

6 WORLD

- British PM Starmer fights for job after top aides quit
- Crackdown on dissent after nationwide protests in Iran widens

8 NATION

- Maoism never benefitted society, only caused destruction: Amit Shah
- Govt-oppn lock horns in LS, House adjourned for day

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Gaurav spikes SIT report, says no proof of Pak link

By leader of LS mulls legal action against Himanta for revealing passport and other details of his minor children

GUWAHATI, Feb 9: Assam Congress president Gaurav Gogoi on Monday claimed that there was nothing in the police report to substantiate Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's allegations of his "Pakistani links".

Gogoi also questioned why Sarma was 'sitting' over the SIT report for six months if there was any evidence of him being involved in 'anti-national' activities.

The Congress' deputy leader in Lok Sabha said he will be exploring legal action against Sarma for publicly revealing the passport and other details of his minor children.

Addressing a press conference a day after Sarma revealed the findings of the SIT probe into Gogoi's 'Pakistani link', he said, "The CM did not want to reveal the SIT report. He sat over it for six months.

He went page by page through it but could not find any evidence to back his allegations of me undergoing some training (in Pakistan), being an ISI agent, etc.

"If the findings were so important from the national security point of view, why did he wait for six months? If help of central and international agencies was needed for the probe, why did he sit over it?" Gogoi asked.

Assembly polls are due in Assam in March-April.

Sarma and the BJP have been attacking Gogoi over his wife's alleged connection with Pakistan's spy agency ISI, with the state government forming a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to probe alleged interference of Pakistani national Ali Tauqeer Sheikh, claimed to (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Evident that access to Rawalpindi (army headquarters) could not have occurred through routine civilian travel permissions: CM

CM gives 'Rawalpindi' twist to Gaurav's Pak visit

GUWAHATI, Feb 9: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Monday demanded a "transparent explanation" from Congress leader Gaurav Gogoi over his "visit to Rawalpindi district of Pakistan", asserting that his visa "explicitly permitted travel only to Lahore, Karachi and Islamabad".



Sarma, in a post on X, said that under Pakistan's immigration rules, travel beyond visa-designated cities is not permitted without specific authorisation.

Reacting to the charge, Gogoi said Sarma was "floundering and sinking in his own web of lies", asserting that the general passport, which was submitted to the Centre to get a diplomatic one, has "all details" of his visit.

Sarma's comments came amid a press conference of the Congress

MP, where he said he had visited Takshashila in Pakistan with his wife, having due permission.

The CM and Gogoi have been engaged in a verbal duel, with Sarma alleging that the Congress leader and his family have Pakistani links.

Gogoi told reporters that his wife had visited Pakistan for work-related purpose in 2013, and he had accompanied her on a 10-day trip to the neighbouring country in December that year.

While the press meet was underway, Sarma asserted that Gogoi made a disclosure that he was not previously aware of.

"Takshashila (Taxila) is not located in Islamabad, but in Rawalpindi District, Punjab. This single fact raises a serious and unavoidable question. If his Pakistan visa explicitly permitted travel only to Lahore, Karachi and Islamabad, how did he visit Takshashila, which lies outside the Islamabad Capital Territory and squarely within Rawalpindi District?" he said.

"So the question is simple, factual, and legitimate: Who facilitated his movement to Takshashila despite the apparent absence of visa clearance for Rawalpindi District?" Sarma said.

He further said that this question gains (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Himanta starts form distribution to tea tribes for land rights in gardens

DIBRUGARH, Feb 9: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Monday launched the distribution of application forms for land rights to tea garden workers within estates, saying the move would "reshape the social status" of the tea tribes and ensure their welfare.

The launch is in line with a slew of development schemes that the state government has rolled out for the community ahead of the Assembly elections, likely to be held in March-April.

The BJP-led government has been focusing on adivasis and tea tribes in a bid to reach out to the sizeable community ahead of the polls -- from providing one-time financial grant of ₹ 5,000 each to 6 lakh members of the tea tribes to reserving government jobs to enhancing education and healthcare facilities. Traditionally viewed as Congress' 'vote bank', the BJP has made major inroads in gaining confidence of the community, with the tea tribes playing an (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Final photo electoral rolls for 3 KA constituencies to be published today

HT Bureau

DIPHU, Feb 9: In line with directives of the Election Commission of India, the Karbi Anglong district administration will publish the final photo electoral rolls for three Assembly constituencies on February 10, officials said on Monday.

The rolls, prepared with January 1, 2026 as the qualifying date, will cover 108-Bokajan (ST), 109-Howraghat (ST) and 110-Diphu (ST) Legislative Assembly Constituencies.

The formal publication will take place at the conference hall of the Deputy Commissioner's office here.

Recognised political parties, including the Aam Aadmi Party, Asom

Gana Parishad, Bharatiya Janata Party and the Indian National Congress, have been invited to witness the publication to ensure transparency in the electoral process.

Following the release, the District Election Officer will address a press meet at 11.30 am to share updated voter statistics and respond to media queries.

Members of the Diphu Press Club, Karbi Anglong Journalists Association and the District Press Club have been requested to attend.

Officials said the final publication follows the Special Summary Revision exercise conducted by the Election (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Assam Film Society institutes Dr Bhupen Hazarika Award

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, Feb 9: The Assam Film Society has instituted an award for film society activists in the name of Dr Bhupen Hazarika.

The first award will be conferred on Premendra Mazumder, vice-president of the Federation of Film Societies of India, in recognition of his contribution to the film society movement.

Announcing this here on Monday, Jayanta Madhab Dutta, founder and general secretary of the Assam Film Society, said the award would be presented on

March 10, marking the commercial release anniversary of Assam's first feature film Joymoti by Jyoti Prasad Agarwala.

Dutta said the award would be biennial, with its jurisdiction extending across Asia.

It will comprise a cash prize, a trophy and a citation.

Highlighting Mazumder's profile, Dutta said he is a film critic, curator, author and organiser who writes extensively on cinema.

Mazumder also serves as general secretary of the India chapter of FIPRESCI and editor of the quar-

terly film journal E-CineIndia.

He has worked with numerous national and international film festivals as chairman, programme director, curator, coordinator and consultant, and has served on juries of more than 40 international film festivals worldwide.

Mazumder is the founder of the South Asian Short Film Festival and the World Film Festival Kolkata.

He has received several honours, including the Ritwik Ghatak Award (Bangladesh, 2016), the Satyajit Ray (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Happy Birthday

Late Bhaswati Nunisa (Lovely)

10/02/1991(Diphu) - 29/04/2014 (New Delhi)

35th Happy Birthday to our dear daughter

It's been twelve years since you left us, And everyday sweet memories of yours comes our way. Since you'll never be forgotten. We pledge to you today, The hollowed place within our hearts is where you'll always stay. We still love you and deeply miss you though you are gone.

Dr. Motilal Nunisa (Father), Mr. Pinaki Chakraborty (Son-in-law), Miss Mainodi (Babli, Elder Sister), Miss Ponaxi (Lolo, Younger Sister), Diphu, Karbi Anglong

অসম চৰকাৰ
বিদ্যালয় শিক্ষা বিভাগ

হাইস্কুল শিক্ষান্ত আৰু উচ্চতৰ মাধ্যমিক চূড়ান্ত পৰীক্ষাৰ সমূহ পৰীক্ষার্থীলৈ

‘ছিয়াভৰা শুভেচ্ছা’

আজিৰ পৰা অনুষ্ঠিত হাইস্কুল শিক্ষান্ত পৰীক্ষা আৰু কাইলৈৰ পৰা অনুষ্ঠিত হ'বলগীয়া উচ্চতৰ মাধ্যমিক চূড়ান্ত পৰীক্ষাত অৱতীৰ্ণ সমূহ শিক্ষার্থীলৈ আন্তৰিক শুভকামনা জ্ঞাপন কৰিলোঁ। প্রতিগৰাকী শিক্ষার্থীয়ে শিক্ষা জীৱনৰ এই গুৰুত্বপূৰ্ণ পৰীক্ষাত সফলতাৰে উত্তীৰ্ণ হৈ নিজৰ লগতে ৰাজ্য তথা দেশৰ নাম উজলাই তোলক — সেয়াই কামনা কৰিলোঁ।”

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মুঠ পৰীক্ষার্থী

হাইস্কুল শিক্ষান্ত পৰীক্ষা

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উচ্চতৰ মাধ্যমিক চূড়ান্ত পৰীক্ষা

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DIPR/D/HLT/294/10-Feb-26

India offers quota-based auto duty cuts, tariff reduction on alcohol under US trade pact

NEW DELHI, Feb 9: India will grant quota-based duty concessions in the automobile sector, while access to alcoholic beverages has been offered under tariff reduction and minimum import price-based formulations under the trade pact with the US, the government said on Monday.

It also said that under the agreement, tariffs on USD 30.94 billion of India's exports will be reduced from 50 per cent to 18 per cent, while the reciprocal tariffs on another USD 10.03 billion will be eliminated.

"This means a substantial share of Indian goods entering the US market will now face either sharply lower tariffs or completely duty-free access, significantly improving price competitiveness," the government said.

It said that USD 1.36 billion of Indian agricultural exports receive zero additional US duty access. Key products include spices, tea, coffee, fruits, nuts and processed foods.

It said that sensitive sectors such as automobiles have been liberalised through a combination of quota and duty reduction mechanisms.

According to an official, India is not granting any duty concessions on electric vehicles to the US.

Medical devices have been addressed through long and staggered phasing schedules, and precious metals and other sensitive industrial products have been managed through quota-based tariff lowering.

"Alcoholic beverages have been offered under tariff reduction along with minimum import price-based formulations, consistent with India's approach in other FTAs (free trade agreements)," it added.

Listing out sectoral gains for India, it said Tariffs on textile exports will be cut down from 50 per cent to 18 per cent, while silk re-



ceives nil duty access, opening enhanced opportunities in the US market valued at USD 113 billion.

Similarly, tariffs will be reduced to 18 per cent for the domestic gems and jewellery sector, providing preferential access to the American market valued at USD 61 billion.

"In addition, 0 per cent duty market access has been secured for major product categories including diamonds, platinum and coins, covering a US market of USD 29 billion," it said adding.

Key export categories expected to benefit include cut and polished diamonds, lab-grown synthetic diamonds, coloured gemstones, synthetic stones and articles of gold, silver, and platinum.

AGRI SECTOR:

It said India maintains a trade surplus of USD 1.3 billion in agricultural trade with the United States, with exports of USD 3.4 billion and imports of USD 2.1 billion in 2024.

The United States will apply zero additional duty on Indian exports worth USD 1.36 billion.

Beneficiary products include

spices; tea and coffee; copra and coconut oil; nuts such as cashew nuts and chestnuts; fruits including avocados, bananas, guavas, mangoes, kiwis, papayas, pineapples, and

mushroom. Cereals such as barley and canary seeds; bakery products; cocoa, and cocoa preparations; sesame and poppy seeds; and processed products such as fruit pulp, juices and jams will also be benefited.

In line with India's approach in previous trade agreements, agricultural market access has been structured based on product sensitivity.

The offer is categorised into immediate duty elimination, phased elimination (up to 10 years), tariff reduction, margin of preference and tariff rate quota mechanisms.

It said highly sensitive agricultural sectors remain fully protected under a carefully crafted exemption category. These broadly include meat, poultry and dairy products; GM food products; soyameal; maize; and cereals.

For select sensitive agricultural products, the tariff reduction category has been applied to ensure that a measured level of duty protection continues. Examples include parts of plants, olives, pyrethrum and oil cakes. Certain highly sensitive items have been liberalised under Tariff Rate Quotas (TRQs), where limited quantities are allowed at reduced duties.

Products under this category include in-shell almonds, walnuts,

pistachios, and lentils, it said.

It added that phased elimination of tariffs over up to ten years has been adopted for certain intermediate products used by India's food processing industry and sourced from multiple countries.

These include albumins, certain oils such as coconut oil, castor oil and cotton seed oil, and plants and parts of plants.

"Immediate duty elimination has been offered only for select non-sensitive products that are already liberalised under other FTAs," it said.

INDUSTRIAL GOODS:

The agreement secures zero additional duty access for industrial exports valued at USD 38 billion, the government said.

India will face zero-reciprocal duty in major industrial product categories, including gems and diamonds, platinum and coins, clocks and watches, essential oils, inorganic chemicals, articles of paper, plastics and wood, and natural rubber.

On the other hand, market access for American industrial goods has been structured strictly on the basis of product sensitivity, combining immediate tariff elimination, phased reduction (up to ten years) and quota-based access.

DIGITAL TRADE:

In 2024, India's digitally-delivered services exports stood at USD 0.28 trillion, growing at 10.3 per cent year-on-year.

India ranks 5th in exports of global digitally-delivered services and 11th in imports.

While the United States holds the first rank in both exports and imports.

"A structured digital trade framework between the two countries reduces regulatory uncertainty, lowers compliance friction and facilitates smoother cross-border service delivery," it said. (PTI)

Draft Income Tax Rules raises threshold for quoting PAN for cash deposits, car purchase, others



NEW DELHI, Feb 9: Draft Income Tax Rules have proposed significantly raising transaction limits for quoting of PAN for cash deposits/withdrawal in banks, purchase of motor vehicles and property, and payment of hotel bills. The draft also proposes raising the value of mandates provided by employers, and making it mandatory for crypto exchanges to share information with the tax department. It also includes Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC) as an accepted mode of electronic payment.

The draft rules have expanded the list of Category 1 metropolitan cities to include Bengaluru, Pune, Ahmedabad, and Hyderabad for the purpose of claiming home rent allowance (HRA). The list includes Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, and Chennai. The Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) will finalise rules after stakeholder consultation and will notify them by the first week of March, Finance Ministry sources said.

The Income Tax Rules are being finalised to give effect to the Income Tax Act, 2025, which will be implemented from April 1.

According to the proposed Income Tax Rule, 2026, quoting of Permanent Account Number (PAN) will be mandatory for making cash deposits or withdrawals aggregating to ₹ 10 lakh or more in a financial year, in one or more accounts of a person. Presently, PAN is required for cash deposits exceeding ₹ 50,000 during any one day

with a banking company or a cooperative bank.

In case of purchase of motor vehicles (including motor cycles), a buyer has to quote his/her PAN if the price exceeds ₹ 5 lakh.

The current Income Tax Rules, 1962, do not provide for quoting of PAN for purchase of two-wheelers, while for motor vehicles it was mandatory irrespective of price.

In case of hotel/restaurant bills, payments made to convention centres or banquet halls or a person engaged in event management, PAN will be mandatory if the payment exceeds ₹ 1 lakh.

The current I-T Rules specify a ₹ 50,000 threshold for quoting PAN in case of hotel/restaurant bills.

In case of purchase or sale or gift or joint development agreement of any immovable property, PAN will be mandatory if the transaction cost is more than ₹ 20 lakh, as against the existing limit of ₹ 10 lakh.

Under the draft rules, PAN will be mandatory for starting an account-based relationship with an insurance company. Currently, payments aggregating to more than ₹ 50,000 in a financial year as life insurance premium require PAN.

Sources said the intent behind rationalising the PAN quoting threshold is to capture only "relevant information" and "leveraging tech-enhancements of reporting entities" under the Income Tax Act. The value of tax-free perquisites for official vehicles and free meals is proposed to be enhanced in view of the current market realities. In case of free food and non-alcoholic beverages provided by the employer to an employee, the requisite value has been fixed at ₹ 200 per meal.

For motor cars, the allowance of cars below the engine capacity of 1.6 litres will be ₹ 8,000/month, while for others it will be ₹ 10,000/month. These would include allowance for drivers.

The draft rules also propose detailed reporting and due-diligence obligations for crypto-asset service providers. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

CM gives 'Rawalpindi'

significance given that Pakistan Army's General Headquarters is also located in Rawalpindi.

"These facts warrant a clear and transparent explanation," Sarma said.

The chief minister asserted that Gogoi did not have visa to visit Rawalpindi, which is a "restricted, high-security" district.

"It is now almost evident that access to Rawalpindi (army headquarters) could not have occurred through routine civilian travel permissions.

"The circumstances strongly suggest that the visit was facilitated through institutional arrangements that do not require standard civilian visa endorsements," Sarma said.

Gogoi later told PTI that the CM should use "Google Map more carefully" to know that Takshashila is "a day's trip from Islamabad".

"I made available my original passport to the Government of India after I became an MP in 2014 to get a diplomatic passport. It lies with them and it contains all the details of my Pakistan visit," he said.

"This shows that the chief minister is floundering and sinking in his own web of lies. He tried to brand me as an agent of a foreign country, and he failed. And in order to cover one lie, he has to tell 100 lies," the Congress leader asserted.

Gogoi said that Takshashila is an important archaeological site in Indian civilisation.

"I am glad that I got the opportunity to visit an ancient Indian place," he said.

On Sunday, Sarma had alleged in a press conference that Gogoi, his British wife Elizabeth Colburn and Pakistani national Ali Tauqueer Sheikh had a "deeper connection", and that information from the Intelligence Bureau was secretly passed on to the neighbouring nation.

Gogoi had dismissed the allegations of his Pakistani connections as "most mindless and bogus". He dubbed the press conference, where Sarma made the allegations, "worse than C-grade cinema", which was a "super flop". (PTI)

Gaurav spikes SIT

have links with Gogoi's British wife Elizabeth Colburn, in India's internal affairs.

Revealing details of the SIT report on Sunday, Sarma had alleged that Gogoi, Colburn and Sheikh have a "deeper connection", and information from the IB was secretly provided to the neighbouring nation.

He had said the Assam government has decided to refer the case and the SIT report to the central government for further investigation.

Dismissing the allegations brought against him by Sarma based on the SIT report, Gogoi said "dragging" his minor children into it was a "new low for even the chief minister".

"Details about my children aged 5 and 9 years were put out in public. I want to warn the CM that we also know all about your children, who are much older, but we don't want to reveal anything. Don't force me to do so," Gogoi said.

On a question over his children's British citizenship, Gogoi said they are mainly looked after by their mother as he remains busy with his public life. "Till they are 18 years old, the mother is looking after them. After they become adults, they can take their own decisions."

He also mentioned that there are instances of children of several BJP leaders surrendering their Indian citizenship, including the nephew of Sarma.

On his 10-day stay in Pakistan in December 2013, Gogoi claimed that his wife had visited the neighbouring country for work-related purpose and he had accompanied her.

Gogoi said his wife had worked on an international programme in Pakistan for a year in 2012, and was later posted in India as part of the same work, which led her to visit the neighbouring nation again.

Gogoi maintained that his visit was on valid permissions and his personal passport, which he submitted to the Centre in 2014 after being elected as MP, has all the records, including VISA permissions.

The Congress leader questioned Sarma's visits to Bangladesh and said, "The CM has gone to Bangladesh 10 times, I had gone (to Pakistan) once."

He also asked "Who were in Singapore after Zubeen Garg's death and whether it was true as alleged by many that the government-sponsored programme continued for three days".

Gogoi further clarified that his wife does not hold any active bank account in Pakistan, nor were any information sourced from the IB incorporated in the reports she submitted to her higher-ups after shifting to India.

On Sarma raising suspicion over Gogoi's questions in Parliament regarding India's security and defence matters, the Congress leader hit back by asking why a MP from Assam cannot be interested in affairs of the nation.

"Moreover, if the Lok Sabha secretariat thinks that a question is not valid or information cannot be revealed, it gets cancelled," he added.

Gogoi said he has refrained from taking legal recourse against the CM as any stay order would have led Sarma to claim that the Congress leader was trying to hide the truth.

Gogoi rejected Sarma's claim that the CM had not revealed the SIT findings immediately after the report was submitted, as popular singer Zubeen Garg had died soon afterwards, and the people were mourning his death.

"The SIT report was submitted on September 10 and Zubeen da died on September 19," he said.

The Congress leader claimed that Sarma wanted to delay contents of the SIT report till just before the polls, but was forced to make it public sooner as he was cornered after the opposition party exposed the 'land grabbing' by the CM and his family.

Gogoi claimed there was threat to his life but he was being denied the security cover given to the state Congress president.

"He (Sarma) should focus on real issues of the state, like ST status for six communities, rampant drug abuse, and other problems," Gogoi added. (PTI)

Himanta starts form

important role in the saffron party's victories in the Assembly and Lok Sabha polls in the state since 2014.

The community holds sway in a number of constituencies in upper and northern Assam, with a fairly large percentage also residing in the Barak Valley.

"Today, Assam is creating history- one which will redefine land rights and reshape the social status of our tea tribes community," Sarma posted on X after the launch.

"From Dibrugarh, we began distributing application forms to our Cha Shramiks, through which they can get ownership of Tea garden line lands," he said.

The CM added that 'The Assam Fixation of Ceiling on Landholdings (Amendment) Act 2025' was passed in the Assembly, "which has paved the way for ensuring land rights to our hardworking Cha Shramiks and we have hit the ground already, ~3.5 lakh families in 825 TEs stand to benefit from this".

Sarma said these lands will now be solely marked for the tea garden community and to ensure that it remains with them, restriction on sale and purchase outside the community for 20 years has been placed.

"We are taking every step for the welfare of our Tea Tribes community," the CM added. (PTI)

Final photo electoral

Commission late last year to ensure an accurate and updated voter list for the district.

Assam Film Society

Memorial Award (Mumbai, 2018), the Vijaya Mulay Lifetime Achievement Award (Kerala, 2023), and the Lifetime Achievement Award of the Jaffna International Cinema Festival (Sri Lanka, 2025).

He has also authored five plays, an anthology of short stories and two collections of essays.

IJMA hopeful after meeting with Union textiles minister

KOLKATA, Feb 9: Jute mills on Monday expressed hope for a resolution of the ongoing raw jute crisis following a meeting with Union Textiles Minister Giriraj Singh.

Sources in the Indian Jute Mills Association (IJMA) said the minister assured the delegation that he would look into their recommendations.

The meeting, held on Sunday at the Central Research Institute for Jute and Allied Fibres (CRIJAF), saw the IJMA reiterate its time-bound emergency proposal earlier submitted to the Jute Commissioner's Office (JCO).

The association sought a reduction of raw jute stock limits for traders to zero by March 31, proposing that all available stocks be compulsorily liquidated to operating mills or tendered to the Jute Corporation of India (JCI).

The delegation informed the minister that despite adequate crop estimates, 25-30 lakh bales of raw jute remain withheld with traders and intermediaries.

This artificial scarcity has driven prices to an unprecedented ₹ 13,000 per quintal, forcing mill closures and putting nearly one lakh workers at immediate risk. (PTI)

ELECTRICAL WORK

Tender Notice No. DYCEE-PS-MLG-HQ-61-25-26; Date: 05-02-2026. E-tenderer are invited by the undersigned for the following work:

Tender No. DYCEE-PS-MLG-HQ-61-25-26; Name of Work: At Maligaon - Electrical work for Extension of portico & middle portion of central block including other ancillary works at HQ campus. Advertised Value: ₹30,32,509/-; Bid Security: ₹60,700/-

E-tenders will be closed at 15:00 hrs. on 27-02-2026. The complete information with the tender document of above e-tender will be available in www.ireps.gov.in

Dy.CEE/PS/Maligaon/HQ

NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
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E-AUCTION FOR MULTI PURPOSE STALLS ASSETS OVER LUMDING DIVISION

E-Auction for 9 Nos MPS-Multi Purpose Stalls assets over Lumding Division for a period of 05 (five) years. Details are as under. Auction Catalogue No.: MPS-LMG-02-26; Auction Start Date & Time (All Lots): 11:00 hrs. on 23-02-2026; Auction Close Date & Time: 12:50 hrs. on 23-02-2026; Rate Unit: Annual Licensing Fee; Trips/Days: 1826.

Seq No.	Lot No.	Stations
AA/1	MPS-LMG-NHLG-MPS-113-25-1	New Halflong
AA/2	MPS-LMG-KXJ-MPS-122-25-1	Karimganj
AA/3	MPS-LMG-KTX-MPS-102-25-1	Katakhal
AA/4	MPS-LMG-NHLG-MPS-112-25-1	New Halflong
AA/5	MPS-LMG-HBN-MPS-121-25-1	Haibargaon
AA/6	MPS-LMG-MBG-MPS-35-23-1	Maibang
AA/7	MPS-LMG-BHRB-MPS-107-25-1	Bhairabi
AA/8	MPS-LMG-SCL-MPS-109-25-1	Silchar
AA/9	MPS-LMG-HBN-MPS-120-25-1	Haibargaon

Prospective bidders are requested to visit e-Auction module of IREPS website www.ireps.gov.in.

Sr. Divisional Commercial Manager / Lumding

NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
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Sensex reclaim 84k, Nifty soars near 26k as India-US trade deal fuels buying

MUMBAI, Feb 9: Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty extended their gains for the second straight session on Monday, driven by robust buying across all segments after India and the US reached a trade deal, putting an end to tariff uncertainties.

The 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 485.35 points, or 0.58 per cent, to close at 84,065.75. During the day, the benchmark surged 734.28 points, or 0.87 per cent, to hit an intraday high of 84,314.68.

