larger bench for adjudication while exercising its limited power under review jurisdiction in the Sabarimala temple entry case.

After that, the matters could not



be taken up for almost five years because of the COVID pandemic, and later, they were not taken up by other chief justices.

On Monday, a bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi said a nine-judge bench will begin hearing the petitions on April 7 and will conclude them on April 22.

The CJ asked the parties to file their written submissions on or before March 14. Solicitor General Tushar Mehta for the Centre said he supported the pleas for review of the Sabarimala verdict that allowed entry of women of all age groups to the hill-top shrine in Kerala.

The bench-appointed lawyer Krishna Kumar Singh is the nodal counsel for parties supporting the review of the Sabarimala verdict. It also appointed Shashwati Pari as the nodal counsel for those opposing the review of the verdict.

"We also deem it appropriate that senior advocate K Parameshwar, along with Shivam Singh, are

appointed as the amicus. Singh shall submit the stand taken by all parties before this court," the CJ said.

"The nine-judge bench will begin hearing the Sabarimala review case on April 7, 2026, at 10:30 am. The review petitioners or the party supporting them shall be heard from April 7 to April 9. The ones opposing the review shall be heard on April 14 to April 16. The rejoinder submissions, if any, will be heard on April 21, 2026, followed by the final and concluding submissions by the learned amicus... which is expected to be over by April 22," the order said.

The bench asked the lawyers to adhere to the schedule. Earlier, the bench read out seven questions it had framed on the scope of religious freedom.

Asserting that it was open to addition and deletion of issues framed, the bench said it would consider: "What is the scope and ambit of right to freedom of religion under Article 25 of the Constitution of India?" (PTI)

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SC issues notice to Centre on plea challenging 2023 data protection law

NEW DELHI, Feb 16: In a significant development, the Supreme Court on Monday agreed to examine a batch of pleas challenging the constitutional validity of several provisions of the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023. The top court, however, refused to grant an interim stay on the impugned provisions, saying "by an interim order, it will not thwart a regime introduced by Parliament unless we hear the case."

A bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi issued a notice to the Centre on the pleas challenging certain provisions of the DPDP Act and the Digital Personal Data Protection Rules 2025 over their amendment of the provisions of the Right to Information Act.

The bench also referred three petitions, filed by Venkatesh Nayak on behalf of digital news platform 'The Reporters Collective', journalist Nitin Sethi and National Campaign for People's Right to Information (NCPRI), to a larger bench.

The pleas raised concerns over the "fiduciary" clauses, which allow the central government to

requisition data from any data fiduciary at its discretion.

The bench said the matter pertained to "complex and sensitive issues," and it involved balancing two competing sets of fundamental rights, the Right to Information and the Right to Privacy.

"This is about balancing competing interests. We have to iron out the creases and lay down what constitutes personal information," the CJ said.

Advocate Prashant Bhushan, also appearing for one of the petitioners, pointed to the landmark Subhash Agarwal judgment, asserting that the apex court had already established a framework for balancing RTI and privacy.

However, the bench noted that the new legislative framework required a fresh, deeper examination.

Senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi, also appearing for one of the petitioners, sought to make additional submissions, but the court proceeded to issue notice to ensure a comprehensive response from the Centre.

The Court has scheduled the matter for a hearing in March. Senior advocate Vrinda Grover, appearing in the matter, contended

that the legislation has taken an excessive approach.

"Instead of using a chisel, it has used a hammer and has thus rendered a body blow," she submitted, arguing that the amendments effectively undermine transparency safeguards.

The petitioners have essentially challenged Section 44(3) of the DPDP Act, which amends Section 8(1)(j) of the RTI Act, giving a blanket exemption to the disclosure of personal information.

Before the amendment, personal information could have been disclosed if there was an overriding public interest.

One of the pleas said that the new provision undermines citizens' right to information and transparency in public administration.

It said that journalists and transparency activists frequently rely on access to personal information in limited, public-interest contexts to expose wrongdoing, corruption, or conflicts of interest.

By eliminating the public interest override, the amended provision allegedly tilts the balance decisively in favour of privacy at the cost of accountability. (PTI)

Delhi court notices against Videocon Group founder Dhoot, 12 others in bank fraud case: ED

NEW DELHI, Feb 16: The ED on Monday said a Delhi court has issued notices to Videocon Group promoter Venugopal Dhoot and a dozen other entities after taking cognisance of its chargesheet filed in connection with an alleged ₹61,700-crore bank loan fraud linked to financing the company's oil and gas assets in Mozambique.

The prosecution complaint (chargesheet) was filed on December 18, 2024 and the special Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) court located at Rouse Avenue took cognisance on February 10, the Enforcement Directorate said in a statement.

The court has taken cognisance of the offence of money laundering and has issued notices against the 13 accused, it said. The Videocon Group could not be contacted immediately for comments.

The accounts of Videocon Industries Ltd (VIL) and its group companies turned NPA (non-performing assets) in 2018 and the banks had filed a total claim of ₹ 61,773.02 crore including the NPA of ₹ 23,647.12 crore in respect of SBLC (stand by letter of credit) facility, said the ED.

The agency has quantified the "proceeds of crime" in this case at ₹ 1,136.49 crore. The money laundering case stems from a June 2020 FIR of the CBI.

According to the ED, probe found foreign currency loan facilities availed by the Videocon Group-- the SBLC facility sanctioned by the SBI-led consortium, the Jupiter facility and the Standard Chartered Bank (SCB) facility-- were systematically "diverted" from their sanctioned purposes, which were stated to be development and refinancing of overseas oil and gas assets (in the African country Mozambique).

"The diversion of funds was carried out under the overall control and direction of the promoters of the



Videocon Group, with the active involvement of overseas group entities and intermediaries," the agency alleged. The loan proceeds were allegedly routed through Videocon Hydrocarbon Holdings Ltd (VHHL) and its overseas oil and gas subsidiaries after which the funds were "layered" through a complex web of overseas Videocon Group companies engaged in activities unrelated to oil and gas operations, it said.

These entities included Jupiter Corporation, Venus Corporation, Eagle Corporation, Paramount Global, Quadrant Corporation, Sky Billion Trading and TGDC Guangdong Display Co. Ltd.

These funds were routed back to India and utilised for purposes "wholly unconnected" with the sanctioned objectives, including meeting expenses of non-oil businesses, making investments, and creation of personal and corporate assets, the ED claimed.

The agency found that a "substantial" portion of the diverted funds was "layered" back into India through the books and bank accounts of VIL and its Indian group companies. (PTI)

IIT Madras, Finnish Meteorological Institute partner to launch 'VAYYU' Research Centre

CHENNAI, Feb 16: The Indian Institute of Technology Madras (IIT-M) on Monday announced its partnership with the Finnish Meteorological Institute to launch VAYYU, a virtual research centre focused on aerosol-meteorology interactions, Himalayan atmosphere-cryosphere interactions, and urban air quality.

VAYYU centre aims to integrate advanced climate modelling and Indo-Finnish expertise to deliver fundamental earth system research and improved weather models, stated a press release issued by IIT-M.

The collaboration will focus on advanced simulations and observations to better understand how aerosols influence regional hydroclimate, Himalayan glacier melting, and air quality in Indian megacities, the release added.

