



- B'desh gears up to hold crucial elections today amid high security
- Russian drone kills father and 3 children in Ukraine
- Govt sold Bharat Mata, it's a wholesale surrender: Rahul
- 20-25 Cong MPs abused Speaker Om Birla in his chamber: Rijiju



GUWAHATI, Feb 11: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday termed the Supreme Court's judgment allowing the state

CM terms SC verdict on forest evictions as 'landmark'

to carry out evictions in reserved forest areas after clearance by a specially constituted committee as "landmark", saying it will streamline anti-encroachment drives.

He said over 1.25 lakh bighas of forest land have been cleared of encroachments, with another 20 bighas still under illegal occupation.

"This is a landmark judgment in the history of our forest department... The state government has won a historic case which gives it the full right to evict in forest land. The apex court

even said that if the forest comes under panchayat areas, it cannot be an excuse for not evicting," Sarma said at a press conference here.

The Supreme Court had on Tuesday allowed the Assam government to constitute a committee of forest and revenue officials to look into unauthorised occupants in the Doyang reserved forest and its adjoining villages in Golaghat district, observing that forests constitute one of the most vital natural resources of the nation.

A bench of Justices P S Narasimha and Alok Aradhe said the committee will issue notices to the alleged unauthorised occupants and give them an opportunity to adduce evidence to show that they have the right to occupy the land which is in their possession.

It said that if an unauthorised occupation is found in a reserve forest area, a speaking order shall be passed and served on the person concerned, giving him 15 days' notice to vacate the unauthorised occupation.

The CM said the petition, which was disposed of by the apex court, was a hurdle for Assam as "evictions were stayed by court orders in some pockets and uncertainty prevailed". "The eviction process will be streamlined now," he added.

Sarma claimed that a total of 1,25,326 bighas of forest land have been cleared of encroachments in the state so far. Around 25-26 lakh bighas of forest land are still under occupation, but it also includes (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

'SIT report on Gaurav's 'Pak links' to be sent to Centre after adding Rawalpindi trip details'

Cong MP's Pak connection not poll issue: Himanta

GUWAHATI, Feb 11: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday said the SIT report on state Congress president Gaurav Gogoi's alleged 'Pakistan links' will be amended to incorporate 'disclosures' made by the MP at a recent press conference, including his visit to Rawalpindi district, and then referred to the Centre for further probe. Sarma asserted that the Congress MP's purported connection with the neighbouring country was not a poll issue as the saffron party is set to win the forthcoming Assembly election, but is a "struggle to ensure that Pakistan cannot enter Dispur".

"The Special Investigation Team (SIT) report will be amended to include Gogoi's remarks at the press conference. Two new pieces of information were revealed by him -- that his wife took salary directly from Pakistan, and that he had visited Rawalpindi district, which has the Pakistan Army headquarters, without

mentioning it in the visa," Sarma told reporters here.

"These will be included in the SIT report and sent to Delhi tomorrow or the day after," he added.

The state government had constituted the SIT to probe alleged interference in India's internal affairs by Pakistani national Ali Taqueer Sheikh, who was claimed to have links with Gogoi's British wife Elizabeth Colburn.

Based on its findings, Sarma had alleged in a press conference on Sunday that Gogoi, Colburn and Sheikh had a "deeper connection", and that information from the Intelligence Bureau was secretly passed on to the neighbouring nation.

The state Cabinet has decided to refer the case and the SIT report to the Ministry of Home Affairs for further investigation.

Gogoi had dismissed the allegations of his Pakistani connections as "most mindless and bogus", and



dubbed the press conference, where Sarma made the allegations, "worse than C-grade cinema", which was a "super flop". On Gogoi not being questioned by the SIT, Sarma said, "Police know who to deal with a case, it has its own strategy. When a person is cornered, they blurt out the truth, just like Gogoi admitted to his

Rawalpindi visit.

"If he were called for questioning, his lawyer would have accompanied him, and he would have never told us about it," he added.

Asked how the Centre will take forward the case, Sarma maintained that "no one will let go of a matter when Pakistan is involved" and

Union Home Minister Amit Shah is a "man of deeds rather than words".

"His silence is indicative of a storm," the CM said, referring to Shah. The CM asserted that the investigations into Gogoi's 'Pakistan links' have nothing to do with the upcoming state elections.

"We don't need this for winning the election; we are far ahead. This is a struggle so that Pakistan cannot enter Dispur... We exposed what kind of people Rahul Gandhi promotes," he said.

Sarma claimed Congress members were angry with Gogoi over his 'Pakistan links'. "Rajiv Bhawan (state Congress headquarters) is now working with us as they want to defeat Pakistan. Not all people take Pakistan so easily," he claimed.

The CM further maintained that Gogoi refrained from taking many questions during his press conference on Monday, during which he had responded (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

PM to land on Assam highway on Feb 14

GUWAHATI, Feb 11: Prime Minister Narendra Modi is set to land on a highway Emergency Landing Facility (ELF) in Assam's Dibrugarh district on Saturday, with IAF fighter jets staging a mega airshow to mark the opening of the facility, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said.

"The PM will be flying from New Delhi to Chabua Air Force base on Saturday morning. From there, he will take a flight and land at the Moran ELF in the district," he said. The prime minister will then witness an airshow featuring around 16 IAF aircraft either landing or flying overhead within about 30 minutes.

"Rafael, Sukhoi and other IAF aircraft will take part in the airshow, and many of the fighter jets will also land at the strip. This will be the first such elaborate exercise on an ELF," Sarma added. Modi will fly out from the ELF for Guwahati for his next leg of the day-long trip to the poll-bound state, the CM said.

Sarma had earlier said the ELF will give a boost to national security and disaster preparedness. The Moran ELF, constructed under the Dibrugarh-Moran NH project in coordination with the IAF, has been (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Special Revision of poll rolls

Deletion of 'doubtful voters': CM credits BJP workers

GUWAHATI, Feb 11: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday said that the names of lakhs of "doubtful voters" were deleted during the Special Revision (SR) of electoral rolls in the state.

He said many of the deletions were based on complaints filed by BJP workers.

His comment comes a day after the Election Commission had published the final voters' list for poll-bound Assam with over 2.43 lakh names deleted from the draft rolls.

"This is only the beginning. Names of more such people will

be deleted when the Special Intensive Revision is conducted," Sarma said at a press conference here. "As far as possible, our party members filed complaints. Names have been struck off based on these," he said.

Sarma claimed that for the first time since the signing of the Assam Accord, such a large number of names have been removed from the rolls. "Some people tried to threaten us, frighten us. But we went ahead and succeeded. Our BJP workers could convince booth-level officers that people against whom complaints were lodged (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

First set of protocols for singing National Song issued by MHA

All 6 stanzas of Vande Mataram now mandatory

NEW DELHI, Feb 11: The Union Home Ministry has directed that all six stanzas of the National Song Vande Mataram, written by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, shall be sung first when the National Song and National Anthem Jan Gana Man are to be played together.

In an order dated January 28, the home ministry gave the first set of protocols for singing the National Song, directing that six stanzas of it, having a duration of 3 minutes 10 seconds, shall be sung on official functions such as the arrival of the President, unfurling of the tricolour, and speeches of governors.

"When the National Song and the National Anthem are sung or played, National Song will be sung or played first," the order read. The assembly where the National Song is (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Orthodox tea subsidy increased

Himanta hints at increase in tea workers' daily wages

GUWAHATI, Feb 11: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday said the state's tea industry has witnessed a "turnaround" this production season with a sharp rise in exports, and urged garden managements to pass on the benefits to workers by increasing their daily wages.

He also announced that the subsidy for the production of orthodox tea will be increased to ₹15 per kg from the existing ₹10 per kg.

"Assam recorded an increase in tea ex-

ports by 40 million kg this calendar year. After 25 years, we have witnessed a turnaround and strong performance by our gardens," Sarma said while addressing a press conference here.

He said the state's total tea production increased by 50 million kg, with 10 million kg domestically consumed and the rest exported, leading Assam Tea to again start reaffirming its footing in the international market. Asserting that 50 per cent of the exported tea was orthodox, Sarma

said, "The state government has been giving subsidy of ₹10 per kg for orthodox tea... We had a meeting with tea associations yesterday and have decided to increase the subsidy to ₹15 per kg so that we see more exports next year."

He maintained that the state's tea industry would also benefit from the trade agreements with the European Union and the US. Sarma said he communicated to the tea associations that the benefits of increased production (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

SC lists another plea against Himanta speech

NEW DELHI, Feb 11: The Supreme Court on Wednesday agreed to consider listing another plea filed by four people seeking a direction against Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma over a series of alleged hate speeches targeting Muslims in the state. On Tuesday, a bench headed by Chief Justice Surya Kant had (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

TTMS becomes effective

DIPHU, Feb 11: The state department of school education has officially announced the reopening of the Teacher Transfer Management System (TTMS) - 2026. Effective today, the online transfer portal is live, marking a continued commitment to a transparent and technology-driven (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Step taken to resolve Assam-Arunachal boundary issue

Pillar installation on in Pakke Kessang-Biswanath sector

ITANAGAR, Feb 11: In a major step towards resolving the decades-old boundary dispute, installation of boundary pillars formally began along the inter-state border between Arunachal Pradesh's Pakke Kessang district and Assam's Biswanath district, officials said on Wednesday.

The exercise, which began on Monday, is being monitored by officials from both states along with representatives of the Centre from the Survey of India.

The development follows the signing of an agreement earlier to amicably resolve the issue and reflects a shared commitment to peaceful coexistence, they said.

Officials said the commencement of the exercise at the ground level marks a significant milestone in implementing the agreement and is expected to bring clarity and stability to communities living along the boundary while fostering peace, harmony and cooperation between the adjoining regions.

Termining the development as "historic," state Health and Family Welfare Minister Biyuram

Wahge, who represents Pakke Kessang district, said the process has begun with the participation of officials from both states and the Survey of India as representatives of the Centre.

"This follows the landmark MoU signed to resolve the long-pending border dispute, paving the way for lasting peace, harmony, and cooperation," Wahge said, while expressing gratitude to Chief Minister Pema Khandu and his Assam counterpart Himanta Biswa Sarma for their leadership in taking the initiative forward. The dispute saw major progress after the signing of the Namsai Declaration in July 2022, which laid the foundation for an amicable and permanent settlement.

Both states adopted a cooperative and phased approach, focusing first on less complicated areas.

Regional committees comprising ministers and officials from both sides were formed to conduct joint field visits, examine historical records and interact with local communities to arrive at mutually acceptable solutions. (PTI)

Controversial video: Cong, BJP lodge complaints

GUWAHATI, Feb 11: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday said that the police have registered a case based on a complaint by Congress leaders over a controversial video featuring him, which was uploaded and later deleted by the state BJP.

Sarma said that a BJP worker has also filed a separate police complaint over the same issue.

The now-deleted video 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 AI-generated video was uploaded on the state BJP's official X handle on Saturday evening, before being deleted following a political backlash.

"The Congress had filed a case and it has been registered," Sarma said at a press conference here.

Congress MLAs Sibamoni Bora and Diganta Barman had filed the complaint against the state BJP at Dispur police station here on Tuesday.

"In fact, one of our BJP men has also registered a case over it," Sarma claimed.

He asserted that the BJP as a party and he, as a human being, do not support anything that goes against the Assamese Muslim community. "We are not against Assamese Muslims but against Bangladeshi Muslims, Miya Muslims. That photograph (in the video) should have made the difference (clear) between Bangladeshi and Indian Muslims," Sarma asserted.

Sarma had on Monday claimed that he was not aware of the video, while state Congress president Gaurav Gogoi accused the CM of "inciting genocide" against Muslims through his videos and urged the police to take suo motu cognisance of the matter. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Success of Operation Sindoor and IAF's ability to dominate enemy to be highlighted on Feb 27

Rafale, Su-30, Tejas to be part of 'Vayu Shakti' at Pokharan

NEW DELHI, Feb 11: The Indian Air Force will demonstrate its full spectrum of combat and firepower capabilities during Exercise 'Vayu Shakti' at the Pokharan range close to the India-Pakistan border in Rajasthan on February 27, which will also highlight the success of Operation Sindoor and the IAF's ability to "rapidly punish the enemy" and dominate the operational environment.

More than 120 air assets, comprising 77 fighter jets, which include Rafale, Su-30MKI, MiG-29, LCA Tejas, Jaguar, Mirage-2000, Apache, Chinook and LCH Prachand, Advanced Light Helicopter (ALH), among helicopters, and eight transport aircraft will be part of the exercise,



with C-295 making its debut in the drill, according to IAF officials. "C-295 will be part of this exercise for the first time, and it will showcase its night operation capabilities. Also, among 277 weapons overall, surface-to-air guided weapons such as Akash SpyDer, will be showcased. There will be integrated and joint

operation with the Indian Army too, with their M-777 (howitzer), L-70 and troops of Special Forces taking part in the exercise, which will run for about 2 hours and 35 minutes," Wg Cdr Ajit B Wasane said.

At a curtain-raiser press conference here, he made a Power-Point presentation on it and said, 'Vayu Shakti', which will take place at Pokharan Air to Ground range in a "near-realistic warfare scenario", will also highlight the successful role of the IAF during Operation Sindoor.

India launched Operation Sindoor on May 7 last year to destroy terror infrastructure at nine places in Pakistan and Pakistan-Occupied-Kashmir in retaliation to the (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

IIT Guwahati researchers develop system to remove 99 pc arsenic from groundwater

Around 140 million people globally are exposed to unsafe arsenic levels

NEW DELHI, Feb 11: Researchers at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Guwahati have developed a new system that can effectively remove 99 per cent arsenic from contaminated water at a low cost, according to officials.

The electrocoagulation (EC) system has demonstrated the ability to remove contaminants within a few minutes, making it suitable for use in regions with limited access to complex water treatment infrastructure, they said.

The research has been published in the "Separation and Purification Technology Journal".

Due to rapid industrialisation and urban growth, global reliance on groundwater has increased significantly. In many regions, groundwater contains arsenic released from natural rock formations or human activities such as mining and agriculture.

According to Mihir Purkait, Professor, Department of Chemical Engineering, IIT Guwahati, long-term exposure can cause serious health problems,



including organ damage and cancer. Around 140 million people globally are exposed to unsafe arsenic levels, with India, Bangladesh and parts of South America among the worst-affected.

"To address this, many conventional methods have been developed, and while some have been successful, these are difficult to implement in uncontrolled environments. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

All key sensitive sectors protected under India-US Interim trade pact: Commerce Secy

NUREMBERG, Feb 11: India has always negotiated with a "clear mindset" on sectors that are "very" sensitive for the country in trade pacts and has protected all those key segments under the interim trade agreement with the US, Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal said.

He also said that both teams are working to convert the joint statement into a legal agreement, which is expected to be finalised and signed before the end of March. "India has always negotiated all agreements with a clear mindset, anything that is very sensitive to India, anything where we feel our farmers, fishermen, dairy, they are going to be impacted, we have been very clear to our partner countries that India can not open up or provide access," he told reporters here.

"If you look at all the agreements that we have done in the last year, five trade agreements that we did -- all the sensitive sectors have been protected. In the US, all the key sensitive sectors have been protected. Wherever there is a little sensitivity, we have



used tariff rate quota mechanisms to ensure that any market access is limited in nature and it doesn't impact our farmers," he added.

Under the interim trade pact, which was announced earlier this month, India has fully protected sensitive agricultural and dairy products such as maize, wheat, rice, soya, poultry, milk, cheese, ethanol (fuel), tobacco, certain vegetables and meat, as no duty concessions have been granted to the US on these goods under the pact. These goods are sensitive

because they involve the livelihoods of small and marginal farmers in the country.

In other Free Trade Agreements (FTA), India has not extended any import duty concessions on sensitive agri and dairy products. It has recently finalised FTAs with the European Union, the UK and Australia. Agriculture and allied activities such as animal husbandry form the backbone of India's rural economy, employing over 500 million people. Unlike in developed economies, where

agriculture is highly mechanised and corporatised, in India, it is a livelihood issue.

India's agriculture sector is currently protected by moderate to high tariffs or import duties and regulations to shield domestic farmers from unfair competition.

The US agri exports to India were USD 1.6 billion in 2024. Key exports include Almonds (in shell, USD 868 million); Pistachios (USD 121 million), Apples (USD 21 million), Ethanol (ethyl alcohol, USD 266 million). The secretary is here for the Biofach 2026 show, where over 100 Indian exhibitors from about 20 states are showcasing their organic products. The European Union (EU) is a big market for these goods. "The teams are working on it, and by March, we are hopeful to make it (interim trade pact with the US) official," Agrawal said.

Talking about the labour-intensive sectors, he said the pact with the US will give them an edge as compared to the competitor nations, which are facing higher tariffs than India in the American market. (PTI)

Services likely to see disruption due to trade unions' strike today

NEW DELHI, Feb 11: Services related to electricity, banking, insurance, transport, health, as well as gas and water supply, are likely to be affected across the country on Thursday due to a nationwide strike called by a joint forum of central trade unions.

The general strike on February 12 is expected to see participation of 30 crore workers from various sectors.

A group of trade unions, on January 9, announced the nationwide strike to show their "resistance to anti-worker, anti-farmer and anti-national pro-corporate policies of the central government".

"Services in electricity, banking, insurance, transport, health, education, gas and water supply will be affected due to the nationwide strike call on February 12," All India Trade Union Congress General Secretary Amarjeet Kaur told PTI.

She informed that all bank unions will not participate in the strike as their united front has already observed a strike on January 27. However, bank workers' unions such as AIBEA, AIBOA and BEFI will participate in the protest.

Besides, Kaur said, the mining and gas pipeline sectors are also expected to see the impact of the agitation. Insurance sector workers will protest against the government's decision to allow up to 100 per cent FDI (foreign direct investment) in the sector and the implementation of new labour codes.

Besides, a large number of workers of private and state transport utilities will participate in the protest, she said. She exuded confidence that this time, "not less than 30 crore workers" will participate in the strike, and around 600 districts are expected to face the impact.

In a similar strike on July 9 last year, about 25

crore workers took part in the agitation, which impacted more than about 550 districts.

According to Kaur, labour commissioners in different districts have called for meetings with union leaders to discuss their issues, but Thursday's agitation will go on as planned by the forum.

Chairman of the All India Power Engineers Federation (AIPEF), Shailendra Dubey, said that around 2.7 million power employees and engineers across the country will observe a one-day strike on February 12.

The strike has been called to oppose privatisation, the Electricity (Amendment) Bill 2025, the proposed National Electricity Policy 2026, and for the restoration of the Old Pension Scheme for power sector employees.

Dubey said that for the first time, the Samyukt Kisan Morcha and ten central trade Unions are joining the strike in solidarity with power employees.

With the participation of power sector employees, engineers, workers, and farmers, the February 12 action is expected to become one of the largest industrial actions in independent India, Dubey said, adding that one of the major demands of the strike is to stop outsourcing, fill regular posts through direct recruitment, and regularise existing outsourced workers.

AIPEF has expressed concern that the privatisation of the power sector (distribution, generation and transmission) is against the interests of poor consumers, small and medium industries, and the common public.

Therefore, the Electricity (Amendment) Bill 2025 and the proposed National Electricity Policy 2026 must be withdrawn immediately, Dubey said. (PTI)

World Bank approves USD 245 mn loan for Himachal Pradesh

NEW DELHI, Feb 11: World Bank on Wednesday approved USD 245 million to rebuild more resilient infrastructure in Himachal Pradesh and enable community-owned firms to invest in more reliable jobs. Himachal Pradesh has been affected by extreme weather events, particularly in the past three years, resulting in estimated losses of USD 1 billion, the World Bank said in a statement. Heavy rainfall during the 2023 and 2025 monsoon seasons led to loss of lives. (PTI)

India observes Anti-Smuggling Day: PM India urges joint action against illicit tobacco trade

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Feb 11: On this Anti-Smuggling Day, Philip Morris India Trading Private Limited (PM India) called for sustained collective action and closer government collaboration to combat the illicit tobacco trade. The company highlighted that smuggled cigarettes account for nearly a quarter of the domestic cigarette market, making India the fourth-largest and fastest-growing illegal cigarette market globally.

As the Government of India

strengthens enforcement with the Track & Trace (T&T) mechanism, PM India stressed the importance of addressing the wider implications of illicit tobacco networks, which often involve sophisticated smuggling techniques and transnational criminal activity. According to the Ministry of Commerce & Industry, Customs Field Formations and DRI seized approximately 3.93 crore cigarette sticks in the financial year up to June 2025. In 2025, PM India conducted a market survey across 3,000 shops in 10 states and over 500 mar-

ket clusters to gather intelligence on contraband cigarettes. The company also provided capacity-building support to over 145 customs and tax officers on identifying illicit products, highlighting its commitment to safeguarding supply chain integrity and supporting national priorities.

Navaneel Kar, Managing Director of PM India, said, "Illicit trade undermines legitimate businesses, deprives the exchequer of vital revenue and exposes consumers to unregulated and potentially harmful products.

Airtel launches AI-powered fraud alert to prevent OTP-related scams

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Feb 11: Airtel has unveiled its new Fraud Alert, an AI-powered solution designed to provide real-time protection against growing One-Time-Password (OTP) banking frauds. The system warns customers whenever a potentially risky incoming call involves a bank OTP, helping them verify the transaction before sharing sensitive information.

Fraudsters often exploit OTPs for day-to-day services, tricking customers into sharing banking transaction codes and putting their savings at risk. Airtel's AI-driven system intervenes proactively at the network level, giving users crucial time to think, verify and stay in control of their security.

Shashwat Sharma, Managing Director & CEO of Air-

tel India, said, "While OTPs are essential for securing digital transactions, their effectiveness is often undermined by criminal tactics. Our AI-powered network solution detects and prevents fraudulent activity in real-time. Extensive trials have shown remarkable accuracy in stopping such scams."

Over the past two years, Airtel has introduced AI-based safeguards like spam-call warnings and malicious link blocking. While these measures have reduced fraud significantly, scams exploiting social engineering continue. The new Fraud Alert feature represents a further step in protecting mobile users from digital fraud.

The solution is currently live in Haryana and will be rolled out to all Airtel customers nationwide within the next two weeks.

Contd. from Page 1...

CM terms SC verdict on forest

land in possession of indigenous communities who will be given 'forest patta' under relevant laws, he said.

"If we are to exclude the land for which the eligible forest dwellers will get rights, about 20 lakh bighas are still under encroachment," he added.

The CM said the committee, as directed by the Supreme Court, will be notified by Wednesday evening, which will take forward the evictions as per the judgment. (PTI)

Cong MP's Pak connection

to the charges brought against him a day earlier based on the SIT report. "I always face questions, even if those are uncomfortable...only selected journalists were allowed to raise questions in Gogoi's presser," he claimed. He also maintained that reporters were "jostled" at the Congress press meet, which never happens in BJP office media briefings.

Sarma further said a whistleblower from within the Congress has told police that three persons, associated with a political consultancy group engaged by the opposition party, have "connived for getting ink thrown on Gogoi and shift the blame to BJP". He said police have recorded the information and called the persons concerned as a preventive measure. Responding to Congress leader Pawan Khera's allegation that Sarma was a follower of a Bangladeshi cleric, the CM said the cleric had earlier visited former chief minister Tarun Gogoi and that Gaurav Gogoi had also met him.

"The cleric had visited Tarun Gogoi at his Koinadhora residence (then official residence of CM). Gaurav Gogoi had visited him twice at a Machkhowa (Guwahati locality) residence," Sarma claimed. "Let Khera post about the cleric's visit to Tarun Gogoi's home. They always post half-truths," he said.

Sarma said he has a "lot of photographs" with maulanas from his Congress days and questioned, "What is wrong with it?" He had joined the saffron party in August 2015. He maintained that he has not deleted his old photographs from social media from his Congress days "so that people can know what kind of person I was after my death".

"I have nothing against Sufism, I have visited many dargahs," Sarma added. AICC leader Khera had on Tuesday alleged that Sarma was a follower of Bangladeshi cleric Dewan Mohammad Saidur Rahman Chishti Saidabadi, on whose advice he had joined the saffron party. (PTI)

PM to land on Assam highway

developed in a strip of 4.2 km of the national highway between Moran and Demow, he had said. In Guwahati, Modi will inaugurate a new bridge over the Brahmaputra River and also spend some time walking on it, which the CM described as an "architectural marvel" executed by the state engineers.

From the Lachit Ghat nearby, Modi will inaugurate the temporary campus of the Indian Institute of Management, Guwahati, and an AI-enabled hyperscale data centre, which was announced by Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw during the Advantage Assam business summit.

"100 EV buses for Guwahati will also be flagged off by the PM," Sarma added. Modi will attend a 'BJP Booth Sammilan' at Khanapara field in the city later in the afternoon and address about a lakh booth workers, Sarma added.

This will be the prime minister's third visit to the state in three months, with Assembly elections likely in March-April. (PTI)

Deletion of 'doubtful

were not residents anymore. We worked a lot," he added.

Sarma also said, "The war against illegal Bangladeshi Muslim (immigrants) will continue." At the end of claims and objections, the final electoral rolls was published on Tuesday with a total of 2.49 crore voters, a decrease by 0.97 per cent from the draft list.

The CM had earlier indicated that only 'Miyas' were being served notices during the SR process as a tactic to "keep them under pressure", and said that more than 5 lakh complaints were filed by BJP workers against "illegal Bangladeshis".

'Miyas' is originally a pejorative term used for Bengali-speaking Muslims in Assam and the non-Bengali speaking people generally identify them as Bangladeshi immigrants.

In recent years, activists from the community have started adopting this term as a gesture of defiance. The SR exercise had stirred much controversy in the state, with opposition parties alleging that it was being used for "vote theft" and genuine citizens, particularly of a religious minority community, were being harassed during the process. (PTI)

Orthodox tea subsidy

and exports should be passed on to the workers and their daily wages raised. "If incentives are given, workers will perform better. The industry said they will consider it. We will talk with the tea workers' organisations also," he added. The last raise in daily wages had come into effect in October 2023, with workers

in tea gardens in the Brahmaputra valley getting Rs 250 per day and those in the Barak valley being paid Rs 228 per day.

With Assembly elections due in a couple of months and the tea tribes forming a sizeable voter group, the government has been wooing the community with various welfare schemes, including a one-time grant of Rs 5,000 each to over 6 lakh workers.

Sarma further said Prime Minister Narendra Modi is likely to visit the state on March 6 or 7, and the government will try to launch the distribution of land pattas to workers in tea garden lines during the trip.

"You all know his connection with tea. It is my wish that the prime minister hands over the first 5,000 to 6,000 pattas to the tea workers himself. After 200 years, the workers will finally be getting ownership over their living quarters," he said.

Sarma added that if the PM's schedule cannot be worked out, Union Home Minister Amit Shah will be invited for the event, which he held before March 10. (PTI)

SC lists another plea against

agreed to list for hearing a separate plea of Communist Party of India (Marxist) and CPI leader Annie Raja seeking action against the chief minister over a viral video allegedly showing him taking aim and firing with a rifle at members of the Muslim community. On Wednesday, the bench was urged to list the fresh plea along with the one filed by Left leaders.

"We will see," the CJI said. The fresh petition was filed by former professor Hiren Gohain, former DGP of Assam Harekrishna Deka, senior journalist Paresh Chandra Malakar and senior advocate Santanu Borthakur.

The plea alleged that the chief minister has repeatedly made statements that incite discrimination, social and economic boycott and violence against Bengali-origin Muslims in Assam. It alleged that the chief minister promoted enmity and hatred on grounds of religion, language, place of birth and residence in his public speeches and media interactions. The plea said the chief minister allegedly used expressions such as "Miyas" and "Bangladeshi" against Bengali-origin Muslims in Assam. (PTI)

All 6 stanzas of Vande

sung shall stand in attention, it said. "Whenever the official version of the National Song is sung or played, the audience shall stand in attention. However, when in the course of a newsreel or documentary the National Song is played as a part of the film, it is not expected of the audience to stand as standing is bound to interrupt the exhibition of the film and would create disorder and confusion rather than add to the dignity of the National Song," it said.

The work in school shall begin with the playing of the National Song. The Centre is observing the 150th year of Vande Mataram.

According to the order, the official version of the National Song shall be played accompanied by mass singing on these occasions -- on the unfurling of the National Flag, on cultural occasions or ceremonial functions other than parades, and on the arrival of the President at any government or public function, among others. "There should be an adequate public audition system so that the gathering in various enclosures can sing in unison with the choir; printed lyrics of the official version of the National Song may be circulated amongst the participants, wherever required," it read.

The order said that on all occasions when the National Song is sung, the official version shall be recited accompanied by mass singing.

"The National Song may be sung on occasions which, although not strictly ceremonial, are nevertheless invested with significance because of the presence of Ministers etc. The singing of the National Song on such occasions (with or without the accompaniment of instruments) accompanied by mass singing is desirable," it said. The order, all the same, said it is not possible to give an exhaustive list of occasions on which the singing (as distinct from playing) of the official version of the National Song can be permitted. (PTI)

TTMS becomes effective

administrative process for the state's educators. The transfer process will be managed through the official Human Resource Management System (HRMS) portal at <https://hrmsassam.in>. This centralised digital platform serves teachers across the Elementary, Secondary, and Samagra Shiksha cadres, ensuring streamlined record-keeping and merit-based movement.

Rafale, Su-30, Tejas to be

April 22 Pahalgam terror attack. Vice Chief of the Air Staff, Air Marshal Nagesh Kapoor, interacting with reporters said the biennial demonstration this time "assumes a different connotation" as this is taking place after last year's Operation Sindoor.

Asked if some of the strikes conducted during the decisive military action will be re-enacted in 'Vayu Shakti', the VCAS said, "long-distance targeting" will not be showcased in this firepower demonstration at Pokharan range in Rajasthan's Jaisalmer. But the effects of the strikes on the ground will be demonstrated as part of it, he said, without elaborating.

Asked if the demonstration taking place not far from the western border will carry any strategic messaging to Pakistan, as well as to China, he said, "We will do our demonstration. What message will go out to anyone...it is up to you to decide." The defence ministry in a statement later said, "As the first, fastest and fiercest responder, the Indian Air Force will highlight its ability to rapidly punish the enemy, dominate operational environment from the outset and decisively influence the course of operations by transforming tactical actions into strategic outcomes." The exercise will also showcase glimpses of how IAF plays a crucial role in humanitarian assistance and disaster management by providing rapid airlift and rescue and evacuation from conflict zones within the country as well as abroad, the ministry said.

"Full spectrum operations by fighter, transport and helicopter platforms including Tejas, Rafale, Jaguar, Mirage-2000, Su-30MKI, Hawk, MiG-29, C-130J, C-295, C-17, Chetak, ALH MK-IV, Mi-17 IV, LCH, Apache, Chinook and Remotely Piloted Aircraft (RPA) will be executed," the statement said.

The exercise will also feature advanced weapon systems such as Short Range Loitering Munitions (SRLM), Akash, SpyDer and Counter Unmanned Aerial Systems (CUAS), carrying out day, dusk and night missions, it added.

The exercise aims to reassure the nation by reaffirming the IAF's role as a key component of India's national security architecture, the ministry said.

'Vayu Shakti' will also "highlight the success of Operation Sindoor, reaffirming IAF's primacy in airspace dominance, long-range precision targeting, multi-domain operations and its ability to deliver decisive effects with indigenous platforms guided by the vision of 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat'," it said.

Many also asked the significance of the exercise, whose 2026 edition is taking place several months after Operation Sindoor, and given the proximity of the drill's venue from the western border. (PTI)

IIT Guwahati researchers

Most methods rely on the addition of chemicals, extensive treatment periods and sophisticated equipment.

"Moreover, the methods need to be performed on site and have the potential to create surplus sludge, increasing the time and energy costs to disposal," he said.

Purkait said electrocoagulation offers a different approach. Instead of adding chemicals from outside, it uses an electric current to release metal ions from electrodes placed in the water. "These ions attach to arsenic and other contaminants, allowing them to clump together and be removed from the water through settling or flotation. The process is relatively simple to operate and reduces the need for chemical handling," he added.

Traditional electrocoagulation systems use stationary electrodes, which can slow the process and cause deposits to form on the electrode surface over time, reducing efficiency. To overcome many of the noted system inefficiencies, the IIT Guwahati team, under Purkait, configured an electrocoagulation system with a rotating anode and a stationary cathode.

"Electrocoagulation, combined with a rotating electrode system, offers an efficient solution for arsenic-contaminated water. In this process, a controlled electric current dissolves a sacrificial iron electrode while its rotation enhances mixing and mass transfer, leading to uniform generation of iron coagulant species that effectively bind arsenic present in the water," he explained.

"Simultaneously, fine gas bubbles formed during the process attach to the arsenic-laden electrodes and lift them to the surface for easy separation. The use of rotating iron electrodes significantly improves removal efficiency while maintaining low operational cost, making the technology well-suited for arsenic removal under optimised conditions," he said.

The researchers explained that for a small community-scale plant (10-50 kilolitres per day), an EC system typically costs ₹ 8-15 lakh, while a conventional system costs between ₹ 12-20 lakh.

At medium-scale capacities (100-500 kilolitres per day), the EC system costs Rs 30-80 lakh, whereas RO-based systems often exceed ₹ 1-2 crore.

"Operationally, the EC system does not require expensive membranes or frequent chemical dosing, and maintenance is largely limited to electrode replacement. In contrast, membrane systems include high operating costs due to membrane fouling, replacement and energy-intensive operations.

"The developed technology is particularly suitable for rural and semi-urban areas, where affordability, robustness and ease of operation are critical," Purkait said. As the next step, the team plans to test the developed system in real-field conditions and evaluate its long-term performance in groundwater containing multiple contaminants such as fluoride and iron.

"We are in discussion with Kakati Engineering Pvt Ltd, Sivasagar, Assam, for the fabrication and installation of the system. Further commercialisation of the developed technology will be initiated once an appropriate funding source is confirmed," he said. (PTI)

Controversial video: Cong,

AIMIM president Asaduddin Owaisi had on Monday lodged a complaint with the Hyderabad Police, seeking criminal action against the Assam CM over the now-deleted video.

Sarma had said, "If any case has been filed against me, arrest me. I don't have any objection. I will be prepared to go to jail. I will always stick to my words. I am opposed to Bangladeshi infiltrators and will always remain so." (PTI)

Historic education reform and development funding approved BTC Assembly session concludes with passage of two key bills

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Feb 11: A one-day special assembly session of the Bodoland Territorial Council Legislative Assembly (BTCLA) concluded on Wednesday at the BTC Legislative Assembly House, Bodofa Nwgrw in Kokrajhar.

Tridip Daimary, Speaker of the BTCLA, chaired the session, which saw detailed discussions on various subjects and agendas focused on the welfare and development of the Bodoland region. BTC Chief Executive Member Hagrama Mohilary, Deputy CEM Rihan Daimary, former CEM and MCLA Pramod Boro, along with other MCLAs from both the ruling and opposition benches, participated in the session.

During the session, the house passed two crucial bills: "The Bodoland Territorial Council Education (Provincialisation of Services and Re-organisation of Educational Institutions) Bill, 2025," introduced by Executive Member (EM) Rabiram Narzary and the clearance of pending bills to support development projects in BTC.



The house also passed a supplementary budget of ₹ 73.90 crore, incorporating additional funds for the payment of arrear fixed pay for employees appointed under the Central Selection Board (CSB) for five entrusted line departments.

The historic BTC Education Bill, 2025, was passed after detailed discussions and received support from the opposition with minor modifications. The bill aims

to provincialise the services of teachers and non-teaching staff of venture educational institutions, re-organise and streamline institutions up to degree level in BTC and ensure compliance with the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009.

It also seeks to regulate the growth of venture schools and improve education quality in line with the objectives of the MoS of BTC signed between the Government of India,

the Government of Assam, and the then BLT.

EM of Education, BTC Rabiram Narzary, informed the house that a total of 5,166 teaching and non-teaching staff across LP schools (1,659), ME schools (1,705), high schools (1,100), higher secondary and senior secondary schools (391) and colleges (226) will be covered under provincialisation. He noted that BTC requires ₹ 205.33 crore annually for the salary component.

Former CEM and MCLA Pramod Boro described the bill as a landmark achievement, stating that decades of efforts to provincialise venture schools in BTC are now being realized. He thanked BTC Chief Hagrama Mohilary and EM Rabiram Narzary for resolving this long-pending issue and assured continued support from the opposition. He emphasised that public funds must be used for genuine development in the region.

BTC CEM Hagrama Mohilary said the special assembly session concluded with the passage of two crucial bills, marking a significant step forward for Bodoland's progress and prosperity.

Karbi language workshop concludes with key findings on phonetics and grammar

HT Bureau

DIPHU, Feb 11: A three-day International Workshop on the Standardisation of the Karbi Language concluded on Wednesday at the Arboretum-cum-Craft Centre in Matipung. Organised by the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) in collaboration with the Centre for Karbi Studies (CKS) and the Standardisation Committee, the event focused on creating a definitive framework for the written form of Karbi.

The workshop brought together academics, writers, linguists, student leaders and religious figures to discuss phonetics, tones and the use of vowels and consonants to preserve the linguistic integrity of Karbi.

On the final day, speaker Khorsing Teron highlighted a major finding: while Karbi was previously thought to have five vowels, experts identified seven distinct vowels— a, e, ê, i, o, ô, u. Teron also noted that spoken Karbi uses three tones (high, mid, and low), which can be represented in writing using diacritical marks.

Speaker Khoyasing Hanse examined grammatical structure, noting that Karbi relies heavily on affixation. He identified five primary types: possessive prefix,



nominaliser prefix, plural suffix, collective suffix and causative prefix.

Scholars presented papers on topics ranging from "Active vs. Passive Priming Patterns" (Anna Timungpi, Intesal Arif Khan and Veena Ravindran) to the "Revitalisation of the Karbi Language" (Dr Kareng Ronghangpi). Other presenters, including Welsing Hanse,

Bonsam Kathar and Kaveso I. Kathar, explored semantics and language contact.

The workshop concluded with a valedictory function, where Dr Dharamsing Teron, Director of CKS, delivered the vote of thanks. Certificates were distributed to all participants for their contribution to this landmark linguistic initiative.

Three declared foreigners ordered to leave Assam within 24 hours

HT Correspondent

KHERONI, Feb 11: The Karbi Anglong district administration has issued another expulsion order against three individuals declared as foreigners by the Foreigners' Tribunal (FT) in the district. The orders, issued by newly appointed District Commissioner Aranyak Saikia, IAS, on Wednesday, direct the three to leave the territory of Assam and India within 24 hours of receiving the notice.

The affected individuals are Md Tajuddin, son of Md Abdul Kalam, a resident of Lengri village, who was declared a foreigner by the FT Court vide FT Case No 144/2009 (Reference Case No 200/2008 from SSP (B), Karbi Anglong); Md Khurshed Ali, son of Late Jubed Ali, a resident of Dodo Colony, declared a foreigner vide FT Case No 239/2008 (Reference Case No 288/2007); and Md Amir Hussain, son of Late Nur Islam, a resident of Tila Basti, declared a foreigner vide FT Case No 147/2009 (Reference Case No 229/2008). All three declared foreigners fall under Khatkhathi Police Station.

Citing Section 2 of the Immigrants (Expulsion from Assam) Act, 1950, the orders state that their presence in India/Assam is detrimental to the interests of the general public and the internal se-

curity of the state. They have been instructed to exit through the Dhubri, Sribhumi (Karimganj) or South Salmara-Mankachar routes, which are bordering areas.

In case of non-compliance, the government has warned that appropriate action will be taken to enforce their removal under the Act.

Copies of the orders have been sent to relevant authorities, including the Senior Superintendent of Police, Karbi Anglong, for execution and compliance reporting; the Additional Deputy Commissioner (Revenue) for confiscation of any movable or immovable property in favour of the government; Electoral Registration Officers to delete their names from voter lists; the Supply Department to cancel ration cards; UIDAI to cancel or freeze Aadhaar cards and all district department heads to exclude them from government social security schemes and grants.

The action aligns with the Assam government's ongoing implementation of Foreigners' Tribunal verdicts to address declared illegal immigrants, particularly in districts like Karbi Anglong. Similar expulsion orders under the same Act have been reported in the district in recent weeks, reflecting continued enforcement efforts.

CRS to inspect Murkongselek-Sille railway section, paving way for operations

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 11: The Commissioner of Railway Safety (CRS), NF Circle, Sumeet Singhal, will conduct a two-day statutory inspection of the newly constructed Murkongselek-Sille section (approximately 15.60 km) on 12th and 13th February, 2026. This section constitutes the first phase of the 26.15 km-long Murkongselek-Pasighat New Railway Line Project under the Tinsukia Division of Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR).

Successful completion of the inspection and subsequent authorisation will pave the way for regular train operations up to Sille for both freight and passenger services, significantly enhancing rail connectivity in the region. During the inspection, the CRS will be accompanied by senior officials of the NFR Construction Organisation, under whose supervision the works have been executed. The inspection is scheduled to commence at 08:30 hours from Murkongselek station.

The Murkongselek-Pasighat New Railway Line Project spans 26.15 km, originating from Murkongselek in Assam and extending up to Pasighat in Arunachal Pradesh. The project is planned in two phases — Phase-I: Murkongselek-Sille (15.60 km) and Phase-II: Sille-Pasighat (10.55 km). The alignment includes three new stations—Sille, Labo and Pasighat—along with several major and minor bridges, Road Over Bridges (ROBs) and Road Under Bridges (RUBs).

Upon full completion of the project, the line will substantially improve connectivity for the people of Arunachal Pradesh with Assam and the rest of the country. It is expected to facilitate economic growth by encouraging small-scale industries, tourism and trade in the region. The project will also reduce transportation costs and travel time, ensure uninterrupted supply of essential commodities and provide long-distance rail access to the people of the region. The rapid expansion of railway infrastructure in the Northeast continues to play a transformative role in strengthening regional integration and fostering socio-economic development.

Silghat jute mill in Nagaon shuts down again over raw material shortage

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Feb 11: The jute mill at Silghat in Nagaon district, operating under the cooperative sector has come to a grinding halt once again as production ceased on February 1 due to a shortage of raw materials, specifically jute. Sources reveal that the mill's second unit was previously shut down due to non-payment of dues to jute suppliers. The mill authorities had handed over the unit's management to a Kolkata-based firm, which allegedly failed to clear the suppliers' dues, leading to conflicts and even an attempted suicide. Despite temporary relief efforts by the Kaliabor Co-district administration and mill authorities, the situation has deteriorated again. Experts blame the mill's woes on mismanagement and alleged corruption by some officials. The mill, which had turned profitable after reopening in 1986 under the Assam Accord, had been running smoothly until the COVID-19 pandemic. It had even shown a profit margin in 2021 and continued for over another couple of fiscal years. Recent attempts to revive the second unit with female laborers had shown promise, but the current shutdown has put thousands of workers' jobs at risk.

Diphu Post Office holds workshop to promote postal schemes

HT Bureau

DIPHU, Feb 11: The Diphu Sub-Division Post Office organised a workshop-cum-awareness program on Wednesday to promote Government of India postal products and services.

Addressing agents and customers, Superintendent of Posts Dilip Kumar Mandal highlighted key offerings such as Postal Life Insurance (PLI), Rural Postal Life Insurance (RPLI) and Postal Savings Bank (POSB) services, including Recurring Deposits (RD), Time Deposits (TD) and the Sukanya Samridhi Account (SSA) for girls aged 0-10.

"Many people are still unaware of these facilities. You should take advantage of them for maximum benefits," Mandal urged. He also noted that the Post Office provides Parcel Package Unit (PPU) and international mail services. The event was attended by Assistant Superintendent of Posts (ASP) HQ, Nagaon, Hifjur Rahman and ASP, Diphu Sub-Division, Debabrata Bora.

Assam to review Karbi land rights implementation

HT Bureau

DIPHU, Feb 11: The Government of Assam has called for an "urgent" follow-up meeting to review the implementation of critical decisions aimed at resolving the volatile land rights dispute in Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong.

According to an official notice issued on Wednesday by the Home & Political Department, Chief Minister Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma will chair a tripartite review meeting on February 15, 2026, at Lok Sewa Bhawan. The session will include leadership from the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) and representatives of various Karbi civil society organisations.

The upcoming review stems from a landmark meeting held on December 26, 2025, which followed a period of intense unrest, arson and tragic loss of life in the hill districts. The original tripartite agreement established a strict roadmap for securing indigenous

land rights and clearing encroachments.

Key decisions currently under review include: The KAAC was tasked with filing an affidavit before the Gauhati High Court by January 5, 2026, regarding the eviction of Professional Grazing Reserves (PGR) and Village Grazing Reserves (VGR); Vacant PGR/VGR lands were to be secured with fencing within 15 days of the December meeting, followed by immediate afforestation to prevent future encroachment; the Council committed to initiating the eviction of encroachers from land belonging to schools and state government departments within a 15-day window; all government offices located within PGR/VGR areas in Kheroni are slated for relocation to areas allotted by the KAAC and Trade Licenses issued to shops in the Kheroni PGR/VGR areas over the last three years were ordered to be cancelled within seven days.

The December minutes also

addressed the human cost of the unrest. The State Government pledged a compensation package of ₹ 10 Lakh and a government job to the next of kin (NOK) of the two victims who died during the clashes. This is in addition to ₹ 5 Lakh previously offered by the KAAC. Furthermore, an amount of ₹ 3 Lakh was sanctioned for those injured during police action.

In a move toward reconciliation, the government agreed to consider withdrawing police cases filed against agitators, with the notable exception of cases involving the death of a physically challenged person during an act of arson.

The February 15 meeting is expected to determine whether the KAAC and state departments have met these aggressive deadlines. Sources suggest that the "urgent" nature of the notice reflects the government's priority in maintaining the fragile peace established at the end of last year.

IAF conducts trial runs at Moran Emergency Landing Facility

HT Correspondent

DIBRUGARH, Feb 11: The Indian Air Force began trial runs at the Emergency Landing Facility (ELF) on the national highway at Moran, Dibrugarh, on Wednesday ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit on February 14.

Large crowds of locals, students and children gathered to watch aircraft land and take off from the 4.2-km highway airstrip on NH-127. Sukhoi-30s, Rafale fighters, Tejas jets, Hercules and Antonov AN-32 aircraft participated in the trial runs, with spectators cheering as the jets performed landings and take-offs.

The trial runs will continue until February 13 as part of preparations for the Prime Minister's inauguration of Northeast's first Emergency Landing Facility. Modi's aircraft is scheduled to land directly on the highway airstrip before he inaugurates the facility and witnesses a 30-



minute aerial demonstration.

Assam Chief Secretary Ravi Kota encouraged locals to witness the event, calling it a "historic and rare experience" for the region, particularly for students and children.

The facility will serve as an alternative run-

way for military aircraft during emergencies or wartime situations. Dibrugarh SSP Abhijit Gurav confirmed that all security arrangements and drills have been thoroughly reviewed ahead of the Prime Minister's visit.

Traffic on NH-127 has been diverted via the old NH-37 through Moran town from February 6 to February 14 to facilitate the trials and main event.

Officials stated that the project enhances the operational readiness and emergency response capabilities of the Indian Air Force in Upper Assam, while reflecting the Centre's focus on integrating civilian infrastructure with national security requirements. The emergency landing strip is expected to play a key role during natural disasters, defence emergencies and strategic operations, further strengthening Dibrugarh's importance on the national map.

BTC Chief Mohilary lays foundation for four major projects in Kokrajhar

Initiatives to boost sports, culture, handloom and youth development

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Feb 11: The BTC Chief Hagrama Mohilary on Wednesday laid the foundation stones of several major infrastructure projects under the Special Development Package (SDP) scheme in Kokrajhar district aimed at strengthening the sports, cultural and handloom sectors while generating employment and promoting youth development in the region.

The foundation stone was laid for the Development of DASA Stadium at Dotma at an estimated cost of ₹ 15 crore. The project will include a standard football ground, a 400-metre athletic track, sprinkler and irrigation systems, a pavilion with VIP dais, spectator galleries, high mast floodlighting, electrification and other essential infrastructure with a seating capacity of 1,500 spectators.

The foundation stone was also laid for the Production and Marketing Centre for Handloom and Textile Products at Haltugan in Kokrajhar district at an estimated cost of ₹ 24.31 crore over an area of 50 bigha. The centre will focus on the production of high-demand products such as Eri silk sarees, mekhela chador, dokhona and Eri stoles, aiming to revitalise the handloom and textile sectors, preserve traditional craftsmanship, empower local artisans and promote



sustainable livelihoods. The project is expected to generate employment for around 650 persons, including 240 direct and 500 indirect jobs and will include production units, exhibition and workshop spaces, marketing offices, administrative blocks and other common facilities.

In addition, the foundation stone was laid for the Construction of Audience Gallery for Volleyball and Football venue at KDSA,

Kokrajhar, at an estimated cost of Rs 4 crore. The project aims to strengthen sports infrastructure in the district, promote football and athletics, facilitate the conduct of district and state-level sporting events and encourage greater youth participation and structured talent development. The project includes the construction of separate spectator galleries for volleyball and football, a VIP gallery for football, among other works.

Further, the foundation stone was laid for the Construction of Dr Bhupen Hazarika Memorial Multi-Purpose Cultural Auditorium Hall at Kokrajhar, to be built at an estimated cost of ₹ 30 crore. The project aims to promote art, culture, music and education while honoring the legacy of Bharat Ratna Dr Bhupen Hazarika. The proposed complex will include a 1,500-seat auditorium, museum, audio-visual library, music workshop, life-size statue and other facilities.

Addressing the media during the programmes, the BTC Chief spoke about the special Assembly Session held on Wednesday, where the crucial bill on provincialisation of venture schools and colleges in the BTC area was passed, ensuring better and more stable educational facilities for the youth. He said, "With the passage of this bill, long-pending issues related to teaching staff and institutional development from LP schools to junior colleges would now be resolved." He also thanked the opposition MCLAs for extending their support, noting it as a major step in the education sector.

EM Derhasat Basumatary and Prakash Basumatary, MCLAs, Additional Principal Secretary Pranji Wary and officials of the concerned departments were also present on the occasion.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

If opportunity doesn't knock, build a door.
- Milton Berle

Disruptions of LS session

Communication between the Modi government and the Opposition has broken down, as evidenced by the turbulent proceedings in Parliament last week. There have been no back-channel negotiations to resolve the paralysis. The protests intensified on last Monday, when Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla announced that the Leader of Opposition, Rahul Gandhi, could not read from a magazine containing an excerpt from a book by retired General Manoj Mukund Naravane, citing Parliamentary rules. This breakdown in dialogue culminated with the Lok Sabha being adjourned for the day last Wednesday, precluding the Prime Minister from delivering his usual reply to the motion of thanks to the President's speech. This was unprecedented in Parliament's history: the Prime Minister could not speak in the lower House on the President's address, underscoring the seriousness of the disruptions. Opposition Members of both Houses of Parliament protested, especially in the Lok Sabha. These protests caused the Lower House to be adjourned several times, often just minutes after it reconvened. Prime Minister Narendra Modi was unable to enter the House because opposition women MPs had positioned themselves near his seat in Lok Sabha. Speaker Om Birla later clarified the following day that he had advised the Prime Minister to avoid the House due to concerns over potential disruptions near his seat.

Overall, Parliament faced significant disruption due to repeated adjournments. This chaos highlights the challenges in maintaining parliamentary decorum and the importance of respectful debate for effective governance. In the early days, there were some very good debates. Members of Parliament (MPs) often make noise in Parliament to protest and get media attention. Their actions include rushing to the well of the House, shouting slogans, holding up signs, and, at times, even tearing up the bill. This behaviour reflects deep political divisions and a shift toward confrontational politics. There has been a noticeable increase in time lost to disruptions and in the costs of running Parliament. It costs 2.5 lakhs a minute, 1.5 crore an hour, and Rs 9 crore per day of taxpayers' money, highlighting the financial impact of disruptions on public resources. Disruptions in Parliament not only hinder government accountability and limit meaningful discussion but also delay the passage of crucial laws, affecting public welfare and policy implementation, which underscores the urgent need for reforms.

To address this, we need electoral reforms to improve the quality of elected representatives. We should also encourage better understanding among political parties, using both formal and informal methods. By increasing public awareness of Parliament's role and how disruptions can harm the public interest, we can reduce these disturbances. The reforms should be implemented sooner rather than later, with political cooperation. Pragmatism in politics will be essential to restore faith and ensure the smooth functioning of Parliament. Above all, the Parliament has to conduct discussions.

No-confidence motion against the Lok Sabha Speaker Democracy at a critical crossroads

By: Lalit Garg

The move to bring a no-confidence motion against Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla is a deeply disturbing development for Indian democracy. Democracy is not merely a system of governance; it is a living tradition rooted in continuous dialogue, respect for dissent, and institutional trust. In a vast and diverse country like India, Parliament represents the highest democratic forum—where not only laws are framed, but the conscience of the nation finds expression. When preparations are made to move a no-confidence motion against a constitutional authority such as the Speaker of the Lok Sabha, the issue transcends individual personalities or political parties and raises serious questions about the health of the entire democratic framework.

The opposition's allegation that it is being denied adequate opportunity to speak in the House—particularly the claim that the Leader of the Opposition is repeatedly prevented from expressing his views—has led to questions being raised about the Speaker's neutrality. This concern becomes even more serious because the office of the Speaker has traditionally been regarded as a symbol of balance between the ruling party and the opposition. The Speaker's role is not confined to presiding over proceedings; it carries the constitutional responsibility of upholding the dignity of the House, protecting democratic decorum, and ensuring equal opportunity for all sides.

When a substantial section of the opposition begins to feel that the Speaker's conduct is partisan or that its voice is being systematically suppressed, the issue ceases to be one of political disagreement and instead reflects a deeper institutional mistrust. The fact that more than one hundred Members of Parliament have signed in support of a no-confidence motion indicates that this is not a momentary outburst but the outcome of prolonged dissatisfaction, unresolved grievances, and a widening communication gap. While it is also true that such a motion is unlikely to succeed numerically, democracy often assigns great significance to symbolic actions, as they convey powerful moral and political messages.

At the same time, the opposition's statement that it has kept the option of reconciliation open—and its efforts to engage in dialogue through meetings between senior leaders and the Speaker—suggest that the door to resolution has not yet been fully closed. This situation compels us to reflect on a troubling question: why

has Parliament, the nation's supreme deliberative body, increasingly become a site of disruption, sloganeering, and stalemate rather than meaningful dialogue? Is this merely the result of mutual distrust between the government and the opposition, or does it point to a deeper erosion of parliamentary traditions?

In recent years, it has repeatedly been observed that instead of serious debate on important legislation and issues of national importance, parliamentary proceedings are frequently disrupted. This not only hampers legislative functioning but also sends a disheartening message to citizens—that their elected representatives are failing to discharge their responsibilities with seriousness and maturity. The greatest strength of democracy lies in its ability to accommodate dissent. The role of the opposition is not limited to protest; it also involves holding the government accountable and presenting alternative perspectives. For this, freedom of speech within the House, the right to question, and respect for criticism are indispensable. If the opposition feels that these democratic pathways are being narrowed, its frustration often spills over into protests and disruptions, ultimately damaging the dignity of Parliament itself. On the other hand, repeated obstruction of parliamentary proceedings by the opposition is equally problematic, as it paralyzes governance and sidelines public concerns. Caught between these two extremes of mistrust and aggression, the true purpose of democracy risks being lost.

In the world's largest democracy, if Parliament consistently makes headlines for disruptions, suspensions, and deadlock, it inevitably affects India's democratic image at the global level as well. When confrontation and mistrust overshadow discussions on development, policy, and public welfare, it bodes ill for the future. Democratic strength does not stem from a powerful government alone; it also requires a strong opposition and impartial institutions. From a position such as that of the Lok Sabha Speaker, society expects not only strict adherence to rules but also the ability to act as a bridge of trust. Likewise, the opposition must ensure that its protest remains constructive rather than degenerating into obstruction.

There is an urgent need today to restore Parliament as a forum for dialogue, where even sharp disagreements are expressed within the bounds of decorum, and where both the government and the opposition reaffirm their commitment to democratic values. If no-confidence

motions are being used as warning signals, they should also serve as opportunities for collective introspection. The central question is not who is right or wrong, but how democratic institutions can be made healthier, more credible, and more effective. Citizens elect their representatives not to indulge in slogans or stall proceedings, but to engage in serious deliberation on the nation's future. When Parliament fails to meet this expectation, the very foundation of democracy begins to weaken.

It is also a matter of record that, as Speaker of the Lok Sabha, Om Birla's conduct of parliamentary proceedings has generally been viewed as disciplined, efficient, and rule-bound. During his tenure, efforts to ensure time-bound functioning of the House, prioritisation of legislative business, and inclusion of diverse political parties have been evident. On several occasions, he has attempted to maintain balance between the ruling side and the opposition, while emphasising adherence to parliamentary traditions and procedures. His image has largely been that of a speaker who employs patience, prudence, and practical wisdom to ensure the smooth functioning of the House. In light of his commitment to democratic institutions, respect for parliamentary norms, and openness to dialogue, the move to bring a no-confidence motion against a speaker of his standing appears tragic and deeply unsettling. This episode points less to an individual failure and more to a broader atmosphere in which mistrust has grown so deep that the bridges of dialogue and confidence are steadily eroding.

Ultimately, this is a moment to rise above accusations and counter-accusations and embrace responsibility. The ruling party must recognise that a strong opposition is not a weakness of democracy but one of its greatest strengths. The opposition must accept that dissent carries its own discipline and creative responsibility. And holders of constitutional offices must remember that neutrality is demonstrated not only through procedural correctness but also through conduct, perception, and equal opportunity. If we fail to preserve Parliament as a platform for dialogue, it will not merely signify the failure of a session or a government, but a collective failure to uphold democratic values. This is the moment for every citizen, every representative, and every institution to engage in introspection—so that the path ahead leads not toward destruction through division, but toward dialogue, trust, and democratic maturity. (The author is a journalist and columnist)

The new shape of CBSE board exams

The CBSE board examinations have always been a defining moment in the lives of Indian students. For decades, these exams have carried immense emotional, academic, and social weight. They have often been seen not just as tests of knowledge but as judgments of ability, discipline, and future potential. With the announcement that the CBSE board exams for 2026 will begin on February 17 and with the introduction of several new rules, the familiar structure of board examinations is undergoing a noticeable transformation. This change has sparked widespread discussion among students, parents, teachers, and education experts, as it reshapes how success, failure, pressure, and opportunity are understood in the school system.

One of the most significant changes in the 2026 CBSE board exams is the introduction of a two-exam system for Class 10 students. This marks a clear departure from the long-standing practice of a single annual board examination. Under the new system, all Class 10 students are required to appear for the first board exam, which will begin on February 17, 2026. This first exam is compulsory and forms the foundation of the academic evaluation for the year. It covers the full syllabus and follows the standard board examination pattern that students and teachers are already familiar with.

The compulsory nature of the first exam is important. It ensures that every student is assessed at a common point in time and that there is a reliable benchmark for academic performance. The results of this exam will be used for official purposes such as promotion to the next class, issuance of certificates, and admissions where immediate results are required. In other words, the first exam remains serious, meaningful, and consequential. It is not a trial run or a low-stakes test, but a full-fledged board examination that students must prepare for with commitment and focus.

What changes the experience, however, is what comes next. After the results of the first exam are declared, students who have passed are given the option to appear for a second board exam later in the same academic year. This second exam is not compulsory. It is designed as an opportunity for improvement. Students who feel that their performance in the first exam did not reflect their true ability can choose to reattempt up to three subjects in this second exam. The best score obtained between the two attempts will be counted as the final result.

This option fundamentally alters the emotional landscape of board exams. For many students, the fear of a single bad day has always loomed large. Illness, anxiety, personal problems, or even simple mistakes could



have long-lasting consequences. The new system acknowledges that students are human and that learning and performance are not always perfectly aligned with one fixed moment. By allowing a second chance within the same year, the board is attempting to reduce fear and encourage a healthier relationship with examinations.

At the same time, the system is carefully structured to prevent misuse. The second exam is not meant to replace preparation for the first exam. Students cannot skip the first exam or treat it casually in the hope of doing better later. Only those who appear for and pass the first exam are eligible for the improvement attempt. This ensures that students remain serious from the beginning and that the second exam serves as a genuine opportunity for refinement rather than a safety net for lack of effort.

The rule allowing re-attempts in up to three subjects has been designed with flexibility in mind. Many students struggle with one or two subjects while performing well in others. In the past, such students had no formal way to improve their scores without repeating the entire year or waiting for compartment exams under limited conditions. Now, they can focus their energy on specific subjects, revise with greater clarity, and attempt to raise their overall academic profile. This approach respects individual learning differences and acknowledges that improvement is often subject-specific rather than uniform across all areas.

However, eligibility for the second exam comes with clear conditions. Students must meet attendance requirements and complete all internal assessments to be considered eligible for both the first and second exams. Attendance is no longer treated as a procedural formality. Schools are expected to maintain strict records, and students are required to maintain a minimum level of class-

room participation. Internal assessments such as projects, practical work, and periodic tests also play a meaningful role in determining eligibility. This reinforces the idea that learning is a continuous process, not something confined to the exam hall.

Students who fail the first exam face a different set of rules. If a student fails in one or two subjects, they may be allowed to appear in the second exam under compartment provisions. This offers a chance to clear the subjects without losing an academic year. However, students who fail in three or more subjects are generally required to repeat the year. This distinction is important because it balances compassion with academic standards. While the system offers support and second chances, it also recognises that repeated failure across multiple subjects may indicate the need for more time, guidance, and foundational learning.

Private candidates are also covered under the new framework, with clearer guidelines regarding eligibility and subject limits. This is particularly important for students who pursue alternative education paths or who could not complete regular schooling due to personal circumstances. By bringing clarity and consistency to their examination process, the board ensures that the reforms are inclusive and equitable.

For Class 12 students, the examination structure remains largely unchanged in terms of frequency. There is no two-exam system for improvement in the same academic year as introduced for Class 10. However, Class 12 students are still affected by several broader reforms. Internal assessments carry greater weight, competency-based questions are being emphasised, and clarity has been improved around compartment exams and eligibility criteria. These changes reflect the same underlying philosophy of encouraging understanding over memorisation and reducing unnecessary stress.

The emphasis on competency-based assessment is particularly significant. Rather than focusing solely on rote learning and recall, the board is encouraging questions that test application, reasoning, and conceptual clarity. This shift aligns examinations more closely with real-world skills and higher education expectations. For students, this means that genuine understanding and regular engagement with subjects are more valuable than last-minute memorisation.

Reactions to the new rules have been mixed but largely thoughtful. Many students welcome the idea of a second chance, seeing it as a relief from overwhelming pressure. Parents, too, often express cautious optimism, hoping that the changes will reduce

anxiety and allow their children to perform more confidently. Teachers and school administrators, while supportive of the intent, face the challenge of adapting schedules, assessments, and teaching strategies to accommodate the new system. Conducting two board exams in one year requires careful planning, logistical coordination, and emotional support for students.

There are also concerns that preparing for two exams might increase workload rather than reduce it. Some fear that students may remain under constant exam pressure throughout the year. These concerns are valid and highlight the importance of thoughtful implementation. The success of the new system will depend not just on rules but on how schools, teachers, and families approach learning and preparation. If the second exam is treated as an opportunity for calm improvement rather than another high-pressure event, the reform can achieve its intended purpose.

As February 17 approaches, students across the country are adjusting their study plans. Revision strategies are being rethought. Instead of aiming for perfection in one attempt, students are encouraged to focus on steady progress, clarity of concepts, and emotional balance. Schools are offering counselling sessions, mock exams, and guidance programs to help students understand the new structure and manage expectations. Parents are being reminded that support, reassurance, and perspective matter as much as academic discipline.

At its core, the CBSE board exam reform for 2026 reflects a broader shift in how education is viewed. It recognises that learning is not linear and that students develop at different paces. It accepts that exams should measure understanding, not fear. And it acknowledges that growth often comes through reflection and second chances rather than one-time judgment.

The beginning of the board exams on February 17, 2026, therefore represents more than just a date on the calendar. It marks the beginning of a new way of thinking about assessment, responsibility, and opportunity. For students walking into exam halls that morning, the journey ahead is still demanding, but it is no longer defined by a single irreversible outcome. Instead, it offers space for learning, improvement, and resilience.

In the years to come, these changes may well be remembered as a turning point in Indian school education. Whether they fully succeed will depend on how they are implemented and supported at every level. But for now, they signal an important message to students: Your effort matters. Your learning matters. And one moment does not define your entire future.

Yogi's budget lays the groundwork for 2027, political moves backed by numbers

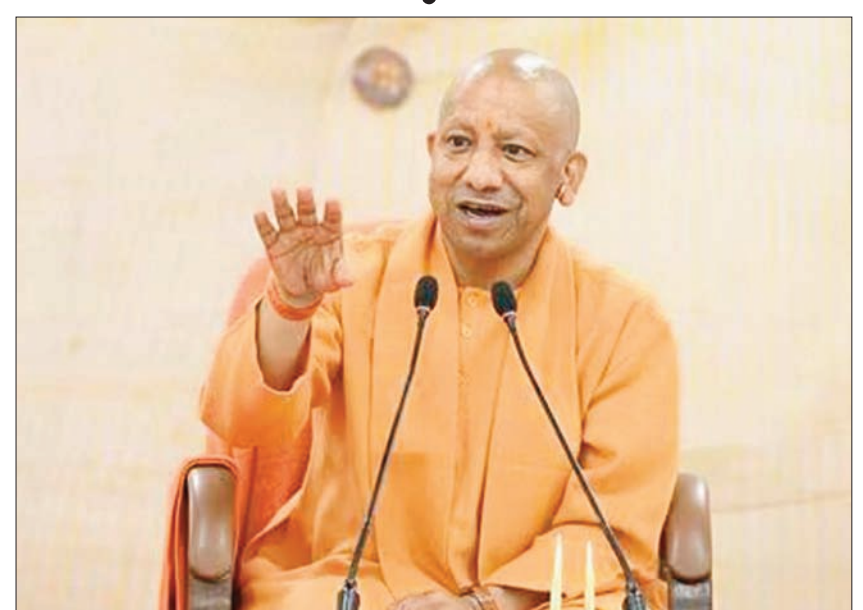
By: Ajay Kumar

The Uttar Pradesh government's 2026-27 budget is not merely an income expenditure plan for the coming financial year; it is being seen as the most concrete political script for the 2027 Assembly elections. Through this ₹9,12,696 crore budget, the government has clearly signalled that before the elections it wants to place its claims on development, security, and welfare firmly on the ground, backed by data. With an overall size nearly 12.9 percent larger than the previous budget, the ruling party is calling it a "budget of confidence," while the political message embedded within it is that the government is neither facing a shortage of resources nor hesitating to increase spending ahead of elections.

The government has first projected the state's economy as its strongest point. According to quick estimates for 2024-25, a GDP of ₹30.25 lakh crore and a growth rate of 13.4 percent are intended to show that Uttar Pradesh is no longer just a populous state, but a rapidly growing economy. From around ₹12.75 lakh crore in 2016-17 to more than two-and-a-half times that figure within eight to nine years, the government attributes this growth to stable governance and an investment-friendly environment. In the 2027 elections, this figure is expected to be highlighted especially before urban voters, business communities, and investment-linked groups, conveying the message that a change in power could slow the pace of development.

The data presented on per capita income is also part of the same political strategy. The rise from ₹54,564 in 2016-17 to ₹1,09,844 in 2024-25, and the projected increase to ₹1,20,000 in 2025-26, is being linked by the government to the everyday life of the common person. This message is particularly targeted at the middle class and lower-middle class, which is most concerned about inflation, children's education, and healthcare expenses. The government claims that rising income does not merely mean statistical improvement, but a change in consumption patterns and living standards.

On the poverty front, the claim of lifting 6 crore people out of multidimensional poverty is being seen as the biggest social card ahead of 2027. By bringing together crores of beneficiaries under schemes such as free ration, Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, Ujjwala gas connections, Ayushman Bharat cards, toilets, and electricity connections, the government wants to show that the poor are not just a policy category, but the center of its political focus. In electoral strategy, this group is crucial because it feels directly connected to the government and often shows stable voting behavior.



The employment figures presented in the budget are being seen as a response to the opposition's strongest issue. By citing an unemployment rate of 2.24 percent, the government is claiming that the employment situation in the state is better than the national average. More than 2.19 lakh recruitments in the police department since 2017, 1.58 lakh promotions, over 60,000 personnel under training, and recruitment processes underway for more than 83,000 posts are being presented together to show that government jobs have moved beyond announcements. The appointment of over 34,000 teachers in the education sector is also placed in this context, as the teaching community plays an important role in shaping opinion in rural and small-town politics.

The strategy to promote self-employment among youth is also clearly visible in the budget. Under the Chief Minister's Youth Entrepreneur Development Campaign, the target of establishing 1 lakh micro-enterprises every year through collateral-free and interest-free loans reflects a political intent to reach out to young people who are disappointed by the limited availability of government jobs. Even partial success of this scheme could directly connect lakhs of families to it by 2027.

Agricultural figures have been selected with rural politics in mind. Record sugarcane payments of over ₹3.04 lakh crore are being seen as the government's strongest electoral weapon in western Uttar Pradesh and the Terai region. The increase of ₹30 per quintal in sugarcane prices, translating into an additional benefit of around ₹3,000 crore, is meant to remind farmers that payments have reached their accounts directly. The figures of procurement of wheat, paddy, and coarse grains in lakhs of metric tonnes, along with payments running into thousands of crores, are attempts to demonstrate the government's commitment to

the minimum support price. Free electricity for tube wells sends a direct message to rural voters that the government is willing to bear irrigation costs.

The figures related to women in the budget are considered to be lessons drawn from the 2022 election experience, where women voters proved decisive. Benefits to 2.681 million girls under the Mukhyamantri Kanya Sumangala Yojana, along with provisions such as Safe City projects, women police beats, CCTV networks, and working women's hostels, show that the government views women's safety and dignity not merely as a law-and-order issue, but as a social concern. Women voters take decisions on both emotional and practical grounds, and the budget's message is aligned accordingly.

Law-and-order data also form a key part of the 2027 electoral narrative. Claims of a 40 to 80 percent reduction in crimes such as dacoity, robbery, murder, and kidnapping are intended to establish that Uttar Pradesh is no longer as unsafe as it once was. Provisions of thousands of crores of rupees for police buildings, housing, and resources indicate that the security infrastructure will be further strengthened. This message is especially important for urban voters, traders, and women.

Overall, the 2026-27 budget has emerged as a document in which every major figure appears to have been chosen with the 2027 voter in mind. By combining development, welfare, security, and identity, the government is trying to convey that continuity of power is the guarantee of stability. In the coming months, this budget will form the basis of political debates in villages and cities alike, where the government will seek trust through these figures, and the opposition will attempt to challenge them. (The author is a Senior Journalist)

The Himalayas laid bare: How vanishing snow and ice are reshaping Asia's water tower

By: Amal Chandra

High above the plains of South Asia, the mighty Himalayas, long revered as the "abode of snow" and the cradle of rivers, are losing their white mantle at an alarming pace. Satellite data and ground observations now reveal vast swathes of the Himalayan range lying bare and rocky during winter, a season that historically has draped these peaks in snow. This striking transformation is not a seasonal anomaly but a symptom of systemic, climate-driven change. The implications of a warmer, snow-poor Himalaya extend far beyond altered landscapes; they threaten the water security, ecosystems and livelihoods of nearly two billion people across South and Southeast Asia.

For millennia, the Himalayan cryosphere, the interconnected system of snow and glaciers, has acted as a natural reservoir. Snow accumulated over winter melts gradually in spring and summer, feeding rivers when rainfall ebbs. Glaciers, in turn, provide sustained baseflow for rivers throughout dry periods. But this delicate balance is unravelling.

"Snow droughts" the new normal

The International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), a regional scientific intergovernmental body, recently published its 2025 Snow Update Report, revealing that snow persistence — the duration snow remains on the ground — across the Hindu Kush-Himalaya (HKH) has dropped to its lowest in 23 years. Snow persistence was found to be 23.6 per cent below normal, marking four of the past five winters as below-normal in snow cover.

This pattern of decline repre-

sents more than a statistical fluctuation; scientists now speak of "snow droughts" — prolonged periods of unusually low snowfall — particularly pronounced at mid-elevations between about 3,000 and 6,000 metres. In many areas of the central and western Himalayas, snowfall in recent winters has been well below the 1980-2020 average, leaving ridges and slopes bare and rocky during peak winter months when they should be snow-covered.

Meteorologists and climate scientists attribute this to a combination of rising temperatures, shifting precipitation patterns and weakening storm systems. Western disturbances, Mediterranean low-pressure systems that historically bring most winter precipitation to the Himalayas are less potent and more erratic, carrying less moisture inland and reducing snowfall. When snow does fall, warmer temperatures mean it melts more rapidly, further reducing snow persistence.

The result is stark: once reliably snow-clad mountains are revealing their rocky skeletons in winter, a visible testimony to the rapid changes underway in the cryosphere.

Climate change, snow loss, and the IPCC perspective

This disturbing trend aligns with the broader scientific consensus on mountain climate change. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), in its assessments of global warming and cryosphere dynamics, has documented declines in snow cover and glacier mass in high mountain areas, including the Himalayas. These changes are linked directly to rising temperatures and altered atmospheric circulation. Snow cover is projected to become even more variable and shorter-lived across the 21st century under continued warming scenarios.



The IPCC's Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate describes how low-elevation snow cover is declining, while other cryospheric components, including glaciers and permafrost, are also shrinking. This has profound implications for water resources, hazards, and ecological integrity.

These scientific assessments underscore that the Himalayan snow loss is neither local nor transient; it is part of broader changes occurring in global mountain systems. The Himalayan region, sometimes dubbed the "Third Pole" because of its vast ice and snow reserves second only to the Arctic and Antarctica, is warming at a pace that outstrips many other parts of the planet.

Double trouble for water security

It is not only snowfall that is declining. Himalayan glaciers themselves: massive, slow-moving rivers of ice are retreating and thinning at accelerating rates. ICIMOD's longer-term assessments and other scientific studies have documented widespread glacier mass loss throughout the HKH region, trends that are consistent with

rising temperatures and increased melt intensity. While some debates exist about spatial variability, the overall pattern is unmistakable: glaciers are losing ice faster than they accumulate it.

Global glacier assessments point out that even if global warming is limited to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, a large fraction of Himalayan glacier ice is projected to be lost by the end of the century. Under higher warming scenarios, the losses are profoundly greater. This glacier melt contributes initially to increased river flow but ultimately leads to declining dry-season water availability once ice reservoirs diminish significantly.

The confluence of declining winter snowfall and accelerating glacier loss represents a dual crisis for the hydrology of the region. Snow provides a seasonal buffer, a steady spring and summer melt that sustains rivers, while glaciers provide longer-term stability. Losing both sources simultaneously threatens the water security of millions.

The hydrological domino effect

The Himalayan cryosphere feeds 12 of Asia's major river systems, including the Indus, Ganga, Brahmaputra, Mekong, Salween, and Amu Darya. Snowmelt contributes, on average, about one-quarter of the annual runoff for these basins, while glaciers and high-altitude ice provide essential dry-season water.

For the billions of people downstream, this meltwater is more than a natural phenomenon — it is the backbone of drinking water supplies, irrigation systems, hydropower generation, food production, and economic activity. The Ganges Basin alone supports hundreds of millions of farmers whose livelihoods hinge on dependable water flows through the dry pre-monsoon months.

Declining snowpack and glacier loss are projected to lead to earlier and more rapid spring melt, followed by reduced flows later in the year. This shift changes the timing and reliability of water availability, compounding stress on reservoirs, groundwater systems, and irrigation infrastructure. As snow cover diminishes, rivers become more reliant on erratic monsoon rains, which are themselves becoming more unpredictable with climate change.

In some regions, reduced snow and ice cover also heighten the risk of drought, forest fires, and ecological stress. Dry spells with low snow cover leave soils and lower vegetation parched, creating conditions ripe for fire outbreaks. Meanwhile, the erosive glue once provided by snow and ice weakens mountain slopes, increasing the risk of landslides, glacial lake outburst floods (GLOFs), and debris flows — hazards that threaten infrastructure, lives and settlements across the Himalayas.

Who pays the price? The ramifications of Himalayan cryosphere loss are not evenly distributed. Mountain communities, already among the most vulnerable socioeconomically, face immediate risks to livelihoods, water access and cultural heritage. Seasonal pastoralism, traditional irrigation practices and high-altitude agriculture are all critically dependent on predictable snow and meltwater regimes.

Downstream, urban centres and agricultural heartlands, from northern India's plains to Bangladesh's deltaic hinterlands and Pakistan's irrigated fields, stand on the frontline of water stress. Smaller hydropower stations in upstream regions may face reduced dry-season flows, undermining their economic viability. Meanwhile, large dam projects on rivers like the Brahmaputra and Indus complicate water sharing and heighten geopolitical tensions in an already fragile transboundary context.

The adaptive capacity of various countries varies widely. Wealthier riparian states possess more financial and technological resources to build storage, enhance forecasting and upgrade water management systems. Poorer, less resourced nations are left scrambling to cope with changing water availability, intensifying inequality in a region already challenged by poverty and infrastructure gaps.

Toward policy responses The scale and systemic nature of Himalayan cryosphere loss make clear that no purely local solution will suffice. At the global level, rapid and sustained mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions remains the most fundamental intervention. The science is unequivocal: every fraction of avoided warming reduces snow loss, slows glacial retreat, and preserves the seasonal and long-term water buffering capacity of High

Mountain Asia. Without decisive global climate action, regional adaptation efforts will be forced into a constant race against accelerating hydrological decline.

At the regional and national levels, adaptation must be grounded in robust science and anticipatory governance. This requires substantial investment in cryospheric monitoring, high-resolution climate and hydrological modelling, and integrated early-warning systems for floods, droughts, and glacial hazards. Institutions such as ICIMOD demonstrate the value of sustained, cooperative scientific observation, but current monitoring and forecasting capacities remain inadequate for the pace of change underway. Strengthening data-sharing and translating scientific insights into water planning, agricultural policy, and disaster preparedness are now policy imperatives, not optional add-ons.

Equally crucial is transboundary cooperation across the Himalayan river basins. As rivers disregard political boundaries, fragmented water governance heightens the risks of conflict, maladaptation, and inequitable outcomes. Shared hydrological data, coordinated reservoir operations, and joint drought and flood contingency planning can significantly enhance regional resilience. These must be complemented by investments in water-use efficiency, groundwater recharge, watershed restoration, climate-resilient agriculture, and social safety nets for mountain and downstream communities. Together, cooperative governance and equitable adaptation offer the only credible path to managing a rapidly transforming Himalayan waterscape without deepening existing social, economic, and geopolitical fractures. (Courtesy: Down to Earth)

If Khejri is cut, Thar will dry up

By: Dr Satvawan Saurabh

The Thar Desert of Rajasthan is not just a stretch of sand, but a complex and sensitive ecosystem whose lifeline is linked to native trees like the Khejri (*Prosopis cineraria*). In recent years, the rapid expansion of solar power projects in western Rajasthan — particularly in Jodhpur, Barmer, Nagaur, and Bikaner — has put this ecosystem under serious threat. Against this backdrop, the Khejri Bachao Andolan (Save Khejri) has become more than just a local protest, but has sparked a broader and deeper debate on current models of development, environmental justice, and democratic participation.

Declaring the Khejri as the state tree of Rajasthan wasn't merely symbolic. This tree has been the foundation of water conservation, soil fertility, a pastoral-based rural economy, and biodiversity in the dry and harsh Thar climate. Its pods provide nutritious fodder for livestock, its leaves provide green food, and its deep roots hold groundwater. In the folk culture of desert societies, the Khejri is not just a natural resource but a symbol of life and dignity, aptly described as, "Even if the head is flat, it's still cheap." The widespread felling of such trees is not only a detriment to the environment, but also a breakdown of the centuries-old symbiosis between humans and nature.

India has made solar energy a pivotal area of development, aiming to become a global leader in renewable energy. Rajasthan, due to its geographical location, is being developed as a solar hub, and the state government is pursuing a target of approximately 90 gigawatts of solar power. However, the question arises: can green energy expansion be achieved at the cost of greenery destruction? Large-scale land acquisitions have been undertaken for solar parks in western Rajasthan, resulting in the wholesale felling of protected trees like the Khejri. In many cases, environmental impact assessments were either not conducted or merely a formality. This has resulted in the destruction of traditional grazing lands, impacting the livelihoods of pastoralists, and accelerating soil erosion in desert areas.

This situation directly conflicts with the concept of sustainable development, which considers energy security, environmental protection, and social justice equally important. The Save Khejri Movement highlights this contradiction. It emerged locally in 2024, but by 2026, it had transformed into an organized mass movement. The Mahapadav held at Bikaner Polytechnic College on February 2, 2026, proved to be a decisive moment in this struggle. Markets remained closed, educational institutions declared a holiday, and thousands of people — saints, sadhus, women, and youth — gathered on a common platform. This scene clearly demonstrates that this struggle is not limited to a single community, but has become a matter of widespread social concern.

The movement's organizers issued a clear warning to the government that if a strict tree protection law was not enacted at the state level, the movement would intensify. Pressure was exerted on the government through peaceful democratic measures such as relay hunger strikes, candlelight marches, and collectorate sieges. By February 4th, hundreds of hunger strikers had been

recorded, with the significant participation of women lending moral and social strength to the movement. This participation of women not only symbolizes protest but also expresses concern for rural livelihoods, folk culture, and future generations.

This movement is deeply rooted in the historical consciousness of the Bishnoi community, which traces its roots to the Khejadi incident of 1730. The sacrifice made by Amrita Devi Bishnoi and her 363 companions to protect the Khejadi grove is considered the first organized example of environmental protection in world history. Standing on the same land nearly three hundred years later, this movement connects historical memory and current struggle. This continuity gives the movement not only emotional but also moral legitimacy, distinguishing it from typical environmental protests.

The Rajasthan government has declared the Khejri tree as the state tree, but the lack of an effective and binding legal framework for its conservation has long been felt. Despite tree protection directives issued by the National Green Tribunal and the Supreme Court, enforcement on the ground has been weak. The main demand of the protesters is that a strong Rajasthan Tree Protection Act be implemented across the state, making tree felling a last resort, not a prerequisite, for development projects. Temporary bans or partial orders in some districts cannot address this structural problem. Although the movement claims to be apolitical, its influence on politics is clearly visible. Slogans like "No tree, no vote" have elevated the environment to the forefront as a crucial electoral issue. The silence of local MLAs and MPs is being questioned, and threats of social boycott represent a new form of democratic pressure. This indicates that the environment in India is no longer just a matter of policy, but a question of democratic accountability, the impact of which will be clearly felt in the upcoming elections.

This movement is not against solar energy or development. The protesters' argument is clear: while the energy transition is necessary, it cannot be synonymous with deforestation. Solutions include strict tree protection laws at the state level, mandatory green belts for solar projects, prioritization of wasteland and rooftop solar, and reforestation campaigns. Internationally, models such as those being adopted in countries like China and the United States, where biodiversity conservation is integrated with solar parks, could be emulated for India.

Ultimately, the Khejri Bachao Andolan reminds us that development cannot be limited to energy production, investment, and statistics. This movement underscores the power of democracy, where ordinary citizens can organize and change the direction of policies. From a researcher's perspective, it can be said that the Khejri Bachao Andolan has the potential to become an important chapter in the history of Indian environmental movements. If the government adopts a path of dialogue, balance, and sensitive policy, this struggle can become an example of sustainable development rather than conflict. Saving the Khejri is not just about saving a tree, but about protecting the identity of Rajasthan, the ecology of the Thar, and the rights of future generations. (The author is a poet and social thinker)

Chemical-free processing for a sustainable blue economy in India

By: Poornima Vengaprath Bhattathiri

Marine biomass, such as microalgae, macroalgae, and fisheries residues, is being increasingly promoted as a renewable feedstock for the sustainable generation of high-value bioproducts and biofuels, addressing both climate change and socio-economic development. Marine biomass cultivation does not require agricultural land or freshwater and shows higher productivity than land-based crops. With more than 99 percent of global seaweed production, expected to reach US\$85 billion by 2026, concentrated in Asia, India can leverage its vast marine biomass potential to achieve its blue economy goals.

India's blue economy strategies often prioritise the scaling up of value-added products from marine biomass, equating it with sustainable production. However, the sustainability outcomes of marine value chains are driven less by the products themselves and more by the processing methods used to manufacture them. Extraction processes account for the majority of sustainability challenges due to chemical-based extraction involving strong acids, alkalis, and organic solvents; high freshwater use; and toxic effluents, requiring energy-intensive, expensive downstream purification steps. Without clear policy guidelines, standards, and monitoring, blue economy initiatives thus risk the proliferation of unsustainable practices camouflaged as green labelling. To ensure circularity and enhance climate gains and local economic benefits, it is necessary to integrate low-chemical or chemical-free processing pathways into these frameworks to establish truly sustainable marine biorefineries aligned with India's National Biofuel Policy and Blue Economy strategies.

Why is Chemical-free Processing Key to Policy Outcomes?

For the extraction of any biochemicals or bioproducts, the biomass must first undergo processing, or pretreatment, to break down its rigid structure and gain access to its components. Pretreatment and extraction processes account for a major share of the economic and environmental footprint of marine bioproduct production costs. For instance, in seaweed value addition, chemical processing hinders scale-up as it contributes approximately 40 percent of the overall production cost while generating harmful acidic or alkaline effluents as part of the pre-discharge treatment requirements. These challenges, compounded by India's reliance on wild-harvested, low-cost seaweed (INR 15–30/kg), lead to inconsistent feedstock composition — marked by wide variations in sugar (15–60 percent) and ash (20–40 percent) content — alongside contamination and uneven maturity, thereby constraining scalable processing.

Global best practices indicate that chemical-free processing can offer viable pathways to overcome the economic, environmental, and feedstock-related constraints facing marine bioproduct manufacturing. For example, Cyanotech, a Hawaii-based microalgae company, uses chemical-free extraction to produce high-quality spirulina and astaxanthin, while meeting international regulatory and sustainability standards. Likewise, Australia's Marinova Pvt. Ltd. uses a chemical-free extraction process to obtain high-purity biochemicals from seaweed, earning the company European Union (EU) organic certification, access to more than 35 international markets, and low environmental impacts. Ocean Harvest Technology, a UK-based company, similarly produces value-added products from seaweed biomass without the

use of any chemical agents or solvents for extraction. Partnering with coastal communities in Asia and Europe, the company not only facilitates steady income but also minimises environmental impacts and increases product competitiveness and market value.

These examples indicate that transitioning towards chemical-free processing yields multiple public and system-level benefits, including reduced environmental impacts, reduced greenhouse gas emissions, climate mitigation, lower freshwater use, reduced compliance costs, improved alignment with environmental social governance (ESG) standards, and the creation of new employment opportunities for coastal communities through decentralised value chains. However, despite their significant environmental burden, India continues to rely on conventional chemical extraction processes, mainly due to outdated infrastructure, established industry norms, and low capital investment costs.

Chemical-free Processing Approaches and Their System-level Benefits

Chemical-free processing solutions must be explored as strategic pathways to build sustainable, environmentally friendly industrial infrastructure, rather than as isolated technologies. Key approaches include mechanical, thermal/hydrothermal, enzyme-assisted and microbial processing. These methods are known to retain biomolecule functionality and reduce wastewater generation by up to 70 percent compared to chemical extractions. These small-scale, low-infrastructure operations can also be easily decentralised, lowering logistical expenses and strengthening local value chains. Techniques such as hydrothermal liquefaction (HTL) and microbial processing do not require freshwater, making them suitable for water-stressed regions.

Indian companies such as Sea6Energy, supported by HPCL, have successfully applied the hydrothermal conversion to produce carbon-neutral fuels, contributing to national biofuel and climate goals. A comparison with life-cycle analysis of other processing methods indicates that microbial fermentation pathways can reduce carbon dioxide emissions by up to 50 percent. Enzyme-based processing enables the production of integrated multiproduct biorefineries, generating multiple value-added products from a single biomass source at mild temperatures and pH, reducing both energy intensity and downstream waste treatment requirements.

The adoption of chemical-free processing approaches can provide substantial governance advantages. Reducing effluent load lowers infrastructure requirements for effluent treatment and simplifies regulatory compliance and monitoring requirements. These pathways also align with the emerging environmental and trade regulations and ESG frameworks, strengthening India's position in the global bioproduct market.

Policy Recommendations

Marine biomass processing can be included as part of green industrial clusters in coastal districts, alongside manufacturing and other logistics, aligning with India's goals for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) and coastal economy development.

Achieving tangible outcomes will require integrating chemical-free processing into coordinated policy action across multiple ministries and initiatives, prioritising the following factors.

• Infrastructure development: Establish regional pilot-scale facilities that employ chemical-free processing methods in coastal regions such as Odisha, Tamil Nadu, and Gujarat, through coordi-

nated efforts by the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES) and the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC). Support cold-chain and biomass-drying infrastructure, maritime transport infrastructure, reduce storage, and maintain feedstock integrity for sustainable downstream processing. For instance, the United Kingdom's . The recent EU funding for projects on sustainable algae cultivation as part of its blue economy initiatives can be used to facilitate such coordinated efforts.

• Incentivise chemical-free processing: Provide targeted financial incentives, research grants, and tax benefits for chemical-free processing techniques to accelerate market entry and commercialisation. The government must incentivise the Ministry of MSME's support schemes, similar to the EU's Maritime, Fisheries, and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF). Further, the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES) and the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) can provide sustainability certification for products involving chemical-free or low-chemical green processing. Financial incentives should be provided to small- and medium-scale processing and biomass value-addition units to reduce transport costs and generate employment among coastal communities. These initiatives can be integrated with port-led development programmes, such as Sagarmala, to develop coastal green industrial clusters and strengthen the coastal value chain. For example, Norway-based Algalvo designs decentralised biorefinery models that can be established near local coastal biomass sources, lowering transport costs and encouraging local community involvement.

• Sustainability Standards and Certifications: Adopt sustainability standards and certifications to differentiate sustainably produced products from chemically processed products, thereby enhancing their marketability. The EU's marine innovation programmes and blue economy observatory lay out criteria for sustainability and environmental assessments to differentiate products that are made using chemical-free methods. Marine biomass processing and biorefineries should be positioned within national industrial and climate policies, particularly those led by MoEFCC, to highlight their contribution to carbon sequestration through the promotion of chemical-free processing. For instance, the European Bioeconomy Strategy embeds sustainable blue bioeconomy initiatives, such as marine biomass value addition, within broader climate and industrial development goals.

• Public-Private Partnerships: Partnership and collaboration amongst research institutions, industries, governmental and non-governmental organisations to advance research for the implementation of chemical-free processing technologies and reduce dependency on imported biomass and chemicals. This can be achieved with initiatives and coordinated efforts by government departments such as the Department of Biotechnology (DBT) and the Department of Science and Technology (DST).

Conclusion

To build a truly sustainable blue bioeconomy, India should adopt chemical-free processing methods for the extraction of high-value marine bioproducts at scale alongside circular blue economy pathways. Through collaborative efforts, strengthening research and development, providing financial incentives, and enabling market entry, India can minimise environmental impact, strengthen local economies, and establish itself as a global leader in marine bioproducts. (Courtesy: ORF)

B'desh gears up to hold crucial elections today amid high security

DHAKA, Feb 11: Bangladesh will hold crucial parliamentary elections on Thursday, 18 months after an interim government took charge following the collapse of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's 15-year regime in massive country-wide deadly protests.

The Election Commission has made elaborate security arrangements, deploying nearly one million security personnel - the largest-ever in the country's electoral history. The 13th Parliamentary elections are being held simultaneously along with a referendum on a complex 84-point reform package.

The contest is mainly between the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and its once ally Jamaat-e-Islami in the absence of Hasina's now disbanded Awami League.

Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus' interim government last year disbanded the Awami League and barred it from contesting the polls.

The voting will begin simultaneously in 299 parliamentary constituencies across the country from 7:30 am and will continue until 4:30 pm. Voting in one constituency has been cancelled due to the death of a candidate.

A total of 1,755 candidates from 50 political parties and 273 independents are contesting in the election. The BNP has fielded the highest number of 291 candidates. There are 83 female candidates.

Chief Election Commissioner AMM Nasir Uddin on Thursday reaffirmed the Election Commission's commitment to holding a free, fair, impartial and acceptable election, saying all preparations have been made to ensure a peaceful and credible election.

"The election will be completed as promised to the people," he said while briefing international observers and media representatives in the capital.

All necessary materials, including ballot papers, have already been distributed to returning officers and are being centrally dispatched to respective constituencies, he said.

"Extensive security and coordination arrangements are in place with the support of law enforcement agencies and the government," he added.

He said that representatives from 45 countries and organisations, including election management bodies and international institutions, are observing the polls.



"The participation of media and observers will play a significant role in ensuring maximum transparency and public trust in this election," he said.

Election Commissioner Abdur Rahmani Machud said nearly 900,000 law enforcement personnel have been deployed to ensure security during the election, state-run BSS news agency reported.

"Security deployment is being made based on local sensitivity assessments," Election Commissioner Abul Fazal Mohammad Sanullah told a media briefing late Tuesday.

He said the poll body expected law enforcement agencies to ensure a peaceful atmosphere for voters during polling and after elections.

Earlier, Inspector General of Police Baharul Alam said they found 24,000 out of nearly 43,000 polling centres across the country were "high" or "moderate" risk-prone election stations.

Police said they provided a list of risk-prone polling centres to the EC, which showed that out of 2,131 polling centres in Dhaka, 1,614 were risk-prone. However, the army said they have identified

two centres in Dhaka city to be "risky".

For the first time, drones and body-worn cameras are being used for election security, Sanullah said.

Around 25,000 body-worn cameras will be deployed on the field. Some of these are IP-based for live feed, while others will record locally. Moreover, for continuous monitoring, CCTV cameras have already been installed in over 90% of centres.

He said voting will be held in a total of 42,659 centres.

EC data showed that first-time voters made up some 3.58 per cent of the total 1,27,700,597 voters.

Election Commissioner Abdur Rahmani Masud on Wednesday said the results of the general elections and the referendum will be announced without much delay.

"The voting atmosphere is very good. A festive mood prevails. We are working in a well-planned manner. I hope the results will be published without significant delay," he told reporters.

For the first time, nearly 800,000 expatriate Bangladeshis, who have registered with the poll body, will be able to vote through an IT-based postal ballot system. (PTI)

Russian drone kills father and 3 children in Ukraine



KYIV, Feb 11: A Russian drone smashed into a home in Ukraine's northeastern Kharkiv region overnight, killing a father and his three small children and seriously wounding their mother, who is 35 weeks pregnant, officials said Wednesday.

The strike completely destroyed the brick house and set it on fire, with the family trapped under the rubble, according to the Kharkiv regional prosecutor's office.

The 34-year-old father and his three children — twin boys aged 2 and their 1-year-old sister — were killed, while rescue workers pulled the mother alive from the rubble, prosecutors said. She sustained blast injuries, a traumatic brain injury, burns and hearing loss, they said.

During the almost four years since Russia invaded its neighbour, and despite a new push over the past year in US-led peace efforts, Ukrainian civilians have endured constant aerial attacks.

Last year was the deadliest for civilians in Ukraine since 2022 as Russia intensified its aerial barrages behind the front line, according to the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in the country.

The war killed 2,514 civilians and injured 12,142 in Ukraine in 2025, 31 per cent higher than in 2024, it said. The drone that struck the Kharkiv town of Bohodukhiv was identified as a Geran-2, a Russian-made version of an Iranian Shahed drone.

"We lost what is most precious — our future," Bohodukhiv mayor Volodymyr Bielyi wrote on his Facebook page. "There are no words to console the family; there is no prayer that could heal the heart of a mother who has lost her children."

Bielyi said the mother is fighting for her life in the hospital and announced three days of mourning, when national flags will be lowered, and all entertainment and organised public events will be cancelled.

"We will endure. We will remember. We will never forgive this horror on our land," Bielyi wrote.

Bohodukhiv had a pre-war population of 15,000. It is located some 22 kilometres (13 miles) from the Russian border. It wasn't immediately clear whether there was any Ukrainian military infrastructure near the house.

"Each such Russian strike undermines trust in everything being done through diplomacy to end this war, and again and again proves that only strong pressure on Russia and clear security guarantees for Ukraine are the real key to stopping the killings," Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said on social media.

Ukraine has accused Russian forces of committing countless war crimes since the start of the war, and European institutions have made efforts to hold Russia accountable.

The International Criminal Court in The Hague has multiple outstanding arrest warrants for Russian officials for war crimes. They include President Vladimir Putin, who is accused of personal responsibility for the abductions of children from Ukraine.

Zelenskyy said late Tuesday that Ukraine is making "many changes" in the way it fights Russia's aerial attacks, especially with short-range air defences. Training and replenishing new troops are also key issues, he said.

Ukraine has been short-handed against Russia's bigger army, though Moscow's forces have made only creeping progress in their invasion. Wide-scale desertions and 2 million draft dodgers are among a raft of challenges for Ukraine, Defence Minister Mykhailo Fedorov said last month. Zelenskyy has also pressed Western partners to provide more sophisticated air defence systems and missiles to help defend Ukraine.

Military aid sent to Kyiv dropped by 13 per cent last year compared with the annual average between 2022 and 2024, as US President Donald Trump stopped sending American weapons, according to Germany's Kiel Institute, which tracks such support. (AP)

'Fine tandoori' India FTA gives UK first mover advantage, UK Parl told

LONDON, Feb 11: The UK government has highlighted its first mover advantage by signing a free trade agreement (FTA) with a rapidly growing Indian economy ahead of the European Union (EU), which it claimed had used Britain's deal as a "baseline".

During a House of Commons debate on the India-UK Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) earlier this week, the Opposition Conservatives insisted the deal with "one of the largest economies on the planet, which is growing approximately five times faster than the European Union" could have been better.

"British businesses needed something with a really good kick in it to get this country growing. Instead of a vindaloo of a deal, the Prime Minister came back with a bag of soggy poppadoms," said Andrew Griffith, shadow business and trade secretary.

Chris Bryant, minister of state in the Department for Business and Trade (DBT), responded on behalf of the Labour government to stress that CETA was a "momentous achievement" which goes "well beyond India's precedent in opening the door for UK businesses".

"On services, the way we transacted this deal means it is supported by the Federation of Small Businesses, HSBC, Standard Chartered, EY, TheCityUK and Revolut, and I do not think they think of the deal as 'soggy poppadoms' at all; I think they think of it as a fine tandoori," said Bryant. Setting out the DBT data at the outset, the minister highlighted that India and the UK did 47.2 billion pounds worth of trade last year, which was up 15 per cent year on year and placed India as the country's tenth-largest trading partner.

"India has the highest growth rate in the G20. It is likely to become the third-largest economy in the world by 2029. By 2050, India will be home to more than a quarter of a billion high-income consumers. Demand for imports is due to grow as well, reaching 2.8 trillion pounds by 2050. Assuming global foreign direct investment into India continues on its recent trajectory, it could grow to 1 trillion pounds by 2033," the minister stated.

He highlighted that the trade deal signed during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the UK last year would boost Britain's GDP by 4.8 billion pounds, wages by 2.2 billion pounds and bilateral trade by 25.5 billion pounds every year by 2040. (PTI)

Iran commemorates 1979 revolution as nation is squeezed by anger over crackdown

DUBAI, Feb 11: Iran marked the 47th anniversary of its 1979 Islamic Revolution on Wednesday as the country's theocracy remains under pressure, both from US President Donald Trump, who suggested sending another aircraft carrier group to the Middle East, and a public angrily denouncing Tehran's bloody crackdown on nationwide protests.

The commemoration represented a spit-screen view of life in Iran, with state television showing hundreds of thousands of people across the country attending pro-government rallies, which included the burning of American flags and cries of "Death to America!" The night before, as government-sponsored fireworks lit the dark sky, witnesses heard shouts from people's homes in the Iranian capital, Tehran, of "Death to the dictator!"

Meanwhile, President Masoud Pezeshkian got on stage at Azadi Square in Tehran and insisted that Iran is willing to negotiate over its nuclear programme as fledgling nuclear talks with America hang in the balance.

Whether the talks succeed remains an open question — and Mideast nations fear their collapse could plunge the region into another regional war. A top Iranian security official travelled to Qatar on Wednesday after earlier visiting Oman, which has mediated this latest round of negotiations. Just before the official's arrival, Qatar's ruling emir received a phone call from Trump.

In his speech at the anniversary ceremony, Pezeshkian also insisted that his nation was "not seeking nuclear weapons... and is ready for any kind of ver-

ification." However, the United Nations' nuclear watchdog — the International Atomic Energy Agency — has been unable for months to inspect and verify Iran's nuclear stockpile.

"The high wall of mistrust that the United States and Europe have created through their past statements and actions does not allow these talks to reach a conclusion," Pezeshkian said.

Yet moments later, he added: "At the same time, we are engaging with full determination in dialogue aimed at peace and stability in the region alongside our neighbouring countries."

Commemoration overshadowed by crackdown

On Iranian state TV, authorities broadcast images of people taking to the streets across the country on Wednesday to support the theocracy and its 86-year-old Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Others criticised Iran's exiled crown prince, Reza Pahlavi, who had been calling for anti-government protests.

"I am here to say we don't stop supporting our leader and our country as the Americans and Israelis are increasingly threatening us, said Reza Jedi, a 43-year-old participant.

Iranian missiles were on display, as were fragments that authorities described as being from downed Israeli drones. Fake coffins draped in the American flag could also be seen, one bearing the picture of US Navy Adm. Brad Cooper, the head of the American military's Central Command. (AP)

Dubai International Airport handled a record 95.2 million passengers in 2025

DUBAI, Feb 11: Dubai International Airport maintained its crown as the world's busiest airport last year as officials said Wednesday that a record 95.2 million passengers transited through its terminals, part of the emirate's continued economic boom.

The airport took off in the post-pandemic years, spurred by worldwide interest in travel and by ever-increasing tourism, business and real estate opportunities in the biggest city in the United Arab Emirates. Dubai on Monday reported a 5% increase in tourists last year, to 19.6 million, a third consecutive year of record-breaking figures.

The state-owned airport is home to the long-haul carrier Emirates, which powers the network of state-owned and state-linked businesses in the emirate known as "Dubai Inc."

Dubai International showed in 2025 "that record traffic is no longer an exception, but part of its operating reality," said Paul Griffiths, the chief executive of Dubai Airports.

Dubai airport saw 92.3 million passengers in 2024, compared with 86.9 million passengers in the pre-



vious year. In 2019, just before the pandemic fully disrupted air travel, traffic was 86.3 million passengers. It had 89.1 million passengers in 2018.

India remained the top destination for people flying out of Dubai International last year, with 11.9 million passengers, followed by Saudi Arabia with 7.5 million and the United Kingdom at 6.3 million. The facility served 108 airlines flying to 291 cities in 110 countries.

A real-estate boom and the city's highest-ever tourism numbers have made Dubai a destination as well as a layover. However, the city is now grappling with increasing traf-

fic and costs that are pressuring both its Emirati citizens and the foreign residents who power its economy.

Dubai plans to move its airport operations to Al Maktoum International Airport, about 45 kilometers (28 miles) away. Al Maktoum, which opened in 2010 with one terminal, served as a parking lot for Emirates' double-decker Airbus A380s and other aircraft during the pandemic, but it has since returned to live with cargo, commercial and private flights. It also hosts the biennial Dubai Air Show and has a vast desert in which to expand. (AP)

Netanyahu to urge expanded Iran talks during White House meeting

WASHINGTON, Feb 11: With President Donald Trump saying he believes Iran wants to make a deal on its nuclear program, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is expected to arrive at the White House on Wednesday with his own urgent message: Expand the talks further.

The visit from Netanyahu — their seventh meeting in Trump's second term — comes as both Tehran and Washington are projecting cautious optimism after holding indirect talks in Oman on Friday about how once again to approach negotiations over Iran's nuclear program.

"We'll see what happens. I think they want to make a deal," Trump said in an interview Tuesday with Fox Business Network's Larry Kudlow. "I think they'd be foolish if they didn't. We took out their nuclear power last time, and we'll have to see if we take out more this time."

He added, "It's got to be a

good deal. No nuclear weapons, no missiles."

Netanyahu pushes for more in Iran talks

Netanyahu's office has said he wants those talks to include limits on Iran's ballistic missile program and support for militant groups like the Palestinian Hamas and Lebanon's Hezbollah.

"I will present to the president our outlook regarding the principles of these negotiations — the essential principles which, in my opinion, are important not only to Israel, but to everyone around the world who wants peace and security in the Middle East," Netanyahu said Tuesday before departing Israel.

It remains unclear how much influence Netanyahu will have over Trump's approach toward Iran. Trump initially threatened to take military action over Iran's bloody crackdown on nationwide protests in January, then shifted to a pressure campaign in

recent weeks to try to get Tehran to make a deal over its nuclear program.

Iran's is still reeling from the 12-day war with Israel this past June. The devastating series of airstrikes, including the U.S. bombing several Iranian nuclear sites, killed nearly 1,000 people in Iran and almost 40 in Israel.

Trump, at the time, said the U.S. action had "obliterated" Iran's nuclear capabilities, though the amount of damage remains unclear. Satellite photos of nuclear sites have recently captured activity, prompting concern Iran could be attempting to salvage or assess damage at the sites.

Israel has long called for Iran to cease all uranium enrichment, dial back its ballistic missile program and cut ties to militant groups across the region. Iran has always rejected those demands, saying it would only accept some limits on its nuclear program in return for sanctions relief. (AP)

Bangladesh elections: Over 50% polling centres considered 'risky'

DHAKA, Feb 11: More than half the polling centres have been identified as "risk-prone" for the general elections in Bangladesh, as officials said 90 per cent of them will be under CCTV surveillance, with many policemen deployed in the capital, Dhaka, wearing body cameras.

Bangladesh will hold parliamentary elections on Thursday - the first since the ouster of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in massive country-wide protests in August 2024.

Officials said the Election Commission's security system is based on risk assessment. "Security deployment is being made based on local sensitivity assessments," Election Commissioner Abul Fazal Mohammad Sanullah told a media briefing late Tuesday.

EC officials said the elections would witness the largest-ever deployment of law enforcement personnel and the most extensive use of technology in the country's electoral history.

Sanullah said the poll body expected law enforcement agencies to ensure a peaceful atmosphere for voters during polling and after elections.

He said the EC was largely satisfied with the current law-and-order situation and "compared to any time in the past, we are in a better position now". (PTI)

FBI search of Georgia offices tied to probe of possible 2020 election 'defects', affidavit says

ATLANTA (US), Feb 11: The FBI obtained a search warrant to seize hundreds of boxes of ballots from election offices in Fulton County, Georgia, as part of a criminal investigation into possible "deficiencies or defects" in the vote count in the 2020 contest lost by President Donald Trump, according to an affidavit unsealed Tuesday.

The affidavit provides the first public justification for an FBI search last month that targeted a county that Trump and allies have long seen as central to their false claim that the 2020 election was stolen.

The investigation, based on a referral from a Trump administration official, rests on claims that have long been made by people who assert widespread fraud in the contest even though audits, state officials, courts and Trump's own former attorney general have all rejected the idea of widespread problems that could have altered the outcome.

The investigation began with a referral from Kurt Olsen, who served as Trump's 2020 campaign lawyer when it lost dozens of lawsuits challenging the election and now serves as an administration official overseeing the attempt to investigate Trump's

loss, according to the affidavit.

The search of the heavily Democratic county stirred immediate concerns among Democrats that Trump was marshalling the powers of the FBI and Justice Department to pursue retribution over his persistent claims of a stolen election and because of the unusual presence of Tulsi Gabbard, the country's director of national intelligence.

The affidavit makes no mention of any evidence of foreign interference in the 2020 election even though the possibility of such meddling has been a longstanding conspiracy theory among Trump supporters who question the 2020 vote count.

Democrat Joe Biden won Georgia by about 11,800 votes in an election overseen by a Republican secretary of state and certified by a Republican governor.

Among the "deficiencies or defects" investigators are looking at is Fulton County's admission that it does not have scanned images of all the ballots counted during the original count or the recount, according to the affidavit. Fulton County has also confirmed that some ballots were scanned multiple times during the recount, the affidavit says.



"If these deficiencies were the result of intentional action, it would be a violation of federal law regardless of whether the failure to retain records or the deprivation of a fair tabulation of a vote was outcome determinative for any particular election or race," the document says.

The affidavit says seizures of the election records was necessary to determine whether election records were destroyed and or the tabulation of votes included materially false votes." It cites po-

tential violations of a law regarding the preservation and retention of election records, a misdemeanor. It also cites a law that makes it a crime to "knowingly and willfully" deprive residents of a "fair and impartially conducted election process," which is a felony.

But the document also expresses uncertainty about whether the potential defects constitute a crime, noting that elections in Fulton County has already been the subject of multiple reviews.

After a particularly disastrous primary election in 2020, an independent monitor was hired to observe the general election that year as part of an agreement between the county and the State Election Board. He documented "sloppy processes" and "systemic disorganization" but found no evidence of illegality or fraud.

State lawmakers in 2021 used a provision of a new law to initiate a performance review of the county's election practices. That review found that the county's elections had been characterised by "disorganisation and a lack of a sense of urgency in resolving issues." But it also found the county had shown marked improvement.

An investigation by the secretary of state's office and a performance review by the state elections board, which came at the urging of the Republican-controlled legislature, came to similar conclusions.

According to the affidavit, the review board stated, "we do not see any evidence of fraud, intentional misconduct, or large systematic issues that would have affected the result of the November 2020 election."

Agents armed with a warrant spent hours on January 28 at the county elections hub, just south of Atlanta, before driving off with trucks loaded with hundreds of cartons of election materials.

A week after the seizure, Fulton County officials filed a motion seeking the return of the materials that had been taken and the unsealing of the sworn statement presented to the judge who signed off on the search. The warrant sought the seizure of the following documents related to the 2020 election in the county: all ballots, tabulator tapes from the scanners that tally the votes, electronic ballot images created when the ballots were counted and then recounted, and all voter rolls. (AP)

Khemchand meets Meitei and Hmar IDPs, says resettlement efforts underway Manipur CM visits Jiribam, calls for reconciliation and lasting peace

IMPHAL, Feb 11: Manipur Chief Minister Y Khemchand Singh on Wednesday visited Jiribam district, which was among the worst affected by the ethnic violence and met internally displaced persons (IDPs) from Meitei and Hmar communities, stressing the need for reconciliation and lasting peace.

He also asserted that his government is dedicated to addressing the challenges of resettlement faced by IDPs.

During his first visit to Jiribam district after swearing in as the chief minister, Khemchand interacted with Meitei IDPs at a relief camp set up at Jiribam Higher Secondary School, officials said.

Khemchand also visited Mongbung Meitei village and interacted with the villagers and told them that both sides should start interacting with each other in order to remove the trust deficit, they said.

The chief minister also told the IDPs that their concerns are being addressed by the district



administration and houses are being constructed for them, and those are expected to be completed by March.

Khemchand said efforts had already begun during the President's rule in Manipur for resettlement of the displaced people.

He said that while it is still early to announce specific timelines or methods for resolution, the government is dedicated to addressing

these challenges.

"Since I took oath as the chief minister last week, my trip to Jiribam is the first outside Imphal. I feel Jiribam is the most important place in Manipur and has the potential to become a business centre. For Jiribam to become a business hub, peace is essential," he said.

"Whatever happened has happened. It was a nightmare. We should move on with thoughts of

living peacefully," the CM added.

He also appealed to the local clubs, Meira Paibis (women torch-bearing activists), journalists and all to take equal responsibility to restore peace and normalcy in the district and the state.

Earlier in the day, he interacted with IDPs from the Hmar community and urged people to remain calm and united.

During his interaction, which included relatives of Zosangkim, a 31-year-old Hmar woman killed in November 2024 amid the ethnic conflict in Jiribam district, Singh stressed the need for reconciliation.

"We need to find out why we are not able to come together. First of all, we are all human beings, then we are Indians. We need to think about our younger generation and must keep ourselves calm," he said.

More than 260 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in ethnic violence in the state since May 2023. (PTI)

Efforts on to identify those involved in Ukhrul violence: Manipur Dy CM

IMPHAL, Feb 11: Manipur Deputy Chief Minister L Dikho said efforts were underway to identify those involved in the violence at Litan in Ukhrul district.

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of a programme on Tuesday, he said all stakeholders were working together to find a solution.

"The chief minister, the government, security forces, civil society groups and other stakeholders are involved in bringing a solution. We are trying to meet everyone and make them understand. There are positive signs," Dikho said.

"Immediately, we may not be able to resolve everything due to the situation, but hopefully things will improve soon," he added.

The Naga People's Front leader said the authorities are "yet to identify those behind the violence, but efforts are on to do so".

"Earlier, there was some confusion following the firing and burning of houses. Now the situation is much clearer," he said.

Dikho said the government was making all efforts to resolve the issue and that the situation was gradually cooling down.



"We hope everyone will cooperate," he added.

In a fresh bout of violence over the alleged assault of a Tangkhul Naga community member in Ukhrul, several abandoned houses were set on fire and shots fired on Tuesday morning, prompting the state government to suspend internet services in the district for five days, police said.

The state government also extended the internet suspension in

the Lungtjin sub-division of Kangpokpi district and Phungyar sub-division of Kamjong district for five days.

In a statement, the Home Department said the decision was taken in view of apprehension that anti-social elements may use social media to circulate images, posts and videos that could incite public passions and have serious repercussions on the law and order situation in the state. (PTI)

CM flags off SpiceJet's direct flights from Imphal



IMPHAL, Feb 11: In a significant step towards improving air connectivity in Manipur, Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh on Monday flagged off the commencement of direct SpiceJet airline services from Imphal to Guwahati, Kolkata and Mumbai at Bir Tikendrajit International Airport.

Speaking on the occasion, the Chief Minister lauded Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of Viksit Bharat, underscoring its pivotal role in achieving Viksit Manipur. He observed that during the current difficult times, air travel has become the preferred mode of transport for people travelling outside the State. He also directed the airline company to review the airfares to ensure affordability for passengers.

As part of the launching programme, the Chief Minister handed over the boarding pass to the first passenger of the SpiceJet service to Guwahati.

The event was attended by Lok Sabha MP Dr Bimol Akojiam, MLA of Thanga Assembly Constituency Tongbram Robindro Singh, MLA of Chingai Constituency Khashim Vashum, Additional Chief Secretary Anurag Bajpai, Director of Transport Khumanthem Diana, Superintendent of Police, Imphal West, Ksh Shivakanta Singh, officials of the Airports Authority of India and other dignitaries.

On the sidelines of the programme, the Chief Minister led attendees in candle lighting, ribbon cutting and cake cutting ceremonies to mark the launch of the new flight services. (NNN)

COCOMI alleges 'proxy politics' behind Litan violence

Body blames Centre's policies, slams security forces' inaction amid Tangkhul-Kuki clashes

IMPHAL, Feb 11: The Coordinating Committee on Manipur Integrity (COCOMI), a conglomerate of several civil society organisations, has expressed "grave concern and deep anguish" over the ongoing arson and burning incidents that erupted between Tangkhul and Kuki groups in Litan village under Ukhrul district since February 7, 2026, terming the violence as neither isolated nor accidental.

In a statement, the COCOMI said the incidents are "yet another tragic manifestation of a long and carefully engineered crisis that has been imposed upon the people of Manipur through proxy politics and deliberate institutional negligence." It alleged that while the people of Manipur "bleed and burn," there are those in New Delhi "celebrating the harvest of their twenty years of so-called investment."

"What we are witnessing today is not an accident of history, but the predictable outcome of a policy architecture that has relied on proxy forces, selective silence and deceptive frameworks such as the Suspension of Operations (SoO) pact," the statement said. The pact, it alleged, was never about genuine peace but has functioned as an instrument of control, leverage and long-term destabilisation of Manipur's social fabric.

The COCOMI said the violence in Litan village must be viewed in this larger context, asserting that in the present turmoil nobody would emerge a winner "except the deep state that thrives on division, fragmentation and internal strife among indigenous communities." The "bitter fruits" of such politics are visible everywhere in the form

of broken communities, burnt homes, displaced families and a society being pushed to fight itself, it added. "While this strategy bears fruit for its architects in New Delhi, it is the natives of Manipur who continue to pay the price in blood, tears and ashes," the statement said.

The committee also recorded its "deep dissatisfaction and strongest condemnation" of the role of Indian security forces deployed in the affected areas. It alleged that security personnel remained "silent spectators" while houses were set ablaze in broad daylight, despite being present on the ground. "No effective or credible control measures were taken to stop the violence, protect civilian lives, or prevent the destruction of property," it stated.

Describing such inaction as not new, the COCOMI said a similar pattern of conduct has been repeatedly witnessed over the past two and a half years of crisis in Manipur, raising serious questions about complicity, selective enforcement and the real objectives behind the deployments.

The committee further stated that it has consistently held both State and Central agencies accountable for what has happened and continues to happen in Manipur. "Though the present conflict involves different actors, particularly in the context of Kuki-related violence, the pattern of narrative management, administrative attitude and operational behaviour of the central forces remains disturbingly the same," it said. This continuity, it added, reinforces public distrust and deepens the sense that Manipur is being sub-

jected to a proxy war rather than being protected as a constituent state of the Union.

Warning that the situation in Litan village carries a serious risk of escalation and spillover into other hill areas, the COCOMI cautioned that if the violence is not immediately and decisively contained, it could trigger a wider cycle of retaliation and communal polarisation, further endangering lives, livelihoods and social harmony across the region.

In this context, the committee reaffirmed the resolutions adopted at the massive public rally held on January 31, 2026, which identified and condemned what it described as a "proxy war being waged by the Indian state against the people of Manipur." The recent developments in Ukhrul district, it said, further justify and validate those resolutions. "What is unfolding today is not merely a failure of law and order; it is the consequence of a political and security approach that has normalised conflict, enabled armed proxies and treated the suffering of the people of Manipur as collateral damage," the statement added.

The COCOMI called upon the authorities to immediately take concrete, transparent and impartial measures to stop the violence, protect civilians and hold accountable those responsible, both on the ground and within the chain of command. It also urged the people of Manipur to remain vigilant against external manipulation and divisive designs. "If we fail to recognise and resist this imposed conflict, we will continue to bleed and burn for someone else's game," it cautioned. (NNN)

JNC seeks probe into coal mine blast, illegal entry issue

SHILLONG, Feb 11: The Jaintia National Council (JNC) has demanded a thorough investigation into the recent Mynsgat-Thangsko coal mine blast that claimed 28 lives and sought a probe into the alleged illegal entry of Bangladeshi nationals into East Jaintia Hills district.

"We cannot accept this tragedy as a simple accident. There is strong suspicion that this is an attack on our communities," JNC president Samborn Lyngdoh told reporters on Monday.

He expressed concern over the presence of Bangladeshi nationals in the area, alleging that they have been threatening the peace of the North East.

"We demand that the inquiry should not be limited only to illegal coal mining, but should also include the issue of illegal entry of Bangladeshi into the East Jaintia Hills district," Lyngdoh said.

Urging the State Government to act firmly, he said, "We urge the state government to take strict action against illegal foreigners residing in the district, as we do not want our land to become a source of livelihood for illegal settlers. We also request the police department to arrest those involved, especially those who are responsible for bringing workers illegally from Bangladesh. As an organisation, we warn those who put the future of our coming generations at risk for their own personal gain."

On the issue of illegal coal mining, the JNC appealed to the Prime Minister and Union Ministers to allow small-scale scientific mining in Meghalaya, stating that it would help eliminate illegal mining activities and benefit both the people and the government.

"Scientific mining is permitted only for those who own 100 hectares or more of land. Very few people own land of such large size and this is the main reason which forces many locals to engage in illegal mining activities," Lyngdoh explained.

He said the incident at Mynsgat-Thangsko has shaken not only Meghalaya but the entire country. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has announced compensation for the families of those who lost their lives in the blast and several Union Ministers have condemned the incident, he added.

"Therefore, we would like to appeal to the Prime Minister and Union Ministers that if they are truly concerned about this tragedy, they should allow small-scale scientific mining in Meghalaya. This will help eliminate illegal mining activities and will benefit both the people and the government as a whole. Illegal mining negatively affects the revenue and budget of both the government and the Autonomous District Council," Lyngdoh asserted. (NNN)



NPF appreciates Rio, PAC for engagement with Centre

HT Correspondent

KOIHIMA, Feb 11: The Naga People's Front (NPF) has extended its appreciation to its President and Chief Minister Dr Neiphu Rio and the Political Affairs Committee (PAC) delegation for their productive engagement with the Government of India on key issues affecting Nagaland.

In a statement, the NPF welcomed Dr Rio's call for reviving the Indo-Naga talks at the highest political level and the Union Home Minister's indication of renewed political-level engagement. It also commended his efforts in highlighting Nagaland's financial concerns, including restoring the earlier financial arrangement under the 16-Point Agreement and seeking relaxation of the Protected Area Permit (PAP) regime and a review of the revised Free Movement Regime (FMR) guidelines.

The party said such initiatives demonstrate responsible leadership, which is crucial for safeguarding Naga rights and identity. It expressed hope that the Government of India's assurances would lead to tangible actions in addressing the state's financial challenges and promoting the welfare of the Naga people.

The NPF also described February 5, 2026, as a red-letter day, stating that the NPF-led PDA government successfully inked the Frontier Nagaland Territorial Authority (FNTA) agreement, calling it a major milestone in the state's history.

Mizoram partners with Indian Army to boost local enrollment

AIZAWL, Feb 11: To increase the presence of Mizo youths in the Indian armed forces, the Mizoram Youth Commission (MYC) on Wednesday announced a strategic partnership with the Army Recruitment Office (ARO), an official said.

The collaboration was finalised following a high-level meeting at the ARO headquarters here between Young Mizo Association (YMA) chairman Malsawmzuala Ralte and ARO director Colonel Prakash Kumar Singh, he said.

Recognising annual recruitment rallies as a vital window of opportunity for local candidates, both entities have agreed on a comprehensive support system designed to improve the success rate of local candidates, he said.

Under the proposed partnership, the MYC will lead mobilisation efforts across the state, providing candidates with digital literacy training for online applications and specialised coaching for entrance examinations.

According to the official, recruitment is open to candidates with educational qualifications ranging from class 8 to Bachelor's degrees.

A memorandum of understanding (MoU) is currently being drafted and will be signed once finalised to formalise the partnership, the official added.

The MYC is a statutory body established by the Mizoram government in 2008 to promote the welfare and advancement of the state's youth. (PTI)

Arunachal Dy CM underscores Buddhist ties, tourism scope at India-Sri Lanka meet Mein underscores enduring Theravada links and civilisational bonds during Colombo visit

ITANAGAR, Feb 11: Arunachal Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Chowna Mein underscored the enduring cultural and spiritual ties between the northeastern state and Sri Lanka through 'Theravada' Buddhist traditions, an official statement said on Wednesday.

During a meeting with the ministers of the island country in Colombo on Tuesday, he highlighted the state's tourism potential.

Despite the geographical distance, Arunachal Pradesh and Sri Lanka remain closely linked through long-standing socio-religious practices, he said.

The deputy CM referred to the regular exchange of monks between Namsai in eastern Arunachal Pradesh and Sri Lanka for higher studies. 'Abhidhamma' teachings and discourses, which continue to spread Lord Buddha's message of compassion, peace and harmony, according to the statement.

Mein was part of an official Indian delegation to Colombo to re-



ceive and facilitate the return of the sacred Devnimori relics of Lord Buddha to India.

The delegates focused on strengthening the relations between the two countries under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, with special reference to India's timely support to

the Sri Lanka during times of crisis, which has helped deepen mutual trust and cooperation, the statement said.

The discussions also highlighted the strong civilisational links between the two countries, rooted in shared cultural and spiritual traditions, it said. (PTI)

G-RAM-G to boost rural jobs, infra: Chouhan

AGARTALA, Feb 11: Union minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Wednesday asserted that the VB-G RAM G scheme was aimed at creating jobs and boosting growth in rural infrastructure, while accusing the opposition Congress and CPI(M) of running a "negative campaign" against it.

Addressing a programme here, the Union minister of agriculture and farmers' welfare said that the Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) scheme is a roadmap for making India developed as conceptualised by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"G-RAM-G is aimed at job generation and boosting growth in rural infrastructure but the opposition Congress and the communists are spreading a negative campaign to confuse the people living in the rural areas," he said.

Chouhan said the Modi government has earmarked a record outlay for G-RAM-G in the budget tabled in Lok Sabha recently.

"In the Union budget, the finance minister has proposed ₹ 95,600 crore for implementing G-RAM-G scheme. If we add the contribution of the states, the outlay will be ₹ 1, 51,282 crore and the finance commission will fund



₹ 55,000 crore directly to gram panchayats.

"In all, over ₹ 2 lakh crore will be spent on rural development in the upcoming fiscal. This means each gram panchayat will get ₹ 1.5 crore to ₹ 1.75 crore annually for development and growth," he said.

Claiming that ₹ 10 lakh crore will be spent on rural development in the next five years, the Union minister said the villages will face a "revolution of development" if the allocation is properly utilised.

Accusing the previous Left government of "destroying" the rural

areas of Tripura, Chouhan said the PM has been focusing on development of rural areas as he also believes in the saying, "real India lives in villages".

"The G-RAM-G scheme is set to change the picture of village and fate of the villagers in the years to come as it not only promises creation of jobs for rural poor but also durable assets," he said.

Praising Tripura for empowering 'didis' through self-help groups (SHGs), he said the northeastern state has already produced 1.08 lakh 'Lakhpati Didis'. (PTI)

St

Will t

IMPH/ Khemct governn p state caq
Addr emnt peopl c where M
"Day Valte fr congratt restorin; asked fo
said.
"Pron RIMS-I

The LoP claimed that India's energy security was gone under the India-US interim trade deal Govt sold Bharat Mata, it's a wholesale surrender: Rahul

NEW DELHI, Feb 11: In a no-holds-barred attack, Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday alleged that the government has "sold Bharat Mata" through the India-US interim trade deal, and that it was a "wholesale surrender" with India's energy security handed over to America and farmers' interests compromised.

Participating in the debate on the Union Budget, Gandhi said he does not believe that any Indian prime minister, including Narendra Modi, would agree to such a deal unless there is a "chokehold" on him.

"Why has he (Modi) sold India -- because they (the US) are choking him. They have a grip on his neck," said Gandhi, who began his address with an analogy of how in martial arts after securing a grip, the next step is a chokehold, and then the opponent taps to give up. The Congress leader noted that Prime Minister Narendra Modi and NSA Ajit Doval had stated some time back that the era of war is over. "In fact, we are moving into the era of war. War is there in Ukraine, war was there in Gaza, war is there in the Middle East, threat of war is there in Iran, we had Operation Sindoor."

"We are moving into a dangerous world. We have to understand our strengths, and the central strength of our country is our people," he pointed out.

He underlined the need to protect country's people, data, food supply and energy system.

Gandhi said that had an INDIA bloc government negotiated the trade agreement with the US, it would have told President Donald Trump that he should treat India as



an equal. "The first thing we would say (to Trump) is that the most important asset in this equation is Indian data. If the US wants to protect the dollar, it must recognise that Indian data is the biggest asset. Second thing, we would say to President Trump is that 'if you want access to it, then you will talk to us as an equal, not talk to us as if we are your servants'," Gandhi said.

He said an INDIA bloc government would have told Trump that India's energy security is non-negotiable and "we are going to protect our energy security."

"The third thing, we would have told President Trump is that 'we understand you have agricultural voter base, you need to protect farmers, but we will also protect our farmers'," the former Congress chief said.

"An INDIA bloc government would say that data is our biggest strength, and now let us talk. We would go there (for negotiating) as

an equal. We will not be made equal to Pakistan. If President Trump decided that Pakistan Army chief will have breakfast with him, we will have something to say about it," he said.

The LoP claimed that India's energy security was gone under the India-US interim trade deal, and the US will decide "who we buy oil from."

"They will decide who we buy oil from, our PM will not decide. They will monitor, and if India buys oil (from where they don't want us to), they will punish us and take tariffs to 50 per cent," Gandhi said.

In a scathing attack on the government, Gandhi said it talks of energy and financial weaponisation, and yet, it has allowed the Americans to weaponise "our finance and our energy against us".

"How can you come to this House and defend this? Are you not ashamed of what you are giving away?" Gandhi said, slamming

the treasury benches.

"I am saying you have sold India. Are you not ashamed of selling India? You have sold our mother -- Bharat Mata. Do you have no shame?" he said.

MPs from the treasury benches repeatedly got up and accused Gandhi of making "baseless" allegations and asked him to authenticate his claims, to which Gandhi responded that he is willing to comply.

Gandhi also referred to a case against a businessman in the US. Jagdambika Pal, who was chairing the session, asked Gandhi not to name those who are not members of the House.

"I do not believe any Indian PM, including Modi, would sign such a deal unless there is a chokehold on him," he said.

Gandhi claimed that through this deal, the interests of farmers have been compromised, textiles have been wiped out, and energy security has been "handed over" to the US.

"This is a wholesale surrender," he alleged.

"It is a tragedy because it is not just a surrender of the PM; he has surrendered the future of 1.5 billion Indians. He has surrendered because he wanted to protect the BJP's financial architecture on which there is a case in the US," Gandhi said.

"We are heading into turbulent times, and the nation has been sold out. Its data has been sold, its farmers have been sold, all our software engineers have been sold out. Small and medium business have been sold out, our forces and our energy security has been sold out," Gandhi alleged. (PTI)

20-25 Congress MPs abused Speaker Om Birla in his chamber: Rijiju

NEW DELHI, Feb 11: Union Minister Kiren Rijiju on Wednesday claimed that 20 to 25 Congress MPs had abused Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla in his chamber and they were not stopped by senior leaders K C Venugopal and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, who were present there.

The parliamentary affairs minister said that Birla was very hurt. The Lok Sabha speaker is a very lenient, else he could have taken strong action, he said.

"Some members went to his chamber and abused (Birla). When 20-25 Congress MPs went to the speaker's chamber, I also went there. I just can't utter the kind of abuses they have hurled at the speaker," Rijiju told reporters in the Parliament House complex.

He claimed that Venugopal, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and other senior Congress leaders were present in the chamber when the incident happened. "They were encouraging (the Congress MPs). Had our MPs misbehaved with anyone, our leader would stop them. But their leaders were egging on the MPs to quarrel," he alleged.

Rijiju claimed the Congress MPs did not obey even the Speaker's rulings.

"Then Rahul Gandhi said he does not need anyone's permission to speak (in Lok Sabha). He will speak as he pleases, irrespective of rules. This is on record," the minister told reporters.

"You have to take permission from the chair. Unless the chair gives permission, no member can speak. Even the prime minister speaks with the permission of the chair," he pointed out.

About Rahul Gandhi's insistence on speaking on the unpublished memoir of General M M Naravane (retired) in the Lok Sabha, Rijiju said conversations between the prime minister and the defence minister, the army chief and the defence minister or between the army chief and his junior officers can't be discussed in public.

"If everything is to be discussed in public, how can you maintain the security for the nation?" he wondered. "The entire country can see how an MP is trying to use a very sensitive matter related to the country's security as an instrument to drive political mileage." The Union minister said it was a matter that should not be taken lightly, as it will not only demean Parliament but also the person raising it.

"Gandhi should understand that he is an honourable member of Parliament. He owes a certain responsibility to the people of this country. You have the obligation to maintain the decorum of the House and also think about the interest of the nation," he said.

The minister said it was difficult to make Rahul



Gandhi understand the issues.

"I don't know which world he lives in. But there are several sensible persons in Congress, and they can make him understand that this is not the way Parliament should function."

"You should not behave like a child on issues of the nation's security. Our country is very big. Security is a very big issue for us. It is not right to lower the dignity of someone for political mileage. Rahul Gandhi got exposed. I don't need to make any comment after he was exposed," Rijiju added.

The Lok Sabha has been witnessing disruptions since February 2, after Congress leader Rahul 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 on the President's address due to opposition protests. In an unprecedented move, the Motion of Thanks was passed on February 5 without the customary speech by the prime minister.

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.

Birla said he received concrete information that many Congress MPs could carry out an "unexpected act" by reaching the spot where PM Modi sits, and, therefore, he asked him not to come to the House to deliver his address. Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra refuted the claim.

Eight opposition members were suspended for the remainder of the Budget session for unruly behaviour in the House.

Opposition parties on Tuesday put in motion the process to oust Birla as Lok Sabha speaker, alleging that he had acted in a "blatantly partisan" manner in the House and prompting him to step aside from chairing the proceedings till the matter is settled. (PTI)

UP presents record ₹ 9.12 lakh cr budget for 2026-27 ahead of assembly polls next year

LUCKNOW, Feb 11: The Uttar Pradesh government on Wednesday presented a record Budget of ₹ 9.12 lakh crore for the financial year 2026-27, the largest in the state's history, with a focus on employment, infrastructure development and healthcare.

The Budget, tabled by Finance Minister Suresh Kumar Khanna in the state Assembly is being seen as the last full Budget ahead of the Assembly elections scheduled early next year.

Khanna said the outlay of ₹ 9,12,696.35 crore is about 12.2 per cent higher than that of the previous financial year, making it the "biggest Budget ever" presented in the state.

He said Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has been working for the development of every section and every region of the state.

The minister said capital expenditure accounts for 19.5 per cent of the total Budget. In line with the recommendations of the 16th Central Finance Commission, accepted by the Centre, the fiscal deficit limit for 2026-27 has been fixed at three per cent, which will remain applicable till 2030-31.

He asserted that the state government remains fully committed

to prudent financial management and debt control.

The allocations for education and health stood at 12.4 per cent and six per cent of the total Budget, respectively. Agriculture and allied services have been allocated nine per cent of the total outlay.

Stressing that strengthening law and order remains a top priority, Khanna said ₹ 1,374 crore has been proposed for the construction of non-residential police buildings and ₹ 1,243 crore for residential buildings.

For medical education, an allocation of ₹ 14,997 crore has been proposed. At present, the state has 81 medical colleges, of which 45 are run by the state government and 36 by the private sector. An amount of ₹ 1,023 crore has been proposed for the establishment of 14 new medical colleges.

Additionally, ₹ 315 crore has been earmarked for the Cancer Institute in Lucknow and ₹ 130 crore for providing free treatment for incurable diseases.

Khanna said ₹ 37,956 crore has been proposed for medical, health and family welfare, which is 15 per cent higher than the previous year. About ₹ 8,641 crore has been allo-

cated for the National Rural Health Mission, ₹ 2,000 crore for the Ayushman Bharat National Health Protection Scheme, and around ₹ 2,867 crore for AYUSH services.

For infrastructure and industrial development, ₹ 27,103 crore has been proposed, 13 per cent higher than 2025-26. A provision of ₹ 5,000 crore has been made for the Chief Minister Industrial Area Expansion and New Industrial Area Promotion Scheme.

Under the Swami Vivekananda Yuva Sashaktikaran Yojana, distribution of tablets and smartphones is underway, for which ₹ 2,374 crore has been proposed. An allocation of ₹ 2,000 crore has been made under the Atal Infrastructure Mission for infrastructure development.

The government has also provided ₹ 1,000 crore for the implementation of the Incentive Policy 2023 aimed at attracting foreign direct investment and investments from Fortune 500 companies.

On the Defence Industrial Corridor project, the minister said MoUs have so far been signed for setting up 200 defence industries, entailing a proposed investment of ₹ 35,280 crore and generating an estimated 53,263 direct jobs. (PTI)

Andhra aims to become USD 3.4 tr economy by 2047: Guv in Assembly

AMARAVATI, Feb 11: The Andhra Pradesh government was determined to achieve sustained high growth to build a ₹ 308 lakh crore (USD 3.4 trillion) economy with a per capita income of ₹ 55 lakh by 2047, Governor S Abdul Nazeer said in the Assembly on Wednesday.

Amid sloganeering by YSRCP MLAs seeking Opposition Party status, among others, a joint session of the Andhra Pradesh Legislature began here with the customary address of the Governor.

The YSRCP members led by former Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy later staged a walk-out.

Reddy is attending the House after almost a year. He last attended on February 24, 2025.

"The government has proceeded with focus and resolve. The Swarna Andhra Vision lays out a clear economic pathway, aiming for sustained high growth to build a ₹ 308 lakh crore economy with a per capita income of ₹ 55 lakh by 2047," the Governor said.

Citing the first advance estimates for FY26, Nazeer said Andhra Pradesh's GDP rose to ₹ 17.6 lakh crore from ₹ 15.9 lakh crore in the previous year, logging a nominal growth of 10.7 per cent.

Per capita income has risen to ₹



2.95 lakh, compared to ₹ 2.66 lakh last year, he said, adding that growth has been driven by strong performance in agriculture and allied sector at 7.83 per cent, industry at 9.53 per cent, and services sector at 12.94 per cent.

According to the Governor, the state's economy is steadily returning to a strong growth path, supported by a revival in agriculture, industry, and services.

Improved fiscal discipline, investment momentum, and infrastructure development are contributing to higher economic activity, he said.

From the very first year of governance in 2024, the state government has moved swiftly to implement its commitments, beginning by making the "Super Six" guarantees a "super-hit", emerging as one of the largest DBT initia-

tives globally, with spending of nearly ₹ 33,000 crore per year, he said.

Through "Thaliki Vandanam", financial assistance of ₹ 15,000 per annum is transferred directly to over 66 lakh bank accounts of mothers of students, irrespective of number of children, enabling them to pursue education from Classes I to Intermediate without financial stress, he further said.

Among other welfare schemes, the "Stree Shakti" free bus travel scheme, launched last Independence Day, has enabled 37.8 crore free journeys by women and trans-genders across the state, he said.

Instead of fragmented welfare schemes, the Governor said benefits are being aligned to every household to address deprivation in a comprehensive manner through Family Benefit Management System (FBMS).

He said the TDP-led NDA government's approach to Scheduled Caste welfare is guided by fairness and inclusion.

He said the government is strengthening public healthcare through the rollout of a comprehensive Electronic Health Record system, aligned with Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission standards, across all network hospitals under Dr NTR Vaidya Seva Trust. (PTI)

Order restored in J-K Assembly after CM expresses regret over his remarks

JAMMU, Feb 11: Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Wednesday expressed regret over remarks made by him during assembly proceedings, paving the way for restoration of order in the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly which had witnessed repeated disruptions by BJP members. BJP legislators had trooped into the well of the Assembly and staged a sit-in to press for Abdullah's apology over his "unparliamentary remarks" against them.

BJP members had also staged a walkout over the issue.

While the BJP members were shouting slogans, the chief minister entered the House to make a statement, prompting the speaker to ask the protesting members to return to their seats.

"As far as emotions are concerned, things do get said in the heat of the moment. If what I said hurt them, I regret that," the chief minister said. He, however, said whatever he said was about them, he did not bring any of their family members into it.

"I did not mention any of their relatives. However, their field commander (LOP) dragged my parents and my late grandfather into the matter. But let that also go. I am willing to leave that aside," he said. (PTI)

UP has moved from 'policy paralysis' to a land of 'unlimited potential' in 9 years: CM Yogi

'By stopping all the tax evasion and leakages in UP through efficient financial management'

LUCKNOW, Feb 11: Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Wednesday said the state has successfully transformed its perception over the past nine years, moving from "policy paralysis" to a land of "unlimited potential," as the government presented its 10th budget in the Assembly.

Speaking with reporters, Adityanath said the budget reflects the sentiments and aspirations of the people and noted that the size of the state budget has more than tripled during the nine-year period.

"Uttar Pradesh has successfully transformed its perception over the past nine years, emerging from policy paralysis and changing perceptions to present UP as a land of unlimited potential," the chief minister said.

Highlighting the theme of the 2026-27 budget, the chief minister said, "This budget is dedicated to safe women, capable youth, happy farmers and work for every hand, a prosperous Uttar Pradesh through technological investment. This budget presents a new saga of nine years of new construction before the countrymen."

Adityanath termed the budget historic, saying it was the 10th budget presented by his government. "This is the tenth budget of our government."

This is the first time that a Chief Minister has had the opportunity to present the tenth budget. This has never happened before in a state like UP."



The chief minister also stressed that no new taxes had been imposed in the past nine years.

He added that through efficient financial management and by plugging leakages, the state has moved from being categorised as a 'BIMARU' state to a revenue-surplus state.

"By stopping all the tax evasion and leakages in UP through efficient financial management, we have succeeded in transforming UP from a BIMARU state to a revenue surplus state, presenting it as a breakthrough in the Indian economy," he said.

In addition, the chief minister said that over ₹ 43,565 crore has been proposed exclusively

for new schemes in the 2026-27 Budget. He added that more than ₹ 2 lakh crore has been earmarked for capital expenditure, which would play a crucial role in asset creation, infrastructure development and strengthening the economy, besides generating employment opportunities.

He also noted that budgetary allocations for various departments have been significantly enhanced.

Adityanath claimed that the state's debt burden, which was over 30 per cent in 2017, was brought down to 27 per cent within two to three years of his government taking office.

Cong's solo move sharpens TMC-BJP binary ahead of Bengal polls

KOLKATA, Feb 11: The Congress' decision to go solo in the West Bengal assembly polls has narrowed the opposition space, reinforced the state's entrenched TMC-BJP binary and shifted the focus from alliance arithmetic to vote consolidation in an increasingly two-cornered battle.

Senior leaders across party lines agreed that the breakdown of the Left-Congress understanding has effectively collapsed the space for a "third pole" in Bengal politics.

"This election will now be fought almost entirely on the TMC-versus-BJP axis. Breaking that binary without a Left-Congress alliance will be extremely difficult, but our leadership believes the party has nothing left to lose," a senior Congress leader said, requesting anonymity.

For the first time since 2006, the Congress will contest all 294 assembly seats on its own.

Party insiders said the move reflects organisational fatigue from repeated alliances and a strategic recalibration shaped by Bengal's altered political arithmetic and national considerations.

The decision, taken at a recent meeting of the Congress' central leadership with senior West Bengal leaders, formally ends the party's electoral partnership with the Left that spanned the 2016 and 2021 assembly polls and the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, without yielding any meaningful revival for either side.

The fallout of the break-up between the Left and the Congress is expected to accelerate polarisation, with the BJP emerging as the principal beneficiary of consolidated anti-incumbency votes and the TMC trying to tighten its grip over the state's nearly 30 per cent minority electorate.

While Congress leaders like Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury favoured continuing the Left tie-up, most of the state unit functionaries pushed for a solo run, arguing that repeated alliances had eroded the party's organisational identity.

"The party has made sacrifices in every alliance since 2001, first with the TMC, then with the Left. Our workers believe we should now fight on our own to revive the party's lost ground," state Congress president Suvankar Sarkar said.

Party insiders said the impending Kerala assembly polls also weighed heavily on the decision, with the Congress-led UDF locked in a direct contest with the Left Democratic Front. The party's electoral trajectory underscores the dilemma behind its solo gamble. (PTI)

'No deal but US steal': Cong's dig at govt over Indo-US trade agreement

NEW DELHI, Feb 11: The Congress on Wednesday took a swipe at Prime Minister Narendra Modi over the India-US interim trade agreement, saying the deal is a steal by the "PM's good friend in Washington" and reflects an "abject failure" of our "political hughlomy" as well as economic diplomacy.

Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said no matter what spin the "PM and his lie-brigade" may give, the hard reality is that the US has extracted more from India than it has conceded.

"It is significant that a number of independent analysts and commentators -- who have not been Modi-unfriendly -- have criticised the India-US trade deal as a capitulation, an asymmetrical set of commitments, a sell-out, and a humiliating cave-in," Ramesh said.

"Whatever the spin that the PM and his lie-brigade may give, the hard reality is that the US has extracted more from India than it has conceded. This is in spite of Mr. Modi's aggressive wooing of President



Trump, including campaigning for him in September 2019," the Congress leader said.

PM Modi also managed to be among the first to greet the re-elected President

Trump in February 2025, he pointed out.

The prime minister's public demonstrations of his personal friendship with President Trump have not yielded the desired

results, Ramesh said.

President Trump too has given full expression to his friendship with Modi but while doing so has dealt India big blows, he claimed.

"This is an abject failure of our political hughlomy and economic diplomacy. The spin will, of course, continue. But facts are facts. The trade deal is a steal -- by the PM's good friend in Washington who has also claimed close to hundred times that he halted Operation Sindoor on May 10, 2025," Ramesh said.

The Congress on Tuesday claimed the India-US trade deal is not a "calibrated opening", but a "coerced opening" and India has been "forced to concede" more than what it has got.

In a post on X, Ramesh had said, "It did not take long for President Trump and his team to puncture the tall claims being made by the PM and his mega-phones on the Indo-US trade deal."

Clearly, the US' understanding of the deal is very different from the propaganda that is being put out by the Modi govern-

ment, he had said.

"This is not a calibrated opening but a coerced opening. India has been forced to concede more than what it has got. And now our much-touted advantage over Bangladesh in textile exports to the US has vanished with the details of the US-Bangladesh trade deal also having just been announced," Ramesh had said in his post on Tuesday evening.

Last week, India and the US announced in a joint statement the framework for an interim agreement regarding reciprocal and mutually beneficial trade. Under this, the US has agreed to reduce the 25 per cent reciprocal tariffs on Indian goods to 18 per cent.

It has already eliminated the punitive 25 per cent tariff on India, which was imposed in August last year for purchasing Russian crude.

The Congress has alleged that the interim Indo-US trade pact is "not a deal but a surrender" of the country's self-esteem and interests, and is a betrayal of India and its people. (PTI)

Raut blames Cong for 'mess' in Chandrapur mayoral polls; says it should be 'ashamed'

MUMBAI, Feb 11: Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut, whose party sprang a surprise by supporting rival BJP in the mayoral elections in Maharashtra's Chandrapur civic body, on Wednesday squarely blamed its MVA ally Congress for the "mess".

He said the Congress should be "ashamed" of not being able to occupy power in Chandrapur despite emerging as the single largest party, and added that there was no point in blaming his party for the political twist.

Talking to reporters in New Delhi, Raut said the move by the Sena (UBT) corporators to back the BJP in the mayoral polls was taken at the local level and not by the Shiv Sena (UBT) leadership.

While the BJP shares power with the Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena and the NCP in the Mahayuti government in the state, the Sena (UBT), Sharad Pawar's NCP (SP) and the Congress are constituents of the Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA).

Raut said Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray had given clear instructions to the party functionaries in Chandrapur not to help the BJP in any way even if that meant sitting in the Opposition, he said.

"Still due to Congress' mess, local (Shiv Sena-UBT) leaders have taken the decision. This does not mean we have joined hands with the BJP," Raut said.

The faction-riven Congress suffered a major embarrassment after a surprise alliance between the Sena (UBT) and the BJP led to the election of a BJP mayor in Chandrapur Municipal Corporation, despite the grand old party being in a position to claim the post.

BJP's Sangeeta Khandekar won the mayoral election by a single vote, defeating Congress candidate Vaishali Mahadule, with the Thackeray-led party extending support to the saffron party. Sena (UBT) corporator Prashant Danav was elected deputy mayor.

The development raised serious questions over Opposition unity and the viability of the MVA.

Chandrapur is one of the few municipal corporations where the Congress had emerged as the largest party and was poised to secure the mayor's post.

However, deep internal divisions between factions led by Vijay Wadetiwar and Pratibha Dhanorkar handed an opening to the BJP.

Attacking the Congress, Raut said the party should be ashamed that despite having the highest number of corporators, they could not win power in Chandrapur.

In the elections held for the 66-member civic body last month, the Congress emerged as the single largest party with 27 seats, followed closely by the BJP with 23.

The Sena (UBT) won six seats, the Bharatiya Shetkari Kamgar Paksh (Janvikas Sena) three, Van-chit Bahujan Aghadi (VBA) two, while All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM), Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and Shiv Sena secured one seat each. Two Independents were also elected.

"Who is responsible for this? This should be probed at the highest level. There is no point blaming the Shiv Sena (UBT)," Raut said.

He further said the VBA and the AIMIM did not back the Congress in mayoral polls because there was no unanimity in the party. (PTI)

Cal HC makes exception, allows re-examination of witnesses in POCSO case

'In the judgment passed by the Port Blair circuit bench of the Calcutta High Court on February 5, Justice Ray said the observation of the special POCSO court judge was "absolutely correct"



KOLKATA, Feb 11: The Calcutta High Court has allowed re-examination of witnesses in a POCSO case, making an exception to the established norm of not recalling victims or witnesses in cases of sexual abuse of minors, and observed that each matter must be judged on its merits.

Justice Apurba Sinha Ray set aside a trial court order that disallowed a prayer for re-examination of seven key witnesses, but agreed with the judge's observation that vulnerable witnesses in POCSO matters should not be called time and again at the instance of the accused on flimsy grounds.

The judge of the trial court in North and Middle Andaman had rejected the prayer of the petitioner on the ground that the Supreme Court had held that recall of victim/witnesses in POCSO matters should be avoided unless the same is absolutely essential.

In the judgment passed by the Port Blair circuit bench of the Calcutta High Court on February 5, Justice Ray said the observation of the special POCSO court judge was "absolutely correct", and there were "no two opinions", but "each case has to be judged on its own merits".

The trial court judge had rejected the petitioner's prayer for recalling seven prosecution witnesses for re-examination in a case in which the accused was

charged under sections 6 (sexual assault), 12 (sexual harassment of a child) of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offence (POCSO) Act, 2012, and various sections of Indian Penal Code (IPC) and Information Technology Act.

The appellant was convicted by the special POCSO court judge for the rape of a girl in 2022. His conviction and sentence of 10-year rigorous imprisonment was set aside by a division bench of the high court's Port Blair circuit bench in 2024, and a re-examination of the appellant was ordered.

The petitioner submitted before the high court that the relevant case had a chequered history. He stated that on August 31, 2022, the trial judge convicted the accused, but the judgment was set aside by the high court in an appeal on April 9, 2024, and the trial judge was directed to examine the accused and to write the judgment afresh.

In view of such directions, the trial judge completed the examination of the accused, but after this, the accused filed an application for re-examination of several witnesses.

The newly-appointed advocate on behalf of the accused claimed to have found that the cross-examination of vital witnesses were not properly done by the erstwhile counsel of the accused, but this petition was rejected by the trial

judge.

The petitioner's lawyer contended that if the prayer of the accused is not allowed, he would be prevented from putting up real defence and may suffer irreparable loss for the fault of his erstwhile counsel.

Opposing the prayer, the counsel for the state contended that law does not allow the defence to fill up the lacuna which arises during examination and cross-examination of the prosecution witnesses.

He also claimed that the petition was filed only to delay the proceedings before the trial judge, as the petitioner was already on bail.

After taking note of the arguments by the parties, the Port Blair circuit bench of the Calcutta High Court said that it appears that although the victim and vulnerable witnesses have been given sufficient protection and privilege under the prevalent law of land, but the right of the accused to defend himself with competent legal advice should not be lost sight of.

Finding "some merits" in the contention of the petitioner's counsel, Justice Ray said that the "cross-examination of prosecution witnesses done on behalf of the accused appears to be deficient, casual, and if such cryptic cross-examination is allowed to remain on the record then there are chances that the accused may not be able to defend his case properly in accordance with law".

"I think that the prayer for re-examination of the prosecution witnesses on the points mentioned in the revisional application should be allowed since it is absolutely essential for the accused to defend his case properly," the court said.

Setting aside the POCSO court's order refusing the application of the accused, Justice Ray directed the special judge to allow the prayer for re-examination of the prosecution witnesses. (PTI)

Akhilesh says UP Budget not pro-people, flags low expenditure

LUCKNOW, Feb 11: Samajwadi

Party president Akhilesh Yadav on Wednesday termed the Uttar Pradesh Budget for FY 2026-27 a "farewell budget" of the Yogi Adityanath government, asserting that the ruling BJP will exit office after the 2027 Assembly elections.

The former chief minister said the budget was big only in size and was not pro-people.

Addressing a press conference in Lucknow shortly after the state government presented the budget in the Assembly, Yadav said the BJP was projecting the size of the budget -- over ₹ 9 lakh crore -- as a major achievement.

"The government says its budget has crossed ₹ 9 lakh crore and claims it as an achievement. It is generally accepted that every budget is bigger than the previous one. The real question is how much of it is actually spent," he said.

Yadav alleged that on an average, the government has failed to utilise even 50 per cent of its allocations. "If the outlay is so large, why is the government unable to spend it? This shows a failure of governance," he said.

Citing figures for various departments, the former chief minister claimed that only 57 per cent of the allocation was spent on agriculture, 36 per cent on rural development, around 60 per cent on animal husbandry, 58 per cent in health and 53 per cent in women welfare.

"In the most important department -- basic education -- only 62 per cent of the budget was spent," he alleged.

Yadav said the government's inability to utilise funds in key sectors reflects administrative incompetence.

"When such a large budget is presented but even half of it is not spent, especially in crucial departments, it exposes the government's failure and the incompetence of those running it," he said, calling the budget a "bidaai budget" (farewell budget) of the Adityanath government. The budget presented on Wednesday is widely seen as the last full-fledged budget of the Adityanath government before the 2027 Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections.

Yadav further questioned the state government's economic pro-

jections, terming them "mere estimates" and not actual figures.

He said the government had projected the state's GSDP at ₹ 30.25 lakh crore in FY 2024-25 and estimated it to rise to ₹ 36 lakh crore in FY 2025-26.

"These are only projections. The real numbers are not yet available," he said, adding that to achieve the target of a USD 1 trillion economy, the GSDP would need to touch around ₹ 90 lakh crore.

"Now that they have presented what is virtually their last full budget, they should explain how they will build a one-trillion-dollar economy," Yadav said, taking a swipe at Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, remarking that the required growth rate would have to be "around 30 per cent".

Referring to per capita income, Yadav said that compared to other states, Uttar Pradesh ranks "second from the bottom". "Perhaps someone showed the chief minister the list upside down," he quipped.

On investment claims, he questioned the government's assertion of signing agreements worth ₹ 50 lakh crore, asking how much have actually materialised on the ground. Citing media reports, he claimed that investments brought in over the past three years fell far short of the announced figures.

"If investments had truly come, jobs would have been visible," he said.

Yadav also targeted the government on sugarcane pricing, alleging that while payments were highlighted, cane prices have not risen adequately. He claimed that potato and sugarcane farmers were in distress and also questioned the implementation of the Ujjwala scheme.

Referring to the recent India-US trade agreement, he asked what measures the state has taken to safeguard farmers amid fears of increased agricultural imports.

While BJP leaders raise slogans of "Swadeshi", "Make in India" and "Atmanirbhar Bharat", they are simultaneously signing free trade agreements, Yadav said, claiming that the rupee has fallen to its lowest level against the dollar during the BJP's tenure.

Warning about the possible fallout of trade agreements, he said the biggest impact would be on the poor

and farmers, as a large section of the population in Uttar Pradesh depends on agriculture and lives in rural areas.

He further alleged that key sectors such as MSMEs and agriculture were not receiving adequate support. Claiming that out of the 96 lakh MSMEs in the state, about 82 lakh were not properly registered, he said this prevented them from accessing government schemes.

On employment, Yadav said the government lacked a clear roadmap to tackle unemployment despite tall claims in the Budget. He alleged that the government was reluctant to provide regular government jobs because it would have to implement reservation.

He further alleged irregularities in skill development programmes and claimed that while little was achieved on the ground, thousands of crores were spent on publicity.

"With that money, how many people could have been given jobs?" he asked.

The Samajwadi Party chief also highlighted the condition of government hospitals and medical colleges, alleging that public healthcare was being weakened deliberately to benefit private institutions. He also sought clarity on allocations for the two AIIMS (All India Institutes of Medical Science) in the state. Continuing his attack, Yadav said the state government has failed to launch any new metro project despite earlier announcements of metro rail in Varanasi, Meerut and Prayagraj.

Without naming Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Yadav said that even in the "city represented by the country's top MP", the metro project has not taken off. He alleged that the delay was linked to the fact that a metro project was not considered feasible in Gorakhpur, the pocket borough of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. While the government promises free LPG cylinders during Holi and Diwali, he said, it has no data on whether beneficiaries are able to afford refills later.

Taking a swipe at the Budget promise to distribute smartphones and tablets to two crore people, Yadav remarked sarcastically, "Those who cannot operate smartphones and tablets themselves are promising to distribute them". (PTI)

From guns to growth: Ex-Maoists rebuild lives at Kanker rehabilitation centre, learn new skills

RAIPUR, Feb 11: In a remote corner of Chhattisgarh's insurgency-hit Kanker district, hands that once wielded guns are now quietly learning to steer vehicles, stitch garments, carve wood, moving away from the path of violence and embracing a new life after spending years in jungles.

As a part of the state government's effort to turn former Maoist cadres towards a life of dignity and self-reliance, 40 surrendered Naxals, including 19 women, have been undergoing vocational training at a rehabilitation centre set up within the premises of a Border Security Force (BSF) camp at Chougel (Mulla) village, about 50km from Kanker district headquarters.

Under the Chhattisgarh Naxalite Surrender/Victim Relief and Rehabilitation Policy, men and women who were once involved in Maoist activities are now being trained in trades such as driving, tailoring, woodcraft and assistant electrician work so that they can earn a livelihood and reintegrate into the mainstream. Rehabilitation centre's nodal officer Vinod Ahirwar told PTI on Wednesday.

Basic education is also being imparted to the surrendered cadres, he informed.

The centre was set up in November last year with 66 surrendered cadres and victims of Maoist violence enrolled as trainees. Of them, 12 have completed their training, while 14 others were transferred to rehabilitation centres in their respective home districts, Ahirwar stated.

Currently, 40 surrendered Maoists are being trained in two batches of 20 each. At present, the trainees have been receiving training in four and two-wheeler driving, tailoring, woodcraft and assistant electrician trades, he said.

Plans are underway to introduce additional courses in mushroom cultivation, horticulture and other self-employment-oriented activities.

Alongside vocational training, classes from primary level (Classes 1 to 8) are being conducted based on individual requirements. The former Naxals are showing keen interest in education and are committed to shaping their future, according to the nodal officer.

One of the surrendered cadres, Manher Taram, who is learning four-wheeler driving, said he has been undergoing training for the past two weeks. The 40-year-old has traded the weight of a rifle to handle the steering wheel and operate the clutch, brake and accelerator. (PTI)

India must sustain momentum on Gaganyaan despite complexities: Shukla

BENGALURU, Feb 11: India must continue to pursue its ambitious human spaceflight programme with sustained enthusiasm despite inherent complexities and unknowns, Group Captain and Indian astronaut Shubhanshu Shukla said on Wednesday.

The Ashoka Chakra awardee asserted that the success of Mission Gaganyaan will place the country among a select group of space-faring nations.

Addressing reporters here, he said, "I think, as a nation, what we are trying to do with Mission Gaganyaan has only been done by three other countries in the world."

The Gaganyaan mission is India's first human spaceflight programme currently under development. It aims to send a three-member crew on a three-day mission to space and bring them back safely to Earth.

According to ISRO, India aims to launch Gaganyaan in 2027.

Group Captain Shukla is among the four astronauts selected for the mission.

"These are very complex and challenging missions. We are trying to do something so audacious, whatever time it takes, we need to continue to work towards it with the same enthusiasm that I had on day one, and that will be there on the final day when we finally launch humans into space," he added.

The Indian astronaut acknowledged that delays and hurdles were natural in such cutting-edge ventures while maintaining that they should not be seen as setbacks.



"I do understand the complexities and challenges that are associated with such an ambitious mission. And yes, definitely there are going to be some unknowns along the way before we finally accomplish it," the Group Captain said.

On India-US cooperation in the space sector, Shukla cited his own Axiom mission as an example of how international collaboration can advance space exploration.

"So my Axiom mission itself was a very good example of how collaboration works in the field of spaceflight or space exploration, and I think it serves as a very good

beacon for all the other sectors as well," he said, adding that joint efforts open doors for future partnerships and serve as models for countries to work together towards common goals.

He noted that comparisons between space-faring nations are inevitable, but they must account for differing starting points and scales of operation.

Shukla also stressed that India's identified missions are being actively supported by the government, with growing investment in science and space exploration over time. He expressed hope that such support would

continue in the years ahead.

Group Captain Prasanth Nair, an astronaut chosen by the ISRO for the Gaganyaan mission, said, "I can only say, just be patient. Everything is happening exactly the way it has to happen."

Nair was responding to a query by reporters regarding the delay in the project.

He likened the Gaganyaan to an "inflection point".

"People should look for the inflection point. And that inflection point, if I may dare say, is going to be the Gaganyaan moment when India puts an Indian astronaut on an Indian rocket, in an Indian capsule, from an Indian spaceport here, and brings him back safely," the Indian astronaut said.

He stressed that India will be only the fourth country in the world if it succeeds.

Nair also noted that the moment is important because "when India does something, it does it differently".

"We believe in Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas (Collective development with everyone's participation). We gave vaccines to the rest of the world even when we ourselves needed them," he said, recalling how India tackled the COVID-19 pandemic.

"This time also, when we go to space and the Gaganyaan moment happens—when an Indian human goes to space—the rest of the world, especially those who cannot send their own astronauts, will say, 'Thank God India went', because once we go, we will hold that space for all of us," he noted. (PTI)

ACTRESS TAMANNAAH ASSUMES ROLES AS KSDL BRAND AMBASSADOR AMIDST 'NON-KANNADIGA' ROW

Actress Tamannaah Bhatia formally took on her role as the brand ambassador of KSDL, amid objections from some persons, including a BJP MP, who questioned the rationale behind picking a non-Kannada speaking actor to represent the famous Mysore Sandal Soap. The government defended its pick, saying Bhatia was selected based on merit and business considerations.

As part of efforts to strengthen the market presence of products manufactured by the State-owned Karnataka Soaps and Detergents Limited (KSDL), an organisation with a legacy of more than a century, the two-year tenure of Bhatia as the company's brand ambassador commenced from Tuesday.

As part of the occasion, at an event held here, Bhatia unveiled 57 products of the organisation, including Mysore Sandal Soap, which has now been introduced in a refreshed and contemporary packaging.

The products that have received innovative packaging include sandalwood oil, jasmine-scented soaps, perfumes, toothpaste, coconut oil, petroleum jelly and organic products, taking the total product portfolio to nearly 60 offerings.

With this launch, KSDL's future roadmap was clearly outlined. Several advertisements featuring Bhatia were also released on the occasion.

Additionally, two coffee table books chronicling the organisation's rich legacy—Sugandha Siri and Aromatic Journeys—were unveiled.

Speaking on the occasion, Bhatia said, "Mysore Sandal Soap is not just a soap. It is deeply associated with emotions, childhood memories and nostalgia. It represents a perfect blend of purity and authenticity. Mysore Sandal Soap holds a special place in people's hearts, and I consider it a privilege to be associated with this institution as its brand ambassador.

Meanwhile, several people took to 'X' criticising the state government's decision, choosing Bhatia as the brand ambassador for the state's iconic band, over Kannada actors.

BJP MP from Chikkaballapura and former state Minister K Sudhakar asked, "Couldn't the traitorous Congress government in the state find Kannada film stars." "Although many stars from our own Karnataka were eligible to be appointed as brand ambassadors for Karnataka's famous international brand Mysore Sandal Soap, a film actress from another state, from another language has been appointed as the brand ambassador by paying crores of rupees. This is yet another proof of the Congress party's anti-Kannada mentality," he slammed in a post on 'X'.

"Kannada film stars like Ramya, Rashmika Mandanna, Srinidhi Shetty,



Pooja Hegde, Rukmini Vasanth and many other actresses have become popular and are in demand in the film industry of many other languages. They have raised the banner of Kannada fame at the national and international levels," Sudhakar said.

The Congress party's attitude of giving priority to others over actresses from our own state is not only an insult to the talents of Karnataka, but also a grave insult to the identity of Mysore Sandal Soap, he further said, adding that "Kannadigas will never forgive this anti-Kannada Congress party." Several other social media users too criticised the government's move, while some have supported it stating that the selection of Bhatia for the role is justified, as the soap sells more outside Karnataka than within the state. They reasoned it has a massive market in north India.

State Industries Minister M B Patil said, Bhatia was chosen as brand ambassador based on merit, and it is purely a business decision considering that the Mysore Sandal sales is not just limited to Karnataka.

"Six months ago I had clarified categorically why Tamannaah Bhatia was chosen as the brand ambassador. A committee formed for this had gone through five-six names, which included two-three names from Karnataka, but they had endorsed some other product. If you endorse some other product you cannot be brand ambassador for this product. So they were not considered," he told reporters.

Noting that Mysore Sandal sales is only 8-12 per cent in Karnataka, he further said, "It is 18 per cent in Telangana and other states, 8 per cent in north India and 1 per cent internationally. It is purely a business decision taken by KSDL's committee." Hitting out at Sudhakar, Patil said doing politics in this doesn't help.

"Tell Mr Sudhakar that three of the Kannada actors selected had endorsed other products, and after due consideration selection was made based on merit, by the committee." The KSDL's decision, in May last year, to appoint Bhatia as the brand ambassador for Mysore Sandal Soaps and other products for two years by paying her Rs 6.20 crore, had received similar criticism from Kannada organisations, activists, some BJP leaders, for the multi-lingual actor being preferred over Kannada film stars. Meanwhile, Minister Patil at the event said, KSDL is no longer confined to Sandal Soap alone and included luxury jasmine-scented soaps as well.

He further noted that currently only one per cent of KSDL's products are exported, and a detailed roadmap has been prepared to substantially increase exports. KSDL Chairman C S Appaji Nadagouda said the organisation's turnover is expected to touch Rs 2,000 crore this year, with profits crossing Rs 500 crore. (PTI)

NEVER THOUGHT IT WILL NOT BE EASY: ACTOR RAHUL BHAT ON DELAYED RELEASE OF 'KENNEDY'

"Kennedy" star Rahul Bhat says the film's team never expected that they will face any difficulty in releasing the Anurag Kashyap-directed film.

"Kennedy" premiered at the Cannes Film Festival in 2023, and received a seven-minute standing ovation. The movie continued to garner good response at the Indian Film Festival of Melbourne (IFFM) and Jio MAMI Mumbai Film Festival.

But its release was stuck in a limbo despite a clearance from the censor board due to some issues with the production banner.

"We never thought that the release part would not be easy. We are actors, we've to do our part, and leave these big decisions to the people who are professionals like the studio producer, director, and they know these things much better.

"But as actors, we always want our work to be released. Finally, it's getting released and we are very happy and excited about that," Bhat told PTI in an interview.

"Kennedy" features Bhat in the titular role of an insomniac ex-cop, who finds himself entangled in a corrupt system

while seeking redemption. The film marks the third collaboration of Kashyap and Bhat after "Ugly" (2013) and "Dobaaraa" (2022).

The neo-noir thriller is slated to stream on ZEE5 from February 20.

"It's coming out on one of the biggest platforms of this country, and we are looking forward to the reactions of people.

Whether people see it on the big screen or on ZEE5, we as actors are hungry for appreciation, as long as they see it and they appreciate it, we are like, 'Okay, give it (love) to us,'" he said.

"Kennedy" also stars Sunny Leone, Mohit Takalkar and Abhilash Thapliyal among others. (PTI)



'The Mummy 4' With Brendan Fraser and Rachel Weisz Gets May 2028 Release Date

Academy Award winners Brendan Fraser and Rachel Weisz are officially returning for a fourth installment of the blockbuster franchise, "The Mummy."

Universal Pictures has dated the movie, directed by Radio Silence's Matt Bettinelli-Olpin and Tyler Gillett, for a wide theatrical release on May 19, 2028.

Fraser and Weisz, whose involvement was first reported last fall, have closed deals to reprise their roles as adventurer Rick O'Connell and Egyptologist Evelyn O'Connell in the movie, plot details for which are being kept — not unironically — under wraps.

The actors' legend begins with the 1999 reboot of "The Mummy," which follows a treasure hunter who accidentally awakens a cursed Egyptian priest with supernatural powers. The movie and its 2001 sequel "The Mummy Returns" were major box office hits, reviving the classic monster movie IP and



will serve as an executive producer alongside Hivemind's Jason F. Brown and Denis Stewart. Executive VP of production development Jay Polidoro and director of production development Jacqueline Garell will oversee the project for the studio.

Fraser and Weisz are represented by CAA and Linden Entertainment. Fraser is also reped by Felker Tozcek Suddleson Abramson, and Weisz by Independent Talent and Hirsch Wallerstein Hayum Matlof + Fishman.

CAA also represents Radio Silence alongside Brillstein Entertainment Partners and Johnson Shapiro Slewett & Kole. Coggeshall is represented by WME, Writ Large and McKuin Frankel Whitehead. (PTI)

Anil Kapoor-starrer "Subedaar" to release on Prime Video on March 5

Prime Video on Wednesday announced March 5 as the worldwide premiere date of its original action-drama movie "Subedaar", starring Anil Kapoor.

Directed by Suresh Triveni of "Tumhari Sulu", "Jaisa", and "Daldal" fame, the film is produced by Vikram Malhotra, Kapoor, and Triveni.

The story revolves around Subedaar Arjun Maurya, a retired soldier struggling to find peace in a changing world where the values he once lived by are increasingly challenged.

"Subedaar" is both a high-octane action movie as well as a deeply moving father-daughter story. It features a tremendous performance from Anil Kapoor playing an action hero that will make people root for him right from the outset," said Nikhil Madhok, director & head of Originals, Prime Video India.

"We are proud to collaborate with Suresh Triveni, Anil Kapoor, Vikram Malhotra, and the entire team on Subedaar and look forward to bringing it to audiences in India and across the world when it premieres on Prime Video on March 5." Vikram Malhotra, Partner, Opening Image Films and producer of "Subedaar", said the film features a never-seen-before lead character who is shaped by service, discipline, and sacrifice.

"From the very outset, I was drawn to this story that is impactfully entertaining, intimate in its relationships and cinematic in its scale. Collaborating with Prime Video, AKFCN, and Suresh Triveni brought together the right creative voices to authentically build this world. With superstar and powerhouse actor Anil Kapoor at the centre, the film offers audiences a compelling cinematic experience like never-before exclusively on Prime Video..." Radhikka Madan, Saurabh Shukla, Aditya Rawal, Faisal Malik and Mona Singh also star in the movie. (PTI)

establishing Fraser as a bankable action star. Weisz, however, did not appear in the 2008 threequel "The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor," so her return to the franchise is particularly thrilling for fans.

Bettinelli-Olpin and Gillett ("Ready or Not" and sequel "Ready or Not 2: Here I Come") direct the new "Mummy" movie from a screenplay by David Coggeshall ("The Family Plan," "Orphan: First Kill"). Sean Daniel — who has produced each installment of the \$1.8 billion-grossing franchise at the studio since 1999's "The Mummy," including "The Mummy Returns," "The Scorpion King," "The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor" and the 2017 Dark Universe project — also returns for the film.

William Sherak, James Vanderbilt and Paul Nesten also produce through Project X Entertainment. In addition to starring in the movie, Fraser

Didn't expect 'Superboys of Malegaon' to do well in theatres but it will age well: Adarsh Gourav

Actor Adarsh Gourav says his critically-acclaimed film "Superboys of Malegaon" struggled to find its footing at the box office as it did not have known commercial actors to bring people into cinemas.

He is confident that the movie, inspired by the life of a group of cinema enthusiasts who take up filmmaking in their village, will "age beautifully". The film was directed by Reema Kagti.

"I didn't really expect it to do really well in the theatres. It's very hard for a film that doesn't have known commercial actors to pull the audience into the theatre. The reason people go to theatres has changed post-pandemic.

"So, you either make a big-ticket film about a big event, or cast big actors. But when you can make a really good film with people who are not really in the commercial space, it will be more difficult for you to pull the audience into the theatre," the actor told PTI in an interview.

"Superboys of Malegaon" is based on the life of Nasir Shaikh, an amateur filmmaker from the town of Malegaon, where the residents look to Bollywood cinema for a much-needed escape from daily drudgery. It starred Gourav, Vineet Kumar Singh, and Shashank Arora in lead roles.

Gourav, known for his work in films like "The White Tiger", "Kho Gaye Hum Kahan", and OTT shows like "Hotel Daze" and "Guns & Gulaabs", is confident that "Superboys of Malegaon" will find its audience over time.

"I'm grateful that I got to be part of a film like 'Superboys' because I know that this film will age. Ten years from now, people will be talking about 'Superboys of Malegaon.'" Despite his love for niche subjects, Gourav said he consciously chooses commercial cinema, including his upcoming film, "Tu Yaa Main".

"One of the strongest reasons why I wanted to be part of this film was because I did want to be part of a commercial film. I want a lot more people to know who I am. I don't think people at large know about the characters I've played or about my work, and that's fine. It's because of that reason I'm doing this," the actor said.

Gourav hopes that the success of his commercial projects, including "Tu Yaa Main", will help him gain more power to invest in "the writers, the directors that have been waiting on the line right now because their



scripts are not getting greenlit".

Billed as a survival drama, "Tu Yaa Main" dives into the lives of social media influencers portrayed by Gourav and Shanaya Kapoor, whose romantic getaway takes a deadly turn when they find themselves trapped in a swimming pool with a crocodile.

In the Bejoy Nambiar-directed movie, Gourav plays the role of a flamboyant rapper named Aalaa Flowpura. He said he used animal-inspired acting techniques to get into the skin of his character.

"We did a workshop with Atul Mongia sir, and we were asked to choose one animal that we thought was representative of our character. I chose a peacock because I thought, Aalaa Flowpura, he's got a lot of peacock in him, because peacocks like to show off a lot, especially to impress their mates, they do this entire dance," he said, adding he previously used this technique and picked up trait of a hyena for his role in "Mom" and an ape-like

while seeking redemption. The film marks the third collaboration of Kashyap and Bhat after "Ugly" (2013) and "Dobaaraa" (2022).

The neo-noir thriller is slated to stream on ZEE5 from February 20.

"It's coming out on one of the biggest platforms of this country, and we are looking forward to the reactions of people. Whether people see it on the big screen or on ZEE5, we as actors are hungry for appreciation, as long as they see it and they appreciate it, we are like, 'Okay, give it (love) to us,'" he said.

"Kennedy" also stars Sunny Leone, Mohit Takalkar and Abhilash Thapliyal among others. (PTI)

"I'm more interested in deep-diving into the psychology of an individual from a character's standpoint, and then to be working with filmmakers and producers that inspire me and just help me bring out a different side of me in some way," he said.

"Tu Yaa Main" is produced by Anand L. Rai, Himanshu Sharma, and Vinod Bhanushali. (PTI)

Nepal look to end winless run in T20 World Cup against debutants Italy



MUMBAI, Feb 11: Fighting hard but not quite there, Nepal will look to go the distance and end a winless run in the T20 World Cup when they face tournament debutants Italy in a Group C match, here on Thursday. Having made their debut in the competition 12 years ago, Nepal recorded a couple of wins in the 2014 edition when they defeated Hong Kong and Afghanistan but the Himalayan nation has gone winless since. Interestingly, Nepal have come agonisingly close on three occasions to beat Test-playing nations but ended up on the wrong side of the result. In 2024, they lost to South Africa by just one run and against Bangladesh by 21 runs. But the four-run defeat in a heroic chase against England last Sunday here at the Wankhede Stadium has firmly placed them in the spotlight and created a buzz around Nepalese cricketers. They have shown tremendous grit having honed their skills in one of the toughest for-

mat with minimal exposure to international cricket. A 10-year gap in playing T20 World Cups notwithstanding, Nepal matched England -- a two-time world champion -- almost on each count on the field and displayed their resolve on the biggest platform. Neither were they bogged down by the grandeur of the stage or the weight of the expectations. As many as 17,008 fans at the Wankhede Stadium made noise for the 'Rhinos', which matched the decibel levels usually witnessed when the home team plays here. In Kushal Bhurtel, Nepal have the top-order aggressor who can provide aggressive starts while the formidable middle-order comprising Dipendra Singh Airee, skipper Rohit Paudel and Aarif Sheikh provides them a lot of firepower. Lokesh Bam threatened to cause a real upset against England with his brutal stroke play which left the likes of Jofra Archer and

Adil Rashid stunned, even as the big-hitting Karan KC took a backseat. However, there were a few areas of concern which Nepal will want to address as they move ahead. They certainly did not get enough boundaries in the middle overs against England in a tall chase, and their running between the wickets also requires improvement. To their credit, Nepal did not make too many errors with the ball for a large part of England innings, but ended up giving away far too many runs in the death overs. On the other hand, Italy will want to leave behind their crushing 73-run loss to Scotland in the tournament-opener behind them and start afresh. Italy also had their skipper Wayne Madsen dislocating his shoulder at the start of the game and in all likelihood, Harry Manenti would lead the side. Italy used as many as seven different bowling options but failed to contain a side

which did not have an ideal build-up to the tournament, and their response in chase of 208 was far from ideal. Six of their batters fell in single digits; three recorded ducks. Ben Manenti's half-century and some big hits from Harry were the only bright spots for Italy, who will want to make all-round improvement in their remaining matches of the tournament. **Teams:** Nepal: Rohit Paudel (c), Aarif Sheikh, Aasif Sheikh (wk), Dipendra Singh Airee, Basir Ahamad, Kushal Bhurtel, Sundeeep Jora, Lokesh Bam, Gulsan Jha, Karan KC, Sompal Kami, Sandeep Lamichhane, Sher Malla, Lalit Rajbanshi, Nandan Yadav. **Italy:** Wayne Madsen (c), Marcus Campopiano, Gian-Piero Meade (wk), Anthony Mosca, Justin Mosca, Syed Naqvi, Harry Manenti, JJ Smuts, Grant Stewart, Ali Hasan, Thomas Draca, Jaspreet Singh, Krishan Kalugamage, Ben Manenti, Zain Ali. Match starts at 3:00pm IST. (PTI)

I said to boys we're going to scrap, says Markram after cliffhanger against Afghanistan

AHMEDABAD, Feb 11: South Africa skipper Aiden Markram had asked his teammates to be prepared for a "scrap" against Afghanistan in what turned out to be one of the greatest T20 World Cup matches of all time here Wednesday. South Africa pipped Afghanistan after two Super Overs in a thrilling Group D match after posting 187 for six. Afghanistan matched that total but failed to knock off the required 23 runs when the game went into the six-ball each shootout for the second time on a frenzied day.

"It's quite hard to sum that all up. Tough competition - teams put you under immense pressure. And when you start putting yourselves under pressure, life gets hard. Grateful for the win and the points," Markram said at the presentation ceremony.

While pacer Lungi Ngidi, who bowled exceptionally well in the regulation time to win the Player of the Match award, conceded 17 runs in the first Super Over, spinner Keshav Maharaj succeeded for South Africa the second time, picking up two wickets to seal the contest in his team's favour.

"Ultimately in Super Overs you're picking your most confident guys. Lungi didn't miss by much in the first over but they still got a good score. Same story with Kesh. Tough being a spinner. Still backed him."

"I said to the boys it's a decent target but we're going to scrap. Wasn't 100 percent comfortable with it, thought we left a few out there," Markram said.

In this game the captain saw areas that needed improvements. "There's areas we can improve.



Small little phases, and it adds up to a lot in this format. That is the positive you take from a game like this, you need to win games like this. "Important to get a really good start in this format and that's exactly what they did for us. Two of them batted really nicely, taking the game on." Afghan camp distraught The great competitor that he is, Afghanistan skipper Rashid Khan could not hide his disappointment after the heartbreaking defeat for a side known for their spirited dis-

plays and an eagerness to improve with each tournament. "The boys did an amazing job, especially with the way they started with the bat. To restrict them under 190 was amazing. So so unlucky to be part of losing team. Gave everything on the ground. This wicket is good, played a lot in IPL on this wicket," Rashid said. "Discussion with the team was 'yes they had a good start but try to restrict them in last 10 overs.'" The star leg-spinner was full of praise for opener Rahmanullah

Gurbaz's efforts, smashing a 42-ball 84 before nearly pulling it off for Afghanistan with his 4-ball 18 in the second Super Over. "Amazing innings, that's what he's famous for. In the last couple of overs in the powerplay where we lost quick wickets put him on the back foot. Overall he played amazing. We had our opportunities. In the last Super Over as well, 1 ball 5 runs could go anyway. "Could've been smarter. One dive, one ball could've finished it. Work hard for the last one and a half years for this game to go to the

next round. Very disappointing. "Any time you're representing your country is a proud moment. Will try my best to keep them as up as possible," Rashid said. On his part, Ngidi said he has "never been this stressed" in his life. "Lost so much weight today. Never been this stressed in my life in a cricket game. Happy to come out on top. Knew I'd probably be the super over option, captain said keep doing the same. Let myself down in the first over, didn't go to plan," Ngidi said. (PTI)

Anish wins bronze in rapid-fire pistol

NEW DELHI, Feb 11: World Championship silver medallist Anish Bhanwala clinched bronze in the men's 25m rapid-fire pistol competition, even as Kazakhstan dominated day eight of the Asian Shooting Championship with four gold medals here on Wednesday.

This was Anish's third Asian Championship medal.

Adriyan Karmakar in the 50m rifle prone junior men's event and the junior men's 25m RFP team also won gold on the day, taking India's table-topping medal tally to 41 gold, 19 silver and 15 bronze, with two more days of competitions left. Anish and Adarsh Singh took the seventh and eighth qualifying spots with scores of 574 and 573 respectively, ensuring two Indians in the RFP final. Former champion Nikita Chiryukin of Kazakhstan topped the qualifiers with a 582 and led a trio of his mates into the decider.

Japanese Dai Yoshioka, a two-time Olympian and a world cup gold medallist and Ha Minh Thanh, a double Asian Games medallist also went through along with Ha's teammate Vu Tien Nam.

In the final consisting of eight series of five rapid-fire shots, Yoshioka, Anish and Chiryukin were fastest off the blocks as Vu and Kazakh Artemiy Kabakov became the first two to be eliminated after the third series.

As long-time team-mate Adarsh bowed out after the fourth series with 11 hits to his name, Anish found himself in joint lead with Yoshioka and Nikita after the sixth series with 21 hits. (PTI)

Hasaranga's absence a big loss, says Chameera, calls for collective effort to fill gap

PALLEKELE, Feb 11: Describing the injured Wanindu Hasaranga's absence as a "big loss", Sri Lanka pacer Dushmantha Chameera on Wednesday called on the entire bowling unit to share the responsibility and fill the void left by the premier spinner.

Sri Lanka's spin spearhead Hasaranga was ruled out of the tournament due to a hamstring injury sustained during their opener against Ireland.

"Yes, not having Wanindu is a big loss for the team. Because we all know his talent. I think the entire bowling unit gets the responsibility. So, I think we all have a big responsibility to fill that gap," Chameera said ahead of their clash against Oman.

Spin-bowling all-rounder Dushan Hemantha has been named as Hasaranga's replacement.

"I think when we consider Dushan Hemantha, he was with us in the team during the recent past. He has also played in Zimbabwe tournament. So, when compared to Wanindu, I think he has a different way of bowling. He can do batting as well, so he can play as an all-rounder."

"...as it's being played in Sri Lanka and previously, he has played in Sri Lanka as well. So, I think, we can get what we wanted for the team from him."

The 2014 champions failed to hit a single boundary between the seventh and 15th overs after Ireland introduced spin in their previous match, and Chameera said that was



an area they needed to improve. "When looking at batting, I think we played well during the power play. I think after the power play, we had a setback, because the Ketharama line was a little far around 80 meters. So, I think we had less chance to go beyond boundaries," said the 34-year-old said. "I think we could have got runs in ones or twos when playing in the mid-levels. And we also played well during the last three overs. I think Kamindu Mendis played well, and that's because we could reach a score above one hundred and sixty-eight. "I should mention that Kusal

Mendis was a little unwell before the last match. So, he played until the end of the power play. So, I think that was also a reason for missing on the runs as in ones and twos. Because he was a little unwell during that match." **One bad performance doesn't define us: Vinayak Shukla** Oman were well short of runs against Zimbabwe, slumping to an eight-wicket defeat in their opener. Making their fourth appearance in the T20 showpiece, Oman struggled against pace and bounce, with their top five batters failing to reach double digits in Colombo. Oman wicketkeeper-batter

Vinayak Shukla, however, backed the side to bounce back, saying their batting struggles did not define them as a team. "We worked hard in the back-stage as well after that game. We came here early and had some practice session here. But what I feel like that one bad game doesn't define you as a team," he said. "I think we are going to come back stronger here and just having an off day on a field as a batting unit it's not going to define how players are going to perform in this particular World Cup so we are looking forward to come up with some good options and tackle these kind of things." (PTI)

T20WC: Sri Lanka battle middle-order woes and Hasaranga absence vs Oman



PALLEKELE, Feb 11: Sri Lanka will have to iron out their batting inconsistencies, particularly in the middle overs, and rework their bowling combination in the absence of an injured Wanindu Hasaranga when they take on Oman in a Group B match of the T20 World Cup here on Thursday.

The former champions were dealt a severe blow after Hasaranga, their most potent spin weapon, was ruled out of the tournament with a hamstring injury sustained during their opener against Ireland.

Sri Lanka had a disappointing build-up to the ICC showpiece, entering the tournament on the back of a 0-3 drubbing by England at home. However, the co-hosts made a positive start to their campaign with a 20-run win over a tricky Ireland.

The victory, though, could not mask their batters' struggle against spin.

The 2014 champions failed to hit a single boundary between the seventh and 15th overs after Ireland introduced spin, an area Oman will look to exploit.

Things could have turned messy but for Kamindu Mendis, who smashed a 19-ball 44 in the death overs to lift Sri Lanka to a competitive total.

While Kamindu provided the late acceleration, Kusal Mendis capitalised on reprieves to anchor the innings with a half-century.

The team will, however, expect more from openers Pathum Nissanka and Kamil Mishara, who failed to convert their starts.

Hasaranga had put in a superb effort against Ireland, completing his four overs and claiming three crucial wickets despite discomfort.

In his absence, Dushan Hemantha, who has played just

five ODIs and three T20Is, will have big shoes to fill after being named as replacement.

Fellow spinner Maheesh Theekshana, who also claimed three wickets in the opener, will have to shoulder added responsibility.

Oman, on the other hand, were well short of runs against Zimbabwe, slumping to an eight-wicket defeat.

Making their fourth appearance in the T20 showpiece, Oman struggled against pace and extra bounce, with their top five batters failing to reach double digits in Colombo.

They will need to quickly address those frailties if they are to spring a surprise like they did on debut in 2016, when they defeated Ireland.

Skipper Jatinder Singh knows his side will need to put up at least 150-160 runs to give their bowling attack, their stronger suit, something to defend.

Sufyan Mehmood impressed with two wickets in the previous outing, while Shah Faisal also bowled well.

Teams: Sri Lanka: Dasun Shanaka (c), Pathum Nissanka, Kamil Mishara, Kusal Mendis, Kamindu Mendis, Kusal Janith Perera, Charith Asalanka, Janith Liyanage, Pavan Rathnayake, Dunith Wellalage, Maheesh Theekshana, Dushmantha Chameera, Matheesha Pathirana, Pramod Madushan, Dushan Hemantha.

Oman: Jatinder Singh (c), Aamir Kaleem, Hammad Mirza, Wasim Ali, Karan Sonawale, Jiten Ramanandi, Vinayak Shukla (wk), Sufyan Mehmood, Nadeem Khan, Shah Faisal, Shakeel Ahmed, Mohammad Nadeem, Jay Odedra, Ashish Odedara, Shafiq Jan.

Match starts 11am (IST). (PTI)