The 50-share NSE Nifty appreciated by 173.60 points, or 0.68 per cent, to settle at 25,867.30. During the session, the index climbed 228.55 points, or 0.88 per cent, to hit a high of 25,922.25.

Among the 30-share constituents, State Bank of India, Titan, UltraTech Cement, Tata Steel, Eternal, Bharat Electronics Ltd, Kotak Mahindra Bank, IndiGo, Trent, Mahindra & Mahindra, Larsen & Toubro, Sun Pharmaceuticals, and Asian Paints were the gainers.

On the other hand, PowerGrid, NTPC, ITC, ICICI Bank, Infosys, HDFC Bank, Tech Mahindra, Maruti Suzuki India and Axis Bank were the laggards.

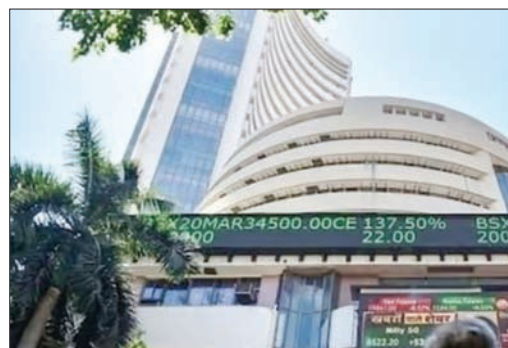
"Positive signals from the trade deal, coupled with the return of FIIs, fuelled a risk-on sentiment in the market. Investors are closely watching upcoming results, with PSU banks delivering stronger-than-anticipated performance, helping the PSU bank index outperform," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Ltd, said.

He added that an accumulation strategy was observed in consumer durables and real estate stocks following the recent correction, driven by expectations of a demand revival.

"The recovery was broad-based, with sectors such as cement, capital goods, textiles, and consumer discretionary attracting investor interest, supported by Union budget proposals and favourable trade deals," Nair said.

On the BSE, the Smallcap Select index rose 2.31 per cent, while Midcap Select index went up 1.27 per cent.

Among sectoral indices, PSU Bank climbed the most by 2.83 per cent, followed by Consumer Durables (2.76 per cent), Realty (2.64 per cent), and Commodities (2.06 per cent). While Industrials and Telecommunication rose by 1.94 per cent each, Capital Goods increased 1.89 per cent, Consumer Discretionary gained 1.73 per cent, and Metal went



up by 1.54 per cent.

"Markets traded with strength on Monday and remained firmly in positive territory, supported by encouraging global cues and optimism around an interim India-US trade framework.

"The benchmark indices opened higher, with the Nifty moving above the 25,800 level in early trade and holding gains through the session to finally close at 25,867.30," Ajit Mishra - SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said.

He added that buying interest was widespread, with realty, metal and pharma among the top gainers, while midcap and smallcap segments also posted notable advances, signalling an improvement in risk appetite after the recent bout of weakness.

"Investor sentiment was lifted by reports that India and the United States have moved closer to a trade agreement that includes tariff reductions and deeper economic cooperation," Mishra added.

A total of 3,110 stocks advanced, while 1,254 declined and 163 remained unchanged on the BSE.

In Asian markets, Japan's Nikkei 225 index, South Korea's Kospi, Shanghai's SSE Composite index and Hong Kong's Hang Seng index closed higher.

European markets were quoting higher. US markets ended higher on Friday.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, declined 0.81 per cent, to USD 67.52 per barrel.

Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) bought equities worth ₹ 1,950.77 crore on Friday, according to exchange data.

On Friday, the 30-share BSE Sensex advanced 266.47 points to settle at 83,580.40, while the NSE Nifty climbed 50.90 points to end at 25,693.70. (PTI)

Uttarayan Group launches premium residential project 'UttarayanNaina'

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 9: Uttarayan Group recently launched its premium residential project, UttarayanNaina, at Ananda Nagar on Pandu Port Road in the Adabari area of the city, marking another addition to the group's growing real estate portfolio.

The launch event was attended by P K Sharma, president of the AREIDA, along with other dignitaries, industry partners and stakeholders.

The programme featured the unveiling of the project brochure and a walk-through video showcasing the design and planning concepts of the development.

Conceptualised around the philosophy of sensory living, UttarayanNaina aims to enhance everyday comfort and well-being through thoughtful design.

The project offers premium 2, 3 and 4 BHK residences, with layouts planned to maximise natural light, ventilation and functional living spaces.

Leading financial institutions, including State Bank of India, Punjab National Bank, Central Bank of India and HDFC Bank, participated in the event to provide home loan support and guidance to prospective buyers.

According to the developer, the project has already generated strong interest from homebuyers even before its official launch.

Uttarayan Group said UttarayanNaina reflects its continued focus on delivering residential developments anchored in quality construction, trust and contemporary urban living.

CM 'inciting genocide' against Muslims, alleges Gaurav

GUWAHATI, Feb 9: Assam Congress president Gaurav Gogoi on Monday accused Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma of "inciting genocide" against Muslims through his videos, and urged police to take suo motu cognisance.

Gogoi was alluding to a now-deleted video, shared by the state BJP on X, which showed Sarma purportedly taking aim with a rifle and firing a shot at two people, one wearing a skull cap and the other with a beard, with "point-blank shot" as the caption.

"The Assam CM is inciting genocide against Muslims through his videos... Police must take suo motu cognisance of Sarma targeting a particular community, and sharing vicious social media videos," Gogoi told a press conference.

The Congress MP's comments also came amid a verbal duel with Sarma, who has been alleging that Gogoi and his family have Pakistani links.

Gogoi said he would also explore legal options over his minor children being dragged into the controversy by the CM.

The Congress leader claimed that his wife had visited Pakistan for work-related purpose in 2013, and he had accompanied her on a 10-day trip to the neighbouring country in December that year.

"The SIT never questioned me about my 2013 visit to Pakistan for 10 days. The Assam CM sat over the SIT report for six months, as it has nothing to prove his allegations of my Pakistan links," Gogoi asserted. (PTI)

'Gogoi is now attempting to project himself as a follower and promoter of Sanatan Dharma'

Union minister Pabitra Margherita targets Gaurav Gogoi over Pakistan visit



HT Correspondent

JORHAT, Feb 9: Union Minister of State Pabitra Margherita on Monday criticised Jorhat MP Gaurav Gogoi and the Congress for what he described as attempts to mislead the public by equating Gogoi's personal visit to Pakistan with official foreign visits undertaken by the Prime Minister, diplomats or Indian sportspersons.

Addressing a press conference at Abart Bhawan here, Margherita said that every foreign visit of the Prime Minister is conducted transparently, with details available to the public in real time through official channels and social media.

In contrast, he alleged that Gogoi stayed in Pakistan for 10 days without any information

being available in the public domain.

He pointed out that at the time of the visit, Gogoi was not even a Member of Parliament but only the son of former Assam chief minister Tarun Gogoi.

The minister alleged that Gogoi is now attempting to project himself as a follower and promoter of Sanatan Dharma by visiting satras and namghars, but claimed that such efforts are being rejected by the public.

Margherita further alleged that members of Gogoi's family have adopted another religion and do not hold Indian citizenship, which, he said, has led to public resistance despite Gogoi's visits to religious institutions.

Margherita also criticised Gogoi for what he

termed as evasive responses during a press conference held earlier in the day.

He alleged that Gogoi failed to clearly explain the purpose of his 10-day stay in Pakistan and merely claimed that he went there to see places his wife had visited.

"Is that enough justification, and did it really require ten days?" the minister asked.

Citing available information, Margherita claimed that Gogoi's visa was issued for three locations in Pakistan, but that he also visited Taxila, which falls under Rawalpindi.

He demanded clarity on who granted permission for travel to additional locations and under what circumstances.

The minister also pointed out that after Gogoi's wife was transferred to another country, Gogoi remained in India for some time before travelling to Pakistan, and said the people of Assam deserve clear answers on these issues.

He further remarked that while senior ministers' overseas visits are communicated transparently, Gogoi was active on social media until just before his Pakistan visit, and resumed activity after returning.

"These details must be made public," Margherita said.

Commenting on the recently announced Union Budget, the minister said it has been framed to benefit people across all sections of society and has received appreciation globally.

He added that Assam and the northeastern region stand to gain significantly, particularly in agriculture, industry and employment generation, with enhanced allocation of central funds.

Preparations underway for CMAAA 2.0 cheque distribution in Diphu

HT Bureau

DIPHU, Feb 9: Preparations have begun in full swing for the cheque distribution ceremony under the Chief Minister's Atmanirbar Asom Abhijan (CMAAA) 2.0, with the Karbi Anglong district administration holding a high-level review meeting on Monday to ensure smooth execution of the programme.

The preparatory meeting was held at the conference hall of the District Commissioner's office and was chaired by District Commissioner Aranyak Saikia, IAS. Senior officials, including the Superintendent of Police, additional district commissioners, assistant commissioners and heads of line departments, were present.

The cheque distribution ceremony is scheduled to be held on February 17, 2026, from 1.30 pm at the KASA Cricket Stadium in Diphu. Karbi Anglong has been selected as the regional hub for this phase of the scheme, with around 1,946 beneficiaries from three hill districts expected to attend.

Of the total beneficiaries, 1,002 are from Karbi Anglong, 487 from Dima Hasao district and 457 from West Karbi Anglong.

The programme will cater to entrepreneurs and youth beneficiaries under the CMAAA 2.0 initiative.

During the meeting, the district commissioner stressed the importance of close inter-departmental coordination to manage the logistics of the large-scale event. Officials discussed arrangements related to construction of the main stage and pandals, helipad facilities, uninterrupted power supply, drinking water and sanitation.

Security measures and transportation arrangements for beneficiaries travelling from neighbouring districts were also reviewed to ensure smooth movement and safety during the event.

Officials said the CMAAA 2.0 continues to be a key initiative of the state government aimed at promoting self-reliance and entrepreneurship among the youth of Assam, and the preparatory measures are intended to ensure the event is conducted efficiently and without disruption.

Sur Sangam talent hunt grand finale to light up Guwahati

Education Minister and Padma Shri singer Suresh Wadkar to grace event

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 9: The Grand Finale of Sur Sangam – Tea Garden Student Talent Hunt, a state-wide music talent hunt and mentorship initiative for students from tea garden communities, will be held on February 10 in Guwahati at the Sri Sri Damodardev International Auditorium, Srimanta Sankardev Kalakshetra.

The initiative is being implemented by The Hans Foundation in collaboration with the Department of Secondary Education, Government of Assam, reaffirming a shared commitment to holistic education and creative empowerment among tea garden communities.

The Grand Finale will be graced by Dr Ranaj Pegu, Minister of Education, Government of Assam, as the Chief Guest, while renowned Indian playback singer and Padma Shri awardee Suresh Wadkar will attend as the Guest of Honour. Wadkar will also offer advanced mentorship to the top five winners at his music academy in Mumbai.

Sur Sangam – Tea Garden Student Talent Hunt was rolled out across 54 Model Schools located in tea garden belts of Sonitpur, Tinsukia and Dibrugarh districts under The Hans Foundation's Uttam Xikhya programme, which focuses on improving access, quality and outcomes of education for tea tribe children. The programme currently supports 54 Model Schools and is slated to expand to 101 schools by April this year.

The initiative follows a review meeting chaired by Chief Minister Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma earlier last year, which emphasised the need for structured co-curricular and vocational activities, including music education, to ensure the all-round development of students from tea garden communities. Acting on this guidance, formal music education programmes were introduced across all participating Model Schools, with dedicated music teachers appointed at each institution. Over the past several months, more than 14,000 tea tribe students have actively participated in weekly, bi-weekly and tri-weekly music classes conducted across these schools.

The talent hunt progressed through three audition rounds held in Sonitpur, Tinsukia and Dibrugarh, followed by a Pre-State Round in Dibrugarh. After multiple levels of evaluation, 16 students were selected for the Grand Finale.

The finalists are presently in Guwahati, undergoing intensive grooming and practice sessions under expert guidance, as part of a structured mentorship process designed to prepare them for the final performance. As part of this preparation, the finalists are being mentored by noted musician Anita Borthakur, with regular jam sessions and collaborative rehearsals helping the young performers refine their technique, stage presence and musical expression ahead of the Grand Finale.

Adding a special dimension to the preparations, celebrity hair stylist Raju Reyaz has extended his support to Sur Sangam – Tea Garden Student Talent Hunt by offering free hair styling and makeup services to all finalists ahead of the Grand Finale. "This initiative by The Hans Foundation is truly inspiring. These young performers carry immense talent and confidence and it is important they feel their best when they step onto such a prestigious stage. I am honoured to support them as they prepare for what could be a defining moment in their lives," Reyaz said.

The top five winners of Sur Sangam – Tea Garden Student Talent Hunt will receive education scholarships up to the post-graduation level, along with advanced mentorship at Suresh Wadkar's Ajjavans Music Academy in Mumbai in addition to other awards and recognitions.

Speaking on the initiative, Jurismita Puzari, Program Manager – North East, The Hans Foundation, said, "At The Hans Foundation, we believe education must go beyond academics to truly empower children. Music builds confidence, discipline and self-expression, especially for children from marginalised communities. Sur Sangam reflects our effort to create equal platforms for talent and aspiration, ensuring that children from tea garden communities are seen, heard, and supported."

Earlier, Mamta Hojai, Director of Secondary Education, Government of Assam, had highlighted that the integration of co-curricular activities such as music into Model Schools aligns with the state's vision of inclusive and holistic education.

Three-day int'l workshop on standardisation of Karbi language

HT Bureau

DIPHU, Feb 9: In a major initiative to promote and strengthen the Karbi language, the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), in collaboration with the Centre for Karbi Studies (CKS) and the Standardisation Committee for Karbi Language (SCKL), on Monday launched a three-day International Workshop on Standardisation of Karbi Language at the Arboretum-Craft Centre, Matipung.

Linguists, researchers, Karbi writers, representatives of literary and socio-cultural bodies, Karbi language teachers and Karbi medium teachers are participating in the workshop to deliberate on evolving a definitive and uniform standard for the written form of the Karbi language.

Karbi priests, pastors and church leaders engaged in literary activities have also been invited, cutting across religious and political affiliations, to ensure a broad-based and inclusive discussion.

The inaugural session was attended by KAAC Chief Executive Member Tuliram Ronghang, MP Amarsing Tisso, MLA Bidyasing

Engeng, executive members of KAAC Suriya Ronghar and Richard Tokbi, along with other dignitaries.

Inaugurating the workshop, Ronghang said language is not merely a medium of communication but the living soul of a people, carrying their history, traditions and identity. He described the effort to standardise the Karbi language as a historic step towards unity, preservation and progress.

He also noted that the Karbi Language Implementation Technical Committee under the KAAC Art and Culture Department has been working extensively on standardisation.

"At present, different spellings are used for the same words. Once standardisation is achieved, there will be uniformity in writing," he said.

Delivering the keynote address, Dr Amalesh Gope, assistant professor at Tezpur University, said the Karbis are among the major indigenous communities of the Northeast with a distinct language and culture.

He said the initiative taken by KAAC would significantly strengthen the Karbi language and emphasised that standardisation

should emerge through mutual agreement, based on careful understanding of the language's sound system.

He also urged the council to organise training programmes for school teachers and suggested developing linguistic tools, including software, for writing and translation in Karbi.

Dr Linda A Konnerth, assistant professor of historical linguistics at the University of Bern, Switzerland, who conducted her doctoral research on the Karbi language and authored "A Grammar of Karbi", also addressed the workshop.

She stressed the importance of proper documentation, including dictionaries, grammar and textual records, for language standardisation. The workshop, she said, would play a vital role in improving the written form of Karbi through a unified standard.

Deputy Director of the Centre for Karbi Studies Maggie Katharpi said the objective of the workshop is to achieve uniformity in writing, even though spoken forms may vary across regions.

She added that participants

would discuss and chart out a systematic process for standardisation.

She later proposed the vote of thanks. The workshop also featured plenary and technical sessions.

Dr Konnerth spoke on "Documentation of the Karbi Language as a Prerequisite for Standardisation", while Dr Gope presented on "Writing Karbi for the Future: Scientific Evidence, Community Choice and Educational Responsibility".

In subsequent sessions, Director of the Centre for Karbi Studies Dharamsing Teron discussed "Insights into Karbi Philosophy – A Linguistic Detour", while deputy director Elwin Teron spoke on "Roman Script: A Script of Convenience?". The first day concluded with a presentation by Dr Robindra Teron of Assam University, Diphu Campus, on "Ethnobotany and Documentation of Karbi Language: Exploring the Language-Plant Connection".

The workshop is expected to lay the groundwork for a widely accepted standardised written form of the Karbi language, aiding its preservation, teaching and wider use in the years ahead.

BJP stages protest march in Sivasagar

HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, Feb 9: Supporters of the Bharatiya Janata Party took out a massive protest march in Sivasagar on Monday, demanding the resignation of Gaurav Gogoi, deputy leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, over his alleged links with Pakistan.

The protest march was led by BJP Sivasagar district president Bitopan Rapidongia, Thowra MLA Susanta Borgohain, chairman of the Ahom Development Council Mayur Bora, BJP state women committee member Dipika Dwurji Kakoty, along with several other party leaders and workers.

During the demonstration, protesters raised slogans alleging that the Assam Congress president posed a threat to national security and demanded immediate action against him.

The march passed through key areas of the town, drawing attention from residents, while police personnel were deployed to maintain law and order during the protest.

Training on profitable dairy farming concludes at ICAR-IARI, Assam

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 9: A three-day training programme on "Profitable Dairy Farming in the North East Region" concluded at the ICAR-Indian Agricultural Research Institute (ICAR-IARI), Assam, on Saturday, with a focus on promoting scientific practices to enhance income and sustainability in dairy farming.

The programme, held from February 5 to 7, aimed at sensitising dairy farmers to adopt scientific management practices for profitable dairy farming. A total of 50 dairy farmers from villages across Lakhimpur and Dhemajai districts participated in the training. The programme was conducted under the guidance of Dr Ch Srinivasa Rao, Director, ICAR-IARI, Assam.

The training was inaugurated by Dr Amjad K Balange, campus in-charge, ICAR-IARI, Assam. Dr A K Srivastava, senior scientist and course director, highlighted the importance of dairy farming as a

livelihood option in the region.

Chief guest Dr Deep Jyoti Chutia, senior agricultural development officer, Lakhimpur district, said such capacity-building programmes are vital for strengthening sustainable and resilient dairy farming systems in the Northeast.

Guest of honour Dr Deepandita Barman, assistant professor, Lakhimpur College of Veterinary Science, stressed that proper breeding and reproductive health management are key to improving dairy farm profitability.

A training manual on profitable dairy farming was also released during the programme.

The sessions covered topics such as breeding, feeding, housing, reproduction and health management, disease prevention and vaccination, integrated farming systems, dairy cooperatives and product branding.

Participants also took part in hands-on practical sessions at a commercial dairy farm.

Alleged illegal collection sparks protest at Telipara tollgate, traffic disrupted on NH-27



HT Correspondent

GOSSAIGAON, Feb 9: Tension prevailed at the Telipara tollgate in Gossaigaon on Monday following allegations of illegal collection of money from goods-carrying vehicles, leading to clashes, injuries to several truck drivers and a prolonged disruption of traffic along National Highway-27.

According to sources, tollgate staff, allegedly with the support of a group of local miscreants, had been demanding unauthorised payments from truck drivers, particularly those entering Assam from other states.

Drivers alleged that money was forcibly collected on various pretexts, including claims of excess load, and that those who resisted were threatened and assaulted. The situation escalated when a truck driver reportedly refused to pay the demanded amount and was allegedly assaulted by tollgate personnel and accompanying individuals.

weather that can affect Earth's magnetic environment. The Sun's surface is known to vibrate continuously due to sound-like waves called five-minute solar oscillations, causing it to behave like a giant resonator.

These oscillations are believed to play a role in carrying energy into the solar atmosphere, but the detailed processes governing their evolution and interaction with energetic particles have remained unclear.

In the new study, the researchers developed an advanced theoretical model that incorporates both low- and high-energy electrons in solar plasma.

Unlike earlier models, this approach accounts for the influence of fast-moving, high-energy non-thermal electrons on surface oscillations.

The findings show that strong nonthermal effects weaken certain pressure-driven oscillations, known as p-modes.

As the population of high-energy electrons in-

creases, the strength of these oscillations decreases, indicating that energetic particles can suppress wave activity and modify how acoustic energy is redistributed in the Sun's lower atmosphere.

This transported energy can act as an additional source to drive spicules, microspicules and atmospheric waves, contributing to the heating of the solar chromosphere and corona, which are much hotter than the Sun's visible surface.

"Our results show that some fast oscillations on the Sun's surface can carry much more energy than previously thought. At the same time, strong nonthermal effects can suppress certain oscillations, offering a clearer picture of how energy is balanced and transported in the Sun's atmosphere," Das said.

The team also proposed a new hybrid decay model to explain how p-mode-driven energy gradually diminishes as it moves upward. Instead of vanishing abruptly, the energy fades steadily with

height due to combined atmospheric and magnetic effects, helping scientists better estimate how much energy reaches different layers of the Sun.

The theoretical predictions were validated using observational data from the Helioseismic and Magnetic Imager onboard NASA's Solar Dynamics Observatory and from Japan's Hinode Solar Optical Telescope, confirming the real-world relevance of the findings.

"This work clearly demonstrates how suprathermal electron populations can strongly influence solar surface oscillations and energy transport, successfully bridging theoretical modelling with observational evidence," Prof Karmakar said.

Scientists note that a clearer understanding of energy transport in the Sun is crucial not only for fundamental astrophysics but also for improving predictions of solar storms that can disrupt satellites, power grids and communication systems on Earth.



HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, Feb 9: Researchers from Tezpur University have made a significant advance in solar physics by uncovering a new mechanism through which energy is transported from the Sun's surface into its lower atmosphere, offering fresh insights into solar activity and space weather phenomena.

The study, titled "Analysis of Solar Surface Oscillations and Energy Transport with Bispectral Electronic Thermostatistics", was carried out by Souvik Das, senior research fellow (DST-INSPIRE), and Prof Pralay Kumar Karmakar of the Department of Physics.

It has been published in The Astrophysical Journal, an leading international journal published by the American Astronomical Society.

The research focuses on understanding how energy generated on the Sun's surface is transported upward, a long-standing problem closely linked to solar magnetic activity, eruptions and space

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QUOTE OF THE DAY

The only time you fail is when you fall down and stay down. - Stephen Richards

Child budget: Growing challenges

The Union Budget is often seen as a document of fiscal priorities, but provisions related to children also reveal how the state defines long-term development. Allocations for children are not confined to the social sector alone; they shape human capital, future productivity, and the trajectory of inequality. In this context, the Union Budget 2026-27 records an increase in allocations for children, suggesting that their importance in policymaking has not been entirely overlooked. Yet the real question is not whether allocations have increased, but whether this increase reflects a genuine shift toward placing children at the centre of development priorities, and whether such investment aligns with their actual needs and India's demographic realities. According to official budget documents, total allocations related to children in 2026-27 have crossed ₹1.32 lakh crore, compared to about ₹1.16 lakh crore in the previous year—an increase of roughly ₹16,000 crore. The share of the child budget in the total Union Budget has risen to 2.47%, while as a proportion of GDP it stands at 0.34 per cent. These figures clearly indicate an increase in spending. At the same time, they also underline that in a country like India—where a large share of the population consists of children and adolescents—this level of prioritisation remains limited. Children's needs go far beyond school enrolment or food alone. Nutrition, health, safe drinking water, a secure environment, protection, and learning opportunities together form the foundations of child development.

The budget reflects increases in some key health and nutrition schemes. Allocations for anganwadi and nutrition services have risen, additional resources have been provided for school meal programmes, and the Jal Jeevan Mission has once again been included within the child budget, recognising the link between safe drinking water and children's health. The education sector also shows some positive signals. The Samagra Shiksha programme has received higher allocations, significant investment has been made in Eklayva Model Residential Schools for tribal children, and increased funding for Navodaya and Kendriya Vidyalayas, along with a substantial allocation for Atal Tinkering Labs, indicates an attempt to move beyond enrolment toward learning quality, innovation, and skill development. However, this picture also has a more troubling side. Equity-based interventions—especially scholarship schemes—have not seen the required expansion. There has been no increase in pre- and post-matric scholarships for Scheduled Caste students, while scholarships for other disadvantaged groups have seen only marginal growth. This directly affects children for whom scholarships are the primary means of continuing education. Without ensuring equitable access to education, claims of inclusive development remain incomplete.

Democracy on crutches: The long shadow of political violence in Kerala

By: M R Lulu

Politics often takes unpredictable twists and turns. Some of its rare flashes of peculiarity linger long in public memory, while moments of upheaval and dramatic reversals are swiftly forgotten. Yet, few chapters in Indian politics parallel the turbulence Kerala has witnessed over decades. The violence and antagonistic ferocity with which ideological opposition is confronted on its streets send a chill down the spine. However, as someone from Kerala, I carry vivid recollections of such animosities that have come to define the state's political landscape.