A memorandum of understanding was recently signed by leadership from both institutions, including Prof Shanti Pawan and Prof Manu Santhanam from IIT Madras along with



Prof Petteri Taalas and Prof Hannele Korhonen from the Finnish institute.

Welcoming the collaboration, Prof V Kamakoti, Director of IIT Madras, said climate change and monitoring is the most important area to be investigated on a global platform.

Prof Petteri Taalas, Director General of the Finnish Meteorological Institute, noted that the

partnership builds on three years of joint work on Himalayan aerosols to address challenges of importance to India and the wider world.

The centre builds on two major international research initiatives, including the 10 million Euro CryoSCOPE project. This project involves monitoring systems in Kargil to quantify the role of aerosols in accelerating glacier melt and drought or flood conditions in the Himalayas.

Another initiative, the CO-ENHANCIN project, has enabled a Rs 5 crore urban observatory in Chennai to investigate land-atmosphere processes and support local weather prediction.

Prof Chandan Sarangi, the research centre coordinator, explained that the goal is to improve coupled climate-chemistry modelling over India to better understand pollution-climate coupling. The partnership also emphasises human capital development through student and faculty exchanges, winter schools, and summer research internships. (PTI)

Higher conviction in cases after full implementation of new criminal laws: Shah

NEW DELHI, Feb 16: Union Home Minister Amit Shah expressed confidence on Monday that the conviction rate in criminal cases will rise to 80 per cent once the three new criminal laws are fully implemented across the nation in the coming years.

Speaking at the 79th Raising Day parade of the Delhi Police, Shah stated that the fight against Maoist violence is in its final phase and assured that the menace will end by March 2026.

He highlighted that the three new justice-based criminal laws represent a significant milestone achieved by the country over the last 11 years. These laws are expected to enhance the efficiency of case disposal and increase conviction rates after their full implementation in the coming years, he said.

The three new criminal laws -- the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS) and Bharatiya Sakshya Adhinyam (BSA) -- replaced the IPC, CrPC, and Indian Evidence Act on July 1, 2024.

"After full implementation of the new Nyaya Sanhita, our justice system will become the most modern in the world. It will reduce delays in the justice system and will also help in increasing the conviction rate," Shah said, adding that some states such as Assam, Gujarat and Haryana have reported "unprecedented rise" in the conviction rate. Over the past 11 years, under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the country has achieved several significant milestones, and whenever justice is discussed in the country. (PTI)

J-K Police busts multi-crore fake online investment racket; 8 arrested

SRINAGAR, Feb 16: Police have unearthed a multi-crore fake online investment racket and arrested eight persons, including the kingpin, in Jammu and Kashmir's Ganderbal district, officials said on Monday. "Jammu and Kashmir Police achieved success in working out a transnational, multi-crore online investment scam, which used phishing and fake trading platforms," a police spokesman said.

Among the eight persons held was the kingpin of the racket, who was arrested in Delhi, he said. Acting on a complaint by Firdous Ahmad Mir, police in Ganderbal launched a probe into allegations of identity theft and cheating by a gang of online fraudsters.

Ganderbal SSP Khalil Ahmad Poswal constituted a special investigation team (SIT) to probe the matter, roping in experts in it. Collection of evidence by way of arrest of suspects, house searches, records from banks and other departments revealed that there were investment websites on social media/Google like paisavault.com, etc., which lured the general public.

"Once the victims started investing in the fake platforms of coin trading, their amounts were diverted into the bank accounts of persons hailing from Budgam, Srinagar, Ganderbal, Baramulla and multiple other places," the spokesman said.

All such accounts were under the control of the fraudsters, who immediately transferred the invested amount into accounts outside Jammu and Kashmir and even outside the country by way of multiple layering to prevent detection, he said. The main handler of the nexus has been identified as Ekant Yogdutt alias Dr Morphine, a resident of Hissar in Haryana.

"The accused learnt these techniques while doing his MBBS in the Philippines. He also had multiple links with Chinese nationals," the spokesman said. The kingpin conspired with Mohd Ibrahim Shah alias Yawer, Nasir Ahmad Ganie, Maqsood Ahmad alias Dr Albert, Tanveer Ahmad alias Dr Martin, Tawseef Ahmad Mir, Khurshid Ahmad and Ishaq Ahmad, who worked as regional heads and account mobilisers. (PTI)

Being 'King' has never meant power, always responsibility: Shah Rukh Khan

He's King Khan to his fans and the industry and his next film quite coincidentally is called "King" too. Shah Rukh Khan, however, brushes off the power the title bestows on him, saying it's less an identity and more "a reminder to live with heart, humility, and purpose".

"The word 'king' has never meant power to me. It has always been about responsibility - to the people who believe in you and the stories you choose to tell..." Shah Rukh told PTI in an email interview.

The star, first seen in the TV show "Fauji" in 1989, has worn the 'Bollywood king' crown with ease over three decades. Maybe not any more.

"As time passes, you realise that what truly matters is not the title, but the intention behind your work," said Shah Rukh, who has lent his voice to fire-works show "The Lion King: Celebration in the Sky" aboard Disney Cruise Line's latest ship, Disney Adventure next month.

"At this stage of my life and career, the title 'King' feels less like an identity and more like a reminder to live with heart, humility, and purpose. Whether it's narrating a story aboard the Disney Adventure or choosing my next film, what matters most to

me is creating work that brings people together, makes them feel something, and leaves behind a little bit of joy," the 60-year-old said.

Shah Rukh, who began his acting career in English theatre in Delhi, gave voice to Mufasa in the Hindi version of Disney's 2024 film "Mufasa: The Lion King". His sons joined in too - the older Aryan (28) was the voice for Simba and the younger AbRam (12) was the young Mufasa.

He and wife Gauri have a third child. Daughter Suhana, 25, shares the screen with her father in Siddharth Anand's upcoming film "King".

While "The Lion King" clearly holds a special place, classics like "The Jungle Book" continue to entertain the Khan clan. The children are also drawn to Pixar favourites like "Toy Story" and almost anything from the Marvel universe are "huge hits".

"Each generation finds its own connection, but what never changes is how these stories bring us together. Whether it's rewatching a classic at home or sharing a magical moment on a Disney Cruise or at the Parks, that sense of connection stays the same," he said.

Discussing "The Lion King",

he said it will always be close to his heart as it's a timeless story about growing up, understanding responsibility and finding your place in the world.

Disney's "The Lion King" is the coming-of-age story of Simba, a young lion prince who must reclaim his kingdom after the death of his father, Mufasa.

The film explores themes of responsibility, loss, and the circle of life. Shah Rukh, whose association with Disney began in 2004 with the Hindi version of "The Incredibles", titled "Hum Hain Lajawab", said animation's limitless possibilities continue to inspire him and the films have been a big part of their family time.

"I find that there's an emotional honesty to animation... There are no human beings in 'The Lion King', and yet this is a deeply human story at its core, centered around the relationship between a father and son, exploring themes of love and loss. That's the magic of animation.

"It helps us reflect on our own lives and relationships in profound ways. I believe this is why stories such as 'The Lion King' endure and are so well-loved even after 30 years," he said.

Terming his latest project with Disney, which will debut

during the vessel's maiden voyage from Singapore on March 10, a "full-circle moment", Khan said returning to the world of "The Lion King" feels like "coming home".

"I'm excited that more families and fans across Asia will now get to celebrate this classic tale and its iconic music in a brand-new way, creating lasting memories at sea."

"That emotional connection and celebration of storytelling, where nostalgia and newness come together to make magic, are what make this project truly special and why I happily said 'yes'," he added.

"The Lion King: Celebration in the Sky" will feature elaborate pyrotechnics, immersive lighting effects and a music-driven narrative unfolding above the ship. The soundtrack includes beloved songs from the franchise such as "Circle of Life", "Hakuna Matata", "He Lives in You" and "Can You Feel the Love Tonight?".

In Shah Rukh's view, cruises teach you to slow down. "And I think we all need that sometimes."

"When you're surrounded by the ocean, there's calm and perspective. The world feels vast, and your worries feel just a little smaller," he mused. (PTI)



ONE OF HIGHEST PAID ACTRESS IN SOUTH WITH ₹200 CR NET WORTH, CHARGES ₹5 CR FOR AD, ₹10 CR FOR FILM - WHO IS SHE?

Stardom in India goes beyond box office hits, a loyal fan base, brand value, and immense financial power for actors. This is also relevant in the journey of actor Nayanthara, who is widely regarded as one of the richest actresses in South India.

Nayanthara's career

Nayanthara made her acting debut with the Malayalam film Manassinakkare in 2003. Although she didn't become a superstar overnight, she went on to make her Tamil cinema debut with Ayya in 2005, in Telugu with Lakshmi in 2006, both of which earned her recognition. In 2010, she further expanded her horizon with her first Kannada film, Super.

With time, Nayanthara took on diverse roles, gradually building a strong and versatile filmography spanning multiple languages.

Nayanthara with Shah Rukh Khan in Jawan

The biggest moment was when Nayanthara was roped in to star with Shah Rukh Khan in Jawan. Khan, who had freshly returned to films after a long gap, was already the highlight of Jawan. Nayanthara's addition made it even more special as the film went on to earn more than 1,000 crore globally, as per reports.

How much does Nayanthara charge? Years ago, Nayanthara hit headlines with her Tata Sky ad. According to a report by Hindustan Times, Nayanthara was paid a

whopping ₹5 crore for the 50-second advertisement. The ad was reportedly shot over two days and later released in four languages, including Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam and Kannada.

The reports about the satellite-dish commercial remuneration sent shock waves in the industry, reflecting that brands were not merely purchasing her screen time, but they invested in her immediate recognition and powerful recall.

Nayanthara's net worth: Report

After nearly two decades in the film industry, Nayanthara is believed to command close to ₹10 crore per film, with her overall net worth estimated at around ₹200 crore. Reportedly, her revenue streams remain stable and diversified, also driven by endorsements, public appearances, and other investments.

If rumours are true, one of the headline-making acquisitions owned by Nayanthara is said to be her private jet, reportedly worth about ₹50 crore. In her situation, it is believed that it enables her to travel between film sets, cities, and multiple indus-

tries. However, she is yet to confirm the claims.

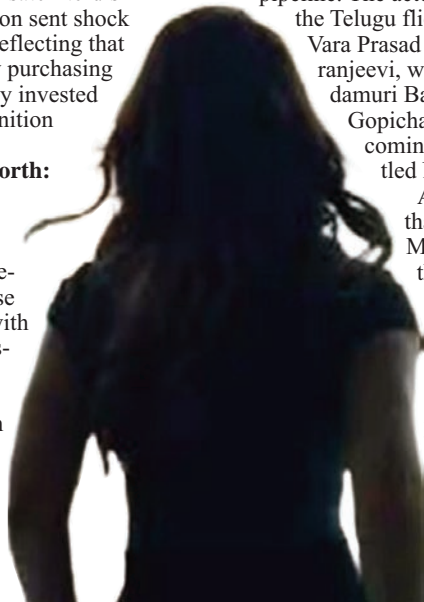
Upcoming work

Regarded as Lady Superstar, Nayanthara has a slew of upcoming films in the pipeline. The actor who was last seen in the Telugu flick, Mana Shankara Vara Prasad Garu, alongside Chiranjeevi, will next star in Nandamuri Balakrishna and director Gopichandh Malineni's upcoming film, tentatively titled NBK 111.

After years, Nayanthara will be returning to Malayalam films with the much-awaited Patriot. It stars Mammootty and Mohanlal together for the first time in 17 years. Fahadh Faasil is also a part of the film.

Besides this, Nayanthara is also a part of two other Malayalam projects-- Dear Students and Pattu.

Meanwhile, Mookuthi Amman 2, the sequel to her acclaimed devotional drama Mookuthi Amman, is also expected to release soon. She has Mannangatti Since 1960, Hi and Rakkayie as her upcoming Tamil releases. (Agencies)



Actor Trisha slams 'distasteful' remarks by BJP leader in Tamil Nadu

With Tamil Nadu BJP chief Nainar Nagenthiran's remarks about her triggering a row, actor Trisha Krishnan on Monday slammed the "distasteful and inappropriate" remarks made by a "person holding a high stature in Tamil Nadu's political space".

The well-known actor posted on her social media a legal communique in the wake of Nagenthiran's comments linking her to actor-politician Vijay.

The statement, dated February 15 and issued through her counsel, clarified, without mentioning the name of anybody, that the actor maintains a strictly neutral political stance and is not affiliated with any political party.

The actor's legal team stated that Trisha never expected such remarks from a "person holding a high stature" in the state's political space. Nagenthiran is also a legislator, representing Tirunelveli Assembly constituency in the Tamil Nadu Assembly.

The communique emphasised that Krishnan has continuously maintained a neutral stand regarding politics in the past and continues to do so in the present.

The statement further noted that Trisha "wishes to be defined" solely by her professional work in cinema rather than any alleged political alignment. It called for responsibility and balance from those in public positions, asserting that personal lives should not be the subject of public discourse.

The controversy erupted after Nagenthiran, while commenting on Vijay's political entry and his party, Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK), made a personal reference to the actor that was widely circulated on social media.

The legal notice, which Trisha posted on her Instagram account with the line, "Disrespect should and always will be called out", requested that the actor's name not be drawn into matters that do not concern her.

Nagenthiran had come under attack from various quarters, including Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam deputy general secretary and Lok Sabha MP Kanimozhi Karunanidhi, for his remarks.

Earlier in the day, Nagenthiran had claimed he never meant to hurt anyone, while talking to reporters in Madurai.

Vijay and Trisha have starred in a number of Tamil hits, including 'Ghilli'. (PTI)



Vetri Kazhagam (TVK), made a personal reference to the actor that was widely circulated on social media.



My goal was to have a legacy: Priyanka Chopra on finding her footing in Hollywood

Actor Priyanka Chopra Jonas says leaving Hindi cinema to make a career in Hollywood was not easy but she was determined to tough it out as she always wanted to have a legacy.

Recalling how she once waited for 15 hours for one shot only for that to be postponed in Hollywood, the actor said, it was something that she, as one of the top actors, did not experience in India.

"I was dealing with a lot when it comes to my work back in India, and I was trying to survive, and I think my goal was, I want to have a legacy. And that's the only way I could wake up every morning and go through the small role that I have to do, and a triple banger trailer, which is 3 actors in one trailer.

"And wait for like 15 hours and not be shot that day. Those are things I hadn't experienced in my career back home. And I was okay to do it every morning because I was like, 'I'm going for long term. I'm going for that legacy,'" she said during India

Conference 2026 at Harvard University in the United States.

Priyanka made her acting debut with the Tamil film "Thamizhan" in 2002 and went on to feature in films such as "Aitraaz", "Krrish", and "Don" franchises. It was in 2015 when her first Hollywood project, thriller series "Quantico" released and now she is one of top Indian stars in international cinema with projects such as "Baywatch", "Isn't It Romantic", "Love Again" and "Heads of State".

The actor, who headlines new Hollywood thriller "The Bluff", said her work in India was turbulent when she came to Hollywood, but her goals were clear.

Priyanka said she recently came across one of her interviews, which she gave around 2011-2012.

"This was 2011-12, whatever many years ago, and I was watching an interview recently, and I heard myself say, 'I want a legacy. I don't want a career. I want a legacy.' And I was thinking about what it meant for me

at that time. What did that mean?"

What did that girl think a legacy would be...What you think your success means at any given time of your life is going to be so different. And that was when I was just starting out in America."

The actor credited her younger self, who was brave and strong but admitted there were choices she regrets.

"And I'm so grateful for my younger self, as she was brave, and she was strong, and that because of her tenacity, and her ability to put all my tears aside, put on my mascara again, you know, wipe myself up, and go and give that interview 20 minutes later, look pulled together, is the reason I can have a different definition of success today," she said.

"My measure of success is being able to spend time with my family, to be able to pick up my daughter from school, to have the luxury to pick and choose work where I can craft time around my family and friends, while I navigate this insane career. And it's only because of that girl who ran so

fast, and so I forgave my younger self, and I do it many times for the things that she did, and the choices that she made, that I don't agree with, but I'm so grateful to my younger self for bringing me where I am today," she added.

"The Bluff", written and directed by Frank E Flowers, will begin streaming on Prime Video from February 25.

Set against a gritty, high-octane backdrop, "The Bluff" follows a former pirate, played by Priyanka, who is trying to leave behind a violent past and protect her family.

The ensemble cast includes Safia Oakley-Green, Temuera Morrison, Ismael Cruz Cordova, Zack Morris and David Field.

The film is produced by filmmaker duo Anthony Russo and Joe Russo, and Angela Russo-Otstot under their banner.

She will also star in S S Rajamouli's "Varanasi" alongside Mahesh Babu and Prithviraj Sukumaran. (PTI)

After stunning Australia, Zimbabwe look for Ireland scalp with maiden Super 8s berth in sight

PALLEKELE (SRI LANKA), Feb 16: On a high after a stunning win over former champions Australia, Zimbabwe would look to continue the momentum against a tricky Ireland side and grab the chance to book a maiden Super Eight berth in the T20 World Cup here on Tuesday.

A win over Ireland will take Zimbabwe to six points and they will continue their unbeaten run, though a Super Eight spot from Group B will still not be guaranteed. Australia — currently on two points from two matches — and Sri Lanka (on four points from two matches) can still reach to six points.

Zimbabwe's final group match is against hosts Sri Lanka on February 19 in Colombo.

In that scenario, the net run rate (NRR) would be the deciding factor.

If Zimbabwe reach the Super Eight, that will be the first time they will progress to the stage in seven attempts.

The African nation has been clinical in the tournament so far.

Their three pacers Richard Ngarava, Blessing Muzarabani and Brad Evans ripped apart the Oman batting line-up with three wickets each, bowling the opposition out for just 103 in their opening match in Colombo.

Their batters, led by Brian Bennett (48 not out), needed just 13.3 overs to chase down the target for an eight-wicket win.

Zimbabwe then emerged as the giant-killers of the tournament, posting 169 for 2 against Australia before shooting the opposition out for just 146 for a 23-run win.

Opener Bennett led the batting show for Zimbabwe once again with an unbeaten 64 while Muzarabani and Evans were on the money with four and three wickets respectively.

While Australia are a depleted side in this tournament marred by injuries, beat-



ing a top team like them will be a huge psychological boost for Zimbabwe going into Tuesday's match against Ireland.

The team management would be looking for Bennett to continue his top form. Other batters like opener Tadiwanashe

Marumani, Ryan Burl and captain Sikan-dar Raza were in good touch in the match against Australia and they would also look to carry that in the Ireland match.

With seven and six wickets respectively from two matches they have played so far, Muzarabani and Evans are in top form, and they will fancy their chances against Ireland.

Ireland, on the other hand, are coming into the match after an easy win over Oman and they would love to end the tournament on a winning note after losing their opening two matches — against hosts Sri Lanka and Australia.

Ireland have much less at stake as compared to Zimbabwe. A win for the European side may, however, complicate Zimbabwe's chances for a Super Eight berth.

Ireland also suffered a major blow on Friday as their captain Paul Stirling was ruled out of the remainder of the T20

World Cup after sustaining ligament damage to his right knee.

Stand-in skipper Lorcan Tucker, however, led from the front with blistering 51-ball 94 to power Ireland to 235 for five, the highest total of this edition of the two World Cup, against Oman to set up a 96-run win.

The Teams :

Zimbabwe: Ben Curran, Clive Madande, Tadiwanashe Marumani, Dion Myers, Sikan-dar Raza, Brian Bennett, Ryan Burl, Brad Evans, Tony Muny-onga, Tashinga Musekiwa, Graeme Cremer, Tinotenda Mposha, Wellington Masakadza, Blessing Muzarabani, Richard Ngarava.

Ireland: Lorcan Tucker, Ross Adair, Ben Calitz, Harry Tector, Tim Tector, Sam Topping, Mark Adair, Curtis Campher, Gareth Delany, George Dockrell, Matthew Humphreys, Josh Little, Barry McCarthy, Ben White, Craig Young. Match starts 3pm. (PTI)

Scotland eye Nepal scalp in T20 World Cup Group C clash

MUMBAI, Feb 16: Scotland's fate hinges on the outcome of another Group C clash but the Richie Berrington-led side would nevertheless look to make the most of the opportunity of taking on a struggling Nepal team in the T20 World Cup here on Tuesday.

A victory for England against Italy on Monday afternoon in Kolkata would be enough for Harry Brook's side to join the West Indies in the Super Eights and knock Scotland out of the race from Group C.

But Scotland, who had joined the competition in dramatic circumstances not long ago, would like to think they would still be in charge of their destiny by the time they take the Wankhede Stadium field for a prime-time clash.

Despite having a better Net Run Rate, Scotland (0.359) are placed third since they have only two points to show in three matches behind England (-0.143), who have four points.

While they lost heavily to England and the West Indies, Scotland dealt a similar treatment to Italy winning by 73 runs.

Against a struggling Nepal outfit, Scotland would not only fancy their chances but also look to better their NRR, especially if the on-song Ital-



ians spring a surprise on England.

But if this turns out to be their final appearance in this T20 World Cup, the Scots would want to sign off with the high of a win. For that, they would still need more consistent performances from both batters and bowlers.

Nepal's reputation and confidence have both taken a severe hit with crushing losses to Italy (by 10 wickets) and the West Indies (9 wickets).

For a team which made an inspirational start against England, losing the last-ball thriller by a mere four runs, Nepal's fight has clearly

petered out on the biggest stage where they look overwhelmed.

The Rhinos have faltered on almost every single count and the third defeat on the trot to the West Indies also shut the doors for making it to the next stage.

Nepal will need all-round improvement as neither their batters nor the bowlers have been able to make a mark.

Dipendra Singh Airee's crucial half-century against the West Indies was the only saving grace on a flat surface, where Nepal terms were outdone by early morning moisture and disciplined line and lengths by

Caribbean pacers.

It not only threw spotlight back on the fact that teams like Nepal would need more international exposure in different conditions for overall improvement, but also the fact that their specialist batters simply lacked discipline in shot selection which led to their downfall.

While Scotland would want to live to fight another day, the contest on Tuesday will be Nepal's final appearance in the tournament where they have enjoyed the benefit of playing at a single venue and in front of their passionate crowd.

Teams :

Scotland: Richie Berrington (c), Tom Bruce, Matthew Cross, Michael Jones, Finlay McCreath, George Munsey, Oliver Davidson, Michael Leask, Brandon McMullen, Brad Currie, Chris Greaves, Safyaan Sharif, Mark Watt, Brad Wheel, Zainullah Ihsan.

Nepal: Rohit Paudel (c), Aarif Sheikh, Aasif Sheikh (wk), Dipendra Singh Airee, Basir Ahamed, Kushal Bhurtel, Sundeep Jora, Lokesh Bam, Gulsan Jha, Karan KC, Sompal Kami, Sandeep Lamichhane, Sher Malla, Lalit Rajbanshi, Nandan Yadav.

Match starts at 7:00pm (PTI)

Fearless Kishan took the game away from us: Pakistan coach Hesson

COLOMBO, Feb 16: Pakistan head coach Mike Hesson said "fearless" Ishan Kishan's marauding fifty was the difference between his side and India, and urged his players to rally after the heavy defeat in the marquee clash of the T20 World Cup here.

Led by Kishan's aggressive 77 off 40 balls, India trumped Pakistan by 61 runs in a Group A match here Sunday night to seal a Super Eight berth.

"I think he's fearless. He's able to score on both sides of the ground. So, he's not just committed to the leg side. We know he's incredibly strong there, but he can reverse. So, if you've got spin, especially in the power play, it can be a challenge," Hesson said in the post-match press conference.

True to Hesson's words, Kishan scored 66 runs off 37 balls against Pakistan slow bowlers, spoiling their spin-heavy strategy on a slow Premadasa pitch.

Hesson admitted that Kishan's approach unsettled his spinners.

"I think the fact that he's in a rare vein of form, applied a lot of pressure to our spinners and probably took them away from the basics, which the pitch was actually doing a lot when we bowled nice and slow and into it, but outside of that, no one really scored better than a run a ball.

"Other than him, Dubai was



slightly better, but it was tough. And that (Kishan's innings) certainly was a standout amongst the whole match, really. The way Kishan played took the game away from us," he added.

The New Zealand-born coach conceded that the massive defeat has left the team disappointed, and the challenge is to come back and play to their potential in the ICC showpiece.

Pakistan failed to put up even a token fight in the chase of 176, getting trounced for 114.

The result has pushed Pakistan (4 points) to the third spot in Group A, behind leaders India and the USA, who also have four points, but enjoy a better net run rate of 0.788 as compared to -4.03 of Pakistan.

Now, Pakistan need to beat Namibia in their last league match to enter the Super Eights.

"We know that it's a huge event — Pakistan against India. We've won five (T20) games on the bounce, we're confident, but today we got outplayed. There's a pretty disappointed dressing room in there at the moment, because they know how much it means to Pakistan," Hesson said.

"We didn't play as well as we could have, but we know in tournaments like this it's not always going to go your way. So, our job is to pick ourselves up and make sure that we're very good in two or three days," he added.

Hesson also asked Pakistan players, especially batters, to trust their decision-making process for a better result while playing under pressure situations.

"Look it's very much when a guy's putting you under pressure — are you going to stick to your basics or are you going to go away from that? And I think that's going to be a real challenge because as the tournament progresses, we'll be put under pressure again.

"And it's how we respond when we're under the pump. All these guys are international players, they're all good players, but when the pressure comes on, are they going to trust the decision making or are they going to probably go outside that? That's something we're going to have to get better at," he added. (PTI)

Morikawa ends title drought as Bhatia finishes tied sixth



PEBBLE BEACH (USA), Feb 16: Akshay Bhatia, who held a two-shot lead heading into the final round, faltered with a closing 72 to finish tied sixth, three shots behind the winner at the AT&T Pebble Beach Pro-Am here.

Bhatia, the 54-hole leader, struggled to maintain momentum on Sunday, managing only two birdies over his final 29 holes. He lost the lead within the first four holes of the final round and was unable to recover on a day when swirling winds and mounting pressure reshaped the leaderboard.

Fellow Indian-American Sahith Theegala carded a 71 to finish tied 6th.

The spotlight, however, belonged to Collin Morikawa, who snapped a 28-month winless streak with a gritty performance in blustery conditions. Morikawa shot a 5-under 67 to finish at 22-under 266, clinching a one-shot victory over Sepp Straka and Min Woo Lee.

The two-time major champion had gone 45 starts since his last victory at the Baycountry Classic in Japan in October 2023. On Sunday, he delivered under immense pressure.

After six players shared the lead at various stages in a dramatic final round, Morikawa seized control with back-to-back birdies, including a decisive 4-iron from 235 yards on the par-5 18th.

Starting the ball over the ocean wall and riding the wind back toward the green, he calmly two-putted from the collar to secure the title.

Adding to the emotion of the moment, Morikawa revealed after the round that he and his wife are expecting their first child this spring. (PTI)

Real Madrid returns to Benfica for Champions League revenge mission with Mbappé back

MADRID, Feb 16: With Kylian Mbappé back in the squad, Real Madrid returns to Portugal looking for some payback against José Mourinho's Benfica in the Champions League.

Three weeks after Mourinho's team stunned his former club in a 4-2 win that allowed Benfica to qualify and kept the Spanish giant from automatically reaching the round of 16, the two teams will meet again at the Stadium of Light in the first round of the knockout stage.

"I hope history does not repeat itself," Madrid coach Alvaro Arbeloa said. "We are prepared for the difficulty of the match, the opponent, the atmosphere and what awaits us on Tuesday. It's 180 minutes and we have to play a great game there. We have it very fresh in our minds, so we know how complicated it will be."

Benfica got the goal it needed to qualify thanks to a last-minute header by goalkeeper Anatoliy Trubin against Madrid, allowing it to grab the 24th — and final — spot for the knockout stage on goal difference.

The rematch highlights a knockout round that will also include defending champion Paris Saint-Germain against Monaco and Inter Milan, last year's runner-up, facing Norwegian outsider Bodø/Glimt.

Mbappé returns

Mbappé, who already has 38 goals for Madrid this season, will be available again after he missed the Spanish league match against Real Sociedad at the weekend because of discomfort on his knee.

He has scored nine goals in his last six matches with Madrid, including both goals in the loss to Benfica.

"He is doing very well," Arbeloa said. "Obviously,

he has been dealing with these minor knee issues for quite some time this season. He is making a great effort every time he steps onto the field, and we have decided not to take risks so that he will be ready to start the match on Tuesday."

Lackluster PSG

PSG dropped out of the top eight that automatically qualified for the last-16 after a 1-1 home draw against Newcastle in the last round of the league phase, dropping it to 11th place.

On Friday, it lost 3-1 at Rennes in the French league for its third defeat of the year — and sixth this season.

Monaco, which finished 21st in the league phase, beat Nantes 3-1 on Friday, but before that it had won only once in its last seven matches across all tournaments.

Inter boosted

Inter heads to its match at Bodø/Glimt on Wednesday after six straight victories, including Saturday's last-minute 3-2 triumph over Juventus, a result that increased its Serie A lead.

Inter won its first four games in the league phase this season, but then lost three in a row before finishing off with an away victory at Borussia Dortmund that secured it 10th place.

Bodø/Glimt, in its first Champions League campaign, needed back-to-back upset wins against Manchester City and Atletico Madrid to make it to the knockout round in 23rd place.

Other matchups

The other first legs on Tuesday include Juventus visiting Galatasaray and Dortmund hosting Atalanta.

On Wednesday, Newcastle is at Qarabag, Olympiakos hosts Bayer Leverkusen and Atletico visits Club Brugge. (AP)

Italy is having its best Winter Olympics of all time at a pace that crushes its 1994 medal count

MILAN, Feb 16: It's official: Host nation Italy is having its best Winter Olympics of all time. Italy picked up four medals in quick succession on Sunday — two golds, a silver and a bronze — to reach 22 and surpass its previous best medal haul of 20, set more than 30 years ago at the Lillehammer Games in 1994.

And there are still seven days left of competition at the Milan Cortina Games.

Italy's cross-country team set the day off with bronze in the men's 4 x 7.5-kilometer relay, and then came a flurry of three medals in less than an hour.

Federica Brignone won an incredible second gold medal with a victory in the giant slalom, barely a month after returning to racing following a horrific injury last year.

Half an hour later, Michela Moioli and Lorenzo Sommariva finished second in the mixed team snowboard cross to pick up Italy's 21st medal. Shortly after that, Lisa Vittozzi won gold in the 10-kilometer pursuit biathlon race.

"We are witnessing something historic, for our talented and extraordinary ath-

letes," local organizing committee president Giovanni Malagò said. "But this success makes us so happy also because we are reaping the fruits of years and years of hard work." The total is more than the target of 19 medals set by Italian Olympic Committee president Luciano Buonfiglio before the Games began.

The breakdown so far? Eight gold medals, four silver and 10 bronze.

In Lillehammer, Italy finished fourth in the final medal table — behind Russia, host nation Norway and Germany. At Milan Cortina, the Italians have consistently been in the top two, trailing Norway (24 medals) early on Sunday.

At the last Winter Olympics, in Beijing, Italy won 17 medals. It fared worse the last time it hosted the Games, collecting 11 in Turin in 2006.

The signs that Italy could do something special at its home games were there right from Day 3, when it had a record-breaking day on home snow and ice with a haul of six medals, the most the nation had ever won in a single day at the Winter Olympics.



"What an incredible day: Six medals in 24 hours at the Winter Olympics will go down in history," Malagò said. "And what's also incredible is the multidisciplinary nature of the medals. We have become a country that is capable of being competitive in sports where we have never been.

"That is fundamental in the Olympic program and in the final medal table. ... I

have always been of the opinion that the strength of a country can be seen in how many medals in different sports you manage to earn, not necessarily the number of golds."

The stories behind some of the medals have added to the feel-good moment sweeping the country.

The 35-year-old Brignone skied through

the pain to win gold in the women's super-G on Thursday, following a year spent largely in rehab after breaking multiple bones in her leg.

Arianna Fontana, the most decorated short track speedskater of all time, won her 12th and 13th medals, equaling fencer Edoardo Mangiarotti's record for most Olympic medals by an Italian athlete — a mark that has stood since 1960.

"We're getting to see the Italian team do incredibly well. ... I've been very fortunate to have gotten to witness Federica's and Arianna's golds, which were just incredible," International Olympic Committee President Kirsty Coventry said on Friday. "Their stories of resilience and fight and everything good in humanity was really showcased.

"Both athletes I have so much respect for ... Arianna is now the most decorated Italian athlete, summer or winter Olympian. And to do that at home, it's so cool. I'm so excited for her. And you could feel in the stadium yesterday, last night, just the passion and the love and the respect." (AP)

Omarzai's all-round heroics seal five-wicket win for Afghanistan over UAE, sends SA to Super 8

NEW DELHI, Feb 16: All-rounder Azmatullah Omarzai delivered a match-winning performance, claiming four wickets before smashing an unbeaten 40 to guide Afghanistan to a five-wicket victory over United Arab Emirates in their must-win T20 World Cup clash here on Monday.

The win opened Afghanistan's account in the tournament and kept their slim Super Eight hopes alive in Group D. It also confirmed South Africa's place in the next round as they occupy the top spot with six points, followed by New Zealand in second place and Afghanistan in third. UAE slipped to fourth.

Omarzai led the bowling effort with superb control of line and length, returning figures of 4 for 15 from his four overs as UAE posted 160 for 9, built around Sohaib Khan's well-crafted 68 off 48 balls.

In reply, Afghanistan suffered early setbacks as the in-form Rahmanullah Gurbaz (0) and Gulbadin Naib (13) departed cheaply, leaving them at 41 for 2 at the end of the Powerplay.

Ibrahim Zadran steadied the innings with a composed 53 off 41 balls, striking six boundaries and a six to anchor the chase. After his dismissal, Darwish Rasooli (53) and Omarzai combined to steer Afghanistan home, reaching 162 for 5 in 19.2 overs.

The chase briefly grew tense when Zadran holed out to Muhammad Waseem off Muhammad Arfan, who also produced a



peach of a delivery to remove Sediqqullah Atal earlier.

With 61 required from 36 balls, Rasooli counterattacked with two fours and a six, adding 43 runs off 26 deliveries with Omarzai before being bowled by Junaid Siddique.

Needing 17 off the final two overs, Omarzai shifted gears, launching Muhammad Jawadullah into the stands before an inside edge raced to the boundary, reducing the equation to four runs in the final over, which

Afghanistan completed without further alarm. Earlier, Sohaib stitched together a 57-ball 84-run partnership for the third wicket with Alishan Sharafu (40 off 29) to rebuild the innings after the early setbacks.

However, Afghanistan clawed back with a cluster of wickets in the middle overs, leaving UAE at 121 for 6 in the 16th over.

Sohaib added another 31 runs with Haider Ali before Omarzai returned to dismiss him in the 19th over, completing his fourth wicket. Omarzai was rewarded for mixing his line

and length as he struck early, removing last match's hero Aryanish Sharma for a four-ball duck.

Skipper Muhammad Waseem (10) tried to push the pace hitting two boundaries before being trapped in front by Mujeeb Ur Rahman as UAE slipped to 13 for 2.

UAE's batters handled the Afghan spinners effectively during the Powerplay, punishing loose deliveries. Sharafu struck two boundaries off Mujeeb as UAE raced to 55 for 2, before launching Rashid Khan for a six to bring up the half-century stand.

However, Ziaur Rahman, who came in for left-arm quick Fazalhaq Farooqi, and spinner Noor Ahmad proved expensive.

Rahman conceded 16 runs in his opening over, with Sohaib striking three boundaries.

Noor too endured a tough spell, being hit for two sixes by Sohaib over cover and mid-wicket as UAE progressed to 93 for 2 in 10 overs.

Mujeeb then provided a timely breakthrough with Sharafu holing out to Ibrahim Zadran at long-off. Omarzai then struck twice in his third over, cleaning up Syed Haider (13) and inducing an edge from Harshit Kaushik (0).

Sohaib brought up his half-century off 37 balls with a six, but Muhammad Arfan (0) fell while attempting a reverse hit, and Omarzai returned to wrap up Sohaib's resistance in the 19th over to complete a fine bowling performance. (PTI)

Babar faces heat: Livid former Pak players demand his axing after India debacle



KARACHI, Feb 16: Under-performing batting star Babar Azam found himself in the line of fire after Pakistan's 61-run loss to bitter foes India in a T20 World Cup match as several former players in the country demanded his sacking alongside some other seniors.

Former captain Babar, senior spinner Shadab Khan and pace spearhead Shaheen Shah Afridi failed to come good in the lop-sided contest in Colombo on Sunday night. While the Pakistani bowling was taken apart by young opener Ishan Kishan (77 off 40), their batters were foxed by the combined might of India's top pacers and spinners.

"If it was in my hands, I would not pick Babar, Shadab and Shaheen again in the T20 team. They have had plenty of chances to come through for Pakistan but failed again yesterday," former captain Shahid Afridi said.

Afridi said it was time to groom younger players in the format. While Shaheen was hammered for 31 runs in two overs, Babar was cleaned up by Axar Patel for five while attempting a slog even though his team was three down for 13 runs in a steep chase of 176.

Former skipper and batting great Javed Miandad was not even willing to speak elaborately on the loss but acknowledged that Pakistan's cricket team has been unable to fight when put under pressure.

"Bhai bade matches main hi players ko character dikhana padta hai, woh hamare players nahi dekha paye (In big matches, players have to show character. Unfortunately our players didn't show that character).

Mohammad Yousaf, another former captain who has always backed Babar, also said that the debacle should end the T20 careers of Babar and Shaheen.

"Time's up for Shaheen, Babar, and Shadab, Pakistan's T20 squad needs new performers, not empty wins against weaker sides," Yousaf posted on X.

Former pacer Shoaib Akhtar, while speaking Indian news channel ABP, mocked Babar's superstar status here.

"You have made a superstar out of a player (Babar Azam) who cannot win you a game," he said.

"For the last 15-20 years, there has been no investment. The sad reality of the situation is that while we fought with India on the ground at one point, today we can't even dream of beating them," he added.

Ahmed Shehzad, a vocal critic of Babar for a while now, felt Babar had played his final game for Pakistan in the format.

"Babar gone once again. Maybe it was his last dance to prove his worth in this format," Shehzad wrote on X.

The defeat has left the Pakistani cricket community despondent with several social media users also mocking the team by saying that perhaps the Pakistan government should have adhered to the boycott call in support of Bangladesh.

"Would have been better if we had kept with the boycott," posted several handles here.

Former captain, Moin Khan said perhaps it was time to accept that India were a far more superior side to Pakistan in any format right now.

"We got our hopes up again this time but as a professional cricketer there was always that lingering feeling that the Indian players will come through when it mattered the most," Moin said.

Miandad said he was surprised to see Pakistan go with just one pace bowler in Shaheen Shah Afridi.

"Why didn't they bowl (pacer) Faheem Ashraf. Playing six spinners what kind of strategy is this?" he wondered.

Former captain Rashid Latif said Pakistan's optimism ahead of the match was bolstered by its back-to-back wins in the previous two league games against lower-ranked teams -- the USA and the Netherlands.

"Look this time there were genuine reasons for the pre-match optimism. The team appeared to be adapting to modern day T20 cricket requirements and looked comfortable under the stewardship of (coach) Mike Hesson and (captain) Salman Ali Agha. But as usual we forgot how good this Indian team really is," Latif said.

"They are a big match team and every player is suited to his role. Unfortunately watching yesterday's match it was obvious we got all our planning wrong," he added. (PTI)

Jacks' late blitz powers England to 202/7 in must-win clash against Italy

KOLKATA, Feb 16: England finally rediscovered their attacking mojo, riding on an explosive start and a splendid late surge from Will Jacks to post a challenging 202 for seven against Italy in their must-win Group C clash here on Monday.

With a Super Eights berth on the line after a scratchy campaign, the two-time champions came out all guns blazing but continued their trend of losing wickets at regular intervals.

It was Jacks' unbeaten 53 off just 22 balls (4x6, 3x4) that provided the late flourish, lifting them to their first 200-plus total in this edition.

England looked in trouble at 105/5 before Jacks and Sam Curran (25 off 19 balls) provided the late thrust.

The duo stitched together the best partnership of the innings in a 54-run stand off just 25 balls for the sixth wicket.

Opting to bat, Phil Salt set the tone with a brisk 28 off 15 balls (2x4, 2x6) as England raced past 50 inside five overs. (PTI)

Loss against South Africa won't have any bearing: Glenn Phillips

CHENNAI, Feb 16: New Zealand all-rounder Glenn Phillips on Monday said the defeat against South Africa will have no bearing ahead of their final match against the bottom-placed Canada, as the Kiwis look to seal a Super Eights berth from Group D here.

New Zealand are currently placed second with two wins from three games behind South Africa, who are through to the Super Eights with six points.

The Kiwis will look to address the frailties exposed by South Africa in the seven-wicket defeat and reaffirm their status as title contenders and Phillips feels that defeat shouldn't necessarily be looked upon as the "be-all end-all of learnings".

"You look at games of T20 cricket and there's small margins between winning and losing. South Africa were very good in all facets of the game the other day. On our day as well, we've taken (on) South Africa, well, in different formats," Phillips said.

"But we've played our best cricket in the recent past, so understanding that you don't necessarily look at one game as the be-all end-



all of learnings. There's not necessarily been a pattern per se. If our top order has gone down, then our middle order (has) stepped up. Sometimes, it just happens to be the way that the top order gets off to a start and then the middle can't go through.

"That's just the nature of T20 cricket when you're trying to keep the momentum going the whole time. But if you look at the options the boys took, they're in really clear mindsets," Phillips said execution is crucial in T20 cricket.

"It just comes down to execution

at the end of the day. With the ball as well, we're just trying to make sure that we're hitting our straps as much as possible. Guys are allowed to hit you (on) good balls and then if we didn't bowl as well as we have on previous days, then we look at that and we can be better on the next day and that's fine.

"It's professional cricket at the end of the day and sometimes you're good and sometimes you're not. You just hope the gap between the two is a little less each day."

If they progress to the Super Eights, which they are expected to

quite easily, New Zealand will travel to Sri Lanka and Phillips said adapting to the conditions will be key.

"I don't think it's about necessarily improving on any given thing per se. It's about adapting as much as possible to the conditions. The conditions in Sri Lanka are going to be very different to the ones that we've got here, so it poses a completely different challenge.

"There's no one thing in cricket that's a magic nugget to be able to give performances, so it's just about trying to be a little bit better and doing our things that we do best for longer periods of time, especially if the conditions dictate that we're going to have to take a game a little bit longer," he said.

"Maybe scores of 150-160 might be different in Sri Lanka with a bit more turn, but you never know. We may get an absolute better and then 200 still on. It's just (about) adapting to those conditions regardless of who we're playing at any given time."

Canada wicketkeeper-batter Shreyas Movva feels bowling is one area which had let them down in the tournament. (PTI)

Win over Australia will count for nothing if we slip up now: Zimbabwe captain Raza

PALLEKELE (SRI LANKA), Feb 16: Zimbabwe captain Sikandar Raza on Monday said that his side's upset win over Australia would count for nothing if they slip up in the next two matches of the T20 World Cup, and the focus is on staying grounded after the giant-killing act. Zimbabwe stunned former champions Australia by 23 runs in Colombo on Friday, and they would look to beat Ireland here on Tuesday to place themselves in a strong position for a Super Eights berth.

"We know this (win over Australia) is just part of that journey that we came and the goals that we set. ... but we always knew there's a next game and that becomes the most important game. Hopefully we get a good result and then the next game becomes the most important game.

"The victories will count for nothing, especially if there is slip-up now. Everybody remains very focused. We've had a travelling day yesterday and a rest day. Today we have trained really well. Tomorrow for me is just

another game, but probably the most important game," Raza said at the pre-match press conference.

After the Ireland match, Zimbabwe, who are currently on four points from two matches, play against hosts Sri Lanka on February 19 in their last group match. Raza conceded that the next two matches would bring a slightly different pressure with the Super Eights qualification hopes on the horizon.

"Yeah, certainly it does. ... it's a lovely position to be in. We've had two results. Fine, the world is talking about Zimbabwe. It is great. But let them do all the talking for us.

"The beauty of these ICC events is that every game you practically feel is a knockout game. And I think it's great for our own mental toughness and growth as well, how well we handle our own expectations rather than what the world wants from us.

"So yeah, but you get excited when the destination looks closer. The biggest challenge, for myself and the team, is to try and

stay with the present and just not get too excited with what lies ahead, as long as we can focus on what's right in front of us."

Asked if performing on this stage can be life-changing for some of the players in the team, he said, "Yeah, certainly. ICC events change lives in every way, whether that is recognition, fame, whether that is financial, respect, whichever way you look at it, once you do well in ICC events against any team that comes here.

"The top 20 teams are here. So yeah, it is life-changing and hopefully we can keep writing our own history and keep going further than we ever went in our history."

He is also happy about the way his pacers -- Blessing Muzarabani, Richard Ngarava, Brad Evans and even Tinotenda Maposa -- have been performing so far.

On the tight schedule of the T20 World Cup, Raza said it has pros and cons but has been a "balanced schedule for all the teams".

"The advantage is that sometimes when

you're winning, the momentum is there and you want to play again and again. The disadvantages are with these conditions the body doesn't recover as well so you want to do something but sometimes it gets tougher to achieve that, whether you're a batter or a bowler. "It's pro and con and it's happening to every team as well so I think it has been very well balanced schedule for all the teams."

Ireland all-rounder Mark Adair admitted that Zimbabwe bowling attack could be one of the best units in that department of the game in this T20 World Cup.

"They're really starting to round out that team and round out that attack. I think they're probably as good of a bowling lineup as you'll find in this competition.

"They're a good batting team and have that little bit of explosiveness towards the back but it's something that we're looking forward to. We've played a lot against them. We've seen a lot of these guys. There should be no surprises for us." (PTI)

Axar Patel: How India's 'Everyday Hero' silently killed Pakistan's chase

COLOMBO, Feb 16: Axar Patel stood with his hands stretched, a smile beaming across his face. He just had Pakistan batter Usman Khan stumped by Ishan Kishan by a mile for 44.

The dismissal reduced Pakistan to 73 for five, signalling a realistic end to their chase of 176 in the high-voltage T20 World Cup match on Sunday.

From a match perspective, the left-arm spinner's celebration was perhaps triggered by the realisation that he had all but ended Pakistan's hopes.

But it could also have been something deeply personal.

Usman had smashed Axar for six boundaries in his 34-ball innings, including back-to-back fours on two occasions.

However, the critical moment of his dismissal was hardly dramatic.

There was no magic like what Kuldeep Yadav or Varun Chakravarty routinely conjure up -- a big rip from outside the off-stump or a missile that

darts past the batter in a flash.

But then Axar has never been a sorcerer like them.

Even on helpful pitches like the one at the Premadasa, shrewd variations of length stemming out of his sharp observatory powers makes him a formidable customer.

Axar pulled his length back by just that bit, preempting Usman's shimmy. The Pakistan wicketkeeper batter could only swish in hope and Kishan did the rest with ease from behind the stumps.

Axar explained his method.

"Basically, what was happening on the wicket, the odd ball was skidding a little more, and some other balls were spinning more. When we came to bowl in the second innings, I realised that the new ball was skidding a little more," Axar said in the post-match press conference.

"So the plan is to observe what the batsman wants to do, in which area he wants to target me. After that I change my line or length. And the second dis-



missal (Usman) happened when he was stumping out. So I again went for my length. So, yeah, I plan like that," he added.

A few minutes earlier, Axar also snapped an edgy 16-minute stay of Babar Azam.

Sensing the Babar's growing impatience, the 32-year-old slipped in a fuller delivery on the off-stump and the former Pakistan captain took the bait.

A wild slog sweep intended to release the mounting pressure ended in Babar losing his stumps.

"He has always been a kid with a big heart. His biggest asset is his ability to observe, and put those observations into practice. He clearly knows what are his strengths and what are his limitations. It is a good quality to have for sportspersons," tells Amrisha Patel, childhood coach of Axar.

"Axar has long strides and he puts it into good use, as he can quickly adjust his lengths without any obvious signals to the batsmen. He has a very flexible mind," he added.

Axar keeps that flexible outlook in his batting as well, though his prowess with the willow was not needed against

Pakistan.

However, more than his batting position or the amount of runs he scores, Axar's focus remains on carrying out the orders by the management.

Axar has batted on positions from No. 4 to No. 8 in the white-ball formats.

When many batters relish a certain degree of security around their batting slots, Axar viewed the uncertainty a bit differently.

"The job of an all-rounder is that you can bowl or bat at any order. I always think that if the team needs me, then that means they are showing confidence in me that I will work in such a situation.

"And I will get them out of this situation. So, it is a plus point for me. And, yeah, maybe in the upcoming match, you can see me (bat) higher up also -- you never know," said Axar.

But for now, Axar the batter will be glad to play second fiddle to Axar the bowler, whom India needs more in the T20 World Cup. (PTI)