

**6** WORLD

**8** NATION

- Voting begins in Bangladesh's crucial parliamentary elections
- Deaths in Iran's crackdown on protests reach at least 7,000, activists say
- BJP, allies term labour Bill 'historic'; oppn calls it 'anti-labour' in Lok Sabha
- India moving towards self-reliance in nuclear sector, setting its own timelines: Govt

**ELF symbolises transformation in Upper Assam's infra landscape: Himanta**

## PM to inaugurate ELF at Moran tomorrow

**STAFF REPORTER**

**GUWAHATI, Feb 12:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi will inaugurate an Emergency Landing Facility (ELF) on the Moran bypass in Dibrugarh district of Assam on February 14, marking the first such facility in the Northeast region.

According to the Defence Ministry, the ELF has been developed on a designated stretch of the national highway and will function as an alternative runway during contingencies.

The facility is capable of handling emergency landing and take-off operations of Indian Air Force fighter jets, transport aircraft and helicopters.

It is also expected to support humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) operations in remote areas.

The ministry described the inauguration as a historic event for



Assam, noting that the facility significantly enhances strategic preparedness in the eastern sector. The programme will be attended by the Governor and Chief Minister of Assam, along with senior civil and military officials.

merged during the monsoon, but now the same land is capable of facilitating the landing of fighter aircraft. He said the project reflects rapid progress in infrastructure development and strengthens India's air defence capabilities, particularly given Assam's proximity to international borders.

The chief minister added that the Prime Minister's visit underscores the Centre's commitment to enhancing infrastructure and national security in the Northeast.

Officials said the Moran ELF is part of a broader strategy to integrate civilian infrastructure with defence preparedness.

The facility can be quickly converted for military use in emergencies and will also aid in faster logistics during natural disasters.

Preparations and security arrangements are underway in Dibrugarh (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Youth, women to get greater representation: Saikia

**Assam polls: BJP to announce candidates after February 25**

**STAFF REPORTER**

**GUWAHATI, Feb 12:** The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) will announce its list of candidates for the upcoming elections after February 25, with a strong focus on youth leaders and women candidates, Assam BJP president Dilip Saikia said on Thursday.

Addressing reporters here, Saikia said the party's candidate selection process is in its final stages and extensive consultations are being held at multiple levels of the organisation.

He indicated that the BJP is keen to provide greater representation to the younger generation while also ensuring adequate participation of women in the electoral battle.

"BJP has always believed in giving opportunities to capable young leaders who have worked for the organisation and the people. This time too, the party will field several candidates from the youth generation," Saikia said.

He added that women candidates would also be given due importance, in line with the party's commitment to women empowerment.

According to party sources, the BJP's state election committee has already held several rounds of discus-



sions, evaluating factors such as organisational work, public acceptance, performance in previous elections and feedback from grassroots workers.

The final list will be sent to the central leadership for approval before being made public.

Saikia also underlined that the BJP's approach to ticket distribution would be inclusive and balanced, ensuring representation from different sections of society. "Our aim is to select candidates who can effectively represent the (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Court restrains Cong leaders from making 'defamatory statements' against CM

**GUWAHATI, Feb 12:** A court in Guwahati restrained Congress leaders Gaurav Gogoi, Bhupesh Baghel and Jitendra Singh from making "defamatory statements" against Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma, who has filed a ₹ 500 crore defamation case.

After hearing the petitioner's counsel, Civil Judge of Senior Division No 1, Nayanjyoti Sarma, ordered an 'ad-interim injunction' on Wednesday, restraining Gogoi, Baghel and Singh, besides a prominent Assamese daily, from "making, publishing, circulating or disseminating any further defamatory statements or materials concerning the petitioner till their appearance in court".

Judge Sarma, in his order, stated that the court is of the opinion that if an order of 'ad-interim injunction'

is not passed, it will "defeat the justice and there is every possibility of multiplicity of proceedings".

The court fixed the date of appearance of the defendants before it on March 9.

Addressing a press conference on Thursday, Advocate General Devajit Saikia said the CM's counsel argued that the details of all properties and assets belonging to him and his family have been filed in the affidavits of all the elections he has contested since 2001.

Besides, according to the rules of the state government, all ministers, including the CM, and senior government officials have to declare their assets annually, and Sarma has been doing it regularly, Saikia said.

The AG said the CM has also been a regular income tax assessee for over 30 years.

"Contrary to the Congress allegations, all his wealth, properties and assets are reflected in Income Tax filing, Register of Societies, Assam government's records and election affidavits," he said.

"Despite everything being in the public domain, the Congress made baseless allegations. From where did they get the so-called information that 12,000 bigha of land is under the control of the CM and his family? This is imaginary, and the court has been informed about it," Saikia said.

The AG said Sarma was unanimously elected leader by his party MLAs in 2021, and thus the other allegations made by the Congress are also absolutely "false, imaginary and to mislead the people of the state". As elections in the state are due soon, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Mapping of priority areas for action on: Govt

**Forest area twice the area of Delhi encroached during Congress regime: Himanta**

**STAFF REPORTER**

**GUWAHATI, Feb 12:** Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday highlighted the scale of forest land encroachment in the state, asserting that nearly 2,676 square kilometres of forest area—almost twice the size of Delhi—is currently under illegal occupation, a crisis he attributed to the previous Congress government.

Taking to social media platform X, Sarma said the figures were being shared to put things in perspective for people who may not be aware of the magnitude of the problem inherited by the present government.

"2,676 sq km of forest land—an area almost twice the size of Delhi—is under encroachment. Rest assured, BJP4Assam is working to fix this," the chief minister posted.

The statement comes amid a series of eviction drives and forest protection measures undertaken by the Assam government across several districts.

According to officials, the government has intensified efforts to reclaim encroached forest land as part of its broader strategy to conserve wildlife habitats, protect ecological balance, and ensure sustainable development.

Senior BJP leaders have repeatedly alleged that unchecked encroachment during the earlier Congress regimes led to large-scale degradation of reserved forests and wildlife corridors.

The current dispensation maintains that the issue poses serious threats to biodiversity, human-animal conflict management, and long-term environmental security in the state.

Government sources said that detailed surveys and satellite mapping are being used to assess the extent of encroachment and identify priority areas for action.

The reclaimed land, officials added, would be restored through afforestation drives and strengthened forest management practices.

The opposition, however, has criticised the eviction exercises, alleging that they disproportionately affect marginalised communities.

The state government has countered these claims, asserting that all actions are being carried out in accordance with the law and after following due process.

Political observers view Sarma's remarks as part of the BJP's effort to underline its governance narrative ahead of upcoming (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Full EC bench on 3-day visit to poll-bound Assam

**GUWAHATI, Feb 12:** The full bench of the Election Commission, led by CEC Gyanesh Kumar, is scheduled to visit Assam for three days from February 16 to review preparedness for the upcoming assembly polls, officials said on Thursday.

Kumar, along with Election Commissioners Sukhbir Singh Sandhu and Vivek Joshi, would meet leaders of political parties, poll-related central and state regulatory authorities, district election officers and SPs on February 17, they said.

The CEC is scheduled to hold separate meetings here with the chief secretary, home secretary, DGP, chief electoral officer, police nodal officer and other senior officials of the (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Assam BJP social media co-convenor removed for uploading controversial video

**GUWAHATI, Feb 12:** The Assam BJP has removed a co-convenor of its social media team for posting the now-deleted video featuring Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma that created a huge controversy, a senior leader said on Thursday.

The 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 after a political backlash.

"The video was uploaded without proper vetting in an unauthorised manner. The person concerned has been removed from the post of co-convenor of the social media team," the senior leader told PTI. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## India clears procurement of 114 Rafale jets in ₹ 3.6 lakh cr military modernisation push



**NEW DELHI, Feb 12:** In its largest-ever defence acquisition push, India on Thursday cleared a long-pending proposal to procure 114 Rafale fighter jets under a government-to-government framework with France, nearly two decades after the plan was originally rolled out to boost the Indian Air Force's combat prowess.

In total, capital acquisition of mil-

itary hardware worth ₹ 3.60 lakh crore including procurement of an additional six US-made Boeing P8-I surveillance aircraft for the Indian Navy, was approved by the Defence Acquisition Council (DAC), chaired by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh.

Under the Multi-Role Fighter Aircraft (MRFA) project, 18 aircraft will be supplied by Dassault Avia-

tion, the maker of Rafale, in a fly away condition and the rest will be manufactured in India with over 50 per cent indigenous content that will be to be met in phases, sources said.

Though the defence ministry did not provide the cost of the procurement, it is expected to be in the range of ₹ 2.90 lakh crore to ₹ 3.15 lakh crore.

The approval for procurement of the Rafale jets came just four days ahead of French President Emmanuel Macron's visit to India.

The Rafale purchase plan is expected to be taken up soon by the prime minister-led Cabinet Committee on Security. There is a possibility of India and France inking an inter-governmental pact on the project during Macron's trip.

However, a formal contract on the deal is unlikely before end of the year as the defence ministry will now have to carry out negotiations with Dassault Aviation to finalise the cost and (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## NPP receives Daniel Langthasa boost in Dima Hasao

**NPP committed to empowering indigenous communities: Conrad Sangma**

**HT Bureau**

**SHILLONG, Feb 12:** The call for bringing together leaders across party lines into one platform branded as, "One North East," has yielded results with the National People's Party (NPP) reaching out to Dima Hasao in the poll bound state of Assam, and popular leader, Daniel Langthasa was welcomed and inducted into the party.

NPP national president and Chief Minister of Meghalaya Conrad K Sangma formally inducted Daniel Langthasa into the party during a large public convention at Maibang, Dima Hasao on Thursday.

The induction ceremony was attended by top NPP functionaries including NPP's National Working President James K. Sangma, Vice President Hemochandra Singh, founder of the Tipra Motha Party, Pradyot Manikya Debbarma, and former minister and leader from Nagaland, Mmholnomo Kikon, along with several senior leaders of the NPP from across the North East.

Langthasa's induction into the NPP assumed significance as Assam is soon going to Assembly polls in March-April this year, paving the way for the party to strengthen its base especially in the hills districts of the poll bound state.

Langthasa joined the NPP along with a large number



of his supporters, marking a significant political development in Dima Hasao and strengthening the party's presence in the region.

Addressing the gathering, Conrad Sangma reiterated the party's commitment to the vision of a stronger and more connected "One North East," where states and communities work together for the shared progress while preserving their unique cultural heritage and identity.

He stated that the induction reflects the growing trust of people in the party's vision (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Assam Rifles in 'Atmanirbhar' mode, to induct Indian dog breeds in its squad

**JORHAT, Feb 12:** Giving a fillip to the central government's call for indigenisation, Assam Rifles is planning to induct dog breeds available in India into its squad for carrying out a range of operations, a senior official said on Thursday.

As part of 'Atmanirbhar Bharat', the oldest paramilitary force has already inducted the Tangkhul Hui breed in its dog squad as a pilot project and is looking to introduce the Kombai breed from April, Assam Rifles Dog Training Centre (ARDTC) Officer Commanding Lt Col Alok Palei told PTI in an interview here.

"The Union Home Minister (Amit Shah) has always advocated for Atmanirbhar Bharat in every field. He also wanted to have more of the Indian dog breeds in the dog squads of all forces. Since then, we have been working on identifying an indigenous breed for our purposes," he added.

The Union Ministry of Home Affairs also issued a directive in this regard last year, following which the Assam Rifles started looking for more local breeds for induction in the force, Palei said.

"Currently we have four breeds -- Labrador, German Shepherd, Belgian Malinois and Tangkhul Hui. Out of them, we inducted six dogs of Tangkhul Hui in 2022 as a pilot project. They are highly disease resistant and all

of them are in narcotics detection," he added.

The Tangkhul Hui is found Ukhrul district of Manipur, and it is a domestic breed, used mainly for hunting purposes, the official said.

Talking about the Kombai breed, Palei said it is found in Tamil Nadu, and this type of dog is being inducted in all the central armed police forces after the call for an indigenous breed.

"We are in the process of identifying the parent stock. The first three years will be for breeding. There are different stages, starting from identifying the breed to final induction. As the first step, we will induct two males and eight females of Kombai in April," he added.

Palei said that the Tangkhul Hui and Kombai breeds are likely to be inducted fully into the Assam Rifles' dog squad by March 2027 together.

"This centre is the only facility of the Assam Rifles. The Kombai dogs will also be trained in this centre," he said.

The Assam Rifles has 344 authorised strength for dogs, but it currently has 253 dogs. These are posted in different battalions across the Northeast and Jammu & Kashmir, the Lt Col said.

He said that the Assam Rifles presently has over 1,200 dog trained handlers, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## '30 crore students in Indian campuses'

## India's AI to be inclusive by design, sovereign by capability: Pradhan

**NEW DELHI, Feb 12:** Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan on Thursday said India's Artificial Intelligence (AI) will be inclusive by design, interoperable by architecture and sovereign by capability.

The minister made the comments at the inaugural session of Bharat Bodhan AI Conclave 2026 here. The two-day conclave will bring together senior policymakers from the Centre and the states, researchers, academic institutions and industry leaders to deliberate on AI's strategic role in transforming India's education ecosystem, with a focus on innovation, scalable adoption and national capacity building.

"India's AI will be inclusive by design, interoperable by architecture and sovereign by capability. We have to embed AI in education to empower our students and support



our teachers.

"I call upon all the stakeholders to build scalable, responsible, ethical, inclusive and India-centric sovereign AI models for transforming our education and realising the goal of Viksit Bharat," Pradhan said.

"There are 30 crore students in Indian campuses. We have decided that beginning from Class 3 till the advanced research stage, we will impart age-appropriate knowledge about AI," he said.

The Bharat Bodhan AI Conclave

2026 is envisioned as a national platform for landscape discovery, strategic alignment and partnership building in AI-enabled education.

"Its primary purpose is to mark the beginning of the development of the Bharat EduAI Stack, an open and interoperable architecture to build, integrate and scale AI-powered learning solutions across India besides enabling landscape discovery and ecosystem mapping to identify gaps and opportunities," he said.

The minister noted that AI is a horizontal issue and not just a subject of technology.

"I believe that all students will require AI. If we make a model combining machines and emotions and build an architecture, then we can be a strength of the world," he said.

The conclave will engage solutions across four priority verticals -- AI for (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

# Sensex falls 558 points on sell-off in IT shares; TCS tumbles over 5 pc

*'A weak sentiment in the IT sector, along with lingering geopolitical tensions between the US and Iran, may influence investors to take a cautious approach in the near term'*

**MUMBAI, Feb 12:** Benchmark BSE Sensex fell 558 points on Thursday amid heavy selling in IT shares, as concerns over AI-led disruptions and waning hopes of a Fed rate cut after firm US economic data weighed on investor sentiment.

The 30-share BSE Sensex declined 558.72 points, or 0.66 per cent, to settle at 83,674.92. During the day, it tanked 716.97 points, or 0.85 per cent, to hit an intraday low of 83,516.67.

The 50-share NSE Nifty declined 146.65 points, or 0.57 per cent, to end at 25,807.20.

Technology stocks led the slide, with Tech Mahindra, Infosys and Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) tumbling nearly 6 per cent each to emerge as major laggards on the Sensex.

HCL Technologies, Mahindra & Mahindra, Hindustan Unilever, Reliance Industries, Eternal, HDFC Bank, IndiGo, Kotak Mahindra Bank, and Adani Ports also ended in the red.

On the other hand, Bajaj Finance, ICICI Bank, Trent, Bharat Electronics Ltd, State Bank of India, Asian Paints, Bajaj Finserv, Titan, Larsen & Toubro, Bharti Airtel and Tata Steel were among the gainers.

BSE MidCap Select Index fell 0.48 per cent, while SmallCap Select Index slipped 0.28 per cent.

Among sectoral indices, Focus IT slumped the most by 5.40 per cent, followed by IT by 5.29 per cent.

Realty also fell by 1.50 per cent, Oil & Gas and Energy fell by 1.18 per cent each, Services by 0.81 per cent, FMCG by 0.43 per cent, Consumer Discretionary by 0.38 per cent and Commodities by 0.32 per



cent on the BSE.

However, Financial Services, Industrials, Telecommunication, Capital Goods, Consumer Durables, BSE Top 10 Banks were the only gainers. A total of 2,582 stocks declined, while 1,634 advanced and 152 remained unchanged on the BSE. Shares of TCS tumbled 5.41 per cent, dragging its market capitalisation below the ₹ 10 lakh crore mark for the first time.

At the end of the trading session, the company's market valuation stood at ₹ 9,95,661.50 crore, pushing it down to the sixth spot among the country's most valuable listed companies.

ICICI Bank, whose shares gained nearly 2 per cent during the day overtook TCS to claim the fifth position in the list of India's top 10 most valuable listed firms.

"Expect markets to remain range-bound with stock-specific activity as the Q3 earnings season ends. Markets would now look at other triggers including global and

domestic inflation, trade developments, and FII flows, while AI-related disruptions could add to volatility," Siddhartha Khemka - Head of Research, Wealth Management, Motilal Oswal Financial Services Ltd, said.

Khemka added that weakness in IT shares followed fading expectations of a near-term US Fed rate cut after better-than-expected January jobs data in the US and investor's fear that new advanced AI models could automate several traditional IT services potentially impacting future business growth.

Meanwhile, foreign institutional investors turned net buyers in February after months of selling, purchasing equities worth an ₹ 5,913 crore so far this month (up to February 11), providing some support to overall sentiment, he said.

"A nosedive correction in the IT index triggered by mounting concerns over AI-led disruptions, along with low expectations of a US Fed rate cut due to strong US job data

and unemployment rates, dampened investor sentiment," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Limited, said.

He added that in the global markets, AI is reshaping markets by compressing margins in service-intensive sectors and increasing concentration-led volatility.

"In India, this technology shift is likely to structurally transform IT services by accelerating delivery timelines and automating volume-driven tasks, thereby challenging the traditional headcount-based outsourcing model."

"A weak sentiment in the IT sector, along with lingering geopolitical tensions between the US and Iran, may influence investors to take a cautious approach in the near term," Nair said.

In Asian markets, South Korea's Kospi closed over 3 per cent higher. Japan's Nikkei 225 index, Shanghai's SSE Composite index also ended on a positive note, while Hong Kong's Hang Seng benchmark finished in the negative territory.

European markets are trading higher in mid-session deals. US equities ended lower on Wednesday.

Meanwhile, Foreign institutional investors bought equities worth ₹ 943.81 crore on Wednesday, while domestic institutional investors were the net sellers of stocks worth ₹ 125.36 crore, according to exchange data. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, fell 0.27 per cent to USD 69.21 per barrel.

On Wednesday, the 30-share BSE Sensex slipped 40.28 points to close at 84,233.64, while the NSE Nifty inched up 18.70 points to settle at 25,953.85. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

## PM to inaugurate

and Moran ahead of the Prime Minister's visit. The Assam government said the project highlights the transformative impact of sustained investment in infrastructure and reinforces the region's strategic importance.

## Youth, women to

aspirations of the people and strengthen the party's position," he said. Political observers believe that the BJP's emphasis on youth and women reflects its broader strategy to consolidate its support base and project a forward-looking image ahead of the polls.

The party is expected to field a mix of experienced leaders and fresh faces to counter the opposition's narrative. The announcement of the candidate list after February 25 is likely to set the tone for the BJP's election campaign, with the party gearing up for an aggressive outreach programme across the state in the coming weeks. As the countdown to the elections begins, all eyes remain on the BJP's final list, which is expected to reveal key signals about the party's priorities and electoral strategy.

## Full EC bench

Assam government. The team is also likely to address mediapersons on the last day of their visit on February 18, the election officials said. Elections to the 126-member Assam assembly are likely to be held in March-April. (PTI)

## Mapping of priority

elections, projecting a firm stance on land protection and environmental governance while blaming past administrations for the crisis. With forest conservation emerging as a key policy plank, the Assam government has reiterated its commitment to reclaim encroached land and safeguard the state's natural resources, even as the debate over evictions and rehabilitation continues.

## Court restrains Cong

the Congress is trying to gain political advantage by defaming the CM," he said.

"There is nothing like 'HBS Tax' prevalent in the state, as alleged by Congress, which is trying to gain political brownie points, and this has hurt the CM. There is a legal recourse, and he has gone to the court," he added.

The CM, in his petition, said the Congress leaders should prove the allegations in court with evidence and if they fail to do so, they should pay a damage of ₹ 500 crore. Saikia said the court, after examining all the documents submitted by the petitioner, passed the ad-interim stay order. (PTI)

## Assam BJP social

The removed social media co-convenor was identified as Ron Vikash Gaurav. "Only a few people have the right to create posts and upload publicity materials on the BJP social media handles. Usually, they can do it on their own for sharing party programmes or speeches of our leaders. But for sensitive topics, they need authorisation from the social media in-charge or party president or the CM's office if it involves the chief minister," the senior BJP leader said. Ranjib Kumar Sarmah currently heads the social media team of the state BJP, and there were four co-convenors in his team, prior to the removal of Gaurav.

CM Sarma on Wednesday said that the police have registered a case based on a complaint by Congress leaders over the video. He said that a BJP worker has also filed a separate police complaint over the same issue.

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.

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 responded to it, saying, "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)

## India clears procurement

the finer details of the weapons package. The Rafale jets are capable of carrying a range of potent weapons. European missile maker MBDA's Meteor beyond visual range air-to-air missile and Scalp cruise missile will be the mainstay of the weapons package of the Rafale jets.

In April 2019, the Indian Air Force issued an RFI (Request for Information), or initial tender to acquire 114 Multi-Role Fighter Aircraft (MRFA) at a cost of around USD 18 billion.

It was billed as one of the world's biggest military procurement programmes in recent years.

The other contenders for the mega project included Lockheed Martin's F-21, Boeing's F/A-18 and the Eurofighter Typhoon. The move to procure the jets has come at a time when the number of the Indian Air Force's fighter squadrons have gone down to 31 from officially sanctioned strength of 42.

Nearly 13 years back, the defence ministry had completed ground work for procurement of a fleet of Medium Multi-Role Combat Aircraft (MMRCA).

However, the project didn't go through.

In 2015, the Modi government announced a government-to-government framework to procure 36 Rafale fighters in the face of rapidly declining squadron strength of the Indian Air Force (IAF).

The NDA government finally inked the deal on September 23, 2016, to procure the jets after a nearly seven-year exercise to procure 126 Medium Multi-Role Combat Aircraft (MMRCA) did not fructify during the UPA regime. The IAF had begun its hunt for the MMRCA in late 1990s and the RFI for it was floated in 2004.

The IAF currently operates the jets. Last year, the Indian Navy sealed a Rs 64,000 crore deal to procure 26 marine variants of the Rafale jet.

"The Defence Acquisition Council, under the chairmanship of Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, accorded Acceptance of Necessity (AoN) for various proposals of the Services at an estimated value of about Rs 3.60 lakh crore," the defence ministry said.

"For the Indian Air Force, AoN was approved for the procurement of Multi Role Fighter Aircraft (MRFA) Rafale, combat missiles and air-ship based high altitude pseudo satellite (AS-HAPS)," it said.

The ministry said procurement of MRFA will enhance the capability of undertaking air dominance roles across the spectrum of conflict and significantly boost the deterrence capabilities of the IAF with long range offensive strikes. "The majority of MRFA to be procured will be manufactured in India. The Combat Missiles will enhance the stand-off ground attack capability with deep strike power and very high accuracy," it said.

The ministry said the AS-HAPS will be utilised towards carrying out persistent intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, electronic intelligence, telecommunication and remote sensing for military purposes.

For the Indian Army, AoN was accorded for the procurement of anti-tank mines (Vibhav) and overhaul of Vehicle Platforms of Armoured Recovery Vehicles (ARVs), T-72 Tanks and Infantry Combat Vehicles (BMP-II).

Vibhav mines will be laid as an anti-tank obstacle system to delay the advance of enemy mechanized forces, the ministry said. The overhaul of vehicle platforms of ARVs, T-72 Tanks and BMP-II will enhance service life of equipment ensuring readiness and operational effectiveness of the Indian Army, it said.

For the Indian Navy, approval was accorded for four MW Marine Gas Turbine based electric power generator and P8I Long Range Maritime Reconnaissance Aircraft.

Induction of four MW marine gas turbine based electric power generator under Make-I category of Defence Acquisition Procedure 2020 will minimise the dependency on foreign manufacturers, ensure self-reliance in power generation requirement of Indian Navy. The acquisition of P8I aircraft will significantly boost the Navy's war-fighting capability of long-range anti-submarine warfare, maritime surveillance and maritime strike capability. (PTI)

## NPP receives Daniel

of development rooted in respect for tribal identity, indigenous rights, and grassroots aspirations.

Sangma also emphasised that the NPP remained committed to empowering indigenous communities while ensuring inclusive development, improved connectivity, and greater opportunities for youth across the North East.

The party leaders who were present at the convention, noted that the event symbolised a strong resurgence of the NPP in the Dima Hasao region and expressed confidence that the people would continue to support a political platform that prioritises identity, dignity, unity, and development.

## Assam Rifles in

while 9-10 people are required for care and maintenance of each dog. The Assam Rifles Dog Training Centre in Jorhat district has 104 dogs and 174 handlers, which are in different stages of training, Palei said.

When asked about any big operation that was successful with a significant role of its dog squad, he said, without sharing details, that a huge cache of narcotics substances transported from Myanmar was seized in September 2025 in a Northeastern state due to its canine unit.

On the training aspect, Palei said the centre is conducting three courses for its personnel and two courses for the dogs. The three courses for personnel are basic dog handler course (23 weeks), dog first aid course (four weeks) and refresher course (two weeks). For dogs, there is a basic obedience course (12 weeks) and a refresher course (two weeks). The officer said that there are three specialised courses also -- tracking, explosive detection and narcotic detection. Each course is of 36 weeks' duration.

"At present, we have the 42nd batch of our basic dog handling course. After this, the best of the handlers are selected for a master trainer course at the CRPF Dog Breeding & Training School in Bengaluru, and it is 24 weeks long. Also, we send our people to the Remount Veterinary Corps Centre (RVC) in Meerut for a six-month course," he added. Palei said after passing out from these two centres, the personnel are deployed at ARDTC as instructors.

Asked if the field of operation for the dogs will be expanded in the coming period, the officer said, "Yes, we are looking into it. We have been tasked to train for dual purpose, which is assault with tracker and assault with explosive detection." There is a possibility of inducting search and rescue dogs in the future for using them in natural calamities, he added. (PTI)

## India's AI to be

School Education, AI for Higher Education, AI for Skilling and Workforce Readiness, and AI Research and Deep Technology. An exhibition showcasing AI-driven innovations in school education, higher education and skilling was also inaugurated, providing a platform for interaction between policymakers and innovators.

A memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed between IIT Bombay and Columbia University to establish a Centre of AI for manufacturing at IIT Bombay, besides the launch of the three new courses on AI by IIM Lucknow, institutional collaborations involving IIM Jammu and AIT Bangkok and an IIM Ranchi Initiative called "Teaching with AI". The Bharat Bodhan AI Conclave precedes the larger India AI Summit scheduled to be held in the national capital from February 16 to 20. The summit is expected to see participation from global tech leaders in the likes of NVIDIA CEO Jensen Huang, OpenAI CEO Sam Altman, Google CEO Sundar Pichai, Anthropic CEO Dario Amodei and Qualcomm CEO Cristiano Amon. (PTI)

## Samsung launches Galaxy F70e 5G

**HT Bureau**  
**GUWAHATI, Feb 12:** Samsung India on Tuesday unveiled the Galaxy F70e 5G, the first smartphone under its new Galaxy F70 Series, targeting Gen Z users with a focus on camera performance, display smoothness and premium design.

According to the company, the Galaxy F70e 5G features a 50MP main rear camera with an f/1.8 aperture, paired with a depth sensor to deliver sharper portraits with natural bokeh effects.

The device also includes a Night Mode aimed at improving low-light photography, while an 8MP front camera supports selfies and video calls. The smartphone sports a 6.7-inch HD+ display with a 120Hz refresh rate, designed to offer smoother scrolling and improved responsiveness across apps and games.

It also comes with High Brightness Mode (HBM) for better visibility under sunlight.

In terms of design, the Galaxy F70e 5G carries a premium leather-pattern finish on the back and measures 8.2mm in thickness.

The device is rated IP54 for water and dust resistance and will be available in two colour options — Lighthouse Green and Spotlight Blue.

The handset is powered by the MediaTek Dimensity 6300 processor and supports multiple 5G bands.

Samsung said the chipset delivers smooth multitasking and improved gaming performance compared to the previous generation.

The device is backed by a 6000mAh battery with 25W fast charging support and runs on Samsung's One UI 8.

Commenting on the launch, Akshay S Rao, Director, MX Business, Samsung India, said the Galaxy F70e 5G has been designed to deliver meaningful innovation for value-conscious young consumers, combining camera capabilities, display performance and a premium finish.

With the introduction of the Galaxy F70e 5G, Samsung aims to further strengthen its presence in the competitive mid-range 5G smartphone segment in India.

## ICICI Prudential Life launches 'SmartKid 360'

**HT Bureau**  
**GUWAHATI, Feb 12:** ICICI Prudential Life Insurance has introduced ICICI Pru SmartKid 360, a long-term savings product aimed at helping parents financially secure their children's future through guaranteed benefits.

The plan offers MoneyBack or pre-decided payouts aligned with key milestones in a child's life, such as school education, higher studies or early adulthood goals. Policyholders can opt for either fixed or increasing payout options based on their financial planning preferences. Commenting on the launch, Vikas Gupta, chief product officer at ICICI Prudential Life Insurance, said the product has been designed to address parents' need to ensure financial stability for their children's aspirations. In addition to periodic MoneyBack benefits, the plan provides a guaranteed lump-sum maturity benefit at the end of the policy term to support the child's transition into adulthood.

## Novotel Guwahati curates Valentine's Day experiences across four venues

**HT Bureau**  
**GUWAHATI, Feb 12:** Novotel Guwahati GS Road has lined up a range of curated dining experiences across four of its signature venues to celebrate Valentine's Day on February 14, offering guests multiple options tailored to different preferences.

At 188 Downtown, the hotel will present "Six Shades of Love", a six-course Indian fusion dining experience featuring modern Indian flavours in an intimate setting.

The experience, available from 7 pm to 11 pm, will include beverage pairings.

The rooftop venue Skye will host "Under the Stars", an open-air dinner featuring a five-course contemporary menu.

Designed for couples seeking a scenic and quieter ambience, the evening will include sparkling wine and panoramic views of the city skyline.

The Square, the hotel's all-day din-

ing restaurant, will offer a special Valentine's Day buffet with an array of international dishes, live counters and themed desserts, creating a more vibrant and social dining atmosphere.

Malt, the hotel's lounge venue, will host "Crimson Nights", a late-evening experience featuring unlimited red wine and a curated selection of appetisers, catering to guests who prefer a relaxed setting to conclude the evening.

Vineet Kumar Mishra, general manager of Novotel Guwahati, said Valentine's Day holds different meanings for different people, and the aim is to provide varied experiences that allow guests to celebrate in their own way.

The hotel stated that the initiative reflects its approach of offering customised experiences rather than a single-format celebration.

Reservations for the Valentine's Day events are currently open, the hotel added.

### LOST

I, Prity Kemprai, D/O: Rajeson Kemprai and Bajonti Kemprai, R/O: Vill.- Digandu II, P.S.- Diyungmukh P.O.- Diyungbra, Pin:- 788931, District:- Dima Hasao, Assam, have lost my BA (Regular) Final Year-2023 Consolidated Grade Sheetbearing Roll No. UA-201-303-0452, Registration No. 20060695 issued by Gauhati University on 10-7-2023.

### AFFIDAVIT

By an affidavit sworn before Executive Magistrate - I, Diphu Judicial Court I have declared that my Son's actual name is Chand Chauhan which is recorded in birth certificate Reg.no. B20251800660001329 but by mistake in AADHAAR Card vide No. 6587 1938 1254 it has been recorded as Chandrika Chauhan. The name of Chand Chauhan and Chandrika Chauhan is the same and single person. Motilal Chauhan/Father Of Chand Chauhan/Vill:- Chauhan Basti P.O.- Pab Sijputa P.S.- Bakalia Dist:- Karbi Anglong (Assam)

### NAME CORRECTION

I Azir Uddin, S/O- Habib Ali, resident of Vill-Pub Jamuna Gaon, P.O.- Ambari, P.S.- Murajhar, Dist.- Hojai, (Assam) That, my actual and correct name is Azir Uddin and my father's actual and correct name is Habib Ali. That, in the land Jama-bandi vide P.P No.- 41 & Dag No.- 312,313,314 under Pub Jamuna KISSAM, wherein our name has been wrongly recorded as Md. Azid Ali, S/O-Hobib instead of Azir Uddin S/O.- Habib Ali. That, Azir Uddin & Md. Azid Ali are the names of one and same person i.e. of my name. That, Habib Ali & Habib Ali are the names of one and same person i.e. of my father's name.

Azir Uddin.

**HDFC BANK** Registered Office: HDFC Bank House, Senapati Bapat Marg, Lower Parel (West), Mumbai - 400 013 and having one of its office as Retail Portfolio Management at HDFC Bank Ltd, 1st Floor, I-Tech Techno Campus, Kanjurmag (East), Mumbai - 400042.

### SALE INTIMATION AND PUBLIC NOTICE FOR SALE OF SECURITIES PLEDGED TO HDFC BANK LTD.

The below mentioned Borrowers of HDFC Bank Ltd. (the "Bank") are hereby notified regarding the sale of securities pledged to the Bank, for availing credit facilities in the nature of Loan/Overdraft Against Securities.

Due to persistent default by the Borrowers in making repayment of the outstanding dues as per agreed loan terms, the below loan accounts are in delinquent status. The Bank has issued multiple notices to these Borrowers, including the final sale notice on the below-mentioned date whereby, Bank had invoked the pledge and provided 7 days' time to the Borrower to repay the entire outstanding dues in the below accounts, failing which, Bank would be at liberty to sell the pledged securities without issuing further notice in this regard. The Borrowers have neglected and failed to make due repayments, therefore, Bank in exercise of its rights under the loan agreement as a pledgee has decided to sell / dispose off the Securities on or after 20<sup>th</sup> February 2026 for recovering the dues owed by the Borrowers to the Bank. The Borrowers are, also, notified that, if at any time, the value of the pledged securities falls further due to volatility in the stock market to create further deficiency in the margin requirement then Bank shall at its discretion sell the pledged security within one (1) calendar day, without any further notice in this regard. The Borrower(s) shall remain liable to the Bank for repayment of any remaining outstanding amount, post adjustment of the proceeds from sale of pledged securities.

Sr. No.	Loan Account Number	Borrower's Name	Outstanding Amount as on 10 <sup>th</sup> Feb 2026	Date of Sale Notice
1	XXXXXXXXXX3793	RHEMBOR G SAIBON	9,96,142.78	07-02-2026
2	XXXXXXXXXX2286	NATHU SAH	5,379.13	11-02-2026
3	XXXXXXXXXX9802	SANTOSH KR TIWARI	40,492.00	07-02-2026

DATE : 13.02.2026 Sd./  
PLACE : MEGHALAYA HDFC BANK LTD.

Party holds grand rally in Bijni, promises development and cross-community support

## UPPL to contest 15 seats in BTR Assembly elections, says Pramod Boro



**HT Correspondent**  
**KOKRAJHAR, Feb 12:** The United People's Party Liberal (UPPL) is fully prepared to contest in 15 constituencies across the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) in the upcoming Assembly elections,

said former CEM of BTR and UPPL president, Pramod Boro. Addressing a rally for a peaceful and harmonious BTR at Bijni town, Boro said the party has prepared strategies for contesting in all LAC segments of the region.

He added that people across communities are coming forward to support UPPL candidates.

He expressed dissatisfaction with the present BPF-led BTC government, stating that it has failed to address public aspirations

and grievances and accused BPF and Hagrama Mohilary of betraying the common masses by not fulfilling promises made during the last BTC elections.

Boro expressed confidence that UPPL would win a majority of seats in the contesting constituencies, emphasising the party's dedication to all-round development for all communities in Bodoland and its adjoining areas.

Thousands of party leaders, supporters and well-wishers participated in the grand rally, which began at the Bijni district committee office, traversed Bijni town main road and flyover and concluded at the Bijni District Sports Association field.

Former CEM Pramod Boro, UPPL general secretaries Raju Kumar Narzary and Madhab Chandra Chetry, MLAs Lawrence Islary and Jiron Basumatary, MCLAs and several senior party leaders attended the rally.

## Dhubri village receives first electricity since independence

**HT Correspondent**

**DHUBRI, Feb 12:** In a milestone for rural development, the border village of Choto Pokalagi under Agomoni tehsil in Dhubri district has received electricity for the first time after India's Independence. The breakthrough comes after decades of darkness for the village's 120+ households, made possible through a unique technical collaboration between Assam and West Bengal.

In a significant revelation, Rakesh Saha, Assistant General Manager (AGM) of APDCL Dhubri, stated that the power for Choto Pokalagi is being sourced from the West Bengal Electricity Board (WBSEDCL). According to Saha, providing electricity from the Assam grid was deemed "technically non-feasible" due to the village's isolated geographical location.

To overcome this, APDCL entered into a strategic agreement to purchase power from the neighbouring state's utility, ensuring reliable supply for the border community. This cross-border purchase arrangement is part of a broader effort to electrify "pockets" along the interstate boundary where local grid extension is infeasible.

The project was executed by the Agomoni Electrical Sub-Division (ESD) under the Revamped Distribution Sector Scheme (RDSS). To manage the load for the village's 120+ households, three transformers have been commissioned — a 63 KVA and 25 KVA transformer serving approximately 85 households in the northern sector and one 63 KVA transformer dedicated to nearly 35 households in the southern sector.



The village, with around 120 households, celebrated the arrival of electricity in their homes. For students and small farmers of Choto Pokalagi, this marks the end of reliance on kerosene and limited solar lamps.

The arrival of electricity is expected to trigger socio-economic growth in the region. Local students, who previously struggled to study after sunset will now have access to reliable lighting. "It has been over 75 years since Independence and seeing a light bulb glow in our homes feels like a new beginning," said a village elder.

The successful electrification of Choto Pokalagi is being viewed as a model for other remote border villages. By prioritising technical feasibility over administrative boundaries, APDCL has ensured that this last-mile village of Dhubri joins the mainstream digital and economic landscape.

## Biswanath College conducts workshop on Molecular Biology

**HT Correspondent**

**BISWANATH CHARIALI, Feb 12:** The Departments of Zoology and Botany, Biswanath College, successfully conducted a one-day workshop-cum-hands-on training programme on "Fundamental Techniques in Molecular Biology" under the DBT STAR College Scheme, Government of Assam, in collaboration with IQAC, Biswanath College on Thursday. Approximately 50 students from Biswanath College and Behali Degree College participated, aimed at strengthening practical competencies in molecular biology.

The technical sessions were led by Dr Nima D Namsa, Assistant Professor at Tezpur University and expert in Molecular Virology, as-

sisted by research scholars Kasturi Saikia and Deepshikha Keot. Dr Chinta Mani Sharma, Principal of Biswanath College, chaired the inaugural session. Dr Indira Sarma coordinated the event, while Dr Naresh Thakur (IQAC Coordinator) addressed the students and Pallabika Dihingia introduced the resource person. The workshop was convened by Dr Sunayana Goswami (Programme Coordinator, DBT STAR College Scheme) and Dr Nilofar Sheikh (HoD, Botany).

It concluded with a valedictory session hosted by Dr Rahul Sarma (HoD, Zoology), where participants submitted feedback forms and were awarded certificates of participation.

## Poi-Fura-Lung convention and Kon Seng silver jubilee celebrations

**HT Correspondent**

**MARGHERITA, Feb 12:** The Tai Ahom community of Margherita Co-District will celebrate the Poi-Fura-Lung-Mung-Sun-Khaam Central full-fledged Convention and Kon Seng Silver Jubilee Jayanti Divas at Ulup Cheng Ren Playground from March 3 to 5.

The Poi-Fura-Lung-Dun-Sun-Khaam Central executive committee will organise a Banfi Puja and erect Lai Khuta at Ulup Chow-Cheng-Ran Playground on Thursday.

Chow Rubul Phukan and Chow Jayanta Dehing, president and general secretary of the central executive committee, said that on March 5, 2000, the local Tai Ahom community made a Kong (big drum) from a nearby tree and established it at Ulup Chow Cheng Ren Playground. Since then, Kong Cheng Divas has been celebrated annually.

During the three-day programme, events will include a cultural rally, ethnic food stalls, book fair, Tai cultural festival, sports competitions, open sessions and felicitation ceremonies.

Assam Education Minister Dr. Ranaj Pegu, Union Minister Pabitra Margherita, Margherita MLA Bhaskar Sharma, along with intellectuals, noted educationists, writers, poets, and eminent thinkers of the Tai Ahom community, will attend the three-day event.

## Man brutally murdered in Lumujem village

**HT Correspondent**

**KHERONI, Feb 12:** man was murdered in a chilling manner on Wednesday evening, by chopping away almost half of his head on the right side in Lumujem village. The murder has sent shockwaves through the Mokoitum area of West Karbi Anglong after the man was found brutally killed in such a manner. The victim has been identified as Lavish Chingthong, a resident of Lumujem village. According to preliminary reports, unidentified miscreants attacked Chingthong, inflicting fatal injuries to his head.

Local villagers reported hearing screams during the night; however, many did not suspect that such a heinous crime was being committed at the time. The gravity of the situation only came to light this morning when Chingthong's lifeless body was discovered, triggering widespread panic and tension in the locality.

Upon receiving information, a team of police officers rushed to the spot to secure the area. An investigation has been launched to identify the perpetrators and determine the motive behind the gruesome killing.

As of now, the attackers remain unidentified and are at large. The body has been sent for a post-mortem examination as part of the ongoing legal proceedings.

## Jadav Payeng calls for hands-on environmental education

'Forest Man of India' honoured with Asom Nakshatra Award

**HT Correspondent**

**TEZPUR, Feb 12:** Renowned environmentalist and globally acclaimed "Forest Man of India" Jadav Payeng on Wednesday said children are the strongest hope for building a sustainable future and called for practical, experience-based environmental education from the earliest stages of life.

Addressing a programme held to mark the 10th anniversary of the Asomiya Suraksha Mancha, Assam, at the Tezpur Sahitya Sabha Bhawan, Payeng stressed that every child should plant a sapling on the day of school admission and nurture it while growing up. "This practice will instil a deep love for trees and for birds and animals that find shelter in them. These children will one day become the protectors who rebuild our natural environment," he said.

On the occasion, the Asomiya Suraksha Mancha conferred its newly instituted Asom Nakshatra Award on Payeng in recognition of his lifelong contribution to environmental conservation. The award included a traditional gamosa, chelang, jaapi, a citation, a memento and a cash prize of ₹ 10,000.

Receiving the honour, Payeng said children across all 195 countries were like his own family. "From the land of the rising sun to where it sets, wherever I go,



I urge children to plant and protect trees and to worship nature as God," he said, adding that environmental values must be taught through practice rather than theory.

Referring to Assam's cultural and spiritual legacy, Payeng said the British decision to preserve Srimanta

## Kokrajhar electricity employees support nationwide strike

**HT Correspondent**

**KOKRAJHAR, Feb 12:** Electricity employees in Kokrajhar extended their support to the nationwide general strike observed on Thursday following a call by central trade unions and various central federations. The strike, which was held across the country, saw participation from employees of different sectors demanding redressal of long-pending issues and policy reforms.

Responding to the nationwide call, the electricity employees of Kokrajhar staged a day-long protest programme, expressing solidarity with their counterparts across India. The strike was carried out peacefully, with employees assembling to voice their grievances and press for immediate action from the concerned authorities.

The Electricity Employees' Union of Kokrajhar highlighted a series of demands during the protest. One of the primary demands was the promotion of Grade III and Grade IV employees, which they said has been pending for a long time. The union members

stated that timely promotion is essential to ensure career progression and maintain morale among the workforce.

Another significant demand was the reduction of the probation period for APDCL (Assam Power Distribution Company Limited) employees to one year, in line with the probation policy followed by APGCL (Assam Power Generation Corporation Limited) and AEGCL



(Assam Electricity Grid Corporation Limited). The employees argued that maintaining uniformity in service conditions across power corporations would promote fairness and equality.

The union also demanded the immediate release of pending dues, which they claimed have caused financial strain to many employees. Additionally, they strongly op-

posed the newly introduced earned leave rules and called for their cancellation, stating that the changes have adversely affected employees' benefits and rights.

Among other key demands were the implementation of proper service rules, regularisation of temporary employees who have been serving for years without permanent status and the scrapping of the NPC policy. The union members emphasised that these issues directly impact job security, service conditions and the overall welfare of electricity workers.

Throughout the day, the employees reiterated that their movement was aimed at safeguarding the rights and interests of the workforce while ensuring better service conditions within the power sector. They urged the government and concerned authorities to address their demands at the earliest to avoid further agitation in the future.

The strike in Kokrajhar concluded peacefully with participants expressing hope for a positive response from the authorities.

## Dimasa community observes 144th death anniversary of Vir Sombudhan Phonglo

**HT Bureau**

**DIPHU, Feb 12:** The hills of Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong resonated with patriotic fervour on Thursday, as the Dimasa community and local leaders gathered to observe the 144th Death Anniversary and Martyrs' Day of the legendary freedom fighter, Vir Sombudhan Phonglo.

The central commemorative event took place at Dilaji Mithiphang village, organised in collaboration with the 'Lairidim' Dimasa Sahitya Sabha. The solemn proceedings began at 8:00 AM, drawing a significant assembly of community leaders, youth and distinguished guests to honour the man who stood as a bulwark against British colonial expansion in the 19th century.

The ceremony commenced with the traditional lighting of lamps and a floral tribute to the portrait of the martyr. Prominent figures in attendance included Horen Sing Bey, former Member of Parliament; Roland Killing, BJP president of Karbi Anglong; Members of Autonomous Council (MACs) of the KAAC and representatives from the Lairidim Dimasa Sahitya Sabha.

"Vir Sombudhan Phonglo's sacrifice is not just a Dimasa legacy, but a proud chapter in the



broader narrative of India's struggle for independence," stated one of the keynote speakers. "His defiance against colonial oppression remains a beacon of justice for us all."

Speakers at the event recounted the historical significance of Phonglo's resistance. Known for his tactical brilliance and leadership, Sombudhan Phonglo famously mobilised the Dimasa people against the British administration, refusing to bow to foreign subjugation.

The gathering highlighted how his martyrdom serves as a timeless reminder of unity, bravery and patriotism. Leaders urged the younger gen-

eration to look toward his life as a roadmap for preserving cultural identity while contributing to the nation's progress.

As the program concluded, the atmosphere was one of quiet resolve. The attendees took a collective pledge to ensure that the heroic deeds of Vir Sombudhan Phonglo are preserved in the annals of history and passed down to future generations.

The observance across the twin districts reinforces the deep-seated respect for regional heroes who laid the groundwork for the freedoms enjoyed in modern-day India.

## Passengers struggle as 24-hour Chakka Bandh

**HT Correspondent**

**DEMOW, Feb 12:** The central trade unions and various federations, along with motor transport workers' organisations of Assam, have called a 24-hour Chakka Bandh in support of the nationwide strike on Thursday, demanding the withdrawal of the labour codes.

Buses did not ply on the roads and other vehicles were scarce, causing serious problems for passengers trying to reach their destinations. Business establishments in the area also faced difficulties as they had to wait for customers throughout the day.

## Deepshikha foundation to receive State Award

**HT Correspondent**

**NAGAON, Feb 12:** Deepshikha, a foundation of Nagaon district administration, has been selected for the coveted state award of the Arunachal Pradesh government for its humanitarian service to cancer patients.

According to sources from the Nagaon district administration, the award will be ceremonially presented to the foundation at the Lok Bhavan on February 20, 2026, during a prestigious function by the governor of Arunachal Pradesh.

## AAJU to honour 4 journalists with prestigious awards

**HT Correspondent**

**TEZPUR, Feb 12:** All Assam Journalists Union (AAJU) will confer distinguished awards on four noted journalists and editors of the state at a special ceremony in Abhayapuri, Bongaigaon on March 9, 2026, in association with the Bongaigaon District Journalists Union.

The awards instituted in memory of eminent journalists will be presented to:

Naren Bora – Prafulla Chandra Baruah Memorial Lifetime Achievement Award.  
Nitonmoni Saikia – Radhika Mohan Bhagawati Memorial Journalism Award.

Adip Kumar Phukan – Saheed Journalist Manik Deuri Memorial Journalism Award.

Imran Hussain – Hari Barman Memorial Journalism Award.

## Obituary

**R**anendra Nath, a noted magician of greater Mayong under the Jagiroad constituency, passed away at Gauhati Medical College and Hospital (GMCH) on Wednesday after battling for life for a week. He was 43.

According to sources, Nath sustained a serious head injury while returning home after performing a magic show at Sonaka near Mayong about a week ago. He had been undergoing treatment at GMCH since the incident but succumbed to his injuries. Known not only as a magician but also as a comedy actor and singer, Nath was a popular cultural figure in the region. Nath played a pivotal role in promoting and preserving Mayong's rich tradition of magic as an integral part of its cultural heritage. His death is being described as an irreparable loss to the cultural society of Mayong. He is survived by his wife, two daughters, two brothers and a host of relatives.

## QUOTE OF THE DAY

Hard work keeps the wrinkles out of the mind and spirit. - Helena Rubinstein

## Viksit Bharat and Net Zero

The most consequential number in NITI Aayog's newly released study on Scenarios Towards Viksit Bharat and Net Zero is not 2047 or 2070. It is \$22.7 trillion. That is the cumulative investment India will need to mobilise to reach Net Zero emissions by 2070 under the preferred scenario—an amount that dwarfs India's current GDP many times over. Even more revealing is the second figure embedded in the report: a projected external financing requirement of at least \$6–6.5 trillion. This is the sum India is expected to attract from global capital markets, multilateral institutions, and climate finance mechanisms over the next four and a half decades. The implications of this dependence are profound and insufficiently interrogated. India's Net Zero pathway, as modelled by NITI Aayog, is not merely a technological or behavioural transition—it is a bet on the availability, affordability, and geopolitical neutrality of global capital. In effect, the country's long-term climate strategy is tethered to a global financial system that has historically undersupplied, over-priced, and politically conditioned capital flows to the developing world. This is the structural vulnerability at the heart of the Net Zero vision—one that optimistic scenario modelling cannot wish away. The study acknowledges the financing gap candidly but treats it largely as a technical problem to be solved through domestic financial reforms and deeper integration with global markets. What it does not fully confront is the asymmetry of power embedded in this reliance.

Climate finance has consistently fallen short of promises. The much-cited \$100 billion annual commitment by developed countries remains unmet, while private capital continues to price climate risk in developing economies at a premium. For India, which already faces higher borrowing costs than advanced economies, the assumption of sustained access to "cheaper external finance" is not a neutral baseline—it is a political and diplomatic challenge. Moreover, large-scale external financing inevitably comes with influence. Whether through trade-linked carbon standards, investment conditionalities, or technology access restrictions, India's development choices could increasingly be shaped by external climate regimes over which it has limited control. In this sense, Net Zero is not just an environmental target; it is a reconfiguration of economic sovereignty. The study invokes the principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities, but the financing architecture outlined risks reproducing the very inequities that principle seeks to correct.

NITI Aayog's scenarios rest on a clear-and-politically convenient—premise: India's coal consumption will continue to rise until 2047. This admission cuts through the rhetoric of green transitions and exposes the real sequencing at play. Growth comes first; decarbonisation follows later. From a developmental perspective, this is understandable. Coal remains central to energy security, industrial competitiveness, and employment in several regions. But from a climate governance standpoint, it represents a deliberate deferral of transition costs—costs that will eventually surface with greater intensity.

## Parliament and the discipline of disagreement

Parliament is not merely a building where laws are passed. It is the living heart of a democracy. It is the one place where the nation is expected to speak to itself honestly, loudly, and sometimes uncomfortably. When Parliament functions well, it reflects the anxieties, hopes, disagreements, and aspirations of society. When it does not, the silence or chaos inside its walls begins to echo outside, weakening democratic trust. At the core of parliamentary democracy lies a simple but powerful idea: Parliament must function as the primary forum to debate contentious issues.

Contentious issues are not accidents in a democracy. They are natural outcomes of a diverse society where people differ in beliefs, identities, economic interests, and visions of the future. These differences cannot be wished away, suppressed, or resolved through force or executive fiat. They must be discussed, argued over, questioned, and refined in a public, structured, and accountable space. That space is Parliament.

Debate is not a luxury in Parliament. It is its essential purpose. Laws that shape millions of lives are not mere technical documents. They carry moral, social, economic, and cultural consequences. When such laws are introduced without thorough debate, they may be legally valid but democratically hollow. A law passed without debate might satisfy the numbers required for a majority, but it fails to satisfy the deeper requirement of democratic legitimacy.

Parliamentary debate allows competing viewpoints to confront each other openly. It forces those in power to justify their decisions, explain their reasoning, and respond to criticism. This process improves the quality of legislation. No government, however experienced or well intentioned, has a monopoly on wisdom. Opposition voices, subject experts among legislators, and representatives from different regions bring perspectives that can expose flaws, unintended consequences, or overlooked groups. Debate acts as a collective intelligence mechanism, refining ideas through disagreement.

Contentious issues especially demand parliamentary discussion because they often touch deep social

nerves. Issues related to identity, religion, language, land, labour rights, economic reforms, national security, or constitutional values cannot be treated as routine administrative matters. They generate fear, hope, anger, and uncertainty among citizens. When such issues are debated in Parliament, people see their concerns reflected and articulated by their representatives. Even if they disagree with the final outcome, the fact that their viewpoint was heard offers a sense of inclusion.

The absence of debate creates a dangerous vacuum. When Parliament does not discuss contentious issues, the debate does not disappear. It merely shifts to the streets, social media, television studios, and sometimes to the courts. These spaces lack the discipline, responsibility, and accountability that Parliament is supposed to provide. Public discourse becomes polarised, emotional, and often misinformed. Instead of reasoned argument, slogans take over. Instead of persuasion, there is intimidation. Parliament's failure to debate thus weakens social cohesion.

Parliamentary norms exist precisely to ensure that debate remains meaningful rather than destructive. These norms are not written merely in rulebooks; they are sustained by practice, restraint, and mutual respect. Listening to opposing views, allowing interruptions only within limits, respecting the authority of the Speaker or Chair, and adhering to time allocations are not bureaucratic formalities. They are the guardrails that allow disagreement without disorder.

One of the most damaging trends in modern parliamentary practice is the shrinking space for discussion. Bills are often passed with minimal debate, sometimes amid chaos, disruptions, or even walkouts. While protests inside Parliament may sometimes draw attention to ignored issues, persistent disruption ultimately undermines the institution itself. A Parliament that cannot hear itself think cannot serve the people effectively.

Government benches often justify limited debate by citing urgency, national interest, or electoral mandates. While urgency can sometimes be



genuine, it cannot become a permanent excuse. Electoral victory grants the right to govern, not the right to silence. Majority rule in a democracy is always balanced by minority rights. Parliament is where this balance is meant to be maintained. Opposition parties, on the other hand, carry an equal responsibility. Their role is not simply to oppose for the sake of opposition, nor to paralyse Parliament through constant disruption. Their duty is to scrutinise legislation, question executive action, propose alternatives, and represent dissenting voices constructively. When opposition reduces itself to noise rather than argument, it weakens its own credibility and deprives citizens of meaningful representation.

The quality of parliamentary debate also depends on preparation and seriousness. Debates should not be theatrical performances designed solely for media soundbites. They should reflect engagement with facts, data, historical context, and constitutional principles. Legislators owe it to the public to study bills, consult stakeholders, and articulate reasoned positions. Passion has its place, but passion without substance erodes trust.

Committees play a crucial role in deepening debate on contentious issues. Parliamentary committees allow for detailed examination away from the glare of the main chamber. They provide space for expert testimony, cross party discussion, and nuanced consideration. Referring contentious bills to committees is not a sign of weakness or delay. It is a sign of democratic maturity. When

committee recommendations are ignored or bypassed, Parliament loses an important layer of deliberation.

Another vital aspect of parliamentary debate is transparency. Debates are recorded, televised, and archived so that citizens can judge the performance of their representatives. This public scrutiny encourages accountability. When debates are rushed, curtailed, or conducted amid disorder, citizens are deprived of the opportunity to understand how decisions are made. Democracy then becomes a distant spectacle rather than a participatory process.

Parliamentary debate also serves an educational function. It helps citizens understand complex issues by presenting multiple viewpoints. A well conducted debate can clarify trade offs, explain policy choices, and dispel misinformation. In a time when misinformation spreads rapidly, Parliament can act as a stabilising force by anchoring public discussion in reasoned argument.

Respect for parliamentary norms is closely linked to respect for institutions. When elected representatives disregard norms, shout down opponents, or treat Parliament as an inconvenience, they signal to society that rules do not matter. This attitude gradually seeps into other institutions and everyday life. Democratic erosion often begins not with dramatic events but with the slow normalisation of disregard.

Contentious issues test the strength of a democracy. They reveal whether a system can handle disagreement without breaking. Parliament is the arena designed for this test. It allows conflicts to be expressed symbolically through words rather than physically through vio-

lence. In this sense, debate is a form of peaceful conflict resolution. When Parliament fails in this role, tensions may seek more dangerous outlets. History offers many examples of how robust parliamentary debate has helped societies navigate crises. Equally, history shows how the sidelining of legislatures has often preceded authoritarian tendencies. When executive power expands at the cost of parliamentary scrutiny, democracy becomes procedural rather than substantive. Elections continue, but meaningful participation declines.

Citizens too have a role in demanding better parliamentary functioning. Voters often reward performative aggression rather than thoughtful debate. Media coverage tends to amplify disruptions over substance. This creates perverse incentives for legislators. A mature democracy requires citizens to value seriousness over spectacle and to hold their representatives accountable for their conduct in Parliament.

Rebuilding respect for parliamentary debate is not easy, but it is necessary. It requires political will from the government, responsibility from the opposition, firmness from the presiding officers, and awareness among citizens. Small steps such as ensuring adequate time for discussion, strengthening committee systems, enforcing rules consistently, and encouraging cross party dialogue can gradually restore faith.

Parliament must not be reduced to a mere law passing factory or a battleground for political one-upmanship. It is a moral space where the nation negotiates its differences. Contentious issues are not obstacles to governance; they are opportunities for democratic engagement. Avoiding them weakens democracy, while confronting them through debate strengthens it.

The measure of a democracy is not how efficiently it silences disagreement, but how confidently it engages with it. Parliament stands as the symbol and substance of that engagement. When it functions as a genuine forum for debating contentious issues, it affirms the idea that democracy is not about uniformity, but about managing diversity through dialogue. That is a responsibility Parliament cannot afford to abandon.

## Daughters of Bharat : A deprived section of the society-II

By: Er Prabhat Kishore

## Special focus on backward states

In the Indian context, just providing facilities is not enough to educate everyone. There is a need to focus on backward states and remove gender and regional disparities, increase enrolment & retention and providing quality based learning.

The work done by girls is usually not visible as it is confined to the home. In rural areas, girls take care of their brothers and sisters, cook food, clean, fetch fuel and wood and help in sowing, ploughing, harvesting etc. in the fields. Even in urban areas, girls do household chores as well as earning money outside the home. Although there is no effective method available for measuring or financially evaluating household work; according to a 1981 estimate, a rural girl would have done work worth more than Rs 39,600 by the time she becomes an adult.

## The curse of child marriage

Child marriage is a curse for both boys and girls. But for girls the consequences are graver since, for them, marriage means the end of education, taking over responsibilities inside and outside the home, and restrictions on movement in and outside the home. Early marriage prolongs the fertility of girls. Due to early and repeated pregnancies, they become physically weak. As a result, child marriage reduces the productivity of adult women.

## Measures for elimination

The Child Marriage Restraint Act, 1929 (replaced by the Child Marriage Prohibition Act 2006) does not seem to be implemented anywhere. Two efforts are required to eradicate child marriage. First, to awaken the community and secondly, to overcome poverty, the root cause of child marriage. On an average, 1,00,00,000 marriages take place every year in Bharat, out of which 30 percent of girls are of the age of 15-19 years. A clear impact of education is seen on the age of marriage. The average age difference between a graduate and an illiterate girl at the time of marriage is four and a half years. Sometimes they are married before they even reach puberty. 90

percent of them become mothers within the first one or two years.

According to the data collected by N.N.M.B. (1980) during the year 1975-78, girls in the age group of 13-18 years get less iron than the recommended amount as compared to boys. Young girls become anaemic as a result of menopause due to deficiency of iron in the diet. Low birth weight and basic delivery related complications are more common among teenage mothers.

Girls/women who give birth to their first child at an early age are at risk of birth complications. After the first menstruation around the age of 14, they have to endure the pain of intercourse. Their bodies and reproductive systems are immature. Apart from the requirements of tissue maintenance and foetal development, they also have to meet the nutritional demands for their own growth.

## Adverse effects

Due to their gender, girls are more susceptible to the adverse effects of adverse circumstances than boys. Children living in difficult circumstances can be classified into many categories such as - working children, street children, neglected and exploited children, children associated with institutions, children affected by the consequences of war, children of prostitutes, children involved in sexual relations in childhood, children who are victims of physical abuse. Poor families in areas adjacent to big cities, deprived families living in rural areas, prostitutes, gamblers, alcoholics, prisoners are at the highest risk of sexual abuse.

## Incidents of rape of minor girls

Incidents of rape of minor children are increasing. 25 percent of rape cases are of minor girls. At some places, sexual abuse is also done in the name of religion, which is popular as "Devdasi" in Bharat. According to Oxfam India's 2011-12 report, 29 percent women in the labour sector, 23 percent in domestic maid service and 16 percent in small scale industrial units have complained of sexual exploitation.

Political will and actions are needed to ensure equal opportunities and status for girls in the

decade of 2030. This is only possible with the joint efforts of the government, international organisations and private institutions. Political, legal and developmental policies should be made to eliminate gender discrimination and bias in childhood.

## The main points suggested by experts regarding girls are as follows:-

(1.) Religious, legal, social, economic and anthropological evidence should be collected and such information should be used in policy making and programme based interventions to improve the situation.

(2.) Concrete steps should be taken by setting targets and preparing a time table related to the basic health, nutrition, education and social status of girls.

(3.) A time-bound process should be set at the community and national levels to ensure survival and development programmes.

(4.) The negative image of girls prevalent through media, education, religion and culture must be corrected through legal and social mechanism.

(5.) To enhance self-confidence and self-reliance in girls, human development activities should be organised at various levels and their active participation should be encouraged.

(6.) Equal rights for girls should be supported in every national and international gathering.

The daughters of Bharat are victims of gender and caste-based malice. They are forced to live a suffocating life from prenatal foeticide till the last breath of their life and are living out the famous lines of the national poet Dinkar, "Nari Jeevan Hai Teri Yahi Kahani, Aanchal Mein Hai Doodh Aur Aankhon Mein Paani". The fact cannot be denied that women are more responsible than men for the pitiable condition of girls. Education is the only spark that can ignite their extinguished lives and remove the darkness that has been going on for generations. Women's awakening and women empowerment is the divine weapon that will be the new ray of dawn for the neglected daughters of Bharatvarsha in which the whole nation will shine. (The author is an engineer and academician)

## India's preconditions for confident free trade

By: Dipak Kurmi

When the proposed India-United States interim trade agreement was grandly described as the "father of all free trade deals," the phrase carried a sense of historic inevitability, as though a new economic era were about to be born. From a Western vantage point, such rhetoric appears natural. Free trade agreements in advanced economies are typically engines of expansion, instruments that unlock markets, enhance competitiveness and consolidate geopolitical partnerships. Yet from an Indian perspective, the celebratory tone provokes an uneasy question: what kind of economic offspring is this father expected to produce? For India, trade agreements have often inspired caution rather than confidence, not because of inherent hostility to liberalisation, but because of the structural imbalance that continues to define the Indian economy.

At the centre of this imbalance lies agriculture. Nearly 45 percent of India's workforce remains dependent on farming, even though the sector contributes only around 16 percent of gross domestic product. No major economy in the contemporary world sustains such a disproportion. In the United States, agriculture employs barely 1.2 percent of the workforce; in the European Union, the figure hovers around 1.6 percent. Even countries known for vocally defending their farmers, such as France, Germany and Japan, do so with relatively small, technologically sophisticated agricultural populations. Their farms are productive, mechanised and integrated into global supply chains. India's farms, by contrast, are crowded, fragmented and increasingly fragile. Millions of cultivators operate on tiny plots that struggle to generate sustainable incomes, turning agriculture into a livelihood of last resort rather than an arena of opportunity.

This structural reality explains why every trade negotiation with the United States or Europe eventually gravitates toward a familiar flashpoint: agriculture. Soyabean oil, dairy products, fruits, animal feed, genetically modified crops and other commodities become symbols of vulnerability. Farmers fear displacement, commerce ministers promise protection, and public discourse frames food security as though it were perpetually under siege. What may appear as routine tariff adjustments in Washington or Brussels acquires existential dimensions in rural India. When nearly half the population depends directly or indirectly on farming, even modest import competition can disrupt millions of livelihoods. The anxiety is not irrational; it is rooted in the demographic weight that agriculture continues to carry.

Yet the deeper truth, seldom articulated with clarity, is that India's fundamental challenge is not trade liberalisation itself but the persistence of surplus labour in agriculture. Modern technology has transformed farming across the globe.

Precision agriculture, mechanisation, artificial intelligence, improved seed varieties and data-driven irrigation systems have radically enhanced productivity. In economic terms, a very small percentage of people can

now feed entire nations. Globally, food security is no longer determined by manpower but by efficiency, logistics and technological capability. India, too, requires no more than 1 percent of its population in agriculture to ensure basic food security, perhaps 5 percent if diversity and transitional complexities are considered. Anything beyond that reflects disguised unemployment rather than genuine necessity.

The consequences of this imbalance are visible in persistent rural distress. Agricultural growth struggles to exceed 4 to 4.5 percent even when the broader economy expands above 7 percent. This divergence is structural, not cyclical. Climate uncertainty intensifies risks, input costs rise, landholdings continue to shrink, and price volatility erodes predictability. Generational stagnation follows.

Each year, millions of young Indians enter the labour market, yet the absorptive capacity of industry and services remains insufficient to accommodate them at scale. Encouraging, directly or indirectly, the continued drift of youth into agriculture is an economic injustice. It locks human potential into low-productivity activity and perpetuates income inequality between rural and urban sectors.

India's global reputation today rests not on wheat or rice but on software engineers, doctors, nurses, technicians, managers and service professionals. Services contribute more than half of GDP and dominate export earnings, while manufacturing retains vast potential to absorb semi-skilled labour if supported by infrastructure, investment and regulatory clarity. The country's true natural resource is not land but human capital. Unlike land, which is finite and increasingly fragmented, human capital multiplies when invested in. Skill development, vocational training, digital literacy and industry-linked education must therefore be treated as core national infrastructure. In a globalised economy, skill has replaced land as the primary determinant of prosperity, and productivity has become the new harvest.

Manpower mobility, often viewed ambivalently in public discourse, is in fact a strategic advantage. Remittances constitute a vital component of India's foreign exchange earnings, reflecting the global demand for Indian talent. Nurses in Europe, engineers in Silicon Valley, technicians in West Asia and entrepreneurs in Southeast Asia collectively reinforce India's economic resilience. Trade agreements, in this context, should not be perceived solely through the prism of agricultural imports but also as avenues for services mobility, technology transfer and manufacturing integration. However, India enters these agreements burdened by the weight of its unfinished structural transition. That is why every tariff reduction appears perilous and every import seems threatening.

Protectionism may offer psychological comfort, but it is not a durable strategy. No nation has achieved sustained prosperity by indefinitely shielding low-productivity sectors. Tariffs can buy time, but they cannot buy transformation. Without structural

change, protection merely postpones adjustment and magnifies its eventual cost. The experience of East Asian economies demonstrates that rapid industrialisation and skill enhancement can absorb labour from agriculture while raising overall productivity. India's demographic dividend, often celebrated, risks becoming a demographic liability if structural reform does not accelerate.

Moving people out of agriculture does not imply abandoning farming; rather, it is the only viable method of rescuing it. Fewer farmers mean larger operational holdings, greater mechanisation, better adoption of technology and more stable incomes. Agriculture must evolve into a high-value, high-technology sector integrated with agro-processing, logistics and export networks, rather than functioning as a social safety net for surplus labour. India's own history offers instructive precedents.

Operation Flood transformed the nation into the world's largest milk producer not by expanding the number of producers indiscriminately but by improving efficiency, supply chains and cooperative structures. The Green Revolution succeeded through scientific innovation and institutional support, not through numerical expansion of cultivators. The next transformation must similarly reduce manpower while increasing value addition.

Free trade agreements, including the much-publicised India-US interim arrangement, are ultimately instruments of integration within a global economic order where productivity and competitiveness determine outcomes. For economies in which agriculture is marginal and technologically advanced, such agreements amplify growth. For India, they expose the fault lines of delayed structural evolution. As long as half the population depends on farming for livelihood, trade liberalisation will evoke apprehension. A confident India would negotiate from a position where most of its citizens are productively engaged in services and industry, while a small, skilled agricultural workforce ensures food security efficiently and profitably.

The plough sustained India for centuries, shaping its civilisation and cultural rhythms. Yet the twenty-first century will be defined less by acreage and more by algorithms, less by monsoon cycles and more by supply chains and digital platforms. The essential question confronting India is not whether to sign the so-called father of all trade deals, but whether it is prepared to nurture a new economic generation.

Nations do not grow wealthy by preserving every inherited livelihood indefinitely; they prosper by enabling their citizens to move toward more productive possibilities. India's challenge, therefore, is to complete the transition it began decades ago, transforming its vast human potential into engines of innovation and enterprise. Only then will trade agreements cease to inspire fear and instead become instruments of confident engagement with the world. (The writer can be reached at [dipakkurmipltd@gmail.com](mailto:dipakkurmipltd@gmail.com))

# Regionalism and Nationalism

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

For people anywhere in the world, there exists a natural balance between their attachment to their motherland and their loyalty to the nation, but in the case of Assam this equation is extremely complex and often painful. India is a federal structure where it is said that there is "unity in diversity," yet in reality the centralized system of governance has frequently treated this diversity as a problem. In a state like Assam—whose history, geography, and demographic composition differ significantly from the Indian mainland—the unilateral application of nationalism has always created a mental conflict. At present, we are witnessing how an aggressive form of nationalism is adopting subtle strategies to swallow regional identity. These strategies are so well-planned that ordinary people, caught up in the dazzle of development and the emotions of religious polarization, are gradually losing their core regional identity.

Regionalism does not merely mean opposing Delhi; its true meaning lies in asserting one's rights over one's own land, water, language, and culture. Yet whenever these rights are spoken of, an attempt is made to portray them as contrary to "national interest." Today, this very conflict stands as the greatest challenge before Assam. It is true that nationalism gives us the pride of being citizens of a vast country, but if that pride comes at the cost of handing over the keys to our own home to others, then it is time to reconsider the very concept of such nationalism. The people of Assam wish to remain Indian while simultaneously preserving their indigenous identity, but the prevailing political climate is trying to make this coexistence impossible.

Looking from a historical perspective, regionalism in Assam was born out of a deep sense of deprivation and neglect—a feeling that began during British rule and has continued into independent India. No one can deny Assam's contribution to India's freedom struggle, yet after independence the economic and political policies of the central government have often made it feel as though Assam has been

treated like a colony. Despite being rich in natural resources such as oil, tea, coal, and timber, Assam remains economically backward. This question has planted the seeds of regionalist thinking in the Assamese mind.

However, the form of regionalism has changed in the present political landscape. The regional forces that once shook the streets of Assam are now weak and directionless. The main reason is the failure to make regionalism relevant to contemporary times and its excessive dependence on mere emotion. Today's younger generation does not wish to live merely on stories of past glory or past injustice; they want development, employment, and a modern way of life. It is here that national parties have played a clever game. They have not rejected regional sentiment; instead, they have hijacked and appropriated it. By invoking gamucha, jaapi, Bihu, and the names of the great saints, they present themselves as well-wishers of Assam, yet their policies and decisions continue to be dictated from Delhi. In this web of "strategic regionalism," the people of Assam have become so entangled that they can no longer distinguish between genuine regional interest and political drama. As a result, Assam's fundamental problems—permanent solution to floods, implementation of Clause 6, revival of industries like Ashok Paper Mill—remain merely election promises.

In the name of nationalism, a centralized form of governance is being imposed in which the decision-making power of the states is steadily diminishing.

The most important and sensitive issue in Assam today is that of demography and illegal immigration, where regionalism and the prevailing form of nationalism are in direct conflict. The existential crisis of Assam's indigenous people is not an imaginary fear; it is a statistical reality. Continuous unchecked infiltration from neighboring countries has altered Assam's demographic composition, and in many places the indigenous population is on the verge of becoming a minority in their own land. The long-standing Assam Movement and the subsequent Assam Accord had kindled hope among the indigenous people.

But recently, by implementing the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), the central government has poured cold water on that hope.

Here the conflict is clear: nationalism wishes to grant citizenship to refugees on the basis of religion, whereas regionalism demands the deportation of all foreigners irrespective of religion. For Assam, whether the infiltrator is Hindu or Muslim is not the main issue; the main issue is that he is an outsider who will share our limited land and resources and pose a threat to our language and culture. Policymakers sitting in Delhi view Assam's problems through the lens of northern or western India, which is fundamentally wrong. They believe that settling Bengali-speaking Hindus in Assam will serve national interest, but they forget that this will push the Assamese language and identity toward extinction.

Whether the base year should be 1951 or 1971 remains a matter of debate, while the real problem continues unresolved. Today, the relevance of regionalism is most evident here—only it can boldly declare that Assam is not India's dumping ground. Unfortunately, for political gain, even our own leaders sometimes maintain silence or adopt double standards on this issue. Demands for Inner Line Permit or Sixth Schedule protection should have grown stronger for safeguarding demography, but under the wave of aggressive nationalism these demands have now become muted.

From an economic perspective, the foundation of Assam's regionalism lies in its historical economic deprivation, and the current notion of "development" is merely keeping that deprivation alive in a new form. Assam is a state extraordinarily rich in natural resources—oil, forests, water, tea—yet per capita income remains lower than in many other Indian states. The primary reason is the lack of full control over our own resources. Nationalist economics claims that the country's resources belong to everyone, yet we have to fight with the Centre even for the royalty on our oil.

At present, the central government's model of development through privatization and large corporate groups can prove fatal

for Assam's indigenous economy. From the Guwahati airport to oil fields, the transfer to private hands means profits flow into the pockets of a few capitalists while the Assam government receives only a small amount of revenue or tax. This process can be called "corporate colonialism." On the other hand, large dam projects may fulfill national electricity needs, but they carry the undeniable risk of pushing vast areas of Lower Assam into the horrors of flood and erosion. Here it is clearly visible that the idea of "national development" is sacrificing "regional security."

Regionalism demands that industries based on Assam's resources should be established within Assam itself so that our unemployed youth can find employment. Yet we see that Assam's raw materials are taken outside and the finished products are sold back in Assam's markets. Breaking this cycle should be the core economic objective of regionalism. In agriculture and handicrafts too, our local produce cannot compete with outside goods. To build a self-reliant Assam, we cannot depend solely on central grants; we must create our own economic policies and markets. If nationalism does not grant us economic freedom, then that nationalism becomes merely an instrument of exploitation for us.

Under the dual pressure of globalization and aggressive centralized nationalism, the future of the Assamese language has now reached a critical juncture. Language is not merely a medium of communication; it is the soul and foundation of a people's identity. Slogans such as "one nation, one language" and the aggressive spread of Hindi are posing a threat to Assamese and other indigenous languages. While a link language is needed for national integration, it should not come at the cost of swallowing the mother tongue. The new education policy speaks of giving importance to the mother tongue, yet in reality parents and students are increasingly attracted to English-medium education and show an irrational preference for Hindi. As a result, even in household conversations the correct use of our own language is declining.

One major failure of regionalism has been that it has kept lan-



guage alive merely as an emotional issue without establishing it as a language of knowledge, science, technology, and commerce. In today's digital age, if a language cannot find its place on the internet or mobile platforms, it gradually becomes irrelevant. Nationalist forces often speak of cultural integration, which in practice means introducing the same festivals, same food, and same lifestyle across the entire country. Under its influence, our Bihu, traditional attire, and food habits are being affected by external cultures. Hindi songs on Bihu stages or the adoption of northern Indian customs during Durga Puja instead of Assamese traditions are signs of cultural decay. Genuine regionalism must not only protest against this aggression but must also build a creative resistance. Only by establishing Assamese literature, cinema, and music on the world stage can our culture survive. The responsibility of protecting language and culture does not belong solely to Sahitya Sabha or student organizations; it is the personal and social duty of every Assamese. If we ourselves do not respect our language, neither Delhi nor anyone else will respect us.

Analyzing the political system and voter psychology, it becomes clear that the idea of regionalism in Assam is now at a complex turning point. A large section of the public has begun to place hope for the resolution of regional problems on national parties—an historically rare phenomenon. The reason lies in the credibility crisis of regional party leadership and their frequent changes of political alliances. When people see

regional leaders joining hands with national parties for personal gain, their faith in regionalism erodes. Meanwhile, national parties, with their powerful propaganda machinery and financial resources, have succeeded in convincing people that only a "double-engine" government can bring development. This promise of development now influences people more than regional sentiment.

Yet we must think deeply: does this development truly secure our fundamental rights, or are we selling our identity in the name of development? In the current political environment, the voice of opposition has become weak and any dissenting voice is increasingly labeled "anti-national" or "anti-development." For a healthy democracy and for Assam's interest, a strong regional opposition force is urgently needed—one that can raise its voice against the central government's wrong policies both in the Assembly and in Parliament. When Assam's MPs go to Delhi and vote against Assam's interest or remain silent out of party loyalty, regionalism dies. We need representatives who believe first in Assam and only then in the party.

Politics is a game of power, but if the nation itself loses in that game, such power has no meaning. Therefore, for the revival of regionalism, it must free itself from old leaders and old methods and organize under new, transparent, and visionary leadership.

In conclusion, Assam's future depends on establishing a healthy and respectful balance between regionalism and nationalism. We must understand that

being Indian and being Assamese are not contradictory but complementary. However, this relationship must be one of equal dignity—not one of master and servant. The Centre must recognize the rights of Assam's people over Assam's natural resources, language, and culture. At the same time, the people of Assam must not remain merely emotional; through hard work, education, and a culture of productivity they must raise themselves to a level where no one can neglect them.

Merely chanting "Land of Lachit" is not enough; we must show the strategy, courage, and patriotism of Lachit—where patriotism means protecting our land and our people. The new definition of regionalism must encompass not only protest but also progress and self-reliance. If we cannot strengthen our agriculture, industry, and education system, no amount of movements will save us. Nationalism gives us the market and security of a large country; we must learn to use it for our own benefit.

Our goal should be a modern, developed, and secure Assam that shines with its own dignity on India's map. This requires political will, intellectual honesty, and public awareness. In the days to come, this struggle must be fought not only on the streets but on the ground of our thinking, our actions, and our policy-making. For the Assamese nation to survive, it must hold firmly to its roots while reaching out to the sky of the world—this is the true regionalism of the twenty-first century. (The author is the recipient of the 'Yuba Lekhak Sanman - 2025' from the Government of Assam)

## Strategic bargaining: Rethinking India's bid to isolate Pakistan in the region

By: Aditya Gowdara Shivamurthy

In December 2025, Pakistan's Foreign Minister, Ishaq Dar, signalled the possibility of creating a new regional bloc in South Asia in collaboration with China. The statement, suggesting India's exclusion, reflects Pakistan's longstanding practice of creating strategic and security challenges for India vis-à-vis other South Asian neighbours. The strategy has gained further momentum since the latest India-Pakistan escalations of May 2025, thereby challenging Delhi's policy of isolating Pakistan in the region and compelling it to reconsider its approach.

**Pakistan's Persistent Challenge to Indian Primacy**

Since independence, India has naturally extended its diplomatic and strategic influence across the region, while Pakistan has challenged the same. Even today, despite growing power asymmetries that favour India, Pakistan continues to challenge India's regional primacy. It continues to be a nuisance to India's strategic presence and security calculations by engaging with other regional countries, keeping India preoccupied with regional contingencies and diverting attention from its broader global ambitions.

Pakistan established diplomatic ties with Sri Lanka in 1948 and with Nepal in 1960. Islamabad's engagement with both Colombo and Kathmandu intensified in the 1950s. It sustained these ties by portraying India as a mutual threat and exploiting India's bilateral differences.

In 1965, Pakistan flirted with the idea of using East Pakistan and cooperating with China and Nepal to cut India off from the Siliguri corridor. It had also expressed disappointment with India's military presence in Sri Lanka and the Maldives in the late 1980s. This strategic approach predates Pakistan's reliance on China as its principal partner in containing India, particularly following the 1962 India-China war.

On their part, South Asian nations nurtured their own distinct ties with Pakistan, reflecting their close geographic, linguistic, cultural, and historical ties. They also saw Pakistan's ties with China and the West as a potential opportunity to enhance trade, development, and defence partnerships. This helped them push back against India, enhance their agency and autonomy. It also helped the elites advance their domestic politics by maintaining a nationalist image. There was also an expectation that engagement with Pakistan—and, by extension, improved India-Pakistan relations—could promote broader regional integration. This approach largely underpinned their neutral stance between India and Pakistan during the four Indo-Pak wars.

**India's Isolation Strategy in Practice**

As Pakistan continued supporting terror at-

tacks against India, New Delhi directed its policy to isolate Islamabad in 2016. On their part, South Asian countries that had condemned terrorism and terror attacks broadly differed on isolating Pakistan. Their stance was largely shaped by their domestic politics and ties with India. Both Bangladesh and Afghanistan, having faced terrorism and Pakistan's interference, aligned with India alongside Bhutan. In contrast, Nepal and Sri Lanka maintained their traditional neutrality. The Maldives remained neutral, despite changes in its bilateral ties with India under successive governments.

Following the 2016 Uri attack, Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Afghanistan were quick to back out of the 19th South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) summit alongside India. With four of eight members refusing to attend the summit, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives also followed suit, though they emphasised the need to reconvene the summit at a more convenient time. A similar pattern emerged in 2019 after the Pulwama attacks and the subsequent Balakot airstrikes: Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Afghanistan supported India, while Nepal, Sri Lanka, and later the Maldives called for restraint and de-escalation.

In other words, New Delhi's bid to isolate Pakistan was dependent on mustering support from the majority—rather than all—South Asian countries. During this time, Islamabad too never shied away from exploiting India's ties with its neighbours, despite its economic mismanagement, political instability, and increasing terror attacks. For instance, even after the Uri attacks, the former Maldivian President Abdulla Yameen and Pakistani officials discussed the prospects of joint patrolling in the Indian Ocean region (IOR). In 2021, Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan visited Sri Lanka to boost ties and also tried to repair relations with Bangladesh. Islamabad was also involved in exploiting prevalent anti-India sentiments and campaigns in the region. This is further evident in the Maldives' India Out campaign and recent social media campaigns in Bangladesh.

**Operation Sindoor, and Pakistan's Outreach**

The regime changes in Afghanistan in 2021, the Maldives in 2023, and Bangladesh in 2024 altered the regional balance that had previously favoured India. This also laid the ground for Pakistan to strengthen ties in the region. During recent crises, such as the aftermath of the Pahalgam attacks and India's Operation Sindoor, none of India's neighbours openly sided with New Delhi, even while condemning the terror attacks. Since 2025, Pakistan has intensified its regional outreach, holding trilateral meetings with Bangladesh and Afghanistan in collaboration with China, and signalling interest in expand-

ing the bloc to other regional countries while excluding India. Pakistan also extended humanitarian assistance to Sri Lanka following Cyclone Ditwah, which was followed by a ministerial visit. Security and defence cooperation has expanded with Bangladesh and Nepal, and the Maldives hosted high-level military delegations. Reports suggest that the Maldives and Bangladesh are also negotiating with Pakistan to acquire its fighter jets for their arsenals.

This recent outreach could be for multiple reasons: first, following Operation Sindoor, there is a renewed interest in diluting India's presence and influence in the region. Beijing's influence, regime change in Bangladesh, and Asim Munir's concentration of power in Pakistan have fuelled this momentum. Second, increasing normalisation between India and Afghanistan has nudged Pakistan to adopt a tougher stance against the Taliban and create new pressure points against India. Third, Pakistan's ability to regain relevance in the US's foreign policy has boosted its confidence. Finally, it's information warfare and narrative of pushing back against a bigger neighbour like India, no matter how exaggerated, has generated sympathy and support from certain countries and their policymakers.

**Recalibrating India's Strategy towards Pakistan**

Islamabad's increased outreach calls for an introspection of India's policy to isolate Pakistan. The first lesson for India is that its isolation of Pakistan in the region was never institutionalised. The strategy was largely dependent on the regime in power and on securing support from the majority of states in the region. The scope of this isolation was also largely restricted to regional organisations such as SAARC, and finding alternatives such as the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) and Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal Subregional Cooperation (BBIN). While this policy, over the years, diluted Pakistan's role as a regional player, it did not restrict Pakistan's bilateral engagements.

Second, Delhi must ensure that its goodwill aligns with its strategic interests. To achieve this, it will need to leverage its assistance without fearing any impact on its reputation. India's development support and ability to provide economic access to its neighbours far surpass Pakistan's. It continues to assist through digital, economic, energy, transport, and trade connectivity initiatives, offering credit lines, grants, and loans to support projects and respond to economic, emergency, and humanitarian needs. Yet, despite these efforts, neighbouring countries have continued to diversify their partnerships away from India. (Courtesy: ORF)

## Equality in education or a new inequality? Judicial pause on UGC regulations

By: Lalit Garg

The new regulations introduced by the Narendra Modi government through the University Grants Commission (UGC), ostensibly in the name of equality in higher education, have once again triggered intense chum in India's educational and social landscape. A policy presented as an instrument of "equity," "equal opportunity," and "inclusive education" quickly became, upon implementation, a source of sharp opposition from a particular section, widespread discontent, and growing social tension. The situation deteriorated to such an extent that the Supreme Court was compelled to intervene and impose an interim stay on these regulations. This judicial pause is not merely a question mark on the government's policy-making process; it also underscores how excessive or imbalanced experimentation in a sensitive domain like education can steer the nation in a troubling direction.

The Supreme Court's intervention should not be viewed as a direct endorsement or rejection of the policy. Rather, it serves as a constitutional caution that regulations enacted in the name of equality—if vague, prone to misuse, and disruptive to social harmony—cannot remain beyond judicial scrutiny. The Court has prima facie observed that the new UGC regulations suffer from a lack of clarity, and it is this very ambiguity that has rendered them controversial. The stay offers the government an opportunity for introspection—an opportunity that should be treated as a chance for correction rather than a political confrontation.

The critical question is this: a government that repeatedly invokes the mantra of "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas" (collective effort, inclusive development, and shared trust) why would it introduce regulations in educational institutions—centers of thought and idea formation—that risk deepening lines of caste identity and class division? India's social history bears testimony to the fact that policies framed around caste, regardless of their welfare-oriented intentions, have often fractured

society from within. Reservation, a constitutional provision introduced to ensure social justice, has indeed empowered many, but its prolonged application has also inflicted wounds whose healing remains incomplete. In such a context, any initiative that further accentuates caste-based distinctions in education naturally provokes apprehension. Educational institutions are not factories that merely distribute degrees; they are laboratories that shape the future direction of society. The students nurtured within these campuses are not just future employees, but future citizens. If these spaces become arenas of mistrust, class conflict, and mutual suspicion, the impact extends far beyond education—it erodes the very fabric of society. The resistance to the new UGC regulations is a manifestation of this deeper anxiety.

It is equally important to reflect on whether policymakers have adequately grasped the distinction between equality and equity. Equality implies identical treatment for all, whereas equity demands balanced opportunities based on differing circumstances. If, in the name of equity, provisions are introduced that generate a new form of inequality, the policy inevitably strays from its intended purpose. The Supreme Court's observations point precisely to this concern: even if the intent behind the regulations was positive, their structure and language have bred confusion and controversy.

Unfortunately, the issue was soon overshadowed by political overtones. Both supporters and critics began viewing it through the prism of vested interests and vote-bank politics, despite the fact that the core issue was education reform and social balance. Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself has, on numerous occasions, emphasized that education should be insulated from politics and that policies must be crafted with long-term national interest in mind. It is therefore natural to ask why the UGC regulations appeared to lack that very foresight and balance. It seems the Commission acted in undue haste, implementing the rules without adequate deliberation.

Had the UGC engaged in wider dialogue, consulted all stakeholders, and assessed the potential for misuse in advance, this situation might well have been avoided. Policy-making demands more than mere legal validity; it requires social acceptability and ethical equilibrium. Through its order, the Supreme Court has reiterated that any change in a sensitive sector like education must be preceded by serious contemplation of its far-reaching consequences. The most serious flaw—and tragedy—of the new regulations lies in the way they positioned reserved and unreserved categories against each other, fueling dissent and confrontation. Such a divisive tendency not only pollutes the academic environment but also weakens the very idea of national unity enshrined in our Constitution. Any policy must ultimately be judged by whether it unites society or fragments it. If it fosters mistrust and conflict, reconsideration becomes unavoidable.

The Supreme Court's stay should not be interpreted as a victory for one side or a defeat for another. It is an opportunity for reform—for the government, the UGC, and the entire educational ecosystem. This is the moment to rise above emotions and political compulsions and formulate a policy that genuinely ensures equal opportunity without spawning new divisions. Educational reform must propel society forward, not reopen old wounds. India needs an education policy that places merit above caste, liberates opportunity from identity, and transforms campuses into spaces of dialogue rather than discord. The Supreme Court's intervention is a signal in that direction. It is now the responsibility of the government and the UGC to heed this signal, engage in honest self-reflection, and design regulations that truly align with India's inclusive, balanced, and forward-looking vision. If this opportunity, too, is sacrificed at the altar of political expediency, it will not merely mark the failure of a policy, but also the defeat of the public trust invested in educational reforms. (The author is a journalist and columnist)

## Voting begins in Bangladesh's crucial parliamentary elections

Nearly 9,00,000 law enforcement personnel deployed; drones and body-worn cameras are being used for election security in a first

**DHAKA, Feb 12:** Voting began on Thursday morning in Bangladesh's crucial general election -- the first since the ouster of prime minister Sheikh Hasina in massive nationwide protests in August 2024.

The voting started in 299 out of 300 parliamentary constituencies across the country from 7:30 am (local time) and will continue until 4:30 pm. The counting of votes is expected to begin shortly after the voting concludes. Voting in one constituency has been cancelled due to the death of a candidate.

The 13th parliamentary elections are being held simultaneously along with a referendum on a complex 84-point reform package.

The Election Commission has made elaborate security arrangements, deploying nearly 1 million security personnel -- the largest ever in the country's electoral history.

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.

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

Yunus, who has promised to quickly transfer power to the elected government, has urged the political parties, candidates and

other concerned parties to maintain restraint, tolerance and democratic behaviour on the polling day.

In a televised address to the nation on the eve of the polling, Chief Election Commissioner AMM Nasir Uddin called upon the voters to cast their votes freely. He urged political parties, candidates, and voters to maintain a peaceful and cordial environment.

He said that representatives from 45 countries and organisations, in-

cluding election management bodies and international institutions, are observing the polls.

Election Commissioner Abdur Rahmani Machud said nearly 9,00,000 law enforcement personnel have been deployed to ensure security during the election, state-run BSS news agency reported.

Authorities have deployed Armoured Personnel Carriers (APCs) and Rapid Action Teams (RATs) across key areas of the capital.

Police said they have 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.

EC data showed that first-time voters made up some 3.58 per cent of the nearly 127 million voters.

For the first time, nearly 8,00,000 expatriate Bangladeshis, who have registered with the poll body, will be able to vote through an IT-based postal ballot system. (PTI)

## Deaths in Iran's crackdown on protests reach at least 7,000, activists say



**DUBAI, Feb 12:** The death toll from a crackdown over Iran's nationwide protests last month has reached at least 7,002 people killed with many more still feared dead, activists said Thursday.

The US-based Human Rights Activists News Agency, which offered the latest figures, has been accurate in counting deaths during previous rounds of unrest in Iran and relies on a network of activists in Iran to verify deaths. The slow rise in the death toll has come as the agency slowly is able to crosscheck information as communication remains difficult with those inside of the Islamic Republic.

Iran's government offered its only death toll on January 21, saying 3,117 people were killed. Iran's theory in the past has undercounted or not reported fatalities from past unrest. The Associated Press has been unable to independently assess the death toll, given authorities have disrupted internet access and international calls in Iran.

The rise in the death toll comes as Iran tries to negotiate with the United States over its nuclear programme.

Senior Iranian security official Ali Larijani met Wednesday in Qatar with Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani. Qatar hosts a major US military installation that Iran attacked in June, after the US bombed Iranian nuclear sites during the 12-day Iran-Israel war in June. Larijani also met with officials of the Palestinian Hamas militant group, and in Oman with Tehran-backed Houthi rebels from Yemen on Tuesday. Larijani told Qatar's Al Jazeera satellite news network that Iran did not receive any specific proposal from the US in Oman, but acknowledged that there was an "exchange of messages".

Qatar has been a key negotiator in the past with Iran, with which it shares a massive offshore natural gas field in the Persian Gulf. Its state-run Qatar News Agency reported that ruling emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani spoke with US President Donald Trump about "the current situation in the region and international efforts aimed at de-escalation and strengthening regional security and peace", without elaborating.

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

Already, US forces have shot down a drone they said got too close to the Lincoln and came to the aid of a US-flagged ship that Iranian forces tried to stop in the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow mouth of the Persian Gulf.

Trump told the news website Axios that he was considering sending a second carrier to the region. "We have an armada that is heading there and another one might be going," he said. (AP)

## Marine Le Pen's appeal trial ends, her presidential bid is at stake

**PARIS, Feb 12:** A Paris appeals court set a verdict date of July 7 for Marine Le Pen in her European Union misuse of funds case, a crucial decision that could derail the far-right leader's presidential bid.

The trial ended Wednesday with one question looming above all others -- whether Le Pen will be able to run for president next year.

Le Pen, 57, is challenging a March 2025 verdict that found her and other members of her National Rally party guilty of misusing European Parliament funds in the hiring of aides from 2004 to 2016.

She denies accusations that she was at the centre of a fraudulent system meant to siphon off EU funds.

Asked by the court whether she'd like to say anything in conclusion, Le Pen declined to speak. She quickly left the courthouse without stopping in front of a crowd of reporters. (AP)

## Democratic senators decry indictment attempt, warn it 'could break this institution'

**WASHINGTON, Feb 12:** Democrats took to the Senate floor to deliver impassioned speeches denouncing the Justice Department's attempt to indict a group of lawmakers who last year urged US military members to resist "illegal orders", framing the episode as a dire test for their chamber and the rule of law. "The fact that they failed to incarcerate a United States senator should not obviate our outrage. They tried to incarcerate two of us," said Sen. Brian Schatz, D-Hawaii on Wednesday. "I am not entirely sure the United States Senate can survive this if we do not have Republicans standing up."

Schatz was among a string of Democratic senators who spoke a day after a Washington grand jury declined to indict six Democratic lawmakers, including Sens. Elissa Slotkin and Mark Kelly, over a 90-second video that drew fierce backlash from President Donald Trump.

While Democrats blasted the Trump administration, they also challenged their Republican colleagues to speak out. Sen. Chris Murphy called it a "test for the Senate" that "could break this institution permanently".

Earlier Wednesday, Slotkin and Kelly praised the grand jury's decision, with Slotkin saying that "if things had gone a different way, we'd be preparing

for arrest". "A group of anonymous Americans upheld the rule of law and determined that this case should not proceed," she said.

The failed indictments mark a high-profile setback for the Justice Department, which has faced mounting scrutiny from Democrats and some Republicans over investigations seen as aligned with Trump's political grievances. The episode has raised stark First Amendments questions about the potential prosecution of sitting members of Congress for their speech.

"This is not a good news story," Kelly said. "This is a story about how Donald Trump and his cronies are trying to break our system in order to silence anyone who lawfully speaks out against them."

Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer similarly framed the attempt as a broader free speech threat, saying that if Trump "believes that he can even attempt to jail senators over speech he dislikes, then the First Amendment is no longer a basic right". Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., said the Justice Department's response "wouldn't have been my response to that, but we are where we are".

"The indictment didn't withstand the scrutiny of a grand jury. It was clear it was not going anywhere," Thune said.

Kelly and Slotkin said during a joint press conference that they have not been told what charges prosecutors sought, and it's unclear whether prosecutors plan to keep pursuing the case. The senators sent a letter Wednesday asking the Justice Department to confirm the investigation is now closed, they said. The two senators and four House members have been embroiled in fallout from the video for months. Trump reacted angrily to their video, labelling it "seditious" and saying on social media that the offense was "punishable by death".

All six of the Democratic lawmakers who appeared in the 90-second video served in the military or intelligence community. They said the video's purpose was to simply affirm existing law after receiving outreach from members of the military.

On the other side of the Capitol, Republican House Speaker Mike Johnson of Louisiana said the video warrants criminal scrutiny. He told MSN News late Wednesday that the lawmakers "probably should be indicted".

"Anytime you're obstructing law enforcement and getting in the way of these sensitive operations, it's a very serious thing, and it probably is a crime. And, yeah, they probably should be indicted," he said. (AP)

## US Energy Secretary Chris Wright visits Venezuela to assess oil industry overhaul

**CARACAS, Feb 12:** United States Energy Secretary Chris Wright arrived in Venezuela for a firsthand assessment of the country's oil industry, a visit that further asserts the US government's self-appointed role in turning around Venezuela's dilapidated energy sector.

Wright's visit comes as the administration of US President Donald Trump continues to lift sanctions to allow foreign companies to operate in Venezuela and help rebuild the nation's most important industry. It follows last month's enactment of a Venezuelan law that opened the nation's oil sector to private investment, reversing a tenet of the self-proclaimed socialist movement that has ruled the country for more than two decades.

Wright met Venezuelan acting President Delcy Rodriguez at Miraflores presidential palace in the capital, Caracas, on Wednesday. He is expected to meet with government officials, oil executives and others during a three-day visit to the South American country. "He will also visit some of the nation's oil fields to see firsthand how President Trump's historic US-Venezuela Energy Deal is unleashing peace and prosperity," the US

Department of Energy said Wednesday in a statement. Rodriguez was sworn into her new role after the brazen January 3 seizure of then-President Nicolás Maduro in a US military attack in Venezuela's capital, Caracas.

She proposed the overhaul of the country's energy law after Trump said his administration would take control of Venezuela's oil exports and revitalise the ailing industry by luring foreign investment.

Rodriguez's government expects the changes to serve as assurances for major US oil companies that have so far hesitated about returning to the volatile country. Some of those companies lost investments when the ruling party enacted the existing law two decades ago to favour Venezuela's state-run oil company, PDVSA.

The new law now grants private companies control over oil production and sales, ending PDVSA's monopoly over those activities as well as pricing. It also allows for independent arbitration of disputes, removing a mandate for disagreements to be settled only in Venezuelan courts, which are controlled by the ruling party. (AP)

## Italy approves new migration bill including powers to impose 'naval blockades' on migrant ships

**ROME, Feb 12:** Italy's conservative government led by Premier Giorgia Meloni has approved a bill introducing new measures aimed at fighting illegal immigration, including a so-called "naval blockade" for migrant ships trying to reach Italian shores.

A cabinet meeting in the late Wednesday afternoon gave the go-ahead to the bill, which now needs to be discussed and approved in both chambers of parliament before becoming effective.

Italy's new migration package -- which also includes stricter surveillance at borders and co-operation with European agencies -- comes a day after the approval of the new EU pact on migration and asylum, which Rome plans to implement swiftly.

The package includes new powers that would enable Italian authorities to impose a naval blockade on migrant ships trying to enter Italy's territorial waters, under certain conditions.

Authorities can ban the crossing into Italian waters for up to 30 days, in cases in which the migrant ship poses "serious threats to public order or national security", as in the concrete

risk of terrorist acts or terrorist infiltration, the bill says. The blockade is extendable up to a maximum of six months.

It would also be possible to stop the ships from entering Italian waters in the case of a drastic influx in migrants that could jeopardise the secure management of borders.

Those violating the rules would face fines of up to 50,000 euros (USD 59,400) and would see their boats confiscated in the case of repeated violations, a measure that seems to target humanitarian rescue ships.

In those cases, the intercepted migrants could be "transported to third countries other than their country of origin, with which Italy has entered into specific agreements", the bill says.

Under those rules, the Meloni government aims at restarting offshore processing hubs similar to the two controversial ones created in Albania, which have been substantially inactive for about two years due to legal hurdles.

These centres -- a major effort by the Meloni government to manage migration flows -- have constantly sparked debates about their legality and efficacy, raising strong opposition from humanitarian groups. (AP)

## Instagram chief says he does not believe people can get clinically addicted to social media

**LOS ANGELES, Feb 12:** Adam Mosseri, the head of Meta's Instagram, testified during a landmark social media trial in Los Angeles that he disagrees with the idea that people can be clinically addicted to social media platforms.

The question of addiction is a key pillar of the case, where plaintiffs seek to hold social media companies responsible for harms to children who use their platforms. Meta Platforms and Google's YouTube are the two remaining defendants in the case, which TikTok and Snap have settled.

At the core of the Los Angeles case is a 20-year-old identified only by the initials "KGM", whose lawsuit could determine how thousands of similar lawsuits against social media companies would play out. She and two other plaintiffs have been selected for bellwether trials -- essentially test cases for both sides to see how their arguments play out before a jury.

Mosseri said on Wednesday that it's important to differentiate between clinical addiction and what he called problematic use. The plaintiff's lawyer, however, presented quotes directly from Mosseri in a podcast interview a few years ago where he said the opposite, but he clarified that he was probably using the term "too casually", as people tend to do.

Mosseri said he was not claiming to be



a medical expert when questioned about his qualifications to comment on the legitimacy of social media addiction, but said someone "very close" to him has experienced serious clinical addiction, which is why he said he was "being careful with my words".

He said he and his colleagues use the term "problematic use" to refer to "someone spending more time on Instagram than they feel good about, and that definitely happens".

It's "not good for the company, over the long run, to make decisions that profit for

us but are poor for people's wellbeing", Mosseri said.

Mosseri and the plaintiff's lawyer, Mark Lanier, engaged in a lengthy back-and-forth about cosmetic filters on Instagram that changed people's appearance in a way that seemed to promote plastic surgery.

"We are trying to be as safe as possible but also censor as little as possible," Mosseri said.

In the courtroom, bereaved parents of children who have had social media struggles seemed visibly upset during a discussion around body dysmorphia and

cosmetic filters. Meta shut down all third-party augmented reality filters in January 2025. The judge made an announcement to members of the public on Wednesday after the displays of emotion, reminding them not to make any indication of agreement or disagreement with testimony, saying that it would be "improper to indicate some position".

In recent years, Instagram has added a slew of features and tools it says have made the platform safer for young people. But this does not always work. A report last year, for instance, found that teen accounts researchers created were recommended age-inappropriate sexual content, including "graphic sexual descriptions, the use of cartoons to describe demeaning sexual acts, and brief displays of nudity".

In addition, Instagram also recommended a "range of self-harm, self-injury, and body image content" on teen accounts that the report says "would be reasonably likely to result in adverse impacts for young people, including teenagers experiencing poor mental health, or self-harm and suicidal ideation and behaviours". Meta called the report "misleading, dangerously speculative" and said it misrepresents its efforts on teen safety.

Meta is also facing a separate trial in New Mexico that began this week. (AP)

## Death toll rises to 31 after Tropical Cyclone Gezani hits Madagascar

**ANTANANARIVO (MADAGASCAR), Feb 12:** Tropical Cyclone Gezani collapsed houses in Madagascar's main port city and left at least 31 people dead as it crossed the Indian Ocean island with high winds and rain, authorities said Wednesday.

Madagascar's weather service issued red alerts for several regions warning of possible floods and landslides as the storm made landfall late Tuesday with wind speeds of more than 195 kph (121 mph). It then roared across the large island of 31 million people, many of whom live in poverty and have inadequate shelter from storms.

Madagascar is especially vulnerable to cyclones blowing in off the Indian Ocean and was battered by another deadly cyclone less than two weeks ago.

The National Office for Risk and Disaster Management said building collapses caused some of the at least 31 deaths, and at least 36 other people were seriously injured as Gezani made landfall in the eastern city of Toamasina. The agency said four people were missing and more than 6,000 people were displaced from their homes. Toamasina, with around 300,000 residents, sustained severe damage, residents told The Associated Press. The majority of the deaths were in that region, authorities said.

President Michael Randrairirina, who took power in a military coup in October, visited Toamasina to survey damage and meet residents, according to videos posted

on his office's Facebook page. The videos showed flooded neighbourhoods, homes and shops with windows blown out and roofs blown off, and trees and other debris strewn across streets.

Randrairirina's office said around 75 per cent of the city's infrastructure had been damaged or destroyed.

"It's devastation. Roofs have been blown away, walls have collapsed, power poles are down, trees have been uprooted. It looks like a catastrophic landscape," resident Michel, who gave only his first name, said by phone. Power has been cut off in Toamasina since Tuesday.

Gezani on Wednesday moved west across Madagascar, weakening to a tropical storm as it moved inland, according to the national weather service. The storm passed around 100 kilometres (62 miles) north of the capital, Antananarivo, one of the regions under a red alert warning for possible flooding.

Forecasts showed Gezani was expected to move into the channel between Madagascar and Africa's east coast on Thursday, and warned it might strengthen into a tropical cyclone again and turn back toward Madagascar's southwest coast next week.

Authorities in Mozambique, where devastating floods last month impacted more than 700,000 people, also issued weather alerts and warned that three of its coastal provinces on the Indian Ocean could feel the effects of Gezani if it strengthens again. (AP)

## Insurgency groups created in Tripura to stay in power, alleges Manik Saha

# Tripura CM credits BJP govt for peace, tribal development

AGARTALA, Feb 12: Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha on Thursday alleged that there was a time in the state when outlawed insurgency groups like ATTF and NLFT were created to remain in power.

The CM did not name any political party or leader, but the border state witnessed bloodshed due to insurgency spanning from the late 1970's to early 2000's, a period ruled by the Congress-TUJS combine and the CPI(M)-led Left Front.

Addressing a programme on a government scheme for tribals, the chief minister said that the BJP-led government has been working relentlessly to uplift the socio-economic condition of the indigenous people.

"There was a time in the state when outlawed groups such as All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF) and National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) were created only to remain in power. It was Prime Minister Narendra Modi and



Union Home Minister Amit Shah who had brought the misguided youth to the national mainstream," he said.

Asserting that the Centre has allocated ₹ 250 crore for the rehabilitation of the surrendered militants, Saha claimed that now a few people are trying to use them to win the elections (in the Tripura Tribal Areas Au-

tonomous District Council).

The CM said the BJP has also brought a much needed solution to the 23-year Bru refugee problem in order to provide a better life to them.

"Nobody had concern for the Bru people who were sheltered in refugee camps in North Tripura's Kanchanpur subdivision before the BJP came to power in 2018. Under

the guidance of PM Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah, the problem has been solved (in 2024)," he said.

Saha said the Centre has pumped in ₹ 800 crore for proper rehabilitation of the Bru refugees in 12 locations of the state and the government is providing various training to the Bru youth for earning a sustainable livelihood.

"We have solved the vexed problem, but someone else is trying to take the credit, which can't be allowed. The BJP-led government did its best to solve the problem," he said, without elaborating.

Saha said the government has already undertaken a ₹ 1400 crore World Bank funded project for development of tribal areas by creating infrastructure.

"The present government is sensible towards development of the indigenous people, be it culture, language or tradition. Most of the externally aided schemes are being implemented in the tribal areas of the state," he said. (PTI)

## Labour reforms, digital growth powering India's inclusive dev: Mein

### Arunachal Dy CM highlights reforms, reskilling and global recognition

ITANAGAR, Feb 12: Arunachal Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Chowna Mein on Thursday highlighted India's ongoing labour reforms, rising technological strength and expanding global presence, saying these developments are strengthening the foundation of a skilled, secure and globally competitive workforce. In a series of posts on X, Mein said the country's transformative labour reforms are driving inclusive growth and empowering workers, while advancements in digital infrastructure and global trade recognition reflect India's steady progress on multiple fronts.

"India's transformative labour reforms are strengthening the foundation of a skilled, secure and globally competitive workforce," Mein said.

The deputy chief minister added that the reforms are being supported by reskilling initiatives and social protection measures aimed at ensuring long-term economic security for workers.

"Backed by comprehensive reskilling programmes and enhanced social security measures under the leadership of Hon'ble PM Shri Narendra Modi ji, we are creating inclusive growth and empowering every worker in the journey towards #ViksitBharat," he said in a separate post.

Highlighting India's digital progress, Mein observed the country's improved global standing in technology and connectivity.

"India climbs four places to rank 45th in the Network Readiness Index 2025 and ranks No1 globally in telecom investment and AI publications. Strong im-



provements in broadband and governance highlight India's growing technological strength," he said.

The deputy chief minister also underscored India's expanding global footprint in the organic products sector, referring to international recognition at a major global event.

"India is honoured as 'Country of the Year' at the world's leading organic trade fair in Germany. The APEDA pavilion showcased organic rice, spices, herbs and value-added products, with participation from 20+ States and UTs, reinforcing India's growing global footprint," Mein added. (PTI)

## Bandh fails to evoke much response in Tripura

AGARTALA, Feb 12: The nationwide shutdown called by 10 central trade unions failed to evoke much response in Tripura on Thursday.

Government offices, banks, educational institutions and markets remained open, while road transport and train services operated as usual across the state.

A large group of CPI (M) leaders, led by the leader of opposition in the assembly Jitendra Chaudhury and former CM Manik Sarkar, picketed in support of the bandh at Paradise Chowmuhani in Agartala in the morning.

Chaudhury claimed people have supported the bandh called for safeguarding the interests of the farmers and labourers.

"The Modi government has been trying to sell the country to the US, ignoring the interests of the working class. The Indo-US deal is set to destroy the country's farming sector," he alleged.

Sarkar alleged the BJP-led NDA government at the Centre has forced the trade unions to call the strike for its anti-labour policies.

"This strike is not the end of our movement. We will launch massive agitation opposing the Modi government's policies," he said.

Police said no untoward incident has been reported so far and additional forces are keeping a watch on key locations, such as bus stops, railway stations and markets.

"The impact of the nationwide strike was not felt in Tripura as life remains normal with government offices, banks, educational institutions and markets functioning as usual," state police spokesperson Rajdeep Deb told PTI. The major demands of the bandh include withdrawal of four labour codes, restoration of MGNREGA and rollback of policies perceived to weaken civil services. (PTI)

## Mizoram MP urges Centre to fast-track border road projects

AIZAWL, Feb 12: Mizoram's lone Rajya Sabha member K Vanlalvena on Thursday urged the Centre to expedite three key road projects, two of them along the Indo-Myanmar border, to strengthen national security and boost regional trade, an official statement said here on Thursday.

During a discussion during the Budget session in Parliament recently, the MP highlighted two primary infrastructure gaps - the lack of high-capacity connectivity to the Myanmar border and increasing congestion between Aizawl and Sairang railway station.

Vanlalvena urged the Centre to designate two strategic routes connecting Hnahthial to Saisihchhuah in Lawngtlai district as national highways.

The two vital routes pass through several key villages, including Tarpho, Cherhluh, Thingsai, Sangau, South Vanlaphai and Pangkhua, terminating at the Myanmar border.

Highlighting significant infrastructure disparity at the border, the MP claimed that the Myanmar government had completed a double-lane highway from Hakha in Chin state to Saisihchhuah on the Indo-Myanmar border in 2020.

Even as the ministry of commerce and industry has designated Saisihchhuah as an official border haat, proper road connectivity was lacking on the Indian side to facilitate large-scale trade, he said. (PTI)

## Elderly man dies in blaze in Arunachal village

ITANAGAR, Feb 12: An 80-year-old man died in a blaze in a village in Upper Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh on Thursday, an official said.

The incident took place in a house in Simong village in the morning.

The deceased has been identified as Tabo Danggen, the owner of the house that was gutted in the blaze, which originated in the kitchen, he said.

He was alone in the house at the time of the incident.

Local MLA Alo Libang, along with Deputy Commissioner Talo Jerang, Superintendent of Police Token Saring and District Disaster Management Officer Anie Yangfo, visited the spot.

The team assessed the situation and provided immediate relief to the affected family. Officials said the necessary formalities for processing the final compensation for the damaged house are underway as per government norms.

The district administration expressed deep condolences to the bereaved family and assured them of all possible support. (PTI)

## Mizoram launches project to boost MSME sector

### CM launches skill, industry support initiatives

AIZAWL, Feb 12: Mizoram Chief Minister Lalduhoma on Thursday launched a project to boost the state's MSME sector by providing technical skills and global industry insights to the entrepreneurs.

Besides the Micro and Small Entrepreneurs Excellence Project, he also launched the Mizoram Entrepreneurs Development Forum.

The initiatives represented a concerted collaboration between the state government, the Confederation of Indian Industry's Centre for Excellence on Employment and Livelihood (CII CEL) and the Volvo Group, officials said.

The excellence project is designed to provide local MSME owners with the technical skills and global industry insights required to compete in a rapidly evolving economy, they added.

Speaking at the event, Lalduhoma highlighted the traditional craftsmanship of the Mizo people with significant potential in the MSME sector, citing the recent IndiaSkills North East Championship where Mizoram emerged



as the overall champion.

He said that his government is committed to nurturing skilled youth.

The state's flagship handholding scheme is designed to assist and empower entrepreneurs, he added.

"Our entrepreneurs have built livelihoods through sheer determination. This project is intended to help them

scale greater heights. In a global economy shaped by modern business practices, there must be upskilling in the MSME sector to remain competitive," Lalduhoma said. The chief minister appreciated the CII for its expertise in the initiatives and the Volvo Group for agreeing to support the programme through its CSR initiative, enabling local MSME owners to participate free of cost.

According to officials, the project will run for an initial duration of one year, with 70 participants selected to undergo basic training. Beyond technical training, the newly formed Mizoram Entrepreneurs Development Forum will serve as a bridge between local business owners and national industry experts, they said.

The inaugural event was attended by officials from CII, including executive director Shalina Thapa and CII CEL director Shivek Gurubaran and Volvo Group Trust director (CSR) G V Rao. (PTI)

## CM Rio calls for unity, political-level talks on Naga issue

DIMAPUR, Feb 12: Chief Minister Dr Neiphu Rio on Tuesday stressed the need for unity among Nagas and renewed political engagement with the Centre, stating that the opposition-less government in 2026 is focused on resolving the Naga political issue. Addressing a grand reception programme at the NPF office in Chümoukedima, Rio briefed party leaders on his recent visit to New Delhi, discussions on the Frontier Nagaland Territorial Authority (FNFTA), financial concerns and other key policy matters.

Detailing his February 3 meeting with Union Home Minister Amit Shah, Rio said the appointment was arranged after contact from the Union Home Secretary in January. Despite prior official engagements, including the Governor's programme and Cabinet and Political Affairs Committee (PAC) meetings, the state delegation adjusted its schedule to meet Shah in the national capital. Instead of involving the entire Cabinet or all MLAs, a Political Affairs sub-committee was constituted to represent the state.

Rio said discussions with Shah covered constitutional provisions, the Naga flag and integration issues, with assurances that the "letter and spirit" of earlier understandings would remain the foundation of engagement. According to him, Shah agreed to process the Naga political issue at the political and ministerial level and to constitute a committee, assigning officials and intelligence experts for further dialogue.

On the FNFTA, Rio described it as an administrative arrangement to address developmental aspirations in eastern Nagaland while maintaining the unity of the state. He said the matter was also discussed during the Delhi visit.

Highlighting financial concerns ahead of the 16th Finance Commission, Rio cautioned against a repeat of the 9th Finance Commission's 1989 zero-deficit requirement. Though Nagaland receives around ₹ 8,000-9,000 crore annually, he said development has suffered. He informed Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman that inadequate funding could trigger public unrest. While the Centre assured serious consideration, no firm commitment was made, he added.

On Manipur, Rio said discussions during government formation involved BJP Northeast in-charge Sambit Patra and explored inclusive arrangements among Meiteis, Nagas and Kukis. He proposed a structure with one Chief Minister and representation for Naga and Kuki leaders as



Deputy Chief Ministers to promote unity and stability.

Referring to differing public statements by certain leaders and groups, including those associated with former Chief Minister Dr SC Jamir, Rio said differences are part of democracy but cautioned against weakening the state's collective negotiating position. He said contradictory signals could create confusion during dialogue with the Centre and stressed that unity of approach is important at this stage.

On the proposed visit of American evangelist Franklin Graham, Rio said the Government of India had granted conditional permission subject to administrative requirements such as route plans and non-political engagement. As the organisers did not accept the conditions, the visit did not proceed.

The Chief Minister also addressed issues relating to the Protected Area Permit (PAP), Free Movement Regime (FMR) and border concerns, noting the complexities along the international border with Myanmar and daily cross-border movement for farming, medical and social purposes.

On oil and gas exploration, Rio said the Cabinet had approved discussions on petroleum development, including a proposed 50-50 royalty-sharing arrangement in disputed areas along the Assam-Nagaland border. A Cabinet sub-committee headed by him has been formed for detailed deliberations.

Rio further said he met the Chief Election Commissioner and other officials in Delhi, highlighted Nagaland's democratic history and invited them to attend the Hornbill Festival.

Reiterating that physical integration of Naga areas may not be immediately feasible, he emphasised that emotional, cultural and social integration through a pan-Naga platform involving Nagas from Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and Assam is achievable and essential for a durable settlement. He said the PAC would continue engagement with Naga national groups and urged party leaders to strengthen the organisation at all levels. Continued engagement with New Delhi and outreach to neighbouring states would remain key priorities, he added.

Earlier, NPF Secretary General Achumbemo Kikon said a party delegation led by president and Chief Minister Dr Neiphu Rio met Amit Shah and pressed for restoring the Naga political talks to the political level. The delegation raised issues including PAP, border fencing and the need to appoint a political representative with a mandate from the Government of India to handle the Naga issue, asserting that it is "not a law and order matter." The Home Minister assured that talks would be brought back to the political track, he said.

Kikon reiterated that the NPF remains committed to an honourable and peaceful solution beyond the 16-Point Agreement and statehood. He termed the signing of the tripartite FNFTA agreement between the Centre, the Nagaland government and ENPO as a significant achievement, following the September 12, 2024 consensus resolution calling for political-level dialogue.

NPF leader and Advisor to the Chief Minister Abu Metha described the FNFTA agreement as a "historic milestone" and said it would be placed before the Nagaland Legislative Assembly for enactment. He said the delegation also highlighted Nagaland's financial concerns to the Centre, including the earlier funding pattern from the Consolidated Fund of India.

Metha further said the NPF's role in Manipur, where the party with five MLAs is part of the ruling alliance and holds the Deputy Chief Minister's post, reflects growing recognition of the party beyond Nagaland. He called for unity among Nagas across states and urged party workers to support ongoing efforts for peace and development.

Rio also thanked party leaders and supporters for the grand reception accorded to him and said the smooth completion of the NPF-NDPP merger without complaints reflects the spirit of unity in the state. (NNN)

## 2 arrested with morphine worth ₹ 3.5 crore in Mizoram's Saitual

AIZAWL, Feb 12: Two persons were arrested with morphine worth ₹ 3.5 crore in Mizoram's Saitual district, the Assam Rifles said on Thursday. Acting on a tip-off, personnel of the Assam Rifles intercepted a vehicle at a check post in Ngpua village located near the state's border with Manipur, it said.

A thorough search of the vehicle led to the recovery of 3.51 kg of morphine, it added.

Two persons, identified as Kasim and Muqeem Ali, who were transporting the drugs, were apprehended, the statement said.

The two accused, along with the seized morphine and the vehicle were handed to the Saitual police station for further proceedings, it said. (PTI)

## Demonstrations in Churachandpur over Kuki MLA joining new govt

IMPHAL, Feb 12: Hundreds of people on Wednesday staged a demonstration in Manipur's Churachandpur district, accusing MLA LM Khaute of betraying the Kuki Zo community by joining the new government led by Y Khemchand Singh.

Members of the Vaiphei Women's Association raised slogans, branding the MLA a "traitor" for "ignoring public sentiments" and joining the government amid the ethnic tensions. The protesters demonstrated near the MLA's residence in the district headquarters town but were timely dispersed by security forces following a brief scuffle, officials said.

The Manipur Police dismissed reports that the residence of Khaute was attacked. (PTI)

## Arunachal minister seeks stronger trade, investment ties with Germany

ITANAGAR, Feb 12: Arunachal Pradesh Commerce and Industries Minister Nyato Dukam on Thursday asserted that the state aims to expand its global footprint through sustainable trade partnerships, investment promotion and skill development initiatives to create long-term opportunities for entrepreneurs and youth.

The minister made the statement during a meeting at the Consulate General of India in Munich with Consul General Shatrughna Sinha, held on the sidelines of BIOFACH 2026 in Germany, an official statement informed here.

The meeting focused on strengthening

trade, investment and skill development linkages between the state and the European nation.

During the discussion, Sinha suggested exploring partnerships between proprietors of fruit wines from Arunachal Pradesh and German wine companies to promote investment, technology exchange and market access for the state's emerging wine industry.

Employment opportunities for Arunachal Pradesh's youth also figured prominently in the interaction.

Sinha observed that the nursing sector holds strong potential for overseas placements and emphasised the importance of

German language training to enhance employability prospects in the country's healthcare sector.

Highlighting the state's growing economic potential, Dukam showcased key focus areas including hydropower development, agriculture-allied and food-based industries, organic produce exports, fruit wines and value-added agro products.

The official Arunachal Pradesh delegation accompanying the minister includes MLA Mohesh Chai, Secretary (Industries) Hage Tari, Secretary (Trade & Commerce) Taru Talo and entrepreneurs Techu Hemu and Senya Lowang. (PTI)

No.TDB/6<sup>th</sup> FC/108/2024-25/1258 Date 12/02/2026

**INVITATION FOR BIDS**

The Block Development Officer, Tamulpur Development Block, Dist- Tamulpur, BTC, Assam invites bid affixing non-refundable Court fee Stamp of Rs. 8.25 (Rupees Eight and Twenty Five Paisa) only from the approved and eligible contractor Class-I (A, B, C), Class-II or Class-III category registered with Assam PWD (R&B) Irrigation Deptt. for the following work under P&RD Deptt. under 6<sup>th</sup> FC for the year 2021-22 during 2025-26. Tender Box will be available for dropping tender in the Office of the Block Development Officer, Tamulpur Development Block from 13/02/2026 up to 2.00 PM on 09/03/2026 (if any holidays or Bandh falls then the subsequent day) and the tender box will be opened at the same day on 3.00 PM in same office.

Sl. No.	Name of work	Tender value (In Lakh)	Time of Completion	Tender Cost & Earnest Money & Date of Tender
1	Construction of crematorium at No. 1 Kekerikuchi under Dwarakuchi VCDC	Rs. 19,99,998.00	180 days from the date of issue of final work order.	1. Tender cost @ 0.03% of A/A amount to be pledged by Bank draft in favour of Principal Secretary, BTC. 2. Earnest money @2% (In case of ST/SC 1%) of estimated value to be pledged by demand draft/FDR in favour of B.D.O. Tamulpur Development Block 3. Bidders are specifically requested to inspect the field and study the working condition before submitting their offer/bid.

Details NIT may be seen at Office of the B.D.O Tamulpur Development Block, Tamulpur, Dist- Tamulpur. Sd/-  
Block Development Officer, Tamulpur Dev. Block, Tamulpur

IPR(BTC)/C/2025-26/3984

## 'The government should listen to the voices of the labourers' BJP, allies term labour Bill 'historic'; oppn calls it 'anti-labour' in Lok Sabha

**NEW DELHI, Feb 12:** The BJP and its allies on Thursday strongly defended the Industrial Relations Code (Amendment) Bill terming it "historic reforms" for the welfare of labourers while the opposition described it as "anti-labour" and sought its complete withdrawal.

According to the statement of objects and reasons of the proposed law, the Industrial Relations Code, 2020 replaces the Trade Unions Act, 1926, the Industrial Employment (Standing Orders) Act, 1946 and the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947, relating to trade unions, industrial employment and industrial disputes.

Participating in the debate on the Bill in the Lok Sabha, Kaushalendra Kumar of the JD(U), an NDA ally, said it is a labour-friendly initiative of the Narendra Modi government and a positive approach towards the welfare of the employees. "It is a historic reform. It is going to bring positive changes in the lives of the labourers and the employees," he said. Opposing the Bill, NCP member Supriya Sule said the government is working against the hardworking labourers, farmers and poor.

She said that her party is in favour of industrial growth but is also in favour of the protection of dignity, fairness and rights of the labourers. "Please rethink. We are not in favour of making the country's labourers insecure," she said.

DMK MP Rani Srikumar opposed the Bill and said the dignity and security of the labourers will be threatened when the legislation will come into effect. "The govern-



ment should listen to the voices of the labourers," she said.

Ravindra Waikar of the Shiv Sena, an NDA constituent, supported the Bill and said it will be a big reform in labour laws and ensure the rights of all kinds of employees.

Now onwards, the labourers will not be required to go to courts for the protection of their rights, he said. Congress' M K Vishnu Prasad opposed the Bill and said it will weaken the rights of the employees. The Bill shows this government's broader approach towards labourers and its priorities to market rather than employees, he said.

BJP MP Jagadambika Pal said the opposition Congress never thought about the welfare of the labourers during its long rule. "It is a historic reform. It is a very big initiative taken by the Modi government for the welfare of the employees," he said. BJP ally Lok Jan Shakti Party (Ram Vilas)'s MP, Arun Bharti, said the labourers of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar face the

maximum discrimination while working in different parts of the country and the Bill will protect their rights and give dignity.

Supporting the Bill, YSR Congress member Gurumoorthy Maddila said it will benefit the labourers in a big way. CPI(M) MP K Radhakrishnan strongly opposed the Bill and sought its withdrawal.

Opposing the Bill, AAP member Malvinder Singh Kang said the labour codes are against the labourers and employees and it will curb their democratic rights.

He said the minimum wages rule will end with the passage of the Bill. IUML member E T Mohammed Basheer, while opposing the Bill, said it is an obstacle and hurdle to trade union.

He said the legislation is being brought at a time when the country is facing "highest unemployment" rate. Sudama Prasad of the CPI(M) too opposed the Bill and said it will encourage the policy of "hire and fire". BJP MP Raju Bista supported

the Bill and alleged that the Congress was never labour-friendly and Prime Minister Narendra Modi is going to honour 50 crore labourers through the Bill. He said that the Bill will ensure timely wages and give equal wages to the women labourers and ensure social security of all employees. Hanuman Beniwal of the RLP said the Bill will weaken the laws that protect labour rights. He said he cannot accept the "anti-labour" laws and sought its withdrawal.

RSP MP N K Premachandran opposed the Bill and said it will take away the basic democratic rights of the labourers. He sought the complete withdrawal of the labour codes. Chandra Shekhar Aazad of the Azad Samaj Party (Kanshi Ram) opposed the Bill and claimed that it will encourage the companies to adopt the "hire and fire policy". "We are not against changes. But rights of the labourers should be protected," he said. Independent MP Abdul Rashid Sheikh said rights of the unorganised sector labourers should be protected. Another Independent MP Umesh Bhai Babubhai Patel too opposed the Bill for its alleged anti-labour clauses. "I can't support an anti-labour Bill," he said. The Bill contains savings provisions under section 104 to ensure continuity and legal certainty.

"Though the repeal has occurred by operation of section 104 of the Code itself, there is a possibility of future confusion being created on a misconceived ground that the Act delegates the power to repeal the said enactments to the executive," it explains. (PTI)

## India moving towards self-reliance in nuclear sector, setting its own timelines: Govt

**NEW DELHI, Feb 12:** The government on Thursday informed the Rajya Sabha that it was following timelines and safety measures on commissioning of nuclear plants in the country, and the third unit of the Kudankulam nuclear plant is likely to be completed by 2026 and the fourth by 2027.

Replying to supplementary questions during question hour, Minister of State in Prime Minister's Office Jitendra Singh told members in the upper house that the nuclear capacity of the country is set to triple to nearly 22,380 MW by 2031-32 and to 100 gigawatts (GW) by 2047. "...the nuclear programme of India is in expansionist mode. It has been possible because of the courage of conviction and out of box thinking of Prime Minister Modi ji that we have opened up the nuclear sector to private players.

"This was something which was unimaginable till about five years ago. I think the nation and the society had reconciled that we had to function behind the veil of secrecy. I think for the first time, as have taken up the global strategy," he told the house.

The minister also informed the house that only the day before yesterday, "we could achieve another record -- the Rajasthan Atomic power project in Rawalbeta successfully achieved its rated capacity of 700 MW on February 10 at 5.30 in the morning."

"I think I have every reason to convince the member that he should trust what has been conveyed to him on the Kudankulam timelines," he said, adding that the credit goes to this government as the Kudankulam plant was for the first time conceived way back in 1988, but construction did not start and the first brick was laid in 2002 that too under the NDA government headed by prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

After that also the construction continued, and there was no headway, he said, adding that it was only after the present government came in, and prime minister Modi took over in May 2014, that in December 2014 the first unit of the Kudankulam plant became functional with 2 units of 1000 MW.

"We have followed a timeline, and we are on a fast track. I think no geopolitical circumstances are going to affect this plant. The third unit is likely to be completed by 2026 and the fourth by 2027. The first two units were also completed in the last decade, only after this government has taken over. Which means that the intent and the plan of this government is very clear and we are following it with a great amount of disci-



pline," Singh told the house.

In response to another query, he also said the NPCIL has been spending the CSR funds for the benefit of neighbour areas located around the plant. That is also called the rehabilitation and resettlement of neighbourhood welfare, he said.

To another query by SP's Ramgopal Yadav, the minister said, in the last 10-11 years, India in this sector is moving fast towards self-reliance. When this government came to power in 2014, the capacity of our nuclear reactors was 4780 MW. "Today in 2026, this capacity has more than doubled to 8780 MW and the manner in which enabling provisions have been made, like the Shanti Act and in this budget, our estimate is that we would be able to increase our capacity to three times or equivalent to 22,380 MW by 2031-32. "The nuclear capacity is increasing, notwithstanding all those assumptions that you are trying to place. If the figures have doubled and is set to triple, it means that we have the self-reliance and the self-potential and we are not depending on others alone," he said.

Jitendra Singh said that for the first time, this government has set its own timelines on nuclear energy.

"In 2025, we are at 8.8 GW (Gigawatt), in 2032 we would be at 22 GW, in 2037 we would be at 47 GW, in 2042 at 67 GW, and in 2047 we would be at 100 GW. We are moving with confidence, with not just self-reliance but also self-confidence," he asserted.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi was sitting in the house at the time. "The mantra that we follow in nuclear programme is safety first, production next. I urge members to dispel fears on safety of nuclear plants as sometimes they are spread for extraneous considerations," he also said on safety of nuclear plants. (PTI)

## Need national content monitoring agency, stringent laws to curb misuse of technology: Shukla

**NEW DELHI, Feb 12:** Flagging concerns over the rampant circulation of AI-generated fake videos, Congress member Rajeev Shukla on Thursday demanded the creation of a national content monitoring agency along with stringent laws to check the misuse of technologies.

During the Zero Hour in the Rajya Sabha, Shukla highlighted the menace of the unregulated spread of fake videos created using artificial intelligence and deepfakes, and said that these technologies have become a powerful tool to defame individuals, especially women. Stating that there is no technology to identify fake videos in real time, Shukla demanded the creation of a national content monitoring agency, the launch of digital literacy and awareness programmes, along with stringent laws against the creation of fake videos. MPs also raised several other issues, including problems faced by migrant workers from Odisha and the nationwide protest demanding the withdrawal of the four labour codes, and sought the government's intervention.

Niranjan Bishi, BJD member from Odisha, raised concerns about the problems faced by unskilled labourers from Odisha working in different parts of the country, who, according to him, are deprived of security, respect, fair wages, and many other welfare measures. Bishi said that over 10 lakh labourers from Odisha are working in various states, but do not have identification cards, due to which they are unable to access several government benefits.

He urged the government to create a national database for all migrant labourers in the country.

Another BJD member from Odisha, Manas Ranjan Mangaraj, said that the state is facing injustice in terms of coal royalty. He said that coal royalty rates have not been revised for the past ten years despite continuous growth in coal production, rising inflation, and increasing operational costs.

According to him, the state has lost about ₹ 10,000 crore, which has severely affected its financial capacity for development and welfare works. "I therefore urge the government to immediately revise coal royalty rates, link them with market prices and inflation, and ensure timely and just compensation to Odisha. This step is essential for sustainable development, social justice, and strengthening the spirit of federalism," Mangaraj said. Seema Dwivedi of the BJP drew the attention of the House to the absence of any direct train service from Janghai Junction in Jaunpur, Uttar Pradesh, and demanded the operation of the Padmavat Express from Janghai.

John Brittas, CPI(M) MP from Kerala, raised the issue of the four labour codes as well as changes made to MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act), and said that farmers of workers, employees, farmers, government officers, and mine labourers are on the path of strike, demanding the withdrawal of the four controversial anti-labour laws and the restoration of MGNREGA provisions. (PTI)

## Sena (UBT) corporator Syed Iqbal elected Parbhani Mayor with Cong support

**CHHATRAPATI SAMBHAJINAGAR, Feb 12:** Shiv Sena (UBT) corporator Syed Iqbal was on Thursday elected the new Mayor of Parbhani city in central Maharashtra with Congress support, defeating his BJP rival Tirumala Khillare by a comfortable margin of 13 votes.

Iqbal, whose party fought the Parbhani City Municipal Corporation (PCMC) polls last month in alliance with the Congress, secured 39 votes to become the fifth Mayor, while BJP corporator Khillare received 26, an official said. Congress corporator Ganesh Deshmukh was elected the Deputy Mayor of Parbhani.

While the BJP hit out at Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray for "taking forward the agenda of Aurangzeb" by fielding a Muslim candidate, the Congress said it supported the Sena (UBT) in the mayoral elections to keep the BJP away from power and to follow the alliance principles.

The Congress also hit out at the Sena (UBT) for not supporting it in Chandrapur mayoral polls held on Tuesday. After Shiv Sena (UBT) corporators joined hands with the BJP in Chandrapur Mayoral poll on Tuesday, all eyes were on the poll in Parbhani, but there was no last minute twist in the central Maharashtra city.

The Congress emerged the single largest party in the Chandrapur Municipal Corporation, but failed to install its Mayor due a post-poll tie-up between rivals Shiv Sena (UBT) and the BJP. The Congress and Shiv Sena (UBT) had a pre-poll alliance for the January 15 elections to the 65-member PCMC, where the latter emerged the single largest party winning 25 seats. The Congress bagged 12. The Congress-Shiv Sena (UBT) combine, with 37 votes, received support from an in-



dependent and a Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) corporator, easily winning the Mayoral poll.

Iqbal is the first Shiv Sena (UBT) Mayor of Parbhani, where the post was earlier held by the Congress for multiple terms. Talking to reporters, Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Sanjay Jadhav said his party was confident of winning the Parbhani Mayoral poll. "I had earlier said the next Mayor of Parbhani will be from our party. Whatever happened in Chandrapur was limited to that city. We had a pre-poll alliance (with Congress) here (in Parbhani). We stayed together and also received support from an independent and an NCP corporator. We have given the first Mayor from our party," he maintained.

The Opposition BJP criticised the Shiv Sena (UBT), headed by former Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray, for its choice of candidate for the Mayor's post and accused it of ignoring Marathi 'manooos' (Marathi people).

State BJP spokesperson Navnath Ban said, "Uddhav Thackeray is taking forward the agenda of Aurangzeb in Parbhani. They take the name of Marathi manooos before elections, but when time comes to install a Mayor, they field a Muslim candidate."

Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) leader Sandip Deshpande de-

fended the nomination of Iqbal.

Deshpande said, "His work is important. I believe he will work in the interest of the city. Are Muslims not allowed to live in the country?"

In the polls, the Shiv Sena UBT won 25 seats, followed by the BJP (12), Congress (12), NCP (11), Jan Surajya Shakti (3), Yeshwant Sena (1) and Independent (1). Maharashtra Congress president Harshwardhan Sapkal said the party supported Sena (UBT) in the Parbhani mayoral election to keep the BJP away from power and to follow alliance principles, but criticised the Sena's role in Chandrapur.

Speaking to reporters in Buldhana, Sapkal said, "In Parbhani, Shiv Sena (UBT) got the mayor's post, while Congress secured the deputy mayor's post. All 12 Congress corporators voted for the Sena (UBT) candidate to prevent the BJP from coming to power."

"We stood by the INDIA alliance and the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) alliance to protect democracy and the Constitution, all our corporators supported Shiv Sena (UBT)," Sapkal said. However, in Chandrapur, the Sena (UBT) did not follow the alliance spirit and instead supported the BJP. It was politically wrong, he alleged.

"Although there was a proposal to make a Congress mayor in Parbhani, the party gave up the claim in the interest of the alliance. We are not hungry for power. We honoured the alliance. But the events in Chandrapur and Parbhani show that Shiv Sena (UBT) takes Congress' votes, but does not support it when needed," he said.

Congress leaders were in touch with Shiv Sena (UBT) leaders, including MP Sanjay Raut, regarding the Chandrapur issue, Sapkal said, saying some statements made by Sena leaders were inappropriate for an alliance partner. (PTI)

## BJP MPs welcome Budget, slam Oppn over disruptions

**NEW DELHI, Feb 12:** BJP MPs on Thursday slammed the opposition parties for disrupting the ongoing Budget session, while Opposition members alleged that the Budget did not promise anything for the common people.

Participating in the debate on the Budget in the Rajya Sabha, BJP MP Kesridevsinh Jhala said the Budget will pave the way for a developed India by 2047, and lauded Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman for presenting the Budget for the 9th time. "At a time when major economies in the world are facing trouble, India is rising... It is one of the fastest-growing economies," Jhala said.

He also said that 25 crore people were pulled out of poverty by the NDA government with its pro-poor policies.

Slamming the Opposition over its criticism of the government, Jhala said, "At a time when India is moving towards 'Viksit Bharat', from fragile five, we are the fourth largest economy... But how has the opposition presented itself in the whole session... we can see there is a system of representative disruptions". "They even reached the Prime Minister's chair," he said. Prime Minister Modi was present in the Rajya Sabha during the Question Hour on Thursday. Madan Rathore of the BJP also targeted the Opposition parties and said, "Opposition for the sake of opposition is not right". Amar Pal Maurya of the BJP said the Budget implements party ideologue Deendayal Upadhyay's vision of "antodyaya", and will help the poor. "If Opposition leaders can't see it, it's because their vision is clouded... They also talked about poverty, but did not do anything," he said. He also accused the opposition parties of insulting President Droupadi Murmu by protesting during her address to the joint sitting of Parliament.

Meanwhile, P Sandosh Kumar of the CPI slammed the Budget for not having anything for the common people and Kerala. "There is nothing to celebrate for the common man..." Kumar said. "Kerala is once again brutally neglected. We gave a detailed memorandum, but nothing was accepted... are we not a part of this country?" he said.

"We don't want any generosity. When you collect ₹ 100 from Kerala, give us back at least ₹ 50, right now we are getting only 25 per cent," he said. Kumar also accused the Centre of not providing any funds for the landslide-hit Wayanad. Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Priyanka Chaturvedi, meanwhile, raised concerns over senior citizens being overlooked in the Budget.

"Senior citizens above 60 were hoping there would be something for them, but there was nothing for them," she said. She said taxes on elder care facilities and items continue to be high, making it unaffordable for the middle class, and also questioned levying taxes on items like adult diapers and wheelchairs. (PTI)

## The controversy unfolds amid sweeping deletions in Kolkata under the SIR draft rolls released on Dec 16 Muslim names disproportionately figure in SIR's logical discrepancy lists in 4 Kolkata seats: Study

**KOLKATA, Feb 12:** A recently published study has flagged what it calls a "striking anomaly" in Kolkata's voter roll revision exercise, claiming that Muslims figure disproportionately in the Logical Discrepancy (LD) lists across four assembly seats during the ongoing SIR.

The study of the LD lists in Ballygunge, Kolkata Port, Metiabruz and Bhabanipur, the constituency of Chief Minister Mamta Banerjee, suggests that the percentage of Muslim-identifiable names flagged under the category far exceeds their estimated share in the population of these constituencies.

The research was conducted by the Kolkata-based Sabar Institute, which works on addressing social disparities. Repeated calls and messages to the office of the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO), West Bengal, seeking a response to the findings did not elicit a reply until the time of filing this report.

The findings came against the

backdrop of the SIR exercise, which has already resulted in the exclusion of over 58.2 lakh names statewide under the absent, permanently shifted, dead, and duplicate (ASDD) category, shrinking West Bengal's electorate from 7.66 crore to 7.08 crore. The second phase of the SIR is currently underway and involves hearings of 1.67 crore electors under scrutiny, including 1.36 crore flagged for LD and around 31 lakh voters whose records lack mapping.

Researcher Ashin Chakraborty, who along with senior researcher Sabir Ahamed conducted the study, said the institute first analysed the December 16 ASDD exclusion list, comprising around 58 lakh names, amid allegations that Muslim voters were being disproportionately struck off.

"In the December exclusion list, the proportion of Muslim names broadly matched their population share in those constituencies. We did not find evidence of excessive

Muslim exclusion at that stage," Chakraborty told PTI.

A similar pattern was observed in the "unmapped voters" list, where Muslim representation largely tracked demographic proportions.

"When it comes to the list involving LD, we did not receive the full list. It is not uploaded on the website. Using our sources and assets, we managed to obtain the lists from local BLOs. What we observed there raises concerns. The proportion of Muslim names appears to be two to three times their population share in some instances. This pattern was not present in the earlier two lists," he said.

In Bhabanipur, Muslims constitute around 20 per cent of the population. While their share in the ASDD and unmapped lists was around 23 per cent and 26 per cent respectively, the LD list shows a Muslim representation of about 52 per cent, the study claims.

In Ballygunge, where Muslims



make up an estimated 50 per cent of the electorate, their share in the ASDD and unmapped lists stood at 42 per cent and 44 per cent. In the LD list, however, it rises sharply to nearly 77.5 per cent.

The pattern is stark in Kolkata Port and Metiabruz, both Muslim-majority constituencies. In Kolkata Port, Muslims account for roughly 50 per cent of voters but 82 per cent of those flagged under LD,

the study said. In Metiabruz, where Muslims constitute around 60 per cent of the population, their share in the LD list is reported to be as high as 87 per cent.

Logical discrepancies include alleged mismatches in a parent's name or unusual age differences between a voter and a parent.

Chakraborty said the institute converted the lists from PDF to Excel and used a machine learning

model to classify names as Muslim or non-Muslim based on nomenclature patterns. "The model performs with reasonably high accuracy. It was through this process that we derived the evidence," he said.

The TMC said the findings vindicated its charge that the SIR exercise was "designed to harass minorities and urban poor voters".

A senior TMC leader said, "First, they said it is about dead and duplicate voters. Now we see that in the so-called LD list, minority names are being flagged disproportionately. This raises serious questions about intent."

The BJP, however, rejected the allegation, asserting that the SIR was a "routine and transparent" revision process. "The Election Commission is an independent constitutional body. Logical discrepancies are technical issues. Linking this to religion is a political attempt by the TMC to polarise voters ahead of the 2026 elec-

tions," a state BJP leader said. The controversy unfolds amid sweeping deletions in Kolkata under the SIR draft rolls released on December 16. In south Kolkata, the four assembly segments of Bhabanipur, Kolkata Port, Ballygunge and Rashbehari together saw over 2.16 lakh names deleted- nearly 24 per cent of their combined electorate of around 9.07 lakh when the process began.

Bhabanipur alone accounted for 44,787 deletions from an electorate of 2,06,295- nearly 21.7 per cent. Kolkata Port, represented by Mayor Firdah Hakim, recorded 63,730 deletions- over 26 per cent of its electorate while Ballygunge and Rashbehari also saw significant reductions. Metiabruz recorded around 39,000 deletions during the draft list released on December 16. North Kolkata presented an even sharper churn, with seven seats together witnessing deletions of about 3.9 lakh names, nearly 25.85 per cent of their electorate. (PTI)

## Arrested in morning, released by afternoon Lamborghini crash accused gets bail from Kanpur court

KANPUR, Feb 12: Shivam Mishra, son of local tobacco baron K K Mishra, got bail from a court here on Thursday, just a few hours after his arrest in connection with the high-profile Lamborghini crash that left several people injured on VIP Road earlier this week.

After his arrest, police produced 35-year-old Shivam before the court of the Additional Chief Judicial Magistrate around 10 am, seeking 14 days' judicial custody.

District Government Counsel (Crime) Dileep Awasthi said Shivam was released after furnishing a bail bond of ₹ 20,000.

Police had sought custody for further interrogation, but the court questioned the need for remand.

Anant Sharma, a counsel for the accused, said the police had moved an application before the court seeking Mishra's remand but claimed the remand papers had several discrepancies.

He also claimed that the documents did not mention details about serving of notice, following which the court rejected the remand plea and ordered the accused's release on bail.

Sharma said Kanpur Police had formally arrested Mishra earlier in the morning and produced him before the court around 10 am. After hearing arguments, the court reserved its order and pronounced it after 3 pm, he added.

Describing the order as "just and appropriate", Sharma said there was no provision for punishment or imposition of fine at this stage



and that Shivam had been released on a bail bond.

Senior defence counsel Naresh Chandra Tripathi, also appearing for Mishra, told reporters that the arrest was in violation of Supreme Court guidelines and provisions of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNS).  
"I argued before the court that the police had not recorded valid reasons for arrest, particularly when the alleged offences carried a punishment of less than seven years," he said.

Tripathi said the court, exercising its discretion and taking into account Supreme Court guidelines and BNS provisions, refused the remand and ordered release of the accused on furnishing a personal bond of ₹ 20,000.

He also alleged that the police acted under government pressure and termed the arrest illegal.

After his release, Shivam

walked out of the crowded court premises amid tight security provided by his lawyers.

Wearing a white face mask, he made his way through a heavy presence of police personnel, lawyers and media persons before reaching his vehicle.

Police said Shivam was arrested from an undisclosed location in the city on Thursday morning, alleging that he had not been cooperating with the investigation. A senior officer, speaking on condition of anonymity, claimed that the accused was trying to evade arrest and had been moving in an ambulance to avoid detection.

After a medical examination, he was produced before the court. He appeared slightly unwell during the hearing and was seen with an intravenous cannula, supported by police personnel and relatives.

He also objected to mediapersons recording videos outside the

courtroom. Another defence counsel Narendra Yadav told the court that the investigating officer failed to present convincing grounds for custodial remand, following which the judge dismissed the plea.

The court also pulled up the investigating officer over alleged procedural lapses. In court, Shivam assured that he would cooperate with the probe and would neither threaten witnesses nor tamper with evidence.

Tripathi further argued that since the offences mentioned in the FIR carry a maximum punishment of less than seven years, the police could have granted bail at the police station itself without producing the accused before a magistrate.

The crash on Sunday, in which the speeding Lamborghini allegedly driven by Shivam rammed into six people, has triggered public outrage and intense scrutiny of the investigation.

His father had earlier claimed that his son was not driving the car and accused the police of framing him. However, the police maintained that the investigation established that Shivam was behind the wheel at the time of the accident.

In a related development, a man identified as Mohanlal appeared before a court on Wednesday seeking to surrender, claiming that he was driving the car at the time of the accident and not Mishra. The court rejected his plea after the police report did not name him as an accused.

## Govt working to bring J-K people into national mainstream: MoS



NEW DELHI, Feb 12: The government, under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, is working to bring the youth of Jammu and Kashmir into the national mainstream and prevent them from going on the wrong path. Minister of State for Labour and Employment Shobha Karandlaje said in the Rajya Sabha on Thursday.

Replying to supplementary questions in the Upper House during the Question Hour, she said there was a time when incidents of stone pelting were commonly seen in Jammu and Kashmir, but the Union Territory is now moving towards creating employment.

"For the first time in the country, in the last seven years, new EPFO subscribers have joined, and in Jammu and Kashmir, 1.6 lakh new subscribers have joined. This is a very big thing in Jammu and Kashmir," she told the house.

"We are working under the leadership of the Prime Minister in bringing people of Jammu and Kashmir into the national mainstream and to ensure that they do not go on the wrong path." Karandlaje said the people of Jammu and Kashmir are being brought to the national mainstream, and we will continue to do this, whatever the Opposition may say.

"You have always come in the way and created hurdles. But our purpose is to save the youth of Jammu and Kashmir and provide them with new employment," she said. The Modi government is working to take Jammu and Kashmir forward with different schemes, Karandlaje said.

"For the first time, Jammu and Kashmir Bank has given nearly ₹ 14,490 crore under the credit guarantee scheme. This is the highest in the country."

"We have also created nine separate clusters for the manufacture of cricket bats in Jammu and Kashmir," the minister noted.

"I can give you one example, when I met a girl on a flight, she said that in the country's history, a prime minister is thinking about the children of Jammu and Kashmir," she noted.

Prime Minister Modi was present in the Rajya Sabha during the Question Hour on Thursday.

The minister said our government is working towards bringing formalisation of jobs for the youth of Jammu and Kashmir, and EPFO

shows this. As many as 1,60,000 people have come to EPFO in Jammu and Kashmir.

"Out of the total 12 crore registrations in the country, as many as 12,297 people have got registered under the PM Viksit Bharat Rozgar Yojna. In Jammu and Kashmir, 8.2 lakh units have been registered, and 32.3 lakh people have set up units there in the last five years, and the number is increasing," she said.

Under the credit guarantee scheme, she said, ₹ 12 lakh crore worth of loans have been given to entrepreneurs across the country, and in Jammu and Kashmir, loans have also been given.

Under the PM employment generation scheme, the minister said nearly 10.5 lakh crore entrepreneurs have been given a subsidy worth ₹ 29,000 crore and assisted one crore units.

In Jammu and Kashmir, 73,349 units are assisted by the subsidy and low-interest loans worth 4,394 crore loans, including 1,530 crore subsidy, she said.

Replying to another supplementary question, she said that under the Prime Minister's Vishwakarma Yojna, "Our aim was to register 30 lakh people in four years, but in two years alone we got 30 lakh people registered and gave training to 22 lakh people. We have also given them toolkits". On gig workers, she said the government has signed agreements with 12 companies and 25 lakh people are working in such online platforms to bring them under ESI and EPFO, and our Labour and Employment department is working in this regard and has signed MoUs.

In his written reply to the question on unemployment rate in Jammu and Kashmir, Minister of Labour and Employment Mansukh Mandaviya said the data on Employment and Unemployment is collected through Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), which is conducted by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) since 2017-18.

"As per the latest Annual PLFS reports, the estimated Unemployment Rate (UR) on usual status for persons of age 15 years and above has decreased from 4.8 per cent in 2019-20 to 3.2 per cent in 2023-24 in the country and from 6.7 per cent to 6.1 per cent during the same period in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir. (PTI)

## No major impact of nationwide strike call in Gujarat

AHMEDABAD, Feb 12: The nationwide strike call given by central trade unions on Thursday against the Centre's labour reforms and economic policies had little impact in Gujarat, with most services and commercial establishments functioning as usual across the state, officials said.

Trade union representatives in Gujarat held demonstrations at a few places, while some employees of public sector banks remained away from work. However, all other things were functioning normally, officials said.

The 'Bharat Bandh' has been called by a joint forum of central trade unions to show their "resistance to anti-worker, anti-farmer and anti-national pro-corporate policies of the central government".

Normal life remained largely unaffected in major cities, including Ahmedabad, Surat, Vadodra and Rajkot.

Markets, shops, industrial units and educational institutions operated without disruption, while public transport services and autorickshaws ran without any problem.

"There are no reports of any disruption in Gujarat due to the bandh call. Commercial activities are continuing as usual, and law and order is under control. There is no significant impact of the bandh in the state," said an official from the state police control room.

State government and private offices, schools, colleges, commercial establishments, industries and even public sector banks reported regular attendance, officials said. Private banks and financial institutions also functioned normally.

In Ahmedabad and Surat, major markets, diamond polishing and trading units, as well as textile markets, saw regular business activity. "The strike has been called by national trade unions, and diamond workers are not affiliated with them. Also, the four new labour codes introduced by the Centre are actually beneficial for our diamond industry. Overall, there is no impact of the strike in Surat," said Bhavesh Tank, vice president of the Diamond Workers Union, Gujarat. (PTI)

## Jobless growth a UPA-era relic: Sitharaman

NEW DELHI, Feb 12: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday asserted that India is on a robust growth trajectory with low unemployment, dismissing concerns of "jobless growth" as a relic of the UPA era.

Replying to the debate on the Union Budget 2026-27, she said the middle class is expanding, not being suppressed, and emphasised that higher taxes paid by individuals compared to corporates do not mean they are being burdened.

She said the steps taken in the Budget are proof of the government's resolve to build a resilient and self-reliant India.

On the Opposition criticism of slashing funds for welfare schemes, Sitharaman said the Centre's funds are not a "free pool of cash" that can be used at will, but are hard-earned contributions of every Indian citizen, which will not be allowed to be squandered.

She said the funds are released only when needed, and not for the sake of increasing expenditure.

"We now have absolute transparency in the government spending process," the minister said.

She also said that inflation in India was lower than in many emerging economies. "I want to highlight the fact that inflation is at a historic low, even though growth



remains high. There is no inflation crisis in India today. Inflation has been tamed and firmly anchored due to stability and the steps taken by the government," she said.

"The growth without jobs was a UPA-era story and not now." Refuting opposition parties' charge that middle-class people were paying higher taxes, the finance minister said, "The conclusion made by the Opposition that the middle class was being sandwiched because personal tax collection exceeds the corporate taxes, that is fundamentally misdiagnosing the situation. There is no evidence of middle-class suppression".

Actually, she said, there is more evidence of middle-class expansion and formalisation, driven by the economic reforms undertaken in the last ten years.

"High personal income tax collection does not necessarily mean the middle class is being crushed," she said, adding that the economy was no longer narrow and confined to the elite, and the middle-class basket is widening.

So, suppression of the middle class cannot happen when the tax base is widening, and the tax net itself is expanding, and people are coming on board voluntarily to pay taxes, the minister said.

Between 2013-14 and 2024-25, Sitharaman said the number of taxpayers rose from 5.26 crore to 12.13 crore. Within the last 11

years, the number of income-tax payers has more than doubled, and this represents the largest structural expansion of the middle class in the country, she added.

The finance minister accused the Opposition of misleading the house by saying that the government was slashing funds for welfare schemes to maintain a low fiscal deficit.

She said that in the past, success was measured by how much was allocated, regardless of whether it was actually spent or not. But, this government has now "absolute visibility" on where it remains and where it gets spent or is lying idle.

So, strictly, the money goes when it is required, and when it is utilised, she said, adding that the government ensures that the money is released only when the ground-level work demands.

"I would like to categorically state that there is no denial or stoppage of funds to any state or any scheme," the finance minister said.

The minister asked the members to urge their state governments to participate in the central schemes.

She also attacked the Congress, alleging that it sheds crocodile tears about rising debt and claimed that they "want us to borrow more money and also release funds to the states". (PTI)

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## FM misinforming Parl on WTO to justify sellout Indo-US interim trade deal: Anand Sharma

NEW DELHI, Feb 12: Congress leader Anand Sharma slammed Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday for criticising India's stand at the WTO Ministerial Conference in Bali in 2013 during the UPA rule, and accused her of "deliberately misinforming" Parliament to justify the "sellout" interim trade deal with the US.

Just for political gains, Sitharaman was misleading the nation and making an "orchestrated claim" that the UPA government "sold out" India's food security at the WTO meeting in Bali, the former commerce minister alleged in a statement.

"It is unfortunate and shocking that Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has deliberately misinformed the Parliament on the agreements reached at the ninth WTO Ministerial meeting in Bali in December 2013.

"In her desperation to justify and defend the sellout interim trade deal with the US, she has levelled an unfair allegation that the Congress-led UPA government had sold out India's right to food security at the WTO meeting in Bali. This is false and incorrect and con-

tradicts the facts on record and WTO's official statement," Sharma said. Claiming that the finance minister made the claim for political gains, he asserted that the "issue of public stockholding for food security was actually forced by India at the Bali Ministerial meeting and the same were secured and protected".

Sitharaman, on Wednesday, launched a blistering attack on Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi, saying that it was the Congress-led UPA government which surrendered India's interest before international organisations, including the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and "sold" the interest of the poor and farmers. She alleged that it was the Congress which not only sold the interest of the poor and the farmers, but the country itself.

The fact is that it was India's strong and uncompromising stance that forced the issue of procurement of food grains for public stock holding and livelihood of the Bali WTO agenda despite stiff opposition from the US, the European Union, the Cairns group and developed nations. (PTI)

## Kerala HC grants anticipatory bail to expelled Cong MLA in first sexual assault case

KOCHI, Feb 12: The Kerala High Court on Thursday granted anticipatory bail to expelled Congress MLA Rahul Mankootathil in a case of rape and forced abortion against him, saying that the prosecution has been unable to show his custodial interrogation was necessary.

While granting the relief to the Palakkad MLA, Justice Kausar Edappagath said that the conduct of the complainant in the case "prima facie suggests the existence of a consensual sexual relationship" between her and Mankootathil, but it requires final adjudication at trial. The High Court said that it was "difficult to believe" that the complainant, being a married and mature woman, would invite the MLA to her apartment and subsequently travel to Palakkad to stay with him "unless she was willing to engage in a physical relationship".

"The absence of any contemporaneous complaint on these occasions reinforces this inference," it said.

The High Court also noted that the Whatsapp chats of Mankootathil and the complainant as well as between her and the MLA's friend -- the second accused

in the case -- "reveal an intense personal relationship and do not indicate any element of coercion or force".

"Not every instance of consensual sexual intercourse in a failed relationship can be characterised as rape. Where two adults voluntarily consent to engage in sexual relations and continue such activity over a prolonged period, it can only be construed as an act of mutual choice or promiscuity, not as sexual assault by one partner against the other.

"The Supreme Court has expressed serious concern over the recent trend of invoking rape laws to criminalise the breakdown of consensual relationships," the High Court added. Regarding the allegations of forced abortion against the MLA, the High Court noted that as per the Whatsapp chats between the complainant and the second accused, she ultimately consented to terminate her pregnancy.

It said that the Whatsapp chats also revealed that the complainant herself requested the tablets for abortion, shared her location and received the medicine from the second accused. (PTI)

## RERA doing nothing except facilitating defaulting builders: SC

NEW DELHI, Feb 12: The Supreme Court on Thursday said it is high time all states rethought the constitution of the real estate regulatory authority (RERA) as the institution is doing nothing, except facilitating defaulting builders.

A bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joyimalya Bagchi said the people for whom RERA was created were "completely depressed, disgusted and disappointed" and asserted that it won't mind if the institution was abolished.

The observations came from the bench, which permitted the Himachal Pradesh government to shift the office of RERA to the place of its choice.

The bench issued notice on a plea filed by the Himachal Pradesh

government and others challenging an order of the Himachal Pradesh High Court in a matter pertaining to the shifting of the state RERA office from Shimla to Dharamshala.

The high court had earlier stayed a June 2025 notification concerning the shifting of RERA office till further order.

Later, in its order passed on December 30, 2025, the high court directed the continuance of the interim order.

The top court stayed the high court's December 30 direction.

"Except facilitating the builders in default, this institution is doing nothing. Better abolish this institution, we don't mind that," the CJ said. "...high time that all the states should revisit and rethink of even

constituting this authority," the bench said.

In its petition filed in the apex court through advocate Sugandha Anand, the state said the decision to shift the Himachal Pradesh RERA office from Shimla to Dharamshala was taken to "decongest" Shimla city, and it was purely on administrative considerations.

Senior advocate Madhavi Divan, appearing for the state, told the bench about the matter and said, "This is about the RERA, which we seek to shift to Dharamshala".

An advocate, appearing for the respondent, said 90 per cent of the projects with which the authority deals are in Shimla, Solan, Parwanoo and Sirmour, which are within a radius of a maximum of



40 km.

He said around 92 per cent of complaints which are pending before RERA are only from these districts, and there are only 20 projects in Dharamshala.

When the bench was informed

that a retired IAS officer was appointed in RERA, the CJ said, "In every state, it has become a rehabilitation centre. These authorities are all occupied by these persons.

"The people for whom this institution was created, they are completely

depressed, disgusted and disappointed. None of them are getting any effective relief. For whom this institution actually is now serving, you will find out when you meet these people," the CJ said. The top court also observed that Shimla is "completely over exhausted".

While issuing notice on the plea, the bench said, "The state is permitted to shift the office of RERA to the place of its choice. However, it shall be subject to the final outcome of the writ petition pending before the high court".

The advocate general of Himachal Pradesh told the bench that, as per a policy decision, the state is developing Palampur, Dharamshala and other cities.

The CJ asked, "What is the

logic of having a retired bureaucrat? How he will be able to help in developing Palampur. You need to avail services of some architect who is environment friendly, who knows Palampur area, Dharamshala area and these entire areas. Only those persons will help". The bench was also informed that the district judge, Shimla, hears the appeals against the orders passed by RERA.

"With a view to ensure that the persons affected by the orders of RERA are not caused any inconvenience to visit Shimla for the purpose of filing appeals, it is further directed that appellate power may be shifted from principal district judge, Shimla, to principal district judge of Dharamshala," the bench said. (PTI)

# I want to explore everything as a newcomer, says Shanaya Kapoor



Actor Shanaya Kapoor says destiny brought her to her second film, survival thriller "Tu Ya Main", which features her in the role of a social media influencer.

Shanaya, who is the daughter of actor Sanjay Kapoor and Mahi Gill, made her acting debut opposite Vikrant Massey in "Aankhon Ki Gustaakhiyan". She credited casting director Mukesh Chhabra for the role in "Tu Ya Main".

"When I read the scenes, I found them super fun, I was like, it's destiny that allowed me to be there at the right time, right moment and Mukesh sir for thinking of me in the first place that I got the chance to audition. I'm just starting out, so I'm just

like an open book. I want to explore everything. I need to figure out which direction I want to go in," she told PTI.

"Tu Ya Main" revolves around social media influencers portrayed by Shanaya and Adarsh Gourav, whose romantic getaway takes a deadly turn when they find themselves trapped in a swimming pool with a crocodile.

It is helmed by Bejoy Nambiar and is slated to release theatrically on February 13. Shanaya's debut film "Aankhon Ki Gustaakhiyan" did not do well at the box office but the actor said seeing herself on the big screen for the first time was a "big achievement" for her.

"I wouldn't say that it (film) didn't receive love. It didn't reflect in the numbers. But for me, it was a moment, I was happy seeing myself on the big screen. For me, that was that moment that I've been waiting for.

"So, when I was watching it in the theatre even if no one was there, it was just me, I was like, 'What is going on?'. I had to soak in that moment, appreciate that moment and not get distracted by anything else. It was my first movie and it's very special to me, it always will be, no matter what," Shanaya said. Instead of dwelling on the result of the

film, the actor said she stayed focused on her next project, "Tu Yaa Main".

"I'm an actor, I want my films to do well, I want the audiences to go in, and like it (theatre) should be jam-packed. I want that and that is the dream and that's what I'm working towards and that is the aim and motivation."

To prepare for her role of social media influencer, Avani, Shanaya said she revisited survival thriller films like "Jaws", "Crawl" and "The Meg". She also did an unconventional acting exercise with acting coach, Atul Mongia.

"Adarsh introduced me to this technique in Atul sir's workshop. At first when I heard it, I was like, 'I don't know if this is for me and if I can do it'. But I gave it a shot and it really helped. I watched a lot of videos of black panther, and that really helped me. I felt the way they moved was graceful, sensual, charming, and confident.

"My character Avani has that sensual side where you feel a little intimidated and she's just gazing, she's not looking at you in a way that you get scared, but there's something about her look," Shanaya said.

"Tu Yaa Main" is produced by Aanand L Rai, Himanshu Sharma, and Vinod Bhanushali. (PTI)

## SINGER JASMINE SANDLAS STOPS SHOW MID-WAY, CALLS OUT HARASSMENT AT DELHI CONCERT



A video of singer Jasmine Sandlas pausing her concert midway after noticing a group of women being harassed by men has gone viral on social media. Many social media users and journalists shared the video from Sandlas' recent concert, which was held at Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium on February 7.

In the short clip, Sandlas is seen beginning to sing when she suddenly says, "Security, can you please remove these two guys? Kudiya nu tang kar rahe hai (They are troubling these women)." She then addresses the crowd in Punjabi and says, "Appan gawan ge hi nahi jab tak kudiya safe ni feel karti hoye (I will not perform till the time women don't feel safe in my concert)." "I will casually walk around like this until the problem is solved," added the Punjabi singer, who received loud cheers from the crowd.

The video has since gone viral on social media, drawing praise for Sandlas for taking a stand on women's safety.

"Respect to Jasmine Sandlas for taking a stand when it truly mattered. No performance is more important than the safety and dignity of women in the audience.

"Artists using their platform to call out harassment sends a powerful message that such behavior will not be tolerated. Every woman deserves to feel safe in public spaces especially at events meant for joy and celebration," said a user on X.

Another user said, "We need more Jasmine Sandlas around us." "Bravo Jasmine Sandlas... Respect! This is how you take a stand," read a post.

Sandlas is quite popular in the Punjabi music industry and has crooned tracks such as "Illegal Weapon", "Sip Sip" and "Taras" from horror comedy "Munjya".

She most recently sang two chartbuster tracks for Aditya Dhar's spy drama movie "Dhurandhar" — lending her voice to the title track along with rapper Hanumankind, and "Shararat" with Madhubanti Bagchi.

At the concert, she was joined by Ayesha Khan, who performed in the music video on "Shararat".

"Main saare steps bhool gayi stage pe aake. I'm so glad to be here. I always tell Jasmine, she's a god's child," Khan said. (PTI)



## Salman Khan's Brother-In-Law gets threat email

Mumbai Police's crime branch is investigating a threat email that was sent to Bollywood superstar Salman Khan's brother-in-law and actor Aayush Sharma.

The sender of the email to Sharma claimed he was a member of the Lawrence Bishnoi gang, police said.

According to the sources, the threatening email sent to Sharma was sent via Proton Mail, making it difficult for the investigating agencies to track the location, as it constantly changes for these platforms.

Server locations are sometimes shown in one country and sometimes in another, making it difficult to trace the true source. This indicates that the sender of the threats was prepared to conceal their identity.

Though there was no formal complaint, the Mumbai police have launched a probe in connection with the threat email to Sharma.

On Tuesday, Bollywood actor Ranveer Singh received a threat in the form of a WhatsApp voice note demanding crores of rupees in ransom.

The threat was sent using a VPN. The secu-

rity outside Singh's house has been increased after this.

Police suspect that members of the Lawrence Bishnoi gang could be behind the threat.

Last week, five rounds were fired at filmmaker Rohit Shetty's residence in Mumbai's Juhu area.

Police have arrested five people in connection with the firing and claimed that the accused were acting on the instructions of Shubham Lonkar, an absconding member of the Lawrence Bishnoi gang. (PTI)

## 'FA9LA' RAPPER FLIPPERACHI TO MAKE INDIA DEBUT WITH MUMBAI CONCERT TODAY

Flipperachi, the Bahraini rapper who became popular in India after his song "FA9LA" featured in the spy film "Dhurandhar", will make his debut in the country with a concert in Mumbai on March 13, the organisers announced on Wednesday.

The show, produced and promoted by Eva Live and Zee Live and powered by Mastercard, will be held at Phoenix Marketcity and marks the Bahraini rapper's first performance in the country as part of his expanding international tour circuit.

Flipperachi has emerged as one of the most talked-about new voices in contemporary hip-hop, known for his raw lyricism, genre-blending sound and unapologetic storytelling. He was also recently

"India has shown me incredible love, and Mumbai is a city I've always wanted to perform in. The energy, the people, the culture — it all feels very familiar. This show is going to be loud, emotional and unforgettable," Flipperachi said in a statement.

In "Dhurandhar", Flipperachi's high-energy track "FA9LA" was used as the background score for actor Akshaye Khanna's entry scene in the film.

It has since gone viral on social media and music platforms, becoming one of the standout musical moments from the movie's soundtrack.

Deepak Choudhary, founder and managing director of Eva Live, said bringing the artist's debut show to Mumbai was a "no-brainer" for the company.

"Flipperachi is not just an artist but a movement. His rise has been completely organic, driven by authenticity and a deep connec-



tion with fans. Mumbai understands global music, and we're thrilled to present a show that reflects where hip-hop is headed next," he added.

Gareth Eswin Thomas, business head at Zee Live, said the concert aligns with the company's focus on curating immersive live entertainment experiences.

"Flipperachi represents the new wave of global hip-hop, where culture and music travel beyond borders... Mumbai is a city that thrives on live energy, and this concert is set to elevate the live hip-hop experience for audiences," he said.

Besides Mumbai, Flipperachi is scheduled to perform in Bengaluru on March 14 at the UN40 Music Festival. (PTI)

## I WAS 30, CONVINCED THAT THE MOVIE WASN'T GOING TO WORK: RYAN COOGLER ON 'BLACK PANTHER'



If there is anything that "Sinners" director Ryan Coogler has learned from his 2018 blockbuster superhero drama "Black Panther" and its late star Chadwick Boseman, it is to stay more present in the moment.

Coogler's "Sinners" recently became the most nominated film in the Oscars history by earning 16 nods for the 2026 edition. The record was earlier shared by "All About Eve" (1950), "Titanic" (1997) and "La La Land" (2016) as they all had 14 nominations each. In an interview with the Hollywood Reporter, Coogler spoke about the lessons he learned from Boseman, the "Black Panther" star who passed away in 2020 after a secret four-year battle with cancer. He was 43.

"Engaging with him on an artistic level, conversations that will forever just be between me and him — I was about 30 years old, stressed, completely out of my mind, sleep-deprived, convinced that the movie wasn't going to work," Coogler said.

"I robbed myself of truly enjoying that privilege — even of sitting there and enjoying the countless Chadwick Boseman takes, because he didn't have a bad take. So when he

passed, I'm like, 'Oh my God, how much stuff have I not allowed myself to enjoy because I was in my own head — feeling like I was unworthy?' 'I'm going to take the lessons from Chad for the rest of my life, bro. That includes all of this. I have to see the good in things, see the value in things, and not let impostor syndrome or guilt or negativity rob me of moments with my cast who I love — or with folks who want to say, 'Hey, good job.'"

Coogler was in his mid-20s when he impressed Hollywood with his directorial debut "Fruitvale Station", which revolved around the real-life events leading up to the 2009 death of 22-year-old Oscar Grant in police firing. His second project was "Creed", a spin-off to Sylvester Stallone's "Rocky" franchise.

"Black Panther", which amassed USD 1.35 billion worldwide, was praised for the way it honoured the black culture and history through the story of a king who rules a technologically advanced African country, hidden from the world.

Coogler was deep into the making the sequel when the pandemic hit and they all

learned about Boseman's death. The filmmaker had to rewrite the story in a way that honoured Boseman's legacy but continued the story without him. "Wakanda Forever", which initially seemed like an easy continuation of the world shown in "Black Panther", had to be reframed completely with Boseman's T'Challa dying at the beginning of the film."

I would look around to people who had been making movies as long as I had been alive, bro, sometimes longer, and they would say: 'I've never seen anything like this,'" Coogler said about the time. "We had to work from the place of being brokenhearted, or else it wouldn't have got done. ... Me and Chad were getting closer, so it was like a wound to the heart. It was like somebody had taken the sun away and we were all these planets floating."

The filmmaker looks back at the time with sadness and also pride. "I learned that I was more resilient than I give myself credit for — I'll say that was the biggest thing. ... And that movie gets watched at home so much more than the other Panther did. I think about that:

People may be watching when they want to feel something specific."

"Sinners", his first movie since his debut to have no IP connection, was inspired by Coogler's great-uncle James Edmonson, who died in 2015. A genre-bending story that combines Black history, Blues music, Jim Crow South, cultural appropriation and vampires, "Sinners" released last year at a time when Warner Bros films were not doing well and uncertainty surrounded the future of Warner's film heads Michael De Luca and Pamela Abdy.

But the film released and became an instant hit with both critics and at the box office. Coogler said he was not worried about the negativity and doubt surrounding the release of "Sinners" "I admired Mike and Pam and what they were doing, so I didn't mind that our film was the one coming at a time when they needed something to work — I actually liked that. I liked the opportunity to show up for a philosophy that I believed in: bravery, creativity, theatrical. I was happy that it was 'Sinners', where people were talking about: 'Is this going to work or not?'" PTI

# T20 WC: Marsh's fitness a worry as Australia eye win over Zimbabwe

COLOMBO, Feb 12: Skipper Mitchell Marsh's fitness will be watched closely as an injury-hit Australia try to ward off a tricky Zimbabwe and move closer to the Super Eights in a Group B match of the T20 World Cup here on Friday. Marsh missed his side's big win over Ireland on Wednesday with an internal testicular bleeding and, according to Cricket Australia, the all-rounder will require a considerable period of rest before returning to action.

Steve Smith has joined the squad as his cover, but the absence of Marsh did not feel in Australia's 67-run romp here as they produced an all-round effort against the Irish.

Without any of the batters making a fifty, they posted a strong 180-plus total before pacer Nathan Ellis and leg-spinner Adam Zampa shared eight wickets among them to give their side two full points.

But the Aussies would like to better that effort against Zimbabwe, with some heavy runs from opener Travis Head and Glenn Maxwell in the middle-over.

It's a pre-requisite for the Aussies if Marsh indeed is going to be absent partially or even fully for the rest of this ICC showpiece.

But Smith's T20 form of late



will solace the Antipodeans.

The former skipper, whose last T20I was in February 2024, was in roaring form for Sydney Sixers in the recent Big Bash League, plundering 299 runs in just six innings at an average of 59 and at a strike-rate of 167.

The Aussies will require their big guns in fine fettle against Zimbabwe, who have the wherewithal to surprise fancied teams.

Oman might not be a leading team, but the efficient manner in which the African outfit dismantled them was an eye-opener.

They have pacers like Brad Evans, Blessing Muzarabani and Richard Ngarava who can test the strongest on their day.

Sikandar Raza's mixed bag of off and leg breaks adds another dimension to their attack. Raza, a vastly experienced T20

player, will have to do his bit in batting as well along with Brian Bennett, Dion Myers, and the 40-year-old Brendan Taylor, though he is nursing a niggle from the last match.

If he is not available then, they can ponder over bringing in Ryan Burl, who can also provide another handy spin option.

Considering Australia's well-documented dislike against spin, they can also bring in another veteran Graeme Cremer, whose leg-spin could be handy here.

**Teams:**  
**Australia:** Mitchell Marsh (c), Xavier Bartlett, Cooper Connolly, Tim David, Ben Dwarshuis, Cameron Green, Nathan Ellis, Josh Hazlewood, Travis Head, Josh Inglis, Matthew Kuhnemann, Glenn Maxwell, Matthew Renshaw, Marcus Stoinis, Adam Zampa, Steve Smith (cover for Mitchell Marsh).  
**Zimbabwe:** Sikandar Raza (c), Brian Bennett, Ryan Burl, Graeme Cremer, Bradley Evans, Clive Madande, Tinotenda Maphosa, Tadiwanashe Marumani, Wellington Masakadza, Tony Munyonga, Tashinga Musekwa, Blessing Muzarabani, Dion Myers, Richard Ngarava, Brendan Taylor.

Match starts at 11 am IST. (PTI)

## Ice-breaker meet with BCCI likely BCB chief Aminul Islam to be in Colombo for Indo-Pak T20WC



DHAKA, Feb 12: Bangladesh Cricket Board chief Aminul Islam says he will be in Colombo to watch the India-Pakistan T20 World Cup clash on Sunday where he expects to break ice with the BCCI after tense exchanges over the past few weeks.

Speaking to Bangladesh newspaper 'Pratham Alo', Islam said the invitation for the high-profile game has come from the ICC.

"The ICC has taken a decision. The major stakeholders of the ICC are these five Asian countries and for the India-Pakistan World Cup match on the 15th, they want representatives of all five Asian countries to be present at the ground together, watch the match together and talk to one another," Islam said.

India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Afghanistan form the Asian block in the world body.

Asked if the meet could be an opportunity to end tensions with the BCCI, Islam said, "You can consider it as something like that."

The BCCI-BCB strife started after the Indian Board ordered the release of Bangladesh pacer Mustafizur Rahman from the IPL contract with Kolkata Knight Riders for unspecified "developments

all around."

It was widely speculated that the move was triggered by political violence in Bangladesh in which Hindus have been targeted.

Bangladesh responded by refusing to travel to India for their World Cup matches citing security worries. However, the ICC, led by former BCCI secretary Jay Shah, rejected their concerns, describing the threat perception as low to moderate after its own assessment.

Bangladesh were eventually replaced by Scotland in the tournament after refusing to budge from their position despite lengthy discussions with the world body.

Their omission led to the Pakistan government announcing a boycott of the game against India as an expression of solidarity with Bangladesh. But the impasse was resolved after the BCB and the Sri Lankan government persuaded Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif to withdraw the call.

Following another round of discussions, the ICC decided not to penalise BCB for its previous stance and also allotted one ICC event to Bangladesh in the 2028-2031 cycle.

Islam said the board will prepare a Memorandum of Understanding to ensure that the assurances are cast in stone.

"We will also enter into an agreement. The agreement will be line by line, an MoU-type document, so that there is no uncertainty," said Islam.

"You know that earlier when we held the Asian Cricket Council (ACC) Annual General Meeting in Dhaka, a similar issue arose. There as well, we prepared a MoU-type document so that no one could ever deviate from the contract in any way.

"Similar discussions (regarding preparing the MoU) with the ICC are more or less finalised," he added. (PTI)

## Koneru Humpy set to return to Norway Chess Wome

STAVANGER (NORWAY), Feb 12: Indian Grandmaster Koneru Humpy is set for her third outing at the prestigious Norway Chess Women's tournament, scheduled to be held from May 25 to June 5.

A two-time world rapid champion, the 38-year-old Humpy is among the three Indian women who have qualified for the Candidates Tournament to decide the challenger for the world championship later this year.

"I'm really happy to be part of Norway Chess Women. It's a tournament I've always enjoyed, not only because of the high level of competition but also the warm atmosphere and excellent organization.

"I'm looking forward to playing in Oslo and competing against some of the world's strongest players," Humpy said.

Humpy made history in 2002 when, at just 15 years old, she became the first Indian woman to earn the Grandmaster title, and at the time, the youngest female grandmaster in history. (PTI)

## Premier League's Nottingham Forest fires head coach Sean Dyche

NOTTINGHAM (ENGLAND), Feb 12: Nottingham Forest has fired Sean Dyche and the Premier League team is looking for its fourth head coach of the season.

Dyche was relieved of his duties late Wednesday following a goalless draw with the last-place Wolves, having been in charge for just 114 days. Forest's failure to convert any of their numerous chances against Wolves left them three points clear of the relegation zone.

"Nottingham Forest Football Club can confirm that Sean Dyche has been relieved of his duties as head coach," the club said in a statement early Thursday. "We would like to thank Sean and his staff for their efforts during their time at the club and we wish them the best of luck for the future.

"We will be making no further comment at this time."

Forest finished seventh in the Premier League under Nuno Espirito Santo last season, missing out on a Champions League spot after a poor end to the campaign. Nuno signed a new three-year deal at the City Ground in June 2025, but was fired in September after a breakdown in his relationship with owner Evangelos Marinakis. (AP)

## Aishwary Tomar leads India's clean sweep in 50m rifle 3-positions

NEW DELHI, Feb 12: World championship silver medallist Aishwary Pratap Singh Tomar beat teammate Niraj Kumar to clinch gold with a world record, as India swept the podium in the 50m rifle 3-positions event on the penultimate day of the Asian Championship here on Thursday.

Aishwary, who signed off 2025 on a high by clinching Asian Championship gold in Kazakhstan along with silver medals at the World Championships and the World Cup Finals, carried that momentum into the new year.

He fired a world record score of 362 to edge Niraj by a margin of just 0.2 points.

The 25-year-old sealed his triumph with a superb 10.7 on his final shot, finishing with a tally of 362.

Niraj settled for silver with 361.8, while Akhil Sheoran claimed bronze with a score of 343.5 at the Karni Singh Shooting Range.

It was a bittersweet moment for Niraj, who came agonisingly close to gold but had to settle for silver, even as he celebrated his first individual international medal.

The contest went down to the 35th and final shot, underscoring just how tight the battle for the top spot had been.

Niraj fired first to hit a 10.3 giving Aishwary a target of 10.6 to win the gold.

Olympian Aishwary held his nerve and hit a superb 10.7 to leap over Niraj and secure the gold.

### Asian Championship

Earlier, Niraj had topped the qualification round with a score of 593, while Aishwary finished second with 588 and Sheoran placed third with an identical score of 588.

The trio of Niraj, Aishwary and Sheoran totalled 1769 to clinch the team gold, followed by Japan (1754) and Kazakhstan (1748) respectively.

In the junior men's final, Adriyan Karmakar secured his second gold medal of the championship with a comfortable victory, shooting a score of 353.2, which was 4.7 more than silver medallist Dmitriy Kim of Kazakhstan.



India's Manvendra Singh Shekhawat won bronze with a final score of 338.6.

The third Indian in the final, Hemant Burman finished in fifth place going down in a shoot-off. The championship will conclude on Saturday with the medals in women's 50m rifle prone and men's 25m centre-fire pistol to be decided. (PTI)

## India drawn with Japan, Australia and Lebanon in U-17 Women's Asian Cup

NEW DELHI, Feb 12: India were on Thursday drawn alongside four-time champions Japan, Australia and Lebanon in a tough Group B at the AFC Under-17 Women's Asian Cup in China.

Having qualified for the AFC U-17 Women's Asian Cup for the first time in 21 years after defeating Kyrgyz Republic and Uzbekistan, India will begin their campaign against Australia, followed by

in 2010 and 2016.

Australia were knocked out in the group stage of the 2024 edition and qualified for the 2026 tournament after victories over Singapore and Northern Mariana Islands.

On the other hand, Lebanon will make their debut, having made it to their maiden tournament with wins over Kuwait and IR Iran.

In Group A, hosts China were drawn alongside Thailand, Vietnam and Myanmar.

Group C comprises DPR Korea, Korea Republic, Philippines and Chinese Taipei.

The top two sides from each group, along with the two best third-placed teams, will progress to the quarter-finals.

The four semi-finalists will qualify for the FIFA U17 Women's World Cup Morocco 2026, where DPR Korea are the current holders.

**Draw**  
Group A: China PR (H), Thailand, Vietnam, Myanmar  
Group B: Japan, Australia, India, Lebanon

Group C: DPR Korea, Korea Republic, Philippines, Chinese Taipei. (PTI)



matches against Japan and Lebanon.

The tournament will take place from May 1-17 in the city of Suzhou at the Suzhou Sports Centre Stadium and the Suzhou Taihu Football Sports Centre.

Japan were runners-up in 2024, thus qualifying automatically for the tournament. They were also FIFA U17 Women's World Cup champions in 2014 and runners-up

of an hour later with a clinical finish as the Canada forward found the far corner of the net with a first-time low shot. Maanum was left unmarked in the box to add her second, with Foord setting her up again early in the second half before substitute Alessia Russo completed the rout with her fifth of the campaign.

The revamped Women's Champions League format has followed the men's competition with an opening league phase of six rounds instead of eight.

The top four in the standings — Barcelona, Lyon, Chelsea and Bayern — advanced directly to the quarter-finals. Teams placed fifth to 12th went to the playoffs round.

Arsenal finished the league phase in fifth while Leuven was 12th in its first campaign in the European top competition.

The two met in the 18-team league phase with Arsenal beating Leuven 3-0 away.

**Real's comeback**  
Real Madrid remains on course for an all-Spanish quarterfinal against three-time champion Barcelona after coming from a goal down to win 3-2 at Paris FC.

After going behind in the 10th minute, Madrid needed just six minutes to turn the game around before halftime in the French capital.

Caroline Weir equalized on a rebound from close range in the 39th and Athenea's

low shot finished off a fast counter in the last minute of the first half to put the visitors ahead.

The 20-year-old forward Linda Caicedo controlled goalkeeper Misa Rodriguez's long pass before before making it 3-1 in the 83rd before Maeline Mendy pulled a goal back in the 89th to narrow the deficit ahead of the second leg.

Paris had taken the lead through Kaja Korošec, who was at the far corner to volley the opener into the roof of the net off a corner kick from Maelle Garbino.

**To come**  
The remaining two playoffs, Wolfsburg vs. Juventus and Atletico Madrid vs. Manchester United are scheduled for Thursday. (AP)

## T20 WC: Netherlands look to stay alive; USA seek revival

CHENNAI, Feb 12: Netherlands will look to blend batting explosiveness and bowling discipline for a victory against the dangerous United States of America, essential to keep their T20 World Cup Super Eights hopes alive during a Group A match here on Friday.

Having lost their tournament-opener against Pakistan narrowly, the Dutch bounced back in commanding fashion against Namibia in their previous outing.

Chasing 157, they sealed a seven-wicket win with two overs to spare to stay in contention for a berth in the next stage.

All-rounder Bas de Leede will be central to their campaign. He anchored the chase against Namibia with a 72 not out at a strike rate of 150 and also claimed two key wickets, including skipper Gerhard Erasmus, in the middle overs. The Dutch possess explosive options at the top, but concerns linger over their middle and lower-order line-up. That frailty was exposed against Pakistan, as they slumped from a comfortable 123/4 after 15 overs to 147 all out in 19.5 overs, losing the last six wickets for just 24 runs.

Max O'Dowd, known for his high back-lift and power-hitting, has endured quiet outings -- 5 and 7 against Pakistan and Namibia respectively -- and will be eager to rediscover his mojo.

Playing their seventh T20 World Cup, the Netherlands have grown into a formidable outfit and will back their bowling depth, particularly at the death, to test an American side which is still searching for its first win in this event.

The USA have shown promise with the ball but faltered with the bat and sloppy fielding too hampered them. Against India, they reduced the fancied opponents to 77/6, only to let the game slip after skipper

Suryakumar Yadav was dropped on 17 by Shubham Ranjane.

He went on to smash an unbeaten 84, lifting India to 161/9 before USA were restricted to 132/8.

Shadley van Schalkwyk has been brilliant in the powerplay, while tall leg-spinner Mohammad Mohsin has been impressive in applying the squeeze in the middle overs along with left-arm spinner Harmert Singh. Bowling has been USA's strength, but they will certainly welcome some runs from top-order as well.

Skipper Monank Patel has made 0 against India and 3 against Pakistan, while wicketkeeper-opener Andries Gous has managed 6 and 13.

Gous was outstanding during the home World Cup two years ago and also smashed the ILT20's highest individual score -- 120 not out for eventual champions Desert Vipers and his form is crucial for their comeback. USA will hope that their new-ball bowler Ali Khan has recovered from a niggle as his absence cost them heavily against Pakistan.

**Teams:**  
**Netherlands:** Scott Edwards (c), Colin Ackermann, Noah Croes, Bas de Leede, Aryan Dutt, Fred Klaassen, Kyle Klein, Michael Levitt, Zach Lion-Cachet, Max O'Dowd, Logan van Beek, Timm van der Gugten, Roelof van der Merwe, Paul van Meekeeren and Saqib Zulfiqar.

**USA:** Monank Patel (c), Jessy Singh, Andries Gous, Shehan Jayasuriya, Milind Kumar, Shayan Jahangir, Saiteja Mukkamala, Sanjay Krishnamurthi, Harmert Singh, Nosthush Kenjige, Shadley Van Schalkwyk, Saurabh Netravalkar, Ali Khan, Mohammad Mohsin and Shubham Ranjane.

Match starts: 7pm. (PTI)

## Khelo India Winter Games' second leg from Feb 23 to 26 in Gulmarg



NEW DELHI, Feb 12: The second leg of the Khelo India Winter Games will be held in Gulmarg from February 23 to 26 and is expected to draw close to 400 competitors, Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya announced on Thursday.

It will continue the sixth edition of the Games after the first leg, featuring ice sports, was held in Ladakh from January 20 to 26.

Gulmarg will host the snow competitions and the Indian Army will defend its overall championship title.

"The Gulmarg leg is coming at the back of the Winter Olympics and this is the perfect time to host the Khelo India Winter Games," Mandaviya stated in a press release.

"We had a very successful first phase in Leh and surely, we will see the same excitement in Jammu and Kashmir as athletes will once again battle with nature and challenging conditions.

"In Leh, the addition of figure skating enhanced the competitive intensity, and in Gulmarg, we are expecting some impressive timings on the Kongdoori slopes," he added.

Gulmarg will feature four medal disciplines -- Ski Mountaineering, Alpine Skiing, Nordic Skiing (Cross-Country), and Snowboarding -- with around 400 athletes expected to compete.

Alpine Skiing will be drawing the highest participation. At the conclusion of the 2025 season, the Indian Army topped the team standings with 18 medals, while Himachal Pradesh finished second, followed by Ladakh, Maharashtra, and Tamil Nadu.

At the end of the Ladakh leg this year, Haryana led with four gold medals, all won by its figure and ice skaters, followed by Ladakh, Maharashtra, and Telangana. (PTI)



LEUVEN (BELGIUM), Feb 12: Defending champion Arsenal took a big step toward the Women's Champions League quarterfinals by routing OH Leuven 4-0 in



Viksit Bharat - Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