The proceedings of the Rajya Sabha recently witnessed a stormy debate after BJP-nominated member C. Sadanandan Master placed his prosthetic limbs on the floor of the House. In his maiden speech, the schoolteacher-turned-politician unsettled the nation with this unconventional yet deeply symbolic gesture. Speaking with composure and restraint, he recounted how he was assaulted in 1994 by cadres of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), CPI(M). Sadanandan Master hails from Kannur district, often described as the political crime epicenter of Kerala, which for decades has endured brutal bloodshed, staining its fertile soil deep red.

Between the CPI(M) and the BJP-RSS combine, the political contest in Kannur evolved into a struggle for sheer survival. As the CPI(M) sensed the slow and steady penetration of the Sangh Parivar into its stronghold, the response it conceived was not merely ideological resistance but the physical annihilation of its adversary, one that offered an alternative vision of nationalism to the people of a Communist citadel.

Kannur remains a bastion of the CPI(M). As the birthplace of Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan and former Chief Minister E. K. Nayanar, the district commands heightened political attention, and the party continues to strive to preserve its ideological sanctity through sustained outreach and articulation. Interestingly, Congress veteran and former Chief Minister K. Karunakaran also hailed from Kannur. A. K. Gopalan, a towering Communist parliamentarian of an earlier era, likewise emerged from the same district. In that sense, Kannur has long served as a crucible of politics for all major parties.

The first recorded political murder in Kannur was that of Vadikkal Ramakrishnan, an RSS cadre, on April 28, 1969. His killing marked the beginning of a grim legacy of vi-

olence. For nearly five decades thereafter, confrontations between the CPI(M) and the Sangh Parivar continued with gut-wrenching regularity. While both sides presently maintain a degree of restraint even as they persist with cadre grooming and political mobilization, the unusual stillness evokes a haunting sense of latent volatility, as though the ground itself awaits another eruption.

This prolonged cycle of violence has left hundreds of families shattered, women widowed, and children orphaned. On both sides, party organizations have stepped in to provide assistance to affected families, yet such measures can scarcely compensate for irreversible loss.

"These are my two legs. I once had strong legs, but below the knee I now use artificial limbs. Why? Because of democracy," Sadanandan Master told the House, holding up his prosthetics. "Every time I hear 'democracy, democracy' echoed here, I remember that those who shouted about democracy were the ones who attacked me 31 years ago."

Teaching is a profession that commands profound respect across societies and political divides. Recounting the attack, Sadanandan Master said he was returning home after his sister's marriage was fixed when organized assailants intercepted him in a bazaar moments after he alighted from a bus. "They, CPI(M) workers, seized me from behind, dragged me onto the road, and severed both my legs. They were shouting 'Inquilab Zindabad.' They were shouting about democracy," he recalled. After prolonged agony, he survived. His case, however, was not an isolated instance of political animosity directed at teachers.

On December 1, 1999, Jayakrishnan Master, then State Vice President of the Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha, was hacked to death by Left cadres inside his classroom at East Mokeri U.P. School while he was teaching. Seventeen children witnessed the gruesome act in broad daylight. The trauma they endured proved deep and lasting; despite prolonged counseling, many struggled to regain psychological stability.

One of the most tragic aftereffects of this murder continues to haunt the conscience of the state. Sheena Shankar, a Class 6 student who witnessed her teacher being hacked repeatedly, suffered extreme psychological trauma from which recovery proved impossible. She died by suicide at the age of 33, unable to escape the shadows of that harrowing day.

Political acrimony in Kerala has

not been limited to attacks on external opponents. Within the CPI(M), ideological dissent has often been met with hostility. This was starkly evident in the case of T. P. Chandrasekharan, a senior party functionary who later broke away due to fundamental ideological disagreements and founded the Revolutionary Marxist Party (RMP) in June 2008. Drawing support from former CPI(M) workers, Chandrasekharan emerged as a prominent dissident voice.

He contested the 2009 Lok Sabha election from Vatakara as an independent candidate, as the RMP lacked a recognized symbol, and secured over 20,000 votes. The response to this dissent was brutal. Chandrasekharan was murdered in 2012 with such ferocity that his body bore 51 stab wounds, a chilling message to those who dared to diverge.

Politics in a democracy must allow space for ideological disagreement. When anchored in public welfare, it should become a confluence of diverse ideas and principles. Yet, the political acrimony witnessed in Kerala, particularly in Kannur, exposes the depths to which activism and rivalry have deteriorated, leaving little room for introspection.

Acts of vengeance against Sadanandan Master and other political opponents of the CPI(M) represent one side of this grim narrative. At the same time, Left parties in the state have also faced violent resistance from the Sangh Parivar and the Congress, resulting in the deaths of numerous party workers. Political violence in Kerala has been tragically reciprocal.

As stated earlier, silence in Kerala's political arena does not necessarily signal calm. It may well be the calm before another storm.

Replying to the Motion of Thanks to the President's address in the Rajya Sabha, Prime Minister Narendra Modi referred to Sadanandan Master's maiden speech and the stark reminder of his suffering, his prosthetic legs. "Due to ideological differences, a teacher and a youth had his legs chopped off, and yet they harbor no regrets," he observed. Politics, however, must be defined in a more subtle, meaningful, and accommodative manner. In its truest form, dissidence and ideological differences should dissolve in pursuit of a larger common cause, the welfare of the nation and its people. Politics must then serve not as an instrument of division, but as a vehicle carrying ideas, plans, and hope for the country's future. (The author is a freelance journalist and social worker. He can be reached at mrulu30@gmail.com)

Oath amid ashes: Manipur's unfinished reckoning

Yumnam Khemchand Singh's swearing-in as Chief Minister of Manipur on February 4, 2026, formally ended nearly a year of President's Rule and symbolically restored an elected government to a state battered by prolonged ethnic violence. For many citizens, the ceremony marked a fragile turning point after months of uncertainty, fear and institutional paralysis. Yet the optimism surrounding his assumption of office is tempered by the depth of Manipur's fractures, which have widened since May 2023, when violence under the previous BJP administration led by N. Biren Singh claimed more than 260 lives and displaced tens of thousands. Singh, a seasoned BJP leader and former Speaker of the Manipur Legislative Assembly from the Meitei community, steps into office at a moment when constitutional authority must compete with entrenched distrust, armed militancy and a social fabric torn by trauma. The restoration of an elected ministry may have closed one chapter of central intervention, but it opens another far more complex struggle over legitimacy, reconciliation and the meaning of governance in a state where parallel structures have gained ground.

The composition of the new cabinet was clearly crafted as a gesture of inclusivity and balance. The appointment of N. Biren Singh as Deputy Chief Minister representing the Kuki community, alongside L. Dikho of the Naga People's Front as Deputy Chief Minister representing Naga interests, signals an attempt to bridge the valley-hill divide that has defined Manipur's politics for decades. On paper, this architectural inclusivity projects a national resolve to heal a wounded state by bringing valley and hills into the same executive frame. It seeks to reassure communities that the new government recognizes their presence and grievances within the constitutional fold.

However, symbolism, however carefully designed, cannot alone dissolve the hardened lines drawn by violence. The very announcement of the ministry was met with rejection from hardline Kuki militant outfits such as the Kuki National Army and the Zomi Revolutionary Army, which dismissed the appointments as tokenism and reiterated their stance of "no truck with Imphal." Such declarations are not mere rhetoric but statements of power, asserting that in parts of the hills, armed factions, not elected representatives, shape political realities.

Manipur today embodies one of India's most intractable internal crises, a landscape segmented into Meitei-dominated valley enclaves, Kuki strongholds in the hills, and vast tracts of Naga territory often administered under arrangements perceived as Kuki-dominated local structures. Since the eruption of violence in May 2023, institutional authority has been hollowed out in several regions, replaced by militia checkpoints, informal taxation, and a climate of fear that restricts free movement. The once porous interactions between valley and hills have hardened into boundaries policed by suspicion and weaponry. Highways that once served as arteries of commerce have become sites of blockade and ambush. Displacement camps, housing thousands uprooted from burned villages, stand as enduring reminders of the state's failure to protect its citizens. In such a context, the challenge before Singh is not merely administrative but existential: to reassert the primacy of democratic institutions over armed networks that have capitalized on chaos.

The roots of this militant intransigence lie in grievances that are both political and deeply emotional. The Meitei demand for Scheduled Tribe status, which gained momentum before the outbreak of violence, triggered profound anxieties among Kuki communities who feared encroachment on constitutionally protected hill lands. For Kukis, land is not merely property but identity, history and survival. The escalation that followed saw villages torched, places of worship desecrated and reports of sexual violence that shocked the nation. Yet accountability has remained elusive, and the slow pace of investigation has compounded anger across communities. In displacement camps, trauma festers alongside economic precarity, creating a reservoir of bitterness that armed groups have skillfully exploited. The porous border with Myanmar, itself destabilized by conflict, has facilitated the inflow of arms and provided sanctuary for insurgent regrouping. Extortion networks finance operations, while unemployed and displaced youth are drawn into militant ranks, deepening cycles of dependency and coercion.

Recent ambushes and improvised explosive device attacks in the wake of Singh's oath underscore the capacity of these groups to impose a costly stalemate. Every check-

point that halts civilian traffic, every disrupted supply line, reinforces the perception that the state's writ does not run uniformly across its territory. Economies atrophy when markets are cut off, and mistrust intensifies when communities retreat into defensive enclaves. The strategic dilemma confronting the new Chief Minister is stark. A heavy-handed security response risks reigniting the very violence he must suppress, feeding narratives of state repression that militants can weaponize. Yet an overly cautious approach that avoids confronting armed actors may entrench their authority and undermine faith in constitutional processes. The path forward demands calibrated security measures combined with credible dialogue, disarmament initiatives, rehabilitation programs and guarantees of free movement that are tangible rather than rhetorical.

Complicating this terrain is a triangular distrust among Meiteis, Kukis and Nagas that predates the current crisis but has been sharpened by it. Meiteis in the valley fear demographic and territorial squeeze, perceiving themselves as confined to a small geographic area while hills remain constitutionally protected. Kukis demand greater autonomy and security assurances in the wake of displacement and violence. Nagas, meanwhile, navigate a precarious neutrality, articulating grievances rooted in land rights, political autonomy and cultural preservation. Many Naga leaders argue that decades of valley-centric governance have marginalized their districts, while electoral manipulation and fragmented representation have diluted hill voices. Allegations of resource bias, particularly in development allocation, and tensions over poppy cultivation in certain hill areas have further fueled inter-community suspicion. The perception among Nagas of being trapped between valley hegemony and tribal competition adds another layer to the crisis, underscoring that the conflict cannot be reduced to a binary Meitei-Kuki confrontation.

For Singh, modest gestures such as visiting relief camps and emphasizing rehabilitation are necessary but insufficient. Credible power-sharing must move beyond cabinet portfolios to institutional reforms that make exclusion costly and inclusion meaningful. Transparent mechanisms to investigate past violence, enforce property

rights and prosecute perpetrators irrespective of affiliation are essential to restoring confidence. Development initiatives must be regionally balanced and visibly responsive to local needs, lest they be dismissed as patronage. Confidence-building measures, including safe corridors for civilian movement and joint community forums, could begin to chip away at entrenched fear. At the same time, engagement with armed groups, whether through backchannel negotiations or structured ceasefire arrangements, must be anchored in clear red lines that uphold constitutional sovereignty while offering pathways for reintegration.

The true strategic moment, however, may lie not solely in the hands of the Chief Minister but within the hill communities themselves. If Kuki and Naga political actors can forge a collective agenda centered on institutional redress rather than militant leverage, they could isolate hardline factions and expand space for negotiation. Such unity would not erase differences but could prioritize shared interests in equitable development, land protection and political representation. Collective hill agency, expressed through democratic platforms rather than armed assertion, would challenge the narrative that violence is the only language heard in Imphal. Equally, Meitei leadership must recognize that security in the valley is inseparable from justice in the hills, and that majoritarian comfort cannot substitute for inclusive governance.

Manipur stands at a crossroads between cautious reconciliation and deeper lawlessness. The end of President's Rule and the installation of a new ministry represent an institutional reset, but not a solution in themselves. The state's recovery hinges on patient, hard-headed politics that combine security with justice, symbolism with structural reform, and dialogue with accountability. Rebuilding shared belonging will require dismantling the informal sovereignties that have emerged and reweaving connections across communities that have retreated into enclaves. Singh's oath was a beginning, not a culmination. Whether it becomes a prelude to durable peace or another episode in a cycle of fragile truces will depend on the courage of political leadership, the restraint of armed actors, and the willingness of ordinary Manipuris to imagine a future beyond the barricades. (The writer can be reached at dipakkurmigpltd@gmail.com)

Indo-US Interim Trade Deal: More a capitulation than a strategic win for India

By: T N Ashok

When India and the United States announced an interim trade framework in early February 2026, the declaration was terse — a few paragraphs and a handful of bullet points in a framework rather than a full legal text.

But beneath that brevity lay a dramatic pivot in India's economic diplomacy, one that has drawn applause from the ruling party and fierce scepticism from Opposition ranks. At stake are India's sovereign policy choices, agricultural protections, energy autonomy, and long-term trade strategy — all juxtaposed against a backdrop of domestic politics and global geopolitics. What's in the fine print and what's not.

The declared essence of the Indo-US agreement centers on tariff adjustments and market access: The United States agreed to reduce its reciprocal tariffs on Indian goods from as much as 50% (a punitive level that included additional charges tied to India's purchases of Russian crude oil) down to 18%, contingent in part on India's commitment to reduce or halt Russian oil imports. (Trump's claim was that India was getting a free ride from the US with much lower import duties while it was taxing American goods at over 17% — it was unfair trade practices. An imbalance for years. He was trying to correct.) India, in return, will lower or eliminate tariffs on a spectrum of American industrial and agricultural products — from tree nuts and wine to soy-based products and ICT equipment — and work toward easier import licensing. Both sides have broadened their commercial interaction commitments, with India indicating a desire to import up to \$500 billion in U.S. goods over five years, including energy, aircraft, defense equipment, and technology products.

Crucially, though India claims protections for sensitive farm sectors — dairy, food grains, and GM products remain officially shielded — the framework signals a willingness to allow enhanced market access that critics argue goes far beyond past practice.

And there's the wrinkle: the full text of the deal is not publicly available yet, and this interim framework functions more like an outline or commitment letter than a binding treaty. Only a short term gain-Tariff relief and imports.

From an immediate economic standpoint: Indian exporters — especially in textiles, chemicals, engineering goods, and pharmaceuticals — will benefit from a reduction in punitive U.S. tariffs. Indian states with strong export clusters — from Ludhiana's hosiery to Gujarat's gems and textiles — have reported heightened optimism at the prospect of sustained market access. (By contrast, under the India-EU FTA, export duties are eliminated on 99% of Indian exports by value, a far more sweeping concession from the EU's side.)

Politically, ministers in the Modi government have cast the deal as a diplo-

matic and economic win: Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal argued that the agreement protects farmers and opens new export opportunities, claiming higher net incomes for rural producers through enhanced overseas market access. Agri Minister Prithviraj Singh Chouhan emphasised that agricultural protections were sacrosanct, and sensitive items were excluded from removal of tariffs.

In government circles, the deal is framed as an example of India's rising global stature and equal partnership with the world's largest economy. What are the long term possibilities - Strategic alliances or just Futures Trading? Longer-term, the potential impact hinges on how the interim framework evolves into a full Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA). Analysts point to several strategic possibilities:

If India steadfastly reduces non-tariff barriers and aligns standards with U.S. regulatory frameworks, Indian firms could plug into advanced manufacturing and technology value chains — a boon for MSMEs and digital sectors.

Commitments around increased U.S. purchases of Indian goods, coupled with expected reduction in restrictive measures on services and investment, could spur capital flows, joint ventures, and technology partnerships.

Yet this is where the fine print matters most: FTAs like the one India concluded with the European Union differ because they encompass not just reciprocal tariff cuts but rules on services, intellectual property, investment protection, and deeper regulatory cooperation — entire architectures that the preliminary Indo-US framework has not yet detailed.

The India-EU Free Trade Agreement, concluded in late January 2026 after nearly two decades of negotiations, offers a useful contrast: It eliminates or sharply reduces tariffs on over 90% of goods, including key Indian exports like textiles and engineering products, while safeguarding sensitive agricultural products. The EU pact went beyond goods, integrating services, regulatory cooperation, and geographic indications protection, and is widely heralded as the most comprehensive FTA India has ever made — dubbed the "mother of all deals".

By contrast, the Indo-US deal so far lacks the same breadth and structural safeguards. It is a framework rather than a fully fleshed treaty, and the details — especially on investment, intellectual property, and non-tariff barriers — remain to be negotiated. The political impact: Domestic scepticism by opposition parties while ruling party and allies hail the framework agreement.

The BJP and its allies have mounted a robust defense of the deal, calling it a calculated assertion of India's sovereign interests: Government spokespeople argue the assurances on agricultural protections demonstrate that New Delhi did not surrender farm policy autonomy even while engaging the world's largest market.

Opposition parties, however, have

seized on the lack of transparency and the sketchy nature of the framework document: Calls for a parliamentary debate on the agreement have emerged, with critics arguing that its vagueness masks concessions that could undermine domestic industries. Leaders across parties have questioned whether the deal represents capitulation to U.S. pressure, especially around Russia oil purchases and farm imports.

Voices like AIMIM chief Asaduddin Owaisi have even framed the concessions as an affront to India's sovereign prerogatives, asking rhetorically whether India's petroleum policy answers to Washington. What's the truth and are the lines blurred: The answer — unsurprisingly — is nuanced and buried in the shades between political hyperbole and economic fact.

On sovereignty: The interim framework does not legally bind India to stop Russian oil purchases, but the implicit link between tariff relief and energy sourcing creates political leverage that could constrain India's policy space.

Trumpian Claim: India has agreed to scale down or cease Russian oil imports. This is not exactly true — A truth social account of the deal which is not exactly what has happened. The world has been misled. Officially incorrect but what happened through back channels, no one knows.

On agriculture: Government assurances about protecting farm interests are technically valid — many sensitive sectors were excluded — but the devil is in definition and execution. If tariff reductions on processed foods, soy-oil products, and other inputs come through, domestic supply chains could face pressure.

On balance: This deal — like many trade agreements — is neither pure capitulation nor triumphant victory. It reflects transactional diplomacy with the U.S., motivated as much by geopolitical balancing and tariff pressures as by economic calculation. In that sense, it is opportunistic alignment rather than seamless strategic autonomy.

It's just a framework agreement, neither a death knell nor a grand finale-somewhere in between where there are a lot of gaps that need to be closed and critical issues still unresolved crying for negotiations and resolution.

The Indo-US trade agreement announced in early 2026 is not yet a full treaty, but a blueprint marked by political signaling, tariff negotiation, and strategic positioning. Its short-term gain lies in tariff rollback and resumed temper between New Delhi and Washington. Its long-term impact will be shaped by whether it evolves into a comprehensive, balanced agreement or falls short of structural integration the way the EU India FTA did.

In both domestic and international arenas, the fight is as much about perception as policy — and until the full text is unveiled and debated, the truth will remain, inevitably, blurred between political spin and economic reality. (IPA Service)

The best sweeteners for people with diabetes

By: Zia Sherrell

A variety of alternative sweeteners is available, each with different pros and cons. However, according to the American Diabetes Association (ADA), while zero-calorie sweeteners might not produce an immediate spike in blood sugar, there is also no evidence that they help lower blood sugar long-term. It is best to use low calorie sweeteners in moderation as part of a varied, carbohydrate-conscious diet.

In this article, we look at nine of the best low calorie sweeteners for people with diabetes.

1. Stevia

Stevia is a natural sweetener that comes from the Stevia rebaudiana plant. To make it, manufacturers extract chemical compounds called steviol glycosides from the leaves of the plant.

This highly processed and purified product is around 300 times sweeter than table sugar, which means a person needs to use only a small amount to sweeten food.

Stevia has several pros and cons that people with diabetes need to consider. It is calorie-free and does not raise blood sugar levels. However, it is often more expensive than other sugar substitutes.

Stevia also has a bitter aftertaste that many people may find unpleasant. For this reason, some manufacturers add other sugars and ingredients to balance the taste. This can make stevia products less suitable for those with diabetes. Additionally, some people report nausea, bloating, and an upset stomach after consuming it.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) classifies sweeteners made from high purity steviol glycosides as "generally recognized as safe" (GRAS). But the FDA does not consider stevia leaf or crude stevia extracts safe. Therefore, it is illegal to sell these products or import them into the United States.

According to the FDA, the acceptable daily intake (ADI) of stevia is 4 milligrams per kilogram (mg/kg) of a person's body weight. So, a person who weighs

60 kg, or 132 pounds (lb), can safely consume 9 packets of the tabletop sweetener version of stevia per day.

2. Tagatose

Tagatose is a form of fructose that is around 90% sweeter than sucrose. It exists in small amounts in some fruits, such as apples, oranges, and pineapples. However, manufacturers usually extract it from milk and may use it in food production as a low calorie sweetener, texturizer, or stabilizer.

The FDA classifies tagatose as GRAS, and scientists are interested in its potential to help manage type 2 diabetes.

Some studies indicate that tagatose has a low glycemic index (GI). GI is a ranking system that measures the speed at which foods increase a person's blood sugar levels.

Tagatose may be particularly beneficial for people with diabetes who are following a low GI diet. However, this sugar substitute is more expensive than other low calorie sweeteners and may be harder to find in stores.

3. Sucralose

Sucralose is an artificial sweetener that is about 600 times sweeter than table sugar but contains very few calories. It is one of the most popular artificial sweeteners and is widely available under the brand name Splenda.

Manufacturers add sucralose to sweeten a range of products, from chewing gum to baked goods. It is heat-stable and is a popular choice for sugar-free baking and for sweetening hot drinks. This is because, unlike other artificial sweeteners, sucralose retains its flavor at high temperatures.

The FDA has approved sucralose as a general-purpose sweetener and set an ADI of 5 mg/kg of body weight. For example, a person weighing 60 kg (132 lb) can safely consume up to 23 packets of the tabletop sweetener version of sucralose in a day.

However, some studies have raised health concerns. A 2016 study found that male mice who consumed sucralose were more likely to develop malignant tu-



ors.

Animal studies do not necessarily indicate that a substance poses a significant risk to humans, but nevertheless, more research on sucralose's effect on humans is necessary to determine its safety.

4. Aspartame

Aspartame is a popular synthetic sweetener that is around 200 times sweeter than sugar. It has been on the market in the U.S. since the 1980s and is available in grocery stores under the brand names Nutrasweet and Equal.

Manufacturers add aspartame to a wide variety of food products, including diet soda. However, unlike sucralose, aspartame is not a good sugar substitute for baking because it breaks down at high temperatures. People generally use it only as a tabletop sweetener.

The FDA considers aspartame safe at an ADI of 50 mg/kg of body weight. A person who weighs 60 kg (132 lb) could consume up to 75 packets of aspartame sweetener per day. However, aspartame is not safe for people with a rare genetic disorder called phenylketonuria.

5. Acesulfame potassium

Acesulfame potassium, also

known as acesulfame K or Ace-K, is an artificial sweetener that is around 200 times sweeter than table sugar. Manufacturers often combine it with other sweeteners to reduce its bitter aftertaste.

The FDA has approved acesulfame potassium as a low calorie sweetener and states that the results of more than 90 studies support its safety. According to the FDA, the ADI for acesulfame potassium is 15 mg/kg of body weight.

This is equivalent to a person weighing 60 kg (132 lb) consuming 23 packets of a tabletop sweetener version of this ingredient per day.

A 2017 study in mice suggests a possible association between acesulfame potassium and weight gain, but further research in humans is necessary to explore this link.

6. Saccharin

Saccharin is widely available under brand names such as Sweet Twin, Sweet 'N Low, and Necta Sweet. It contains zero calories and is 200-700 times sweeter than table sugar.

According to the FDA, people expressed safety concerns about saccharin in the 1970s after research found a link between saccharin and bladder cancer in

laboratory rats.

However, more than 30 human studies now support saccharin's safety, and the National Institutes of Health no longer consider this sweetener to have the potential to cause cancer.

The FDA has determined the ADI of saccharin to be 15 mg/kg of body weight, which means that a person weighing 60 kg (132 lb) can consume up to 45 packets of a tabletop sweetener version per day.

7. Neotame

Neotame is a low calorie artificial sweetener that is about 7,000-13,000 times sweeter than table sugar. It can tolerate high temperatures and is therefore suitable for baking.

The FDA approved neotame in 2002 as a general-purpose sweetener and flavor enhancer for all foods except meat and poultry. According to the FDA, more than 113 animal and human studies support neotame's safety. The FDA has set an ADI for neotame of 0.3 mg/kg of body weight.

This is equivalent to a person weighing 60 kg (132 lb) consuming 23 packets of a tabletop sweetener version of neotame per day.

8. Monk fruit

Monk fruit, which is also

known as Lo Han Guo or Swingle fruit, is a small, round fruit that grows in Southeast Asia. There, people have used it for centuries in traditional Chinese medicine as a digestive aid.

Some manufacturers make a zero-calorie, carbohydrate-free sweetener from dried monk fruit. It is around 250 times sweeter than table sugar and does not affect a person's blood sugar levels.

People can add monk fruit sweetener to many foods and drinks. It is stable at high temperatures but is not suitable as a sugar alternative in baked goods that need sugar for texture and structure.

The FDA approved monk fruit extract as a food additive in 2010. It recognizes monk fruit as safe for everyone, including pregnant people and children, and has permitted the use of monk fruit in foods and beverages. However, it has not set an ADI for monk fruit.

9. Allulose

Allulose is a low calorie sugar that occurs naturally in some fruits and vegetables, such as figs, raisins, and jackfruit. It is around 70% as sweet as table sugar but has only 10% of the calories. It does not increase blood sugar or feed the dental bacteria that cause cavities.

The FDA has classified allulose as GRAS but has not set an ADI. Unlike some other artificial sweeteners, allulose is suitable for baking and acts like sugar.

Is agave nectar OK for people with diabetes?

Agave nectar or syrup comes from agave plants. Although brands often market it as a healthy alternative to sugar, it is not suitable for people with diabetes because of its sugar content.

Agave nectar contains fructose, or fruit sugar. Fructose breaks down more slowly than sucrose, meaning that it is less likely to cause sudden spikes in blood sugar. For this reason, agave syrup has a low GI rating.

However, GI is not the only consideration for people with diabetes. The ADA lists agave nectar as an example of an "added sugar" that people with diabetes

need to watch for on food labels, along with corn syrup, honey, and table sugar. Consuming large amounts of added sugars may contribute to prediabetes, type 2 diabetes, and obesity.

Considerations

When deciding which low calorie sweetener to use, a person may wish to consider:

Intended use: Many sugar substitutes do not withstand high temperatures, so they would make poor choices for baking.

Necessity: Sometimes, it is possible to flavor a dish with whole food ingredients instead of sweeteners. This option also adds vitamins and minerals to meals. For example, people can infuse water with mint and citrus fruits or add whole blueberries or raspberries to their breakfast.

Cost and availability: Some sugar substitutes are expensive, whereas others have a cost closer to that of table sugar. Additionally, some sugar substitutes are more widely available than others.

Taste: Some sugar substitutes, such as stevia, have a bitter aftertaste that many people may find unpleasant.

Natural versus artificial: Some people prefer using natural sweeteners, such as stevia, rather than artificial sugar substitutes. However, as with agave nectar, "natural" does not always mean better.

Summary

Many people with diabetes need to avoid or limit sugary foods. Low calorie sweeteners can allow those with the condition to enjoy an occasional sweet treat without affecting their blood sugar levels.

Each sweetener has advantages and disadvantages. For example, tagatose may be actively helpful for those with type 2 diabetes. However, research into this is ongoing. So far, there is no evidence that switching to low calorie sweeteners helps manage diabetes in the long term.

It is best for people with diabetes to consume sweeteners in moderation as part of a balanced and diabetes-appropriate diet. People can consult a doctor or dietitian for advice on the best diet for them. (Courtesy: *Medical News Today*)

PhD in India: Fewer patents, less products, only theses

By: Prof RK Uppal

India today stands among the world's largest producers of PhD degrees. Every year, thousands of doctoral scholars graduate from public and private universities across disciplines. On paper, this should translate into a surge of innovation, patents, start-ups, and globally competitive technologies. In reality, however, the outcome is deeply troubling: despite the explosion in PhD numbers, India continues to struggle with low patent output, weak commercialization of research, and limited global impact. The uncomfortable truth is that India's PhD ecosystem has become thesis-centric rather than innovation-driven. At the heart of the problem lies a misalignment of purpose. In many universities, the PhD is treated primarily as a credential for career advancement—needed for promotions, recruitment, or regulatory compliance—rather than as a rigorous journey of original discovery. Research topics are often repetitive, incremental, and disconnected from real-world problems. Instead of asking "What problem does this solve?" the dominant question has become "Will this be accepted by the university?" As a result, theses pile up in libraries, while patents, prototypes, and products remain rare.

Another critical weakness is poor integration between academia and industry. In advanced research economies, doctoral research is closely linked to industrial challenges, national missions, or frontier technologies. Industry-funded PhDs, joint supervision, and lab-to-market pipelines are common. In India, by contrast, industry participation in doctoral research is minimal. Many supervisors themselves lack exposure to industrial research or commercialization processes. Consequently, PhD scholars are trained to write dissertations, not to develop technologies, file patents, or create start-ups. The absence of structured technology transfer offices in most universities further widens this gap. The incentive structure of the Indian higher education system worsens the situation. Universities are rewarded

for enrolment numbers, completion rates, and publication counts—not for patents granted, technologies licensed, or products launched. Faculty promotions often depend more on the number of supervised PhDs than on the impact of the research produced. This encourages quantity over quality and speed over substance. When success is measured by how many theses are submitted rather than what they achieve, innovation naturally becomes a casualty.

Equally concerning is the quality of supervision. While India has many dedicated and capable research mentors, the system as a whole suffers from overloaded supervisors, uneven expertise, and weak accountability. In several institutions, a single guide supervises an excessive number of scholars, leaving little time for deep intellectual engagement. In others, supervision becomes a formality, focused on procedural compliance rather than intellectual rigor. Without strong mentorship, scholars struggle to move beyond literature surveys and data collection to genuine innovation. Funding constraints further limit doctoral impact. India's expenditure on research and development remains modest compared to global leaders. Many PhD scholars work with outdated equipment, limited access to high-quality databases, and inadequate financial support. Stipends are often delayed or insufficient, forcing scholars to take on teaching or non-academic work, reducing the time and energy available for research. Under such conditions, expecting cutting-edge innovation is unrealistic.

The culture of risk aversion within academia also plays a role. Innovative research is uncertain by nature—it may fail, require longer timelines, or challenge established ideas. However, Indian PhD systems often prioritize "safe" topics that guarantee completion within prescribed deadlines. Scholars are subtly discouraged from pursuing bold, interdisciplinary, or application-oriented research because it might complicate evaluation or delay submission. Over time, this creates a culture where originality is sacrificed for predictability. Globally, the conse-

quences are visible. While India produces a high volume of academic publications, its citation impact, patent conversion rate, and global research influence remain relatively low. Many of India's brightest doctoral graduates seek opportunities abroad, where their skills contribute to foreign patents, companies, and laboratories. The irony is stark: Indian talent fuels global innovation, while Indian universities struggle to convert research into national value.

Reversing this trend requires systemic reform, not cosmetic changes. First, doctoral evaluation must move beyond the thesis alone. Patents filed, prototypes developed, datasets created, policy impact, or industrial collaboration should be formally recognized as doctoral outcomes. Second, industry-linked PhD programs must be expanded, with incentives for companies to co-supervise and co-fund research. Third, supervisors should be evaluated not only on numbers but on the quality and impact of the research they mentor. Equally important is investing in research infrastructure, technology transfer offices, and innovation cells within universities. PhD scholars must be trained in intellectual property rights, entrepreneurship, and translational research alongside academic writing. Finally, regulators and policymakers must shift their focus from counting degrees to measuring outcomes. A smaller number of impactful PhDs is far more valuable than a mass of doctorates with no societal or economic return.

In conclusion, India does not suffer from a shortage of PhDs; it suffers from a shortage of purpose-driven doctoral research. As long as the system continues to reward theses over technologies, degrees over discoveries, and paperwork over progress, the gap between doctoral education and national innovation will persist. If India truly aspires to be a global knowledge and innovation leader, its PhD ecosystem must move decisively from submission to solution, from theses to transformations. (The author is the Principal of Guru Gobind Singh College of Management and Technology, Gidderbaha (Ph.))

Preparing right for HSLC and CBSE

By: Satyabrata Borah

The HSLC and CBSE board examinations arrive in a student's life at a time when everything already feels intense. Bodies are changing, emotions are unpredictable, expectations are heavy, and the future seems both exciting and frightening at the same time. In the middle of all this, the board exam stands like a giant checkpoint that everyone keeps talking about. Teachers remind you of it every day. Parents worry silently or loudly. Relatives suddenly become interested in your studies. Friends compare preparation levels. Social media shows success stories and rank holders. It is easy to feel overwhelmed and even smaller than your own fears. Yet the truth is simple and reassuring. The HSLC and CBSE board exams are important, but they are not unbeatable monsters. They are structured evaluations meant to test consistency, understanding, and discipline more than brilliance or perfection.

Preparation for these board exams does not begin in the last two months. It begins the moment a student accepts that steady effort matters more than sudden panic. Many students believe that toppers are born different, that they have special brains or extraordinary memory. In reality, most successful students are simply those who start earlier, make fewer excuses, and forgive themselves quickly when they fall behind. The first and most important step in preparing for HSLC or CBSE exams is to change the way the exam is viewed. When the exam is seen as an enemy, the mind resists studying. When it is seen as a responsibility, the mind becomes calmer. When it is seen as an opportunity to grow, the fear slowly loses its power.

Understanding the syllabus clearly is one of the most underestimated parts of exam preparation. Many students study hard but still feel lost because they never truly sit down and look at what is actually required. HSLC and CBSE syllabi are well defined. Every chapter, every unit, every topic has a purpose. When students take time to go through the syllabus, mark completed portions, identify weak areas, and understand the weightage, the exam becomes less mysterious. Clarity reduces anxiety. Confusion feeds fear. A student who knows what lies ahead walks with more confidence than

one who keeps guessing.

Once the syllabus is understood, planning becomes meaningful. Planning does not mean creating a perfect timetable that looks impressive on paper but collapses in reality. Planning means being honest about time, energy, and limitations. A student who studies four focused hours daily with consistency will often perform better than one who studies ten hours occasionally with exhaustion. HSLC and CBSE exams reward regularity. Studying a little every day builds memory naturally. Concepts settle slowly. Panic memorisation fades quickly, but understanding stays.

The way a student studies matters as much as how long they study. Reading a chapter five times without understanding is less effective than reading it twice with full attention. Active learning makes a difference. Asking why something happens, explaining a concept in your own words, teaching a friend, drawing diagrams, solving problems without looking at solutions, and writing answers instead of only reading them all strengthen learning. Board exams are written exams. If the hand is not trained, the mind struggles during the exam. Writing practice is especially important for languages, social science, and even science subjects where explanations matter.

Different subjects require different approaches. Languages need regular reading and writing. Vocabulary grows through exposure, not memorisation. Writing improves through practice, not fear. Mathematics demands patience and repetition. There is no shortcut to confidence in maths other than solving problems again and again until the fear disappears. Science needs conceptual clarity. Mugging up answers without understanding experiments or processes creates confusion in the exam hall. Social science subjects need structure. Understanding timelines, causes, effects, and connections between events makes answers richer and more logical. Geography becomes easier when maps are practiced regularly instead of avoided.

One of the biggest challenges during HSLC and CBSE exam preparation is distraction. Mobile phones, notifications, reels, games, and constant comparisons silently steal time and energy. Most students do not realise how much time disappears in small

breaks that stretch into hours. Discipline does not mean cutting off the world completely. It means knowing when to stop. Creating fixed study hours, keeping the phone away during those hours, and rewarding yourself after completing tasks can restore control. Discipline is not punishment. It is self respect.

Revision is where preparation either strengthens or collapses. Many students keep studying new chapters but rarely revise old ones. As a result, everything feels familiar but nothing feels confident. Regular revision locks information into memory. Short notes, formulas, key points, diagrams, and summary sheets are extremely useful during revision. Revising does not mean reading everything again. It means recalling actively, testing yourself, and identifying gaps. The discomfort felt during revision is actually growth happening.

Solving previous years' question papers is one of the most practical tools for HSLC and CBSE exam preparation. It helps students understand the pattern, the language of questions, and the level of detail expected in answers. It also builds speed and confidence. When students practice writing full-length answers within time limits, the exam day feels less intimidating. The exam becomes familiar territory instead of unknown ground.

Mental health plays a crucial role during board exam preparation. Fear of failure, pressure to meet expectations, and constant comparison can slowly drain motivation. Students must remember that feeling stressed does not mean they are weak. It means they care. Talking to parents, teachers, or friends about anxiety helps release its grip. Silence increases pressure. Sharing reduces it. Short breaks, deep breathing, listening to music, light exercise, or simply sitting quietly can reset the mind.

Sleep is not wasted time. It is essential for memory and concentration. Many students sacrifice sleep to study late at night, believing they are gaining extra hours. In reality, a tired brain learns slower and forgets faster. A well rested student thinks more clearly, writes better answers, and manages time more effectively during exams. Eating balanced food and drinking enough water also support mental performance. Health is often ignored during exams, but it quietly decides how well a student performs.

Parents play a powerful role during this phase. Supportive parents create safety. Constant pressure creates fear. Encouragement builds confidence. Comparison breaks it. When parents focus on effort rather than marks, students feel motivated instead of threatened. Teachers too become anchors during this time. Their guidance, reassurance, and experience can help students see beyond temporary stress. Asking doubts is not a sign of weakness. It is a sign of seriousness.

As the exam approaches, it is natural to feel nervous. Nervousness means the moment matters. The goal is not to eliminate nervousness but to manage it. In the final days, students should avoid starting completely new topics. Revising what is already known strengthens confidence. Staying calm, trusting preparation, and keeping a steady routine helps the mind remain stable. On the exam day, reading the question paper carefully, planning answers briefly, and managing time wisely can make a huge difference. Neat presentation, clear handwriting, and structured answers help examiners understand responses better.

It is important to remember that HSLC and CBSE board exams are milestones, not destinations. They open doors, but they do not define a person's worth, intelligence, or future happiness. Many successful people did not top board exams. Many toppers faced struggles later. Life is long and layered. Exams are one chapter, not the whole story. What truly matters is the discipline learned, the resilience built, and the confidence gained through honest effort.

Preparing for board exams teaches students how to manage pressure, organise time, and believe in themselves. These skills remain useful long after mark-sheets are forgotten. When students look back years later, they may not remember every answer they wrote, but they will remember how they survived fear and grew stronger.

The HSLC and CBSE board exams are not battles to be fought alone. They are journeys walked step by step. With consistency, clarity, support, and self belief, every student can walk through this phase with dignity and hope. Success does not always mean scoring the highest marks. Sometimes success means giving your best without breaking yourself. And that kind of success stays with you forever.

EPSTEIN SCANDAL FALLOUT

British PM Starmer fights for job after top aides quit

LONDON, Feb 9: British Prime Minister Keir Starmer is fighting to hold on to his job after two of his top aides resigned over a controversial politician's appointment as the UK's ambassador to the US despite known links with convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein.

Morgan McSweeney stepped down as Starmer's chief of staff at 10 Downing Street over the weekend after the release of Epstein's files exposed further details of Peter Mandelson's connections with him and triggered a criminal investigation by the UK police. He was followed out by Tim Allan, who resigned as director of communications on Monday, saying he wanted to "allow a new No 10 team to be built".

While McSweeney attempted to take full responsibility for Mandelson's appointment to Washington last year in his resignation letter, Starmer's own Labour Party MPs continue to question his judgment and leadership abilities, with a make-or-break party meeting set for Monday evening.

"The decision to appoint Peter Mandelson was wrong. He has damaged our party, our country and trust in politics itself," McSweeney said in his resignation letter.

"When asked, I advised the Prime Minister to make that appointment and I take full responsibility for that advice," he said.

As the man credited with running



Starmer's leadership bid and winning the Labour Party its landslide general election in July 2024, McSweeney's loss will hit Starmer hard as he is forced into a reset of his Downing Street ranks minus his closest aide.

"He turned our party around after one of its worst ever defeats and played a central role running our election campaign. It is largely thanks to his dedication, loyalty and leadership that we won a landslide majority and have the chance to change the country,"

said Starmer, in response to McSweeney's resignation letter.

According to documents associated with the late Jeffrey Epstein released in the US, Mandelson shared confidential information with him when he was the business secretary in the Gordon Brown Labour government.

The Opposition parties rounded on Starmer, and his own MPs questioned the vetting process that resulted in the appointment of Mandelson to a top diplomatic position before having to sack him as US

envoy last year.

Last week, Starmer issued an apology to the victims of Epstein in an effort to move on from the scandal: "It had been publicly known for some time that Mandelson knew Epstein, but none of us knew the depth and the darkness of that relationship.

"I am sorry. Sorry for what was done to you, sorry that so many people with power failed you, sorry for having believed Mandelson's lies and appointing him."

All eyes are now on the weekly Parliamentary Labour Party meeting, where Starmer will have to persuade his Cabinet and backbench MPs that he continues to be the best person for the top job.

Meanwhile, the scandal surrounding Epstein's sex trafficking of underage girls triggered a rare intervention from the royal circles, with Prince William and Kate Middleton's office issuing a statement on behalf of the Prince and Princess of Wales.

"I can confirm the Prince and Princess have been deeply concerned by the continuing revelations. Their thoughts remain focused on the victims," Kensington Palace said.

There is no mention of Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor, William's uncle and King Charles III's younger brother, as among those under intense scrutiny over his past connections with the sex offender. (PTI)

Crackdown on dissent after nationwide protests in Iran widens



DUBAI, Feb 9: Iranian security forces have launched a campaign to arrest figures within the country's reformist movement, reports said on Monday.

That widens a crackdown on dissent after authorities earlier put down nationwide protests in violence that killed thousands and saw tens of thousands more detained.

Detained Nobel Peace Prize laureate Narges Mohammadi has received another prison sentence of over seven years. It signals a widening effort to silence anyone opposed to the bloody suppression of unrest by Iran's theocracy as it faces new nuclear talks with the United States. President Donald Trump has repeatedly warned he could launch an attack on the country if no deal is reached.

Media reports quoted officials within the reformist movement, which seeks to change Iran's theocracy from inside, as saying at least four of their members had been arrested. They include Azar Mansouri, the head of the Reformist Front, which represents multiple reformist factions, and former diplomat Mohsen Aminzadeh, who served under reformist President Mohammad Khatami.

Also detained was Ebrahim Asgharzadeh, who led students who stormed the US Embassy in Tehran in 1979, sparking the 444-day hostage crisis.

Their arrests likely stem from a reformist statement in January that called for Iran's 86-year-old Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei to resign from his position and have a transitional governing council oversee the country.

Iran's state-run IRNA news agency quoted a statement from prosecutors in Tehran, the country's capital, saying four people had been arrested and others summoned to meet authorities. It accused those allegedly involved of "organising

and leading ... activities aimed at disrupting the political and social situation in the country amid military threats from the United States and the Zionist regime."

"Having bludgeoned the streets into silence with exemplary cruelty, the regime has shifted its attention inward, fixing its stare on its loyal opposition," wrote Ali Vaez, an Iran expert at the International Crisis Group.

"The reformists, sensing the ground move beneath them, had begun to drift — and power, ever paranoid, is now determined to cauterise dissent before it learns to walk."

However, it remains unclear just how much political support reformists have within Iran. The anger on the streets of Iran during the demonstrations, heard in people shouting "Death to Khamenei!" and in support of the country's exiled crown prince, appeared to lump reformists in with all other politicians now working in the Islamic Republic.

Iran and the US held new nuclear talks last week in Oman. Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, speaking Sunday to diplomats at a summit in Tehran, signalled that Iran would stick to its position that it must be able to enrich uranium — a major point of contention with Trump, who bombed Iranian atomic sites in June during the 12-day Iran-Israel war.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is to travel to Washington this week, with Iran expected to be the major subject of discussion, his office said.

The US has moved the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln, ships and warplanes to the Middle East to pressure Iran into an agreement and have the firepower necessary to strike the Islamic Republic should Trump choose to do so (AP)

Iraq executes former senior officer under Saddam



BAGHDAD, Feb 9: Iraq announced on Monday that a high-level security officer during the rule of Saddam Hussein has been hanged for his involvement in the 1980 killing of a prominent Shiite cleric.

The National Security Service said that Saadoun Sabri al-Qaisi, who held the rank of major general under Saddam and was arrested last year, was convicted of "grave crimes against humanity," including the killing of prominent Iraqi Shiite cleric Mohammed Baqir al-Sadr, members of the al-Hakim family, and other civilians.

The agency did not say when al-Qaisi was executed.

Al-Sadr was a leading critic of Iraq's secular Ba'athist government and Saddam, his opposition intensifying following the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, which heightened Saddam's fears of a Shiite-led uprising in Iraq.

In 1980, as the government moved against Shiite activists, al-Sadr and his sister Bint al-Huda — a religious scholar and activist who spoke out against government oppression — were arrested. Reports indicate they were tortured before being executed by hanging on April 8, 1980.

The execution sparked widespread outrage at the time and remains a symbol of repression under Saddam's rule. Saddam was from Iraq's Sunni minority.

Since the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq, authorities have pursued former officials accused of crimes against humanity and abuses against political and religious opponents. Iraq has faced criticism from human rights groups over its application of the death penalty. (AP)

Takaichi's landslide win reflects deep structural, ideological shift in Japan: China

BEIJING, Feb 9: China on Monday said that Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's massive victory in the midterm polls, a result widely seen as fuelled by public resentment over Beijing's strong opposition to her, reflects some deep-seated structural problems and shifting ideological currents.

Takaichi's Liberal Democratic Party won more than two-thirds majority in the House of Representatives in Sunday's election.

The election results in Japan reflected some deep-seated structural problems as well as evolving trends of ideological currents, which deserve profound reflection by visionary individuals from all walks of life in Japan and the international community at large, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lin Jian told reporters.

He was replying to a question at a media briefing here whether Beijing's tough stance toward Takaichi's remarks on Taiwan, persisting with diplomatic tension, influenced the outcome of elections in her favour.

"We urge those running the Japanese government to take seriously rather than brush aside the concerns of the international community, follow the path of peaceful development rather than return to militarism," he said.



"If Japan's far-right forces miscalculate and act recklessly, they will be met by resistance from the Japanese people and serious backlash from the international community," he said. China never interferes in the internal affairs of other countries, firmly opposes any erroneous words and actions that interfere in its internal affairs, infringe upon its core interests, Lin said, defending Beijing's tough stance towards Japan in the last few months objecting to Takaichi's remarks.

China mounted a massive diplomatic offensive against Japan over Takaichi's remarks in November last year that a Taiwan contingency could be a "survival-threatening situation" for Japan that

may lead to action from the country's defence forces in support of the United States.

China, which claims Taiwan as part of it and vows to integrate it with the mainland, asked her to retract her remarks, saying that Taiwan-related issues are its internal affairs.

China's policy toward Japan is clear and consistent, Lin told a media briefing here while answering a volley of questions on Takaichi's victory, which came as a surprise here.

Regardless of who leads Japan or which party is in power, they must abide by the four political documents between China and Japan, as well as Japan's pacifist constitution, and fulfil their commitments and international obligations, Lin said.

He hoped that Japan would pursue a peaceful path and "not repeat the mistakes of militarism." The diplomatic row deepened after the Chinese Consul General in Osaka, Xue Jian, in a post on X, threatened to "cut off dirty neck without a moment of hesitation", prompting Japan to lodge a strong protest with China.

China, which is the largest source of tourists to Japan, also asked its citizens to avoid travelling to Japan, resulting in a spate of cancellations of trips by Chinese tourists. China also banned imports of fish from Japan. (PTI)

Norwegian ambassador resigns as she faces scrutiny over contacts with Epstein

OSLO, Feb 9: A Norwegian ambassador who was involved in Israeli-Palestinian peace efforts in the 1990s and most recently served in Jordan has resigned as she faces scrutiny over her contacts with Jeffrey Epstein, the country's Foreign Ministry said. The ministry announced Mona Juul's resignation on Sunday evening, days after she was suspended as Norway's ambassador to Jordan. That followed reports that Epstein left the children of Juul and her husband, Terje Rod-Larsen, \$10 million in a will drawn up shortly before his death by suicide in a New York prison in 2019.

Foreign Minister Espen Barth Eide said Juul's decision was "correct and necessary." Her contact with the convicted sex offender showed a "serious lapse in judgment," he said, adding that "the case makes it difficult to restore the trust that the role requires."

A ministry investigation into Juul's knowledge of and contact with Epstein will continue, and Juul will continue discussions with the ministry "so that the matter can be clarified," Eide said. The ministry said it also launched a review of its funding of and contact with the International Peace Institute, a New York-based think tank, during the period when it was headed by Rod-Larsen. Eide said Rod-Larsen also had shown poor judgment regarding Epstein.

Rod-Larsen and Juul were among those involved in facilitating the landmark Oslo Accords aimed at resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the 1990s. Juul acknowledged in a statement to Norwegian news agency NTB last week that it had been "imprecise" to describe her contact with Epstein as minimal, but said that the contact originated in her

husband's relationship with Epstein and she had no independent social or professional relationship with him. She wrote that her contact with Epstein had been sporadic and private, not part of her official duties, but acknowledged that she should have been much more careful.

The latest batch of Epstein files has cast an unflattering spotlight on several prominent Norwegian figures. Crown Princess Mette-Marit on Friday issued an apology "to all of you whom I have disappointed" after documents offered more details of her relationship with Epstein. The country's economic crimes unit has opened a corruption investigation into former Prime Minister Thorbjorn Jagland — who also once headed the committee that hands out the Nobel Peace Prize — over his ties with Epstein. His lawyer said Jagland would cooperate. (AP)

B'desh's EC bans use of mobiles within 400 yards of polling centres

DHAKA, Feb 9: Bangladesh's Election Commission has issued a directive, prohibiting mobile phones within 400 yards of polling centres on the election day, sparking protests from right-wing political parties who threatened to lay siege to its office if the decision is not withdrawn.

Bangladesh will hold parliamentary elections on February 12 — the first since the ouster of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina following massive protests led by students in August 2024.

"No individual will be allowed to enter a polling centre or remain within a 400-yard radius of it with a mobile phone. The restriction will apply to voters, polling agents, and all others present on election duty, with limited exceptions," said the directive issued on Sunday.

It said only the presiding officers, officers-in-charge of the police assigned to centres, and two authorised para-police Ansar members on election duty would remain beyond the purview of the order.

Jamaat-e-Islami and its right-wing allies, which emerged as the main challenger to its once crucial ally, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), in the absence of the now disbanded Awami League, sharply protested the decision, threatening to besiege EC's office unless the order was retracted.

"If this rule is not withdrawn by this (Monday) evening, a stern movement will be built," Jamaat

chief Shafiqur Rahman said.

Jamaat's assistant secretary general Ahsanul Mahboob Zubair made the announcement in a press release. The student-led National Citizen Party (NCP), which emerged last year with interim government chief Muhammad Yunus' blessings and joined the Jamaat-led 11-party right-wing election alliance, also criticised the EC's decision.

"If the decision is not withdrawn by this evening, the EC will be besieged tomorrow (Tuesday)," NCP convenor Nahid Islam said.

The NCP leaders spearheaded the 2024 street protests called the July Uprising that toppled Hasina's Awami League regime.

The BNP has not commented on the EC order so far.

Meanwhile, the election campaign entered its final day, with the national capital witnessing rallies by senior leaders of major political parties.

BNP Chairperson Tarique Rahman attended rallies at Kamal Ataturk Avenue playground in his Dhaka-17 constituency and at the Kalabagan Krirachakro Club playground.

Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis Ameer Maulana Mamunul Haque, nominee of the 11-party electoral alliance in Dhaka-13, joined a rally at Mohammadpur Eidgah Ground. Jamaat Ameer Rahman and NCP's Nahid Islam also attended the event. (PTI)

Machado says a close ally was kidnapped hours after prison release

CARACAS, Feb 9: Venezuelan opposition leader Maria Corina Machado on Monday said one of her closest allies was kidnapped hours after being released from prison.

The government had released several prominent opposition members from prison on Sunday after lengthy, politically motivated detentions. Machado said on social media that Juan Pablo Guanipa was taken around midnight in a residential neighbourhood of the capital, Caracas.

"Heavily armed men, dressed in civilian clothes, arrived in four vehicles and violently took him away," she posted on X. "We demand his immediate release."

The releases of the opposition figures came as the government of acting President Delcy Rodriguez has faced mounting pressure to free hundreds of people whose detentions months or years ago have been linked to their political activities. The releases also followed a visit to Venezuela by representatives of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

The government's press office did not immediately respond to a request for comment early Monday.

Rodriguez was sworn in as Venezuela's acting president after



the Jan. 3 capture of then-President Nicolas Maduro by the US military. Her government began releasing prisoners days later.

Some of those freed Sunday joined families waiting outside prisons for their loved ones to be released. They chanted "We are not afraid! We are not afraid!" and marched a short distance.

"I am convinced that our country has completely changed," Guanipa, a former governor, had told reporters hours after his release. "I am convinced that it is now up to all of

us to focus on building a free and democratic country."

Guanipa had spent more than eight months in custody. Venezuelan-based prisoners' rights group Foro Penal confirmed the release of at least 30 people on Sunday.

In addition to Guanipa, Machado's political organisation said several of its members were among the released, including Maria Oropeza, who livestreamed her arrest by military intelligence officers as they broke into her home with a

crowbar. Machado's attorney, Perkins Rocha, was also freed.

Alfredo Romero, president of Foro Penal, expressed serious concern over Guanipa's disappearance.

"So far, we have no clear information about who took him," he said on X. "We hope he will be released immediately."

Guanipa's son, Ramon, said on social media that his father was "intercepted and kidnapped" by "a group of approximately 10 unidentified people." He also described three vehicles involved in the situation.

"We demand proof of life immediately, and his release," Ramon Guanipa wrote on X.

Guanipa was detained in late May and accused by Interior Minister Diosdado Cabello of participating in an alleged "terrorist group" plotting to boycott that month's legislative election. Guanipa's brother, Tomas, rejected the accusation and said the arrest was meant to crack down on dissent.

"Thinking differently cannot be criminalised in Venezuela, and today, Juan Pablo Guanipa is a prisoner of conscience of this regime," Tomas Guanipa said after the arrest.

Rodriguez's government announced Jan. 8 it would free a sig-

nificant number of prisoners — a central demand of the country's opposition and human rights organisations with backing from the United States — but families and rights watchdogs have criticised authorities for the slow pace of the releases.

The ruling party-controlled National Assembly last week began debating an amnesty bill that could lead to the release of hundreds of prisoners. The opposition and non-governmental organisations have reacted with cautious optimism as well as with suggestions and demands for more information on the contents of the proposal.

National Assembly President Jorge Rodriguez on Friday posted a video on Instagram showing him outside a detention centre in Caracas and saying that "everyone" would be released no later than next week, once the amnesty bill is approved.

Delcy Rodriguez and Volker Turk, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, spoke by phone in late January. His spokesperson, Ravina Shamdasani, in a statement, said he sent a team to the country and "offered our support to help Venezuela work on a roadmap for dialogue and reconciliation", in which human rights should be centred. (AP)

Election climate warms up in Nepal's Jhapa

KATHMANDU, Feb 9: Weeks ahead of the March 5 general election, Jhapa constituency in eastern Nepal has been hogging much of the limelight with former Kathmandu mayor Balendra Shah 'Balen' taking on the deposed prime minister K P Sharma Oli.

On Sunday alone, Balen, popular rapper-turned-politician, and the prime ministerial face of the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP), reached the Jhapa-5 constituency in Koshi province while Oli, the chair of Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) — CPN-UML — already reached their two days ago to launch door-to-door campaign to woo voters.

Oli has won parliamentary elections from Jhapa district six times out of seven in the past. In the last election, he defeated Nepali Congress candidate by a huge margin.

"However this time, the fight will be tougher for Oli, who was forced to resign during the Gen Z movement in September last year," said Charan Prasai, senior rights activist, who is closely watching Nepalese politics.

The March 5 election was necessitated after Oli resigned on September 9 following violent protests by a youth-led Gen Z group against

his government over corruption and a ban on social media.

Sushila Karki became the interim prime minister on September 12 and recommended to the president to dissolve the House of Representatives and hold general election on March 5.

This is the second time that Balen launched a campaign in Jhapa in as many weeks. "On Sunday alone, Balen visited at least a dozen places and met voters during the door-to-door campaign," said RSP sources.

Balen ventured to choose Jhapa-5, Oli's stronghold, as he has already declared to directly take on the legacy party and aim for the top executive position of the country.

As electioneering gained momentum, security has been intensified in Jhapa district from where these two influential candidates are contesting, said Nepal Police sources.

Although there are candidates from other parties as well, the contest is mainly between Oli and Balen.

Other contestants include Mandhara Paudel from Nepali Congress, Ranjit Tamang from Nepali Communist Party and Laxmi Sangraula from Rastriya Prajatantra Party. (PTI)

Arunachal Dy CM joins delegation in Colombo to bring back Buddha's Devnimori relics

FNTA to fast-track peace, autonomy, development: Union minister



ITANAGAR, Feb 9: Arunachal Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Chowna Mein on Monday arrived in Colombo as part of an official Indian delegation to receive and facilitate the return of the sacred Devnimori relics of Lord Buddha from Sri Lanka.

He described the occasion as one of "imense spiritual and national importance" with deep civilisational significance.

"Arrived at Colombo, Sri Lanka alongside Hon'ble Governor of Madhya Pradesh, Shri Mangubhai Chhaganbhai Patel ji for the return of the Holy Devnimori relics of Lord Buddha from Sri Lanka," Mein said in a post on X.

Expressing his sense of privilege in being part of the initiative, the deputy chief minister said, "Deeply honoured to be part of the delegation for bringing back Holy Devnimori relics of Lord Buddha from Sri Lanka."

Highlighting the larger significance of the occasion, Mein described it as a moment that transcends national boundaries and resonates deeply with followers of Buddhism across the world.

"This sacred and historic occasion holds profound spiritual, cultural and civilisational significance for the nation and for millions of Buddhists across the world," he said.

The deputy chief minister also conveyed his gratitude to Prime Minister Narendra Modi for nominating him to be part of the delegation. "I express my heartfelt gratitude to Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi ji for nominating me and granting me the privilege to be associated with this moment of immense spiritual and national importance," Mein added.

The relics were brought from India on February 4.

The Devnimori relics are among the most revered Buddhist antiquities discovered in India. They were excavated from the ancient Buddhist site of Devnimori in Gujarat's Aravalli region in the 1960s, where archaeologists uncovered a stupa believed to date back to around the 3rd-4th century CE, officials at the state research department said.

Inside the stupa, relic caskets containing sacred remains associated with Lord Buddha were found, along with inscriptions and artefacts linked to early Buddhist worship.

These relics are considered highly significant in Buddhist tradition, symbolising devotion, continuity of faith, and the spread of Buddhism across regions.

Their ceremonial movement and display often carry deep diplomatic, spiritual, and cultural importance, strengthening ties between Buddhist communities and nations connected through shared heritage, they added. (PTI)

KOHIMA, Feb 9: The signing of the Frontier Nagaland Territorial Authority (FNTA) agreement marks a decisive step toward peace, autonomy, and accelerated development in the eastern part of the state, Union Minister Kirtiwardhan Singh said on Monday.

Addressing the press at the BJP state headquarters in Kohima, Singh said the agreement, signed on February 5 between the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Nagaland government, and the Eastern Nagaland People's Organisation (ENPO), will enable region-specific decision-making and faster execution of development programmes across the six eastern districts.

He said the FNTA has been granted administrative autonomy with 46 subjects devolved to the authority, a dedicated secretariat, and a separate annual budget funded by the Centre, allowing development priorities to be determined locally.

Singh, the MoS for Forest, said that the agreement will strengthen peace and stability, creating the necessary conditions for infrastructure development, investment, tourism, and employment generation in eastern Nagaland.

He said the FNTA framework reflects the Centre's broader ap-



proach toward the Northeast, noting that since 2019, the government has signed over 40 peace and development agreements with various groups in the region.

"Peace and development must move together. Once stability is ensured, people can focus on growth, livelihoods, and entrepreneurship," he said.

Singh said he would look into the long-pending issue of the expansion of the Dimapur Airport, the only commercial airport in the state, continues to be pursued.

State Tourism Minister Temjen Imna Along said that land occupied by the Assam Rifles training

centre is under the jurisdiction of the Airport Authority of India and the Ministry of Home Affairs.

The state government has already allotted alternate land for relocation, and the Centre is following up to facilitate expansion, including the possibility of handling international flights in the future, he said.

Singh said Nagaland would benefit from the Union Budget's provisions, targeting eco-tourism and rural livelihoods, including schemes for developing sustainable mountain trails, forest trails, bird-watching circuits, and home-stay-based tourism. (PTI)

Clubs declare battle against drug trafficking in Tripura



AGARTALA, Feb 9: Altogether 12 prominent clubs of the Tripura capital Agartala have decided to launch a battle against the drug trafficking at Santipara, considered the epicenter of drug cartels of the state, said an official on Monday.

Tripura is one of the worst drug-affected states in the country, prompting Chief Minister Manik Saha to take multi-dimensional strategies to address the problem.

"To save the young generation of our state, as many as 12 prominent clubs of Agartala city have decided to launch a battle against the drug trafficking at Santipara," president of Aikatan Yuba Sangstha, Nagadraj Dutta said at a press conference.

Claiming that almost all the Tripura-bound drug consignments are being off-loaded at Santipara, he said banned items were coming through trucks laden with vegetables, fish and dried fish.

"We know the law enforcement agencies have legal limitations to detain drug paddlers for an indefinite period that resulted in release of undertrial prisoners," he said.

Datta said to launch an all-out battle against the drug trafficking, a 15-member committee has already been constituted which will prepare a roadmap on how to implement the movement against drug menace.

Termining the drug trafficking as an internal problem, he said the committee will seek help from the administration and law enforcement agencies to intensify operations against the drug menace. (PTI)

Arunachal Cong unit terms allegations against Gaurav Gogoi 'baseless, unfounded'

ITANAGAR, Feb 9: The Arunachal Pradesh Congress Committee on Monday dismissed Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's allegations linking the deputy leader of opposition in Lok Sabha Gaurav Gogoi with Pakistan, terming the claims "baseless" and politically motivated.

APCC president Bosiram Siram termed the claims "baseless, unfounded and without any proof," while accusing Sarma of making such remarks out of political desperation.

Addressing reporters here, Siram said the allegations made against the Congress MP representing Jorhat constituency in Upper Assam were completely false and intended to mislead people.

"This is all a lie. The allegations made against our young leader are wrong. They are baseless, unfounded and without any proof," he said.

The PCC chief alleged that such statements were being made for political reasons and claimed that the Assam chief minister was under pressure.



He said the growing support for the opposition had created panic within the ruling establishment, leading to repeated personal attacks and controversial remarks.

Siram further stated that making unsubstantiated claims against a national-level leader would not change public perception and that people were aware of the reality.

He added that no amount of rhetoric could brand someone an 'agent' without evidence.

Sarma during a press conference

in Guwahati on Sunday alleged that Gogoi, his British wife Elizabeth Colburn and Pakistani national Ali Tauqeer Sheikh had a "deeper connection", and that information from the Intelligence Bureau was secretly passed on to the neighbouring nation.

The chief minister also claimed that Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) rules were violated when Colburn was paid salary by Sheikh while she was working in India.

Sarma had also alleged that Gogoi undertook a "very confidential" visit to Pakistan in 2013 and was believed to have undergone "some kind of training" there, during the Congress leader to come clean on the trip or face charges of "rashtra-droh" (treason).

Gogoi, also the state Congress chief, termed Sarma's presser "worse than a C-grade cinema" and a "super flop".

The CM said, "We believe there is a deeper connection between Gogoi, Colburn and Sheikh. We believe that Colburn and Sheikh were part of an international conspiracy." (PTI)

Will take full responsibility for Kukis visiting Imphal: Manipur CM

IMPHAL, Feb 9: Manipur Chief Minister Y Khemchand Singh said on Monday that his government will ensure the security of every person from the Kuki-Zo community visiting state capital Imphal.

Addressing a function, Singh said his government will not allow anything to happen to people of the Kuki-Zo community in Imphal, where Meiteis are the majority.

"Day before yesterday, MLA Vungzagin Valte from Churachandpur rang me up. He congratulated me and said he would assist in restoring peace. Later, his son called me and asked for medical assistance for Valte," he said.

"Promptly, with the help of the doctors at RIMS-Imphal and the state Health Department, treatment was guided and supervised to Valte, who was in Churachandpur," he

added. Valte was taken to New Delhi by an air ambulance from the Imphal airport on Sunday afternoon. Singh met him at the airport and wished him a speedy recovery.

The CM said, "In addition, I also want to inform that the state government will take full responsibility for any Kuki-Zo individual who comes to Imphal for medical treatment or other purposes. The government will not allow anything to happen to them."

Singh took oath as the CM of the restive state last week after a year of President's Rule. The clashes between Meiteis and Kukis, which broke out in May 2023, deeply divided the state on ethnic lines, with members of the two communities not venturing into each other's areas. Over 260 people have been killed and thousands displaced in the ethnic clashes. (PTI)

Arunachal gov reviews welfare measures of ex-servicemen

ITANAGAR, Feb 9: Arunachal Pradesh Governor Lt Gen KT Parnaik (Retd) reviewed the welfare measures taken up by the state's Rajya Sainik Board at Lok Bhavan here.

According to an official report on Sunday, the governor, in a meeting with Rajya Sainik Board director and also secretary, Air Commodore RD Mosabi

(Retd) on Saturday, had a detailed discussion on the welfare of ex-servicemen and their dependents, resettlement and employment support, and effective coordination with the armed forces and government agencies.

Sharing his concern for the welfare of his former comrade in arms, Parnaik underscored the state's commitment to safeguarding the welfare of ex-servicemen, Veer Naris, and their families through the timely implementation of welfare schemes, financial assistance, and responsive grievance redressal.

He also suggested organising ex-servicemen rallies in collaboration with In-

dian Armed Forces units stationed in Arunachal Pradesh to ensure wider outreach and direct engagement.

Emphasising dignified resettlement, the governor called for concrete and result-oriented measures to support ex-servicemen through skill development, employment facilitation, and guidance for self-employment.



He also advised the Rajya Sainik Board to function as a strong coordinating platform between the Armed Forces, the state government, Zilla Sainik Boards, and the Kendriya Sainik Board to ensure effective policy implementation and meaningful outreach to the veteran community, the report added. (PTI)

Four militants arrested in Manipur

IMPHAL, Feb 9: Security forces arrested four militants belonging to various proscribed outfits from different parts of Manipur valley districts for their alleged involvement in extortion activities, the police said on Sunday.

In a statement, the police also said that the security forces recovered a mortar and two IEDs from Yangoubung area along the Indo-Myanmar Border in Tengnoupal district on Saturday.

The recovered explosives have been destroyed in situ by a bomb disposal team. Police said that two cadres of the PREPAK were apprehended from Imphal East and West districts on Saturday on the charge of extortion.

One cadre of the banned KYKL was arrested from Kakching Lamkhai area in Kakching district on Saturday. A member of the proscribed UNLF (K) was arrested on Friday from Chanchipur area in Imphal West district.

Police said that intelligence based combing, cordon and search operations are being carried out extensively to nab those involved in extortion and criminal activities in the state. (PTI)

Sikkim CM inaugurates farmer-focused organic market in Gangtok

GANGTOK, Feb 9: Sikkim Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang inaugurated a "fully organic" farmers-oriented market set up through voluntary contribution of villagers at Reshithang area in Gangtok.

Tamang unveiled the 'Hamro Gauley Bazar' in the Upper Burtuk constituency on Sunday in the presence of local MLA Kala Rai.

The community-driven organic marketplace is aimed at enabling farmers to sell their homegrown produce directly to customers, officials said.

The market was set up by 'Shram Daan' - voluntary contribution of villagers.

Speaking on the occasion, Tamang expressed gratitude to all those who facilitated the establishment of 'Hamro Gauley Bazar' without government expenditure.

He emphasised the vision of developing it into a hub of rural economic activity, and underscored the need for verification mechanisms to ensure the stall holders possess agricultural land. (PTI)

New Sairang-Silchar train service inaugurated, Mizoram CM Lalduhoma calls it 'economic gateway'

AIZAWL, Feb 9: Railways Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw on Monday virtually inaugurated a new rail service between Sairang in Mizoram and Silchar in Assam's Cachar district, a move officials said would enhance connectivity and help transform the region's economic landscape.

In Mizoram, Chief Minister Pu Lalduhoma attended a special commemorative programme at Sairang station alongside Rural Development Minister Lalnilawma, Revenue Minister B. Lalchanzova, and Adviser to the CM and MLA TBC Lalvenchhunga.

Addressing the gathering, Lalduhoma hailed the new Sairang-Silchar railway link as a significant milestone in the state's progress.

He said that the link would strengthen ties with neighbouring Assam, facilitate broader market access for agricultural products like ginger, and reinforce the state's flagship 'Bana Kaih' (handholding) scheme. He emphasised that the new rail service is not just for passenger comfort, but is a vital "economic gateway."

"Silchar is not merely a neighbouring city but a vital economic gateway for Mizoram. The new train service would contribute positively to Mizoram's economic growth," Lalduhoma said.

The CM credited Prime Minister



Narendra Modi's 'Act East Policy' for elevating Mizoram and the Northeastern region to an important position within the national development trajectory.

"The Northeast region once considered remote is now seeing the benefits of enhanced connectivity," he said.

He also expressed his gratitude to the railway minister for acting on the state's request to operationalise the Sairang-Silchar route.

Highlighting the rapid growth of the

Sairang railway station since its opening five months ago, Lalduhoma commended the ministry of railways, particularly the NF Railway Lumding division for their infrastructure efforts.

He proposed three additional measures: construction of a warehouse facility at Sairang to support local entrepreneurs, completion of the proposed rail line to Thenzawl Peace City in Mamit district, and extension of the New Delhi-Silchar Rajdhani Express up to Sairang. (PTI)

No.JDB/6th-ASFC/2025-26/2312

Date 09/02/2025

NOTICE INVITING TENDER

Sealed Tenders affixing a non-refundable Court fee stamp amounting Rs. 8.25 (Rupees eight & twenty five paise) only with a validity period of 180 Days which will be converted and drawn up in the printed of F-2 form are invited from the registered Contractor of Class-I (A, B, C), Class-II, Class-III category of Assam PWD (Roads & Building) and BTC for the following works under 6th-ASFC fund for the year 2021-22 (2nd Inst.) during 2025-26 under Jalah Dev. Block of BTC area. The Tenders will be received by the undersigned up to **2.30PM on 04-03-2026** and will be opened on the same date & place at 3.30PM.

Sl. No.	Name of Scheme	Tender Value (In Rs.)	Bid Security	Cost of BID documents (D/D) @ 0.03% (Approx.)	Time of Completion
1	Const. of crematorium at Jambari village (under Jalgaon VCDC)	Rs. 19,99,998/-	Rs. 20,000/- @ 1% for ST/SC/OBC & Rs. 40,000/- @ 2% for General.	Rs. 600/-	3 (Three) months from the date of issue of work order

Details NIT may be seen at the office of the undersigned from 09/02/2026 to 04/03/2026 up to 1.00PM. The contractor should be attested copy of latest Registration certificate, Labour licence, Income Tax, GST, PAN, Aadhar, Caste etc. The BTC authority reserves the right of accepting or rejecting the tender papers without assigning any reason thereof. Sd/-

IPR(BTC)/C/2025-26/3948

Block Development Officer,
Jalah Dev. Block, Jalahghat

'The Maoist rehabilitation policy of the Chhattisgarh government is the most attractive'

Maoism never benefitted society, only caused destruction: Amit Shah

JAGDALPUR (CHHATTISGARH), Feb 9: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Monday said Maoism never benefitted any society and spread destruction wherever it existed, citing examples of nations like Colombia, Peru and Cambodia.

Speaking at the closing ceremony of the three-day division-level 'Bastar Pandum 2026' cultural event at Jagdalpur, the headquarters of Chhattisgarh's Bastar district, Shah reiterated that the Naxal menace will be uprooted completely from the nation by March 31.

He appealed to Naxalites to surrender and join the mainstream, promising them dignified rehabilitation.

"The Maoist rehabilitation policy of the Chhattisgarh government is the most attractive," the minister asserted.

He also expressed concern over the fact that the remaining Naxals still holding out included young tribal girls.

"They must be sent for rehabilitation as their whole lives lie ahead of them," Shah said.

While assuring that surrendered Naxals would not face any harm, Shah also warned that those who continue to fire bullets, plant IEDs (Improvised Explosive Devices) and torch schools and hospitals will not be spared.

"Armed violence will be met with a firm response. If someone holds weapons, the response will also be with weapons. Maoism never benefitted any society and spread destruction wherever it existed, including nations like Colombia, Peru and Cambodia," he said.

"We do not want to fight with anyone. Our fight is to protect our tribal brothers and sisters. When IEDs are planted, innocent tribals



and children can be killed or permanently disabled. Where does this cruelty come from?" Shah said while urging the remaining Naxalites to lay down their arms.

Maoists shut down schools for decades, depriving generations of education and creating large-scale illiteracy, he rued.

"But Bastar is now on the path of fast development, with schools reopening, roads being built, mobile towers installed, post offices opened, and electricity and drinking water being extended to villages. It is our resolve that Bastar will become the country's most developed tribal-dominated division within the next five years," Shah said.

The government has prepared a roadmap to accelerate development in the Bastar region, comprising seven districts, aiming to provide electricity to all villages by December 2027, ensure mobile connectivity in every village, and open a post office or bank branch within every five km, Shah added.

"Paddy will be procured from tribals at Rs 3,100 per quintal, cooking gas cylinders will be provided to households, and tap water connections will be ensured in

every home. With Naxalism declining, new tourism initiatives such as adventure tourism, homestays, canopy walks and glass bridges are being developed to boost Bastar's economy," he said.

A new industrial area spread over 118 acres is being set up in Bastar to generate employment for tribal youth, the Union minister informed.

Highlighting irrigation plans, Shah said new projects on the Indravati river will be launched to irrigate 2.75 lakh hectares in Dantewada, Bijapur and Sukma districts, along with generating 120 MW of electricity.

"The government is committed to preserving Bastar's culture for decades. Prime Minister Narendra Modi aims to take Bastar's culture to the entire country and the world. Guns and explosives cannot be Bastar's identity. Its true identity is its culture and heritage," he said.

The Home Minister thanked the Chhattisgarh Police, CRPF, ITBP and BSF for their decisive fight against Naxalism and expressed gratitude to the families of security personnel who died in the line of duty. Hailing the Vishnu Deo Sai government in Chhattisgarh for or-

ganising the 'Bastar Pandum 2026', Shah said the top three winners in each of the 12 disciplines of the event will be invited to Rashtrapati Bhavan to showcase their art and share a meal.

The Bastar Pandum festival has significantly expanded this year, with competitions held in 12 disciplines involving participants from seven districts, 1,885 gram panchayats and 32 janpad headquarters. Only seven disciplines were included last year, and the expansion reflects efforts to further promote and strengthen tribal culture, he said.

Bastar, which a few years ago was gripped by fear due to Naxal violence such as mortar shelling, gunfire and IED blasts, has now witnessed over 55,000 people coming together through the event to revive and celebrate its rich cultural heritage, Shah noted.

He said the government wants to preserve Bastar's culture for years and decades to come, asserting that such a unique tribal culture is rarely found anywhere in the world.

Bastar's traditional ornaments, folk songs and dances, he said, are a treasure not just of the region but of the entire country, and Bastar Pandum has played a key role in showcasing them, he said.

These cultural traditions have been preserved since the era of Lord Ram and Bastar's prominent art and culture will continue to gain national recognition in the coming days, the minister said.

Shah said he thanked President Droupadi Murmu for inaugurating the division-level Bastar Pandum event (on February 7) and requested her to invite the top three winners in all 12 disciplines to Rashtrapati Bhavan to showcase their art and for dining, to which she agreed. (PTI)

Govt-opppn lock horns in LS, House adjourned for day

NEW DELHI, Feb 9: The Lok Sabha was adjourned for the day on Monday amid a stand-off between the government and the opposition over Rahul Gandhi's demand that he be allowed to speak before the discussion on the Union Budget begins.

When the House met at 2 pm after two adjournments, Sandhya Ray, who was in the Chair, asked Congress member Shashi Tharoor to initiate the debate on the Budget.

Tharoor told the Chair that Gandhi, being the Leader of Opposition (LoP), should be allowed to raise certain points before he starts his speech.

Ray said she had no issues if Gandhi wanted to speak on the Budget and asked him to begin.

Gandhi said at a meeting between Speaker Om Birla and some opposition MPs, an agreement was reached that he would be allowed to raise certain points before the Budget discussion, but the Chair was now renegeing on its word.

Ray said she was not aware of any such agreement and that she could not allow anyone to raise any issue without notice.

At this point, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju intervened, saying there was no such agreement and if the LoP wanted to say something about the Speaker, then Birla should also be present in the House to respond.

Rijiju also said other members of the House would also speak on the subject and there would be a broader discussion.

With neither side budging from its position, Ray adjourned the House for the day.

The Lok Sabha proceedings were adjourned twice earlier -- once at 11 am when the business of the day began and again after a few minutes of proceedings at 12 noon.

At 11 am, as the House took up Question Hour, opposition members started raising issues which they demanded should be ad-



ressed immediately.

Birla, who was in the Chair, said these issues could be raised during the discussion on the Union Budget. He said members, including the LoP, were free to speak during the debate.

With the opposition members not relenting, Birla slammed them for "planned" disruptions and asked them to let the House run according to rules.

As the protests over various issues continued, the Speaker adjourned the House proceedings briefly.

At 12 noon, when the House re-assembled, opposition parties insisted that Gandhi be allowed to speak before the House took up the discussion on the Budget.

As Krishna Prasad Tenneti, who was in the Chair, called Tharoor to initiate the debate on the Budget, opposition members dug in their heels and demanded that Gandhi be allowed to speak first.

Tenneti underlined that the discussion was on the Budget and the Congress had given Tharoor's name as its lead speaker.

He said he would need to get clarity on whether the LoP could be allowed to speak. He also asked Gandhi whether he wanted to speak on the Budget.

Tharoor, meanwhile, said he yields to the LoP.

As the stalemate continued, Tenneti adjourned the House till 2 pm.

After the House was adjourned for the day, Tharoor told reporters in the Parliament House complex that Gandhi wanted to respond to allegations that Congress MPs wanted to carry out an "unexpected act" in the Lok Sabha when the prime minister was to come last week to respond to the debate on the Motion of Thanks to the President's January 28 address to both Houses of Parliament.

He said a clarification was required on the part of the LoP.

The Lok Sabha has been witnessing disruptions since February 3, after Gandhi was disallowed by the Chair from quoting from 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.

On February 4, Prime Minister Narendra Modi could not reply to the debate on the Motion of Thanks due to opposition protests. In an unprecedented move, the Motion of Thanks was passed on February 5 without the customary speech by the PM.

The Speaker read out the Motion of Thanks to the President for her address and it was passed by a voice vote, amid sloganeering by opposition members. (PTI)

SP members raise slogans in UP Assembly

LUCKNOW, Feb 9: Samajwadi Party MLAs on Monday protested inside the Uttar Pradesh Assembly on various issues, including the special intensive revision exercise and alleged insult to Malwa queen Ahilyabai Holkar.

When the House met at 11 am and Speaker Satish Mahana invited the governor to read out the address, senior Samajwadi Party (SP) member Dr Sangram Yadav raised the SIR issue. When the governor started speaking, SP legislators moved to the well of the House in front of the Speaker's podium and raised slogans such as "Insult to Mata Ahilyabai will not be toler-

ated by Hindustan." Terming the Governor's address as a "bundle of lies", SP members shouted slogans including "False speech will not be accepted", "Governor Madam, go back" and "Governor, go back".

The sloganeering by SP members continued till the conclusion of the address. SP members had come to the House carrying placards with slogans written on them.

SP MLA Sachin Yadav reached the House wearing a kurta bearing a picture of Holkar on the front and an image of Manikarnika Ghat (in Varanasi) printed on the back, while SP MLA Atul Pradhan carried a large photograph of Holkar. (PTI)

TN archaeology dept sent 45 excavation proposals for Centre's nod: Govt to Parl

NEW DELHI, Feb 9: Tamil Nadu's state archaeology department has forwarded 45 proposals for seeking approval of the Centre for conducting archaeological excavations, the government told Parliament on Monday.

Eight of the twelve requests for digging sent in 2025 are "under consideration", the government further said.

DMK MP Kanimozhi also asked whether the government is aware that the Madurai bench of the Madras High Court has recently directed the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) to "positively consider and extend full cooperation to any request" made by the Tamil Nadu government for continuation of archaeological excavations at Adichanallur in Thoothukudi.

To this, Union Culture Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, in a written response, said, "Yes, sir."

Kanimozhi represents Thoothukudi in the Lok Sabha.

Shekhawat was also asked year-wise details of the number of requests received by the ASI from the Tamil Nadu government "seeking permission or co-operation" for archaeological excavations during the last five years and the current year, and the details of the number of such requests approved, "rejected or pending along with the reasons for non-approval".

In his response, the Union minister shared year-wise details of the proposals forwarded by the Tamil Nadu State Department of Archaeology for "seeking approval of the government of India for conducting archaeological excavation" for 2021-2026.

According to the data, "45 proposals" have been forwarded by Tamil Nadu's state archaeology department for seeking approval of the Centre for conducting archaeological excavations. (PTI)

BJP believes in nation first, oppn in self-interest first: Nitin Nabin



PATNA, Feb 9: BJP president Nitin Nabin on Monday said his party believes that the nation comes first, the organisation comes second, and self last, but for the opposition, "self-interest is the first and the last thing".

Addressing a function organised by the state BJP upon his first visit to his hometown after being catapulted to the party's top post, Nabin said BJP workers helped uproot 'jungle raj' from Bihar, fighting it out during times when even distributing pamphlets was fraught with danger. "That spirit of sacrifice continues. I have got the opportunity to visit states like Kerala and West Bengal, where party workers are making sacrifices, without worrying about what they are going to get in return. BJP is a party that believes the nation comes first, the party comes second, and the self comes last. For our opponents, self-interest is the first and the last thing," he alleged.

Nabin, who has become the party's national president at 45, assured BJP workers, "We have a strong watch tower. A booth-level worker can rest assured that his work will be taken note of and he may rise to become the state unit chief, even the national president. I stand before you as an example." "I would like to tell our young workers not to get dependent if sometimes things do not happen to their liking. They can rest assured of better days for themselves. The party has so far seen horizontal growth. In the days to come, there will be a vertical growth of workers," he said. (PTI)

Absolutely bizarre: Tharoor slams govt for not allowing Rahul Gandhi to speak in LS

NEW DELHI, Feb 9: Senior Congress leader Shashi Tharoor on Monday said Leader of Opposition (LoP) Rahul Gandhi must be allowed to put forth his concerns in the Lok Sabha and described as "absolutely bizarre" the "denial of the right to speak to one side" in the House.

Tharoor, who was to initiate the discussion on the Union Budget, said yielded to Gandhi to make his remarks before his speech, but both his and the LoP's microphones were cut off.

The Congress MP from Thiruvananthapuram wondered what the Speaker and the government wanted.

"The situation is very strange. I don't know whether the Speaker or the government do not want the House to debate the Budget. Very clearly, there is a long-standing tradition of the House, of more than 70 years, that when two people ask for the floor, it is always given -- first is the LoP and the other is the minister for Parliamentary Affairs," Tharoor told reporters in the Parliament House complex after the Lok Sabha was adjourned for the day.



"Now we have had two successive presiding officers who refused to let the LoP speak, whereas the minister for Parliamentary Affairs, whenever he raises his hand, is given the floor. That is not correct. You cannot favour the government side like this. The House belongs to all of us," the Congress leader said.

The government has the right to reply in due course and no one is going to prevent them from replying, he said.

Tharoor further said, "He (Gandhi) should be allowed to lay his concerns on the table. When you do not allow him to speak, you actually undermine the purpose of Parliament which is the House for discussion and deliberation. So I do not understand what instructions these presiding officers came with, but they simply would not let Rahul Gandhi ji speak."

"So when I got the mic on the Budget, I said I yield to the LoP. 'let him speak'. Then they cut off my mic and the LoP's mic. I don't understand what the government and Speaker want?" he said.

In Parliament, both sides have the right to speak, but to deny one side the right to speak is "absolutely bizarre", Tharoor said.

"It is not the parliamentary culture that we have been accustomed to over seven decades of democracy. He (Gandhi) was standing up to clarify some of the allegations made against the opposition that women MPs were to attack the PM etc... How would we know what he would have said?" Tharoor added. (PTI)

Pollution needs year-round action: CM as Delhi gets six new air monitoring stations

NEW DELHI, Feb 9: Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on Monday said pollution control requires sustained, year-round action, inaugurating six new Continuous Ambient Air Quality Monitoring System (CAAQMS) stations to expand real-time tracking of air quality across the capital.

She also flagged off 100 'Vayu Rakshak' vehicles for stricter monitoring, and enforcement of pollution control norms.

Addressing an event at the Delhi Secretariat, Gupta said the government is working towards comprehensive citywide monitoring and long-term policy action to address pollution at its source.

"Our aim is to ensure that for every 25 sq km area in Delhi, there is at least one air quality monitoring station so that we get complete and accurate data on pollution levels and their sources," she said.

The six new monitoring stations set up by the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) are located at Jawahar-

lal Nehru University, Indira Gandhi National Open University, Netaji Subhas University of Technology West Campus (Dwarka), CWD Akshardham, Sarodaya Bal Vidyalyaya in Delhi Cantt and the Dr Syama Prasad Mookerjee Swimming Pool Complex at Talkatora Garden.

Gupta said Delhi currently has 46 air quality monitoring stations, and 14 additional stations will be installed in the coming phase to ensure full coverage of residential areas, industrial zones, traffic corridors and green belts.

"Pollution is not a seasonal problem. It requires 365-day caretaking, continuous monitoring and sustained action," she said, adding that air safety officers will be deployed for year-round supervision and enforcement.

The chief minister asserted that the government is working on strengthening pollution control across sectors, including transport, roads, waste management and



green cover. "Clean air is a right, and we are committed to delivering it with seriousness and long-term planning," she said.

Highlighting the works undertaken, she said city has the highest number of electric buses in the country, with 4,200 vehicles currently operational. "By 2028, this number will increase to 14,000, which will significantly reduce vehicular emissions," she said. Gupta stressed that the pollution

checking infrastructure is being upgraded, with automated vehicle testing stations being developed and a new electric vehicle policy for private vehicles under preparation. She described notification of large parts of the Delhi Ridge as forest land as a historic step. She said protecting green spaces is essential for improving Delhi's environmental health and ensuring long-term sustainability.

Criticising previous approaches, Gupta said earlier governments treated pollution as a short-term issue. Referring to measures such as smoke towers and odd-even schemes, she said these were "cosmetic solutions" that failed to address pollution at its root. Delhi Environment Minister Manjinder Singh Sirsa, who also addressed the event, outlined further steps being taken by the government to strengthen pollution control and enforcement.

"To ensure strict monitoring, 100 'Vayu Rakshak' vehicles will be deployed across

Delhi to check industrial, vehicular, hotel and institutional pollution," Sirsa said, adding that 100 permanent surveyors will also be appointed for year-round physical inspections.

He said the government has strengthened coordination among the Delhi Pollution Control Committee (DPCC), CAQM and the Centre, leading to systematic monitoring and data-based policy planning.

Sirsa asserted that Delhi has also made progress in waste management, with around 85 per cent of the city's daily waste generation, around 12,500 metric tonnes, now being processed for energy production. Referring to legacy waste, he said the present government inherited three garbage dumps spread over 202 acres and about 60 metres high.

"In just one year, garbage has been cleared from around 45 acres, and the height of the remaining dumps is being reduced," he said. (PTI)

LIQUOR SCAM: SC to hear after a week Chhattisgarh govt's plea against Chaitanya Baghel's bail

NEW DELHI, Feb 9: The Supreme Court on Monday said it would hear after a week the Chhattisgarh government's appeal challenging the bail granted to Chaitanya Baghel, son of former chief minister and senior Congress leader Bhupesh Baghel, in alleged liquor scam cases.

A bench of Chief Justice of India (CJI) Surya Kant and Justices Jyotsna Banerjee and N V Anjaria was told by senior advocate Mahesh Jethmalani, appearing for Chhattisgarh, that one of the vital witnesses in the case was not coming forward after Chaitanya Baghel was granted bail.

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has separately challenged his bail in a related money laundering case. The bench said it would hear the matter after a week.

The top court also dealt with a separate plea filed by former Chhattisgarh chief minister Bhupesh Baghel's deputy secretary Saumya Chaurasia, who was arrested by the ED in December last year in connection with the alleged liquor scam in the state.

Senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, appearing for Chaurasia, said the



apex court had earlier granted bail to Chaurasia in other cases in which she was arrested.

"They have again registered a fresh FIR and arrested her in December," Rohatgi said, adding this is the sixth time that she has been arrested. The bench asked her to approach the Chhattisgarh High Court for bail.

It said she may file her petition before the high court within a week and the high court may take her plea on a priority basis and decide it within two weeks.

The bench was also informed that Chaurasia was also arrested by

the Economic Offences Wing (EOW) in a separate case on January 2. The top court said she may move the high court to seek bail in that case as well.

Chaurasia, who was earlier granted bail by the apex court in the coal levy scam case, was re-arrested in the liquor cases by the probe agencies.

On January 15, the apex court deferred the hearing on the Chhattisgarh government's appeal challenging the grant of bail to Chaitanya Baghel.

While the state government alleged that Chaitanya Baghel was

one of the prime accused and masterminds in the sensational case, his counsel had argued that the high court delivered a well-considered judgement in the case in which the probe was ongoing for the last two years.

On January 2, the high court granted bail to Chaitanya Baghel in two cases linked to the alleged liquor scam.

The single bench of Justice Arvind Kumar Verma allowed Chaitanya Baghel's bail pleas in a case lodged by the ED and another by the Chhattisgarh Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB)/EOW.

In its order on the bail application in the ED's case, the high court noted that the applicant's alleged role was "significantly lesser" than that of several senior accused who have already been granted bail.

It said the alleged kingpins and principal beneficiaries Anwar Dhebar, Anil Tuteja, Arvind Singh, Arunpati Tripathi and Trilok Singh Dhillon have already been charged on bail by the Supreme Court, and denying bail to the applicant would violate the well-established principle of parity. (PTI)

UP govt committed to service, security of every citizen: Adityanath

LUCKNOW, Feb 9: Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Monday said the Uttar Pradesh government is fully committed to the service and security of all citizens, asserting that strict action will continue against criminals. The chief minister was speaking at a 'Janta Darshan' in the state capital, where he met people, listened to their grievances and issued directions for their redressal, an official statement issued here said.

Two soldiers from Hapur raised a complaint regarding alleged illegal encroachment on their family land. One of them told Adityanath that they are serving in the Army and their father is visually impaired. He alleged that their land had been encroached upon by their uncle's sons, who have a criminal background and have been threatening their family using weapons.

Taking cognisance of the complaint, the CM directed the Hapur district administration to immediately investigate the matter and take the strictest

possible action against the guilty. "The government is committed to the service and security of the 25 crore people of the state," Adityanath said. Several people also approached the chief minister seeking financial assistance for medical treatment. He assured them of all possible help from the government. "Get an estimate prepared from the hospital. You focus on the patient's health, the responsibility of taking care of the treatment expenses lies with the government," he said.

Issues related to electricity supply, municipal bodies and revenue department were also raised during the interaction and the chief minister instructed officials to ensure timely and appropriate resolution.

Children accompanied by their parents also attended the 'Janta Darshan'. After enquiring about their well-being and studies, Adityanath advised them to focus on their education and stay away from mobile phones. (PTI)

A forgettable budget prepared by a finance minister: Chidambaram

NEW DELHI, Feb 9: Senior Congress leader P Chidambaram on Monday attacked the government for cutting capital expenditure in 2025-26 at a time 'when neither the public sector, private sector nor foreign investors are investing in India', while terming Union Budget 2026-27 a "forgettable budget".

Initiating a general discussion on Union Budget 2026-27 in the Rajya Sabha, the former finance minister also said the government's much vaunted 'Reform Express' is stuck, if not derailed and while the unemployment among youth continues to pose serious challenge, the government's "internship scheme" has failed.

Chidambaram also hit out at the government for cutting allocations for agriculture and rural development accusing it of depriving roads and housing to villages.

"This is a forgettable budget, a forgettable budget which has been prepared by a finance minister, who forgot her promises made in this House last year," he asserted.

Attacking the government, he said, "For almost 12 years, capital investment, gross fixed capital formation, is stuck at 30 per cent of GDP. Net FDI in 2024-25 collapsed to less than 0.09 per cent. FPIs, foreign portfolio investors are pulling out. Private investment, although companies are cash rich, is stuck at 22 per cent of GDP."

He further said, "In this situation where neither the public sector nor the private sector nor the foreign investor is investing in India, this government has cut capital expenditure. In the year 2025-26 they have cut capital expenditure by a whopping ₹ 1,44,376 crore." The Centre has cut its capital expenditure by ₹ 25,335 crore, he said, adding, "and what is worse the state's capital expenditure for which the Centre gives advances is cut by ₹ 1,19,041 crore." Stressing on the challenge of unemployment, the senior Congress leader said, "Youth unemployment is 15 per cent. Less than 25 per cent of the workforce is in regular employment. There is a shift to self employment, and more workers are in the agriculture sector than they were four or five years ago."

He further said, "In a country with 144 crore people, only 195 lakh, that is less than two crore, are employed in a factory. Manufacturing, which is largely factories, is stuck at 16 per cent for many, many years."

Highlighting the PM Internship scheme, in which the corporate houses were persuaded to offer internship, Chidambaram said, "1.65,000 offers came. Only 33,000 were accepted. Are there no young men and women to accept an internship in big companies?...and of the 33,000 that were accepted, 6,000 left the job." (PTI)

Opposition likely to move resolution to remove LS Speaker Birla from office

NEW DELHI, Feb 9: The opposition is considering moving a resolution to remove Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla from office for disallowing Rahul Gandhi and other opposition leaders from speaking in the House on the Motion of Thanks to the President's address, as well as for the suspension of eight MPs.

At the same time, Gandhi, the leader of the opposition in the Lok Sabha, and some others met Birla on Monday afternoon to work out a solution to end the stalemate, as the House has not been functioning properly ever since the former Congress chief was not allowed to speak on the India-China issue last week.

Sources said a notice for the resolution is likely to be given under Article 94-C of the Constitution, and over 100 opposition MPs have already signed it. However, the TMC is keen on taking up the SIR issue more vigorously, while the Samajwadi Party wants to highlight the alleged insult of Malwa queen Ahilyabai Holkar.

The notice is being given to move a resolution for the removal of the Speaker for disallowing the leader of the opposition from speaking in the House on the motion of thanks, for not initiating action against BJP MP Nishikant Dubey for his unsubstantiated charges against women MPs of the Congress, and suspension of eight opposition MPs, the sources said.

They said a resolution in this matter would be moved in the Lok Sabha soon, and signatures of MPs are being procured. As many as 103 MPs had already signed the resolution, the sources said, adding that a final decision on when to give the notice against the Speaker would be taken on Tuesday.

Rahul Gandhi alongwith TMC's Abhishek Banerjee, Samajwadi Party's Akhilesh Yadav and DMK's T R Baalu, met Birla soon after the Lok Sabha was adjourned for the day on Monday, to work out a solution and end the stalemate. During the talks, the leaders are learnt to have raised various points on why the opposition was protesting in the House. Gandhi also told the Speaker that they were ready for a discussion, provided he was allowed to speak.

The Congress and other opposition leaders are now awaiting the final decision of Speaker Om Birla, after he is learnt to have told the opposition leaders during the meeting that he would get back to them after speaking to the government side, the sources said.

During the meeting, which lasted a few minutes, Gandhi and other leaders apprised the Speaker about the issues they wanted to raise in the House.

Sources said Gandhi told the Speaker that he wanted to raise the issue of suspension of eight Congress MPs and other matters relating to Parliament, including the charges made against the women MPs. They urged the Speaker to revoke the suspension of eight MPs to end the stalemate.

The Lok Sabha has not been functioning properly ever since Gandhi was not allowed to speak on February 2. The Rajya Sabha started the discussion on the Union Budget for 2026-27 on Monday.



After the meeting with the Lok Sabha speaker, Gandhi claimed that Prime Minister Narendra Modi did not come to the Lower House of Parliament to reply to the discussion on the motion of thanks to the President's address as he was "scared" of former army chief MM Naravane's unpublished memoir.

The Leader of Opposition also dared those claiming there was a threat to the prime minister from MPs last Thursday to "file an FIR" against the person threatening Modi.

Gandhi said the opposition is quite keen that the discussion happens. He claimed the government was scared of having a discussion on the Budget because of the India-US deal, the way it was done, and its impact on farmers.

"We are very disturbed about this idea that has been floated that members were going to threaten the PM. There is no question of that. The fact is very clear, the prime minister was scared to come to the House, not because of the members but because of what I was saying, and he is still scared because he cannot face the truth," he said.

"He (Modi) should have the courage to come. I also mentioned that 'look, if somebody has said that he is going to attack the PM, please file an FIR, arrest that person'. Why are you not doing that?" Gandhi posed. "The agreement is that we will be allowed to say these points, and then the discussion should happen."

"But let us see what the government says. My personal view is that the government is scared of having a debate. The PM did not come to the House. He was scared of what we say, he was scared of being handed Naravane's book as a first step," he added.

Separately, women Congress MPs have written to Birla over the "unsubstantiated allegations" made by him against them. In the letter by several women MPs, including Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, they objected to charges made by the speaker.

The decision to move the resolution to remove Birla from the office of Lok Sabha speaker was taken at a meeting of opposition leaders held in the chamber of Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge this morning. The TMC, the Left, DMK, SP, RJD, Shiv Sena (UBT) and NCP (SP) and RSP were among the parties that attended the meeting. (PTI)

UP tobacco baron's son rams Lamborghini into pedestrians in Kanpur

KANPUR, Feb 9: An FIR has been registered against an "unidentified person" after a speeding Lamborghini allegedly driven by a tobacco baron's son ploughed into pedestrians here, leaving at least six injured, police said on Monday. Police said the name of Shivam Mishra, son of Banshidhar Exports Pvt Ltd's owner K K Mishra, is not there in the FIR, but he is part of the investigation.

Recalling the horror, which unfolded on VIP Road in the upscale Gwaltoli area on Sunday, eyewitnesses said the car first hit an autorickshaw and then crashed into a stationary motorcycle, flinging its rider nearly 10 feet into the air. The car mounted the motorcycle's front wheel and dragged it for some distance before hitting an electric pole and coming to a halt. An FIR was registered in the matter against an unidentified person late on Sunday night, Deputy Commissioner of Police (Central) Atul Kumar Srivastava said. No one has been detained in connection with the incident, the DCP said in a response to a question, adding that a detailed probe is underway. Asked if the driver was under the influence of alcohol at the time of the incident, the officer said it will be known once the probe has been completed.

According to Gwaltoli police, footage from multiple CCTV cameras installed at nearby shops, traffic intersections and residential buildings is being examined to reconstruct the sequence of events and determine the speed of the vehicle at the time of the crash.

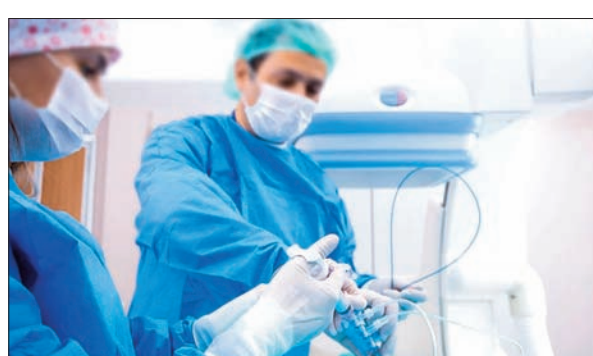
The accused driver has been identified as Shivam Mishra. He is under close surveillance to prevent any attempt to evade the investigation, according to police. Statements of the injured victims and eyewitnesses are being recorded, while the black Lamborghini has been seized and sent for mechanical inspection, police said. (PTI)

Botched up angioplasty: SC refuses to interfere with bail to Gujarat cardiologist

NEW DELHI, Feb 9: The Supreme Court on Monday refused to cancel bail granted to a cardiologist in Gujarat, who was arrested for carrying out unnecessary and botched up angioplasty operations on two PMJAY beneficiaries resulting in their death.

A bench of Justices JK Maheshwari and AS Chandurkar dismissed a plea of the Gujarat government challenging grant of regular bail by the high court on December 8, last year to Dr Prashant Vazirani. "He is a doctor, a cardiologist, let him serve. You can keep a watch on him. If he's doing something, you can take recourse," the bench told the Gujarat government standing counsel Swati Ghildiyal.

The Gujarat government said it was a serious case and two persons have lost their lives due to unnecessary operations carried out by the doctor. "We have seen all the material. We will not interfere," Justice Maheshwari said. The top court also asked senior advocate Ranjit Kumar, appearing for the doctor, "Why was he doing



all this. You are a cardiologist, don't indulge in all this".

On December 8, last year, the high court granted bail to Vazirani, who had carried out angioplasty on the victims at the Khyati Multispecialty Hospital in Ahmedabad.

On November 14, 2024, police registered three FIRs over the death of two PMJAY beneficiaries due to unnecessary and botched up angioplasty operation and arrested Vazirani who performed the heart procedure.

The city's Vastrapur police had registered the cases and arrested the accused doctor.

Two cases came on complaints by the kin of the deceased, while the third was

registered after the Chief District Medical Officer approached the cops on behalf of the state government.

According to the police, these accused "hatched a conspiracy to get undue financial benefit under the Ayushman Bharat - Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY) which led to the death of two persons".

Nagarbhai Senma (59) and Mahesh Barot (45) were among seven persons on whom angioplasty with stent placement was performed at the Ahmedabad hospital.

The duo, residents of Mehsana district, died at the hospital the same day. As per the FIRs, angioplasty

was performed and stents were placed in the arteries of these two persons despite the fact that there was no need for the surgical intervention.

Moreover, these patients were not given proper post-operative care and no cardiologist was present at the time of the patients' death, police had said. The police further claimed that the hospital lied about the blockage in arteries to persuade the patients to undergo angioplasty and stent placement.

It had said the victims were operated upon and stents were placed just to exploit the PMJAY scheme as the government would pay the hospital for the surgeries it conducted on the scheme beneficiaries.

The relatives of the deceased, in their complaint, alleged the hospital kept them in the dark and conducted the heart procedure in haste to take undue benefit of the government scheme.

The Ayushman Bharat-PMJAY provides free health insurance of up to ₹ 5 lakh per year to needy people. (PTI)

KARBI ANGLONG AUTONOMOUS COUNCIL DEPARTMENT OF SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER, S.E.. WORKS, KAAC::SECRETARIAT

DIPHU-782460

No. KAAC/HRN/S.E.-W-116 (Pt)/2025-26/

Dtd./ /2026.

TENDER NOTICE

Sealed tender affixing non refundable KAAC court fee stamp (receipt) Rs. 10.00 (Rupees Ten) only eventually to be drawn up in form are hereby invited from KAAC registered contractor/reputed firms of works department and will be received by the undersigned up to 4 P.M. on 09/02/2026. and will be opened on the same date, place and the hours in presence of the tenderer or their authorized agent if any.

If the day of the opening of tender happens to be a holiday/non-working days, the tender will be opened in the next day. The undersigned has the right to accept, reject any tender without any assigning reason thereof and will not be bound to accept the lowest tender quoted rate..

SL No.	Name of Works	Tender Amount (Rs)	A/A Amount(Rs)	Earnest money	Time allowed for completion
1	Construction of Paver block road with 3nos Box culvert from Mulokbong Teron Vill. To Kekang Vill. Via Mukinder Anglong.	Rs. 1,61,90,000.00	Rs. 1,61,90,000.00	ST/SC/OBC=1% General = 2%	90 days

Terms & Condition

N.B

- The rate to be quoted as % (Percent) above/below/as per schedule rate for building/sanitary/works for all division under CPWD-2020-21.
- Earnest money should be deposited in favour of the undersigned in the form of call deposit/bank draft & should be attached with the tender without which no tender will be accepted.
- The Contractor shall repair/re-Construction if the works executed failed due inferior quality of works, The KAAC Authority will take legal action if the contractor refuse to repair/re-construction the woks.
- The work must be carried on as directed by the E.E (W), KAAC Diphu Authority.
- The following up to date documents should be enclosed with the tender.
 - Professional Tax Clearance Certificate.
 - Sale Tax Clearance Certificate/GST.
 - Council Registration.
 - Call Deposit.
 - Council receipt
 - Caste Certificate.
 - Pan Card/Adhaar Card
 - Account number
 - Payment will be made subject to availabilities of fund
 - The undersigned is not bound to accept the lowest quoted rate.

Sd/-

Superintending Engineer (SE), Works,
Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council,
DIPHU.

Zahan Kapoor-Swanand Kirkire's musical dramady 'Bandwaale' to release on February 13



66 Bandwaale, a musical Hindi series, starring Zahan Kapoor, Shalini Pandey and Swanand Kirkire, will premiere on Prime Video on February 13.

Created and written by Ankur Tewari and Swanand Kirkire, and directed by Akshat Verma and Ankur Tewari, the Prime Original series is produced by OML Entertainment.

Set in Ratlam, "Bandwaale" revolves around Mariam, a young poetess who begins anonymously sharing her poetry online as she searches for independence and a sense of self. The deeply personal poems, penned by Kausar Munir, become a quite yet powerful expression of her inner world, giving voice to emotions she finds difficult to articulate otherwise.

Her journey unfolds alongside Robo and DJ Psycho, her bandmates and closest companions from the same town, who bring music, humour, and companionship into her world.

Ashish Vidyarthi, Anupama Kumar, and Sanjana Dipu play pivotal roles in the series, which features original compositions by Yashraj Mukhate, marking his first foray into composing music for a long-format series.

"Bandwaale" is a story that grew from everyday observations about expression, hesitation, and the quiet courage it takes to be yourself," said Kirkire, actor, co-creator and co-writer.

"Mariam's journey reflects how creativity, friendship, and music can offer strength in moments of doubt. Writing this series allowed us to explore how small choices slowly shape confidence and identity. I'm grateful to Prime Video and OML Entertainment for supporting a story that is intimate in scale, yet universal in emotion, and I look forward to audiences discovering Mariam's journey when the series premieres."

Ankur Tewari, co-creator and co-director, said the idea was to tell a grounded story that feels honest and familiar.

"Working closely with Swanand Kirkire and our amazing team, we wanted to stay true to Mariam's world, her questions, her conflicts, and the way her poetry shapes her self-discovery. Prime Video's creative trust allowed us to stay true to the tone of the story, and I'm excited for audiences to experience this warm, heartfelt series."

"Bandwaale" is a warm, grounded

comedy drama that brings together a beautiful blend of music, humour and emotions in a story rooted in familiar realities. The series reflects our continued focus on creator-first storytelling, and our collaboration with OML Entertainment, allowed us to support such a passionate narrative that feels immersive yet widely relatable. With a talented ensemble and a thoughtful creative vision, we believe Bandwaale will truly resonate with audiences in India and beyond," said Nikhil Madhok, Director and Head of Originals, Prime Video India.

Tusharr Kumar, CEO, OML Entertainment, said "Bandwaale", at its core, is about discovering one's identity and challenging expectations that are imposed rather than chosen.

"Collaborating once again with Prime Video has been immensely fulfilling, particularly given their continued support for creator-driven narratives to find a global audience. Partnering with Ankur Tewari and Swanand Kirkire to bring Mariam's journey to life alongside an exceptional cast and crew has been a rewarding experience. We look forward to audiences across India and the world discovering Bandwaale when it premieres on Prime Video." (PTI)

SHEKHAR KAPUR SAYS 'MASOOM' OPENED BADLY, GAINED MOMENTUM LATER



Shekhar Kapur still remembers the advice he received from the man who sold tickets in black. It was to not make 'article' films as only two people, including the director, had turned up to watch "Masoom" on the release day in the cinema hall.

Sharing a photograph from the 1983 movie, starring Naseeruddin Shah, Shabana Azmi, Urmila Matondkar, Jugad Hansraj and Aradhana Srivastava, Kapur wrote about the disappointing first day of the movie that became a major milestone in his career.

Those days 'black marketing' of cinema tickets was really prevalent... young men, or even gangs, would bulk by cinema tickets and then sell them at higher prices on the day of the show... of course if the hall was full... Except the first show on the first day for "Masoom", the hall was completely empty!

"Outside I got surrounded by some pretty angry looking young boys when they discovered I was the director... they had lost their money that day. I must have looked pretty crestfallen. So one of them actually took pity on me, and said, 'Sir... the problem is you've made an 'article' film... if you want a career, don't do that'," Kapur shared in a note on X.

The director, who went on to make critically-acclaimed films such as "Mr India", "The Bandit Queen" and "Elizabeth" and its sequel in Hollywood, said he kept thinking what an "article film" meant when it suddenly struck him that the guy meant he had made an "artistic film".

"Well, the Friday of release... all the cinema halls were empty... as they were on Saturday, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday. The distributors of the film gave up trying to support the film. It was too expensive to keep the film showing to empty halls."

"I remember the feeling that day... when they told me they had decided to give up trying to hold the theatres... I walked the streets of Mumbai and thought about what I was going to do next in my life, for making films was certainly no longer an option," Kapur said.

The movie, considered a classic even today, revolved around a couple DK and Indu, who have two daughters.

The gentle rhythm of their married life is broken when DK's illegitimate son, Rahul, comes to live with them after his mother passes away. (PTI)

'Pati Patni Aur Woh Do', starring Ayushmann, Sara and Wamiqa, to release in May



Comedy movie "Pati Patni Aur Woh Do", starring Ayushmann Khurrana in the lead role, will hit cinema halls across the country on May 15, the makers announced on Sunday.

Billed as a laughter-packed entertainer, the film is a follow-up to 2019's "Pati Patni Aur Woh", which was a remake of Sanjeev Kumar-Vidya Sinha's 1978 movie.

It is directed by Mudassar Aziz, who also helmed the first part, starring Kartik Aaryan, Bhumi Pednekar and Ananya Panday.

"Pati Patni Aur Woh Do" features three female leads in Sara Ali Khan, Wamiqa Gabbi and Rakul Preet Singh.

The movie, which was earlier scheduled for release on March 4, promises "triple the fun and laughter" as it takes audiences into the unpredictable world of Prajapati Pandey, played by Khurrana.

It is produced by Bhushan Kumar and Renu Ravi Chopra, with Juno Chopra on board as creative producer.

"Pati Patni Aur Woh Do" is backed by T-Series and BR Studios. (PTI)

A gift that was given to me: Lucky Ali on 30 years in music

Renowned singer Lucky Ali, who has completed three decades in the music industry, is humbled by all the love he has received in his career, which he considers a gift that, he says, he didn't necessarily deserve.

Ali, known for hits such as "Gori Teri Aankhein Kahen", "Teri Yaad Jab Aati Hai", and Bollywood tracks "Na Tum Jaano Na Hum", "Ek Pal Ka Jeena" and "Jaane Kya Dhoondta Hai", is back with his signature soulful style with his latest single, "Tu Jaane Hai Kahan", which is produced under the Tips music banner.

"I feel grateful to the Almighty that I've had this opportunity and the response that I've received continuously over all these decades. I don't think I deserve this. I feel it's a gift that was given and I respect it. And that's what I've done all this time. I've not abused my career in any way. It's the greatness of the people who give you that love. You don't go expecting, 'Oh, love me'," Ali told PTI in a virtual interview. The singer said

he is aware that the love and success that he has garnered over the years is not permanent.

"I feel that nothing is permanent at some point, it will stop. I'm happy for that. I'm not holding on to that. I look forward to those changes whenever they come. I think they're happening now as we age and go further into trying to identify what is it that makes it tick for us.

"After all the fame and all the success, there's still something in me that feels like I need to find or look for that, which maybe could be a piece that I seek away from all the noise." Ali began his journey in 1996 with his album, "Sunoh", featuring his iconic track "O Sanam" and established him as a leading figure in Indi-pop.

When asked about his unconventional start with Indi-pop rather than mainstream film music, Ali candidly replied, "Yeah, because I'm not a singer-singer. I knew that I don't have a career in



the film industry. I didn't want to sing for anyone."

"I didn't have a career because I'm not a singer. I just sing for myself. I don't sing as a director. I don't do 'gayaki'. Whatever work I did was more internal. At some point, I felt that I need to express this and that's how the albums came about," he added.

For Ali, music serves as a vital means of communication, a way to connect with others.

"It's a means of communication to the other person; it's a means to be heard by people who understand the same language. That's what music is to me, it's a communication, it's a language." (PTI)

'Bhooth Bangla' release shifted to April 10, announces Akshay Kumar

Bollywood superstar Akshay Kumar on Saturday announced that "Bhooth Bangla", his upcoming horror comedy with frequent collaborator Priyadarshan, will now hit the theatres on April 10.

"Bhooth Bangla", which reunites Akshay and Priyadarshan after 14 years, was earlier scheduled for release on May 15.

"Bhooth Bangla" ka countdown rewind! 10 April... Milte hain theatres mein. #BhoothBangla," Akshay posted on Instagram alongside an announcement teaser.

The actor has worked with the veteran filmmaker on several hit comedies such as "Hera Pheri", "Garam Masala", "Bhool Bhulaiyaa", and "Bhagam Bhag". They last collaborated on "Khatta Meetha" in 2010.

Besides Akshay, the movie will also feature Wamiqa Gabbi, Paresh Rawal, Tabu and Rajpal Yadav.

Presented by Balaji Motion Pictures, a division of Balaji Telefilms Ltd, in association with Cape of Good Films, the film is produced by Akshay Kumar, Shobha Kapoor and Ektaa R Kapoor.

Akshay and Priyadarshan are working on two more projects -- "Haiwaan", which will also star Saif Ali Khan, and the third part of "Hera Pheri" franchise. (PTI)

REMEMBERING MIR IN THE STREETS THAT WERE HIS HOME AND MUSE



66 Dikhai diye yun ki bekhud kiya" from the movie "Bazaar", "Patta patta buta buta" from "Ek Nazar" and "Yeh Dhuun Kahan se Uthta Hai" from "Pakeezah" odes to life, romance and love that were never to be.

Few know that the poetry made memorable by Bollywood were actually written more than 300 years ago by Mir Taqi Mir, a migrant to Delhi from Agra who was feted even by Mirza Ghalib a generation later.

Three centuries after Mir walked the streets of Delhi's fabled Walled City his words wafted through again, perhaps at the very place he made his home and muse.

The wandering poet was celebrated at a soiree recently at the launch of translator, poet and academic Anisur Rahman's latest book "Essential Mir". The place: Chor Bizarre, the Delhi restaurant that recently reopened at Hotel Broadway on Asaf Ali Road at the edge of bustling, picturesque Old Delhi.

The launch was followed by a discussion on the poetry of Mir and his enduring resonance within the cultural fabric of the city that he lived in most of his life. Towards the end, he moved to Lucknow but always regretted it.

Ghalib had written this about Mir: "Rekhta kay tumhi ustaad nahi ho Ghalib, Kehte hain agle za-

mane me koi Mir bhi tha."

Rahman read out from his book while interacting with Darain Shahidi of the Dastangoi Collective to weave a poetic picture of Mir's life through verses that have survived the ages and remain relevant even today, especially his compositions that celebrate secularism.

Among the audience were lyricist Javed Akhtar and veteran actors Sharmila Tagore and Shabana Azmi.

A rendition of Mir's 'nazms' and 'ghazals' was performed by vocalist Yusra Naqvi. Adding to the nostalgia was singer Inder Thakur's old Hindi film songs.

Rahman's book is a one-of-a-kind collection that presents 200 of Mir's best verses, which he has meticulously selected and translated and provided the critical commentary to help modern readers appreciate the context.

"Rah-e-dur-ishq mein rota hai kya; aage dekhiye hota hai kya"; "Ab to jaate hain but-kade se 'mir', phir milenge agar khuda laaya"; "aag the ibtida-e-ishq mein ham, ab jo hain khaak imtiha hai ya"; "Dilli jo ek shahr tha alam mein intikhah, rahte the muntakhab hi jahan rozgar ke"

These and many other verses, going beyond the couplets popularised in films, are part of Mir's oeuvre.

vre. Rahman's book is aimed at making Mir come alive for those who haven't read him.

The poetry and song synced in nicely with the theme of Chor Bizarre itself. The chain is renewing its focus on building the restaurant into a culture and heritage salon for Delhi where patron can enjoy conversations around food, literature, culture and music.

"As Chor Bizarre completes 35 years, we are consciously shaping it into a culture and heritage salon for Delhi-one that brings together food, ideas, heritage, and shared memories," said Rohit Khattar, founder chairperson of the Old World Hospitality that runs the restaurant.

"As part of this vision, Chor Bizarre will host cultural conversations every Friday and heritage walks every Sunday Morning, reinforcing its role as a vibrant cultural address in the city. The celebrations also coincide with 70 years of Hotel Broadway, now reopening as part of the Alivaa Collection."

The restaurant was the first to begin 'Chor Bizarre's Memory Lanes', i.e. heritage walks of Delhi in the 90s, which have been revived. These will begin at 10 am from Chor Bizarre every Sunday morning, take people through the walled city or through Darya Ganj's Kitaab Bazaar and explore many other forgotten lanes. (PTI)

New Zealand eye victory over UAE to consolidate top place in group

T20 World Cup 2026

CHENNAI, Feb 9: New Zealand will be eager to consolidate their top position in Group D with a second successive victory when they face the United Arab Emirates in a T20 World Cup match here on Tuesday.

The Kiwis overcame a dangerous Afghanistan by five wickets on Sunday to garner crucial two points, and would now look to maximise their outing against a relatively easier opponent.

The win against the Afghans showcased the utility of New Zealand's long and experienced batting order as they recovered efficiently from a tricky 14 for two while chasing 183 on a slower pitch.

But the Mitchell Santner-led side will

want a confidence-boosting outing from Finn Allen and Rachin Ravindra, the two vital cogs in their batting unit.

Allen and Ravindra fell to the spin sorcery of Mujeeb ur Rahman in the previous match, and the UAE do not offer the same quality.

Therefore, the two top-order batters will be looking to make a hefty score against the Gulf outfit ahead of the all-important match against South Africa.

But one heartening aspect of New Zealand's win over Afghanistan was the prudence shown by Glenn Phillips while steadying the innings after Mujeeb's twin blows.

An earlier version of Phillips would have resorted to brazen aggression to get out of trouble, but here he showed a welcome trait of getting a grip on the conditions and bowlers before freeing his hands.

New Zealand will hope that Phillips,



if it gets to that, will play another fine knock to keep him going.

"Glenn's world class. His experience in this country, he's had a lot of success

in the last few weeks here playing against a very strong India side. I've got high hopes for him for the rest of the tournament," his teammate Lockie Fer-

guson had said after the match against the Afghans.

Similarly, the New Zealand bowlers too showed impressive adaptive skills and variations on a surface that gave them some assistance to keep a potent Afghan batting line-up under check.

But the Kiwis would know the dangers of treating the UAE match as a mere laboratory, particularly after fellow associates USA, Nepal and Netherlands ran their fancied opponents close.

In their ranks, the UAE have some experienced campaigners such as skipper Mohammad Waseem, exciting hitter Alishan Sharafu and seasoned pacer Junaid Siddique, who can spring a surprise or two on their day.

Waseem reached 3000 T20I runs in just 84 innings, just behind Virat Kohli and Babar Azam, who reached the mark in 81 innings.

Irrespective of the fairly predictable outcome of the match, the UAE players would relish the chance to learn from the experience of playing against a legacy side like New Zealand.

It would be their biggest takeaway.

Teams :

New Zealand: Mitchell Santner (c), Finn Allen, Michael Bracewell, Mark Chapman, Devon Conway, Jacob Duffy, Lockie Ferguson, Matt Henry, Kyle Jamieson, Daryl Mitchell, James Neesham, Glenn Phillips, Rachin Ravindra, Tim Seifert, Ish Sodhi.

UAE: Muhammad Waseem (c), Alishan Sharafu, Aryanah Sharma, Dhruv Parashar, Haider Ali, Harshit Kaushik, Junaid Siddique, Mayank Kumar, Muhammad Arfan, Muhammad Farooq, Muhammad Jawadullah, Muhammad Zohaib, Rohid Khan, Sohaib Khan, Simranjeet Singh.

Match starts at 3 pm. (PTI)

USA, Pakistan eye improvements with bat in another T20 World Cup showdown

COLOMBO, Feb 9: An unpredictable Pakistan will look to exorcise ghosts of the past when they meet a determined USA, 20 months after being handed an infamous defeat by the same opponents, in the T20 World Cup here on Tuesday.

During their World Cup debut in the 2024, USA announced their arrival on the big stage with a memorable victory over the Pakistanis.

Having lost to India in the 2026 opener, USA would be extra motivated for an encore against Pakistan in an evening game at the Sinhalese Sports Club here.

Both teams have work cut out on the batting front.

Pakistan were cruising in their chase of 148 against The Netherlands before a suicidal middle-order collapse. Thanks to Faheem Ashraf, they got over the line but would be thoroughly shaken by the imposition.

USA had defending champions India under pressure at the Wankhede but their batters could not complement an impressive bowling performance.

For Pakistan, Babar Azam will be under the scanner having made a comeback in the shortest format. More from the bat will be expected from opener Saim Ayub as well.



Ayub has been more productive as a spinner in the recent past.

Captain Salman Ali Agha feels his players need to handle pressure better than how they did against The Netherlands.

"We batted really well. And then they managed to pull wickets down. And then at that time, the pressure came in. And I think we need to absorb pressure better when it comes to these kinds of games.

"It's not easy to start, but once you get in, it's a good wicket to bat on. When someone gets in, we need to make sure that person will

finish," said Agha, who also needs to deliver with the bat after his move up the order.

USA will be looking for an improved batting effort at the top of the order.

By captain Monank Patel's own admission, they were guilty of playing loose shots in the power-play against India. Monank too fell to a soft dismissal.

Led by South Africa-born Shadley Van Schalkwyk, they had a good night with the ball.

However, senior pacer Saurabh Netravalkar had an opening game to forget and would be itching to

make an impact against Pakistan.

USA practised in Sri Lanka ahead of the ICC event and are familiar with the conditions.

Question marks remain over the fitness of their pacer Ali Khan who limped off the field against India.

"I thought the intent (with the bat) was a bit missing there because we lost a few wickets initially. But a lot of learning from this game and a lot of positives. And definitely this game is going to help us in running forward," said Monank following the loss to India.

Squads:

USA: Monank Patel (c), Jessy Singh, Andries Gous, Shehan Jayasuriya, Milind Kumar, Shayan Jahangir, Saiteja Mukkamala, Sanjay Krishnamurthy, Harmeet Singh, Nosthush Kenjige, Shadley Van Schalkwyk, Saurabh Netravalkar, Ali Khan, Mohammad Mohsin, Shubham Ranjane.

Pakistan: Salman Ali Agha (c), Abrar Ahmed, Babar Azam, Faheem Ashraf, Fakhar Zaman, Khawaja Nafay, Mohammad Nawaz, Mohammad Salman Mirza, Naseem Shah, Sahibzada Farhan, Saim Ayub, Shaheen Shah Afridi, Shadab Khan, Usman Khan, Usman Tariq.

Match starts 7 PM. (PTI)

Morning Star FC lift memorial football title at Donkamokam



HT Correspondent

HAMREN, Feb 9: Karbi Anglong Morning Star FC of Diphu clinched the title of the Sing Ronghang, Dipali Teronpi and Uptal Ronghang Memorial Football Tournament, defeating Chokihola FC 2-1 in a closely contested final at Donkamokam Waisong Stadium on Monday.

The final match generated an electrifying atmosphere as both teams displayed attacking football, keeping spectators engaged until the final whistle.

With the victory, Morning Star FC lifted the prestigious trophy, capping off a competitive tournament that featured 16 teams from different parts of the region.

The tournament was jointly organised by Hell Angel and the Donkamokam Sports Association with the aim of promoting football and nurturing local talent.

Morning Star FC received a cash prize of ₹1 lakh along with the trophy and certificates, while runners-up Chokihola FC were awarded ₹50,000 and a trophy.

The Best Player of the tournament received ₹30,000 along with a citation.

The final was attended by Tuliram Ronghang, Chief Executive Member of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council, as chief guest.

Addressing the gathering, he underlined the role of sports in building a conscious and disciplined

society, stating that sports help individuals develop awareness and choose a positive path in life.

Among others present on the occasion were Samson Rongpi, executive member of the Dima Hasao Autonomous Council, Mohan Tisso, chairman of various departmental boards, Bidyutal Ronghang, forest ranger and sponsor of the event, members of the Waisong Sports Association and members of the bereaved Ronghang family.

The successful conclusion of the tournament was hailed by organisers and spectators alike as a significant boost for football and sporting talent in West Karbi Anglong.

After rattling Pakistan, Netherlands face Namibia in T20 World Cup



NEW DELHI, Feb 9: After pushing Pakistan to the limit, the Netherlands will test its credentials against a quietly dangerous Namibia when the two associate nations meet in a T20 World Cup Group A clash here on Tuesday.

The Dutch arrive in New Delhi with tangible proof that they can unsettle higher-ranked opposition. After rattling former champions Pakistan in the tournament-opener in Sri Lanka, the Dutch will look to convert that confidence into points when they take on the African nation. Namibia, by contrast, begin their campaign against a team already battle-hardened, but one whose narrow loss also exposed areas they can target.

For the Netherlands, the 147 they posted against Pakistan was built on scattered contributions rather than a single dominant performance.

Scott Edwards' 37 anchored the innings, while Bas de Leede (30) and Colin Ackermann (20 off 14) provided momentum through the middle overs.

The Dutch showed that they have the ability to stretch bowling attacks beyond the recognised batters.

Yet, the innings also underlined a recurring concern: the inability to fully capitalise after decent starts. At 105 for four in the 13th over, the Netherlands were positioned for a 160-plus total, but lost five wickets for 42 runs as Pakistan's spinners tightened the screws.

Against Namibia's varied but less experienced attack, that middle-overs phase could again decide the

contest.

The Netherlands bowling, meanwhile, showed why they remain competitive in global events. Paul van Meekeren's control (2/20) and Roelof van der Merwe's economy (1/13) dragged Pakistan into a scrap, while Aryan Dutt's off-spin accounted for two key wickets.

Pakistan batters too helped the cause of the opposition by self-destructing in the middle overs.

Conceding 46 in four overs to Logan van Beek and struggling at the death against Faheem Ashraf's late assault highlighted the fine margins the Netherlands continue to operate within. Namibia will take encouragement from those gaps. Led by the experienced Gerhard Erasmus, the side blend youth with battle-tested performers who have made a habit of punching above their weight at World Cups.

Erasmus, Jan Frylinck and JJ Smit form a robust all-round core, capable of shaping games with both bat and ball. Frylinck's left-arm pace and Smit's variations could be especially relevant on New Delhi surfaces that tend to reward bowlers who hit hard lengths and mix their pace. Batting-wise, Namibia will lean heavily on stability at the top from Louren Steenkamp and Malan Kruger, with wicketkeeper Zane Green expected to marshal the middle order.

The presence of young batters like JC Balt and Dylan Leicher adds unpredictability, while Loftie-Eaton's dual skills provide balance and depth. (PTI)

Athlete welfare education, mental health, anti-doping priority areas of National Olympic Academy

NEW DELHI, Feb 9: Athlete welfare education, covering mental health, anti-doping safeguards and transition beyond competitive careers, would be the priority areas of the re-launched National Olympic Academy, the Indian Olympic Association said on Monday.

A delegation from the International Olympic Academy, led by its director Makis Asimakopoulou and head of NOAS/NOCs Relations Alexandra Karaiskou held a meeting with Indian Olympic Association President P T Usha here.

Earlier on January 9, the Indian Olympic Association announced the "formal reactivation" of a National Olympic Academy (NOA) in Ahmedabad with Usha leading the facility's management.

While the NOA has existed since 2018, its operations were stalled due to various reasons, including the COVID-19 pandemic. The International Olympic Academy, set up in 1961 and housed in ancient Olympia in Greece, is the only institution in the world promoting Olympic education and studies. It has a network of National Olympic Academies in various countries, including the one in India.

Monday's meeting reaffirmed the shared commitment of both institutions to strengthening Olympic

Education in India and to further integrating National Olympic Academy within the global Olympic education framework, the IOA said in a release.

"Discussions focused on the development of structured Olympic Education programmes with clearly defined outcomes, educator capacity-building, youth engagement and international knowledge exchange.

"The delegation also welcomed the appointment of Olympians Dr. PT Usha as Chairperson and Mr. Gagan Narang as Director of the National Olympic Academy of India, highlighting the importance of athlete leadership in advancing credible, inclusive and athlete-centred Olympic education initiatives."

Particular emphasis was placed on the role of the National Olympic Academy as the central intellectual and educational institution, supporting good governance, ethical leadership and sustainable sport development in line with the long-term priorities of the Olympic Movement.

"Athlete welfare education, covering mental health, safeguarding, anti-doping and transition beyond competitive careers, was identified as a priority area, alongside the meaningful involvement of athletes in educational programmes and governance processes. (PTI)

Before Vonn's crash, Iranian coach called the skier her 'superhero' — and hoped to get her pin

CORTINA D'AMPEZZO (ITALY), Feb 9: Before U.S. skier Lindsey Vonn's devastating crash on Sunday while racing on a badly injured left knee, Iran's Alpine women's skiing coach shared words of admiration for the American.

"She's my superhero," Mitra Kalhor told The Associated Press in the Cortina Olympic and Paralympic Village on Thursday.

The Olympic Games are a place of camaraderie, where bitterness between governments like the U.S. and Iran is often of little relevance. That conviviality is likewise shown by athletes trading national team pins, a popular and beloved Olympic tradition.

"I would love to get a pin from Lindsey Vonn," Kalhor said, noting that she met the three-time Olympic medalist previously at the world championships.

Kalhor said Sunday that her heart broke when Vonn crashed, and called her "super strong." Vonn broke her leg, according to a statement from the hospital treating her.

Iran's pin a hot commodity
Pin trading dates back to the first modern Olympic Games, revived



by Pierre de Coubertin in 1896. Athletes are proudly wearing lanyards displaying pins from other teams and show them off on social media.

At the top of Cortina's Olympia delle Tofane course, where Vonn raced in the women's downhill on Sunday, skiers on Friday swapped pins while fog delayed their training runs.

Just as Kalhor would love a pin from Vonn, many have been coveting Kalhor's Iran pins; she started with about 30, and by Thursday was almost out. Iranians are scarce — their team has just four athletes, only one in Cortina.

because of its rarity.

"It's a way to interact with people who you might not otherwise," Niederhofer said while walking through the athletes' village.

But he didn't locate Saveshemshaki. And, as of Sunday morning, he still hadn't found an Iranian to trade with.

Other sought-after pins

There are other prized pins in Cortina, and the athletes' village is the hub for their exchange. China's are admired for their beauty and variety; the team brought three designs showing a Chinese panda with the Olympic mascot Tina. A Netherlands pin featuring tiny clogs is esteemed for its uniqueness. Many athletes sought pins from countries with small delegations, like the Philippines.

Even before the Games officially began, Kailey Allan's cross-body bag was covered in pins. She is competing for Canada in the inaugural women's doubles luge at the Olympics, and her team pin shows a moose on a luge sled.

It's easy to do, she said. First, she introduces herself. They talk about their sports and journeys to the Olympics, then make the trade. Pin-swapping isn't just for ath-

letes and coaches, either; Olympic staff, volunteers, journalists and collectors get in on the craze, asking those they meet, "Do you have a pin for me?"

American luge athlete Sophia Kirby posted videos on social media from a pottery studio before the Olympics, as she made hundreds of pins herself. Hers high-lighted women in sport with athletes in ponytails.

"Everyone wants a pin and it's crazy how it's a currency here," she said during a news conference Friday. "I feel like the pin trading game because essentially what I did was, I came to the Olympics and I brought my own currency."

The last Iranian pin

On Thursday, the AP spotted Iran's Kalhor at an outdoor coffee stand, a popular gathering spot in the athletes' village. As a former athlete turned coach, Kalhor didn't discuss politics. She spoke only about her love of Vonn and the pin trading tradition.

Walking back to her room, she was stopped by an Italian security guard who wanted a pin. It was her very last one, but she gave it to him all the same, even though he didn't have any to trade. (AP)

Scotland outplay debutants Italy by 73 runs in T20 World Cup

KOLKATA, Feb 9: All-rounder Michael Leask starred with a late cameo and a four-wicket haul after opener George Munsey's attacking fifty as Scotland thrashed debutants Italy by 73 runs in their T20 World Cup Group C match here on Monday.

The left-hander Munsey, who survived a reprieve on 41, dominated the bowling with a fluent 84 off 54 balls (14x4, 2x6) before Leask gave the final flourish in a 22 not out from last five balls, smoking Thomas Draca for two sixes and two fours at the Eden Gardens.

After his quickfire cameo, the off-spinner took a wicket off the first ball of the innings and returned figures of 4/17. Italy folded for 134 for nine in 16.4 overs as captain Wayne Madsen did not bat after suffering a shoulder injury earlier in the game.

West Indies, Scotland and England now take the top-three spots in group C, separated by net run-rate. Scotland have played two matches while England and WI have played one each.

Italy's chase began poorly as Leask struck with the very first ball, removing Justin Mosca.

He remained the busiest man on the field, breaking partnerships at crucial moments.

JJ Smuts briefly lifted Italy's spirits, taking 23 runs off Brad Wheel's third over with a sequence of 6, 4, 6, while Anthony Mosca added another big hit.

Despite losing three wickets inside the first 28 balls, Italy showed fight through Ben Manenti (52 off 31), who scored the country's first-ever T20 World Cup fifty.

He reached the landmark in 29 balls, hitting Oliver



Davidson over midwicket for six.

Ben and his brother Harry added 73 runs off just 46 balls to raise hopes, with Harry scoring 37.

But Leask broke the stand against the run of play, dismissing Harry, and Ben followed in the next over.

soon.

The off-spinner then removed Grant Stewart and Gian-Piero Meade in the space of four balls to finish to cap his spell.

Scotland also had a point to prove, having lost to

Italy -- their only defeat in four matches -- at last July's European qualifiers to miss a direct World Cup berth.

A dramatic late entry following Bangladesh's refusal to play India on security grounds brought them back into the tournament, and they responded in style against their European rivals.

Apart from getting the toss right, little went Italy's way.

Their troubles deepened when captain Madsen injured his left shoulder after an awkward dive in the fourth over and had to walk off and was later ruled out of the game.

Munsey set the tone immediately, pulling and driving Ali Hasan for back-to-back boundaries in the first over.

Italy's bowlers persisted with short and wide tactics and the aggressive opener cashed in.

He was dropped on 41 when Anthony Mosca spilled a skier at cover, a lapse that proved costly as Munsey raced to his 14th T20 fifty off just 30 balls with a six against Ben Manenti.

Jones, who was watchful early on, joined the charge as Scotland reached 91 without loss at the halfway mark.

Munsey grew increasingly destructive after his fifty before Italy finally broke through in the 14th over when Grant Stewart claimed their first-ever World Cup wicket.

The opener failed to clear long-on and was caught by Harry Manenti.

Jones departed soon after, but McMullen provided the late surge along with Leask. (PTI)

Italy skipper Madsen doubtful for remaining league matches with shoulder dislocation: Coach Davison

KOLKATA, Feb 9: Italy captain Wayne Madsen is "doubtful" for the remainder of the league stage after suffering a shoulder dislocation during their 73-run defeat to Scotland in their T20 World Cup debut here, head coach John Davison said on Monday.

Davison said that the experienced skipper could still travel with the squad and join the dugout as "coaching staff".

Madsen injured himself in the fourth over of Scotland's innings while diving at mid-wicket to stop a boundary. He landed awkwardly on the hard practice pitches and immediately clutched his shoulder before walking off the field with his arm supported in a makeshift sling.

He was later ruled out of the match as Italy chased 208 with effectively one batter short and finished in 134 in 16.4 overs.

"He dislocated his shoulder. The physio managed to get it back in, but he'll have to go and get more scans to see how serious it is," Davison said in the post-match media interaction.

"I think it'll be doubtful... I'm not going to say he's out, but I think it'll be doubtful if you dislocate your shoulder in cricket. It's going to be pretty tough to come back from, but we'll see what the scans say."

"A captain going down like that in the start of the game was a tough one for us. Things weren't really going our way either."

Despite the setback, Davison hopes Madsen will continue to remain with the group as Italy travel to Mumbai for their next fixture against Nepal at the Wankhede on Thursday, before returning to Kolkata to face England (February 16) and West Indies (February 19) in their last two league matches.

"I hope so. He's an integral part of the team. He's a very experienced head. We might have to give him a red shirt, but he can join the coaching staff."

Italy showed fight during the chase despite the early blow and the absence of their skipper.

The Manenti brothers -- Ben (52) and Harry (37) -- added a brisk 73-run partnership off 47 balls to keep them in the hunt before Scotland fought back.

Davison felt the target was within reach at one stage.

"200 on that wicket is achievable and I think we were with the Manenti boys' partnership and then with Grant Stewart still there who can hit a big ball. I was still hopeful that we could get back into the contest. It would only take a couple of big overs, which are very achievable on that ground. (PTI)

Bennet, bowlers power Zimbabwe to eight-wicket win over Oman



COLOMBO, Feb 9: The highly rated Brian Bennett showed his class on the big stage with an unbeaten 36-ball 48 to complement the bowlers' excellent display and power Zimbabwe to an eight-wicket win over Oman in their T20 World Cup match here on Monday.

Opting to bowl, Blessing Muzarabani wreaked havoc with the new ball before his pace-bowling colleague Richard Ngarava joined him in the demolition job to skittle out Oman for 103.

The duo of Muzarabani (3/16 in 4 overs) and Richard Ngarava (3/17 in 4 overs) were the most successful bowlers for Zimbabwe as Oman put up an ordinary display with the bat. They were in danger of being bowled out for a much lesser total after slipping to 27 for five in the seventh over.

Pacer Brad Evans also chipped in with impressive figures of 3/18 from 3.5 overs in a brilliant Zimbabwean bowling performance.

Zimbabwe then made a flying start to the chase courtesy of Tadiwanashe Marumani who blazed away to 21 off 11 balls before Wasim Ali pulled off a stunning catch to dismiss the opener.

Sufyan Mehmood struck again in the same over, dismissing Dion Myers for a duck. But Bennett and experienced wicketkeeper Brendan Taylor (31 retired hurt off 30 balls) put on 68 runs for the third wicket to complete the task for Zimbabwe in just 13.3 overs.

The 22-year-old Bennett, who came into the World Cup after enjoying the form of his life on home soil by scoring three half-centuries and a hundred to clinch Zimbabwe's place in the showpiece, continued in the same vein and showed why he is rated so highly.

Needless to say, Bennett's form will hold the key for Zimbabwe going forward in the tournament.

Taylor was not far behind as he too played some fine shots en route to an easy victory for a team that has a point to prove having missed the last edition of the tournament.

Earlier, Vinayak Shukla (28 off 21 balls), Sufyan Mehmood (25 off 39) and Nadeem Khan (20 off 18) were the significant contributors with the bat for Oman.

Opting to field after the coin landed in favour of Zimbabwe skipper Sikandar Raza, Muzarabani struck thrice and lefty-arm seamer Richard Ngarava once to leave Oman precariously placed at 17 for four in the fourth over.

Raza then brought himself onto the attack and tasted success when he beat Wasim Ali in the flight to disturb his stumps.

After none of their top five batters managed to reach double digits, Mehmood and wicketkeeper Shukla tried to stabilise the Oman innings with a partnership of 42 runs for the sixth wicket.

However, just when their association had begun to raise hopes of lending their total a semblance of respectability, Oman lost their sixth wicket in the form of Shukla.

He was sent back by Ngarava after a brilliant catch by wicketkeeper Brendan Taylor off a back of a length delivery that cramped the batter for space.

This was soon followed by the wicket of Jiten Ramanandi as Ngarava struck for the third time in the game and Oman slipped to 71 for seven in the 15th over.

Evans then broke the resistance of Mehmood as the batter holed out at deep square leg after a half-hearted pull shot. (PTI)

Surya's calm leadership in T20Is has made my life easy: Gambhir

NEW DELHI, Feb 9: India head coach Gautam Gambhir says his high-pressure job feels a bit easier in the T20 format thanks to the "calm leadership" of Suryakumar Yadav, who "ticks every box" as captain.

In a short clip posted by Star Sports, which did not specify when exactly the coach spoke, Gambhir said India is lucky to have the swashbuckler as its captain for the ongoing T20 World Cup.

"Surya has made my life a lot easier in this format. He is a phenomenal leader of men, not by what he does on the field, not by how he is as a batsman or how his strokes are in this format," Gambhir said.

"All that you can keep aside but the way he relates to the players, the way he talks to players, the way he spends time with players, how much he is relaxed on the field. Sometimes as coach, you can think about a lot of other things because you know he is going to keep the atmosphere pretty much calm that any coach can dream of," he added.

India defeated USA in their opening game of the showpiece on Saturday with Suryakumar playing a stellar role, striking a 49-ball 84 that rescued the side after a top-order collapse against a plucky opposition. India will next play Namibia here on Thursday. (PTI)

Naqvi set to seek Sharif's nod for India match after BCB asks Pak to end boycott: PCB source

KARACHI, Feb 9: Pakistan Cricket Board chief Mohsin Naqvi is set to request his Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif to withdraw the boycott of their T20 World Cup match against India after being requested to do so by his Bangladesh counterpart, a PCB source has revealed.

Naqvi is set to brief Sharif on the latest developments on the issue later on Monday. The game against India is scheduled to be held in Colombo on February 15. "Naqvi will brief the PM on the communications he has had with the Bangladesh, Sri Lankan and Emirates cricket boards and with the ICC on the crisis," the source said. Bangladesh Cricket Board President, Amin ul Islam was in Lahore for the talks Naqvi had with Imran Khawaja, vice chairman and independent director of the ICC, on Sunday.

Sri Lanka and Emirates board have both urged the country to review its decision and the PCB source confirmed that Islam, while appreciating the support Pakistan has shown for Bangladesh cricket, also requested Naqvi to end the boycott.

He said that Naqvi is likely to ask the PM to permit the team to play India in the World Cup in



view of the discussion and appeals from Sri Lanka, Emirates and Bangladesh boards.

However, the final decision rests with Sharif and the PCB would abide by it.

The source said that during talks with Khawaja, Naqvi had raised a number of issues.

"He questioned Khawaja if the ICC had kept quiet if the Pakistan team had refused to accept the Asia Cup trophy at the presenta-

tion from any Indian board official," the source said.

The trophy lies locked at the Asian Cricket Council (ACC) headquarters in Dubai after Naqvi, who currently heads the body, made it clear that only he would carry out the presentation formalities in full media glare.

Bangladesh were ousted from the World Cup after refusing to play in India citing security concerns. (PTI)

BWF revamps World Tour: India Open stays but Syed Modi downgraded

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 9: The India Open retained its Super 750 status despite the organisational issues this year but the Syed Modi International was downgraded from Super 300 to Super 100 as the country saw its share of events reduced from four to two in the Badminton World Federation's revamped schedule announced on Monday. The events axed from the calendar are Super 100 tournaments in Guwahati and Odisha which were introduced in 2023.

The Syed Modi International, which is held in Lucknow in memory of Commonwealth Games champion Syed Modi, has been a World Tour Super 300 event since 2018. Introduced back in 2009 as a Grand Prix event, it will be one of the eight Super 100 tournaments on the circuit from next year.

"See last time, 32 countries had applied for the world tour tournaments. This time, 56 countries had applied. Now naturally the numbers are limited, so BWF wanted to take the game to new areas," Badminton Association of India (BAI) secretary general Sanjay Mishra told PTI.

"Even China has got just three events. We told BWF that we want to host the events which we have been hosting. But BWF had too many requests and they wanted more countries to host world tour events.

Because smaller nations can host super 100 events as the funds and requirements are small.

"So since we were getting one Super 100, we thought it is better to have it in Lucknow as Syed Modi International is one of our oldest events," he explained.

The India Open, held in Delhi and upgraded to Super 750 status in 2023, will continue to hold its Grade 2, Level 3 standing. It will remain one of the five Super 750 tournaments in the new 2027-30 cycle.

The tournament had come under fire this year when multiple organisational issues such as cleanliness were pointed out by international competitors.

Under the new structure, the BWF World Tour will comprise 36 tournaments across six tiers -- the World Tour Finals, five Super 1000 events, five Super 750, nine Super 500, eight Super 300 and eight Super 100 tournaments, with Super 100 events being integrated into the main tour for the first time. One of the major changes is the expansion of Super 1000 tournaments from four to five beginning with the 2027-2030 cycle.

These elite events will be held across Asia and Europe, featuring 48 players in singles through group and knockout stages, while doubles competitions will have 32-pair knockout draws. (PTI)

It's just the beginning; I played some different tennis in these matches: Dhakshineswar

BENGALURU, Feb 9: India's newest Davis Cup hero Dhakshineswar Suresh says his dream run for the country is "just the beginning" as he prepares to step into full-fledged competition on the ATP Tour after completing his studies at a US university.

Pursuing communication studies at the Wake Forest University, the 25-year-old will complete his degree in May this year.

In just two ties since making his debut in September 2025, Dhakshineswar boasts an impressive 4-0 record, with three of those wins coming against the Netherlands in Bengaluru last weekend.

"It's a long way to go. It's just the beginning," said Dhakshineswar, who

matched Leander Paes' feat of winning three matches in a single tie back in 2004 against Japan.

Following Dhakshineswar's superlative show, India edged the Netherlands 3-2 to progress to the second round of the Davis Cup Qualifiers, where they will meet Korea in September.

"I'll go back to the US to finish my studies, then come down in May and figure out my schedule. Once that's sorted, I'll start getting into the Tour and prepare for the next Davis Cup," he said.

On Dhakshineswar's remarkable record, captain Rohit Rajpal said, "There aren't many players who go 4-0 in Davis Cup rubbers, especially against quality opponents. He keeps coming up



with big serves and big forehands. I hope he keeps enjoying his tennis and

keeps performing."

Dhakshineswar said representing India had brought out a different side of his game.

"It's a different feeling when you're playing for your country. You're not just playing for yourself, you're playing for the whole nation. I played some different tennis in these matches and I'm really proud of that," he said.

The tall Chennai-born player, who played marathon singles and doubles matches over two days, credited the support staff and team environment for his recovery and consistency.

"The physios and everyone took care of me really well. Team chemistry on and off the court makes a huge difference. Everyone trusting me helps me

play good tennis," he added.

Rajpal also lauded an injured Sumit Nagal for leading the team despite being far from full fitness.

"Sumit was not even 50 per cent fit. He had a grade two tear in his hip and we were working day and night with the physios. But he fought like a tiger and led the team like an India number one should."

Rajpal singled out the contribution of the support staff, especially the physios, and said the tie underlined India's growing depth.

"With these guys, a strong doubles team and the bench strength we now have, India is a tough team to beat. If we play to our potential, we can take on anybody in the world," he said.

Nagal, who lost both his singles matches after a three-week injury layoff, admitted it was a tough week but felt encouraged by his fight.

"It was disappointing to get injured before such an important tie, but to come out and compete after not playing or practising was not easy. The doubles point was crucial and DK played amazing tennis," he said, adding that he would resume preparations in Chennai.

Looking ahead to the next tie against Korea, Rajpal said planning would begin after the celebrations.

"We'll start strategising tomorrow, where they play us, on what surface. I stay in constant touch with the players. Team selection and planning is a collective process," he said. (PTI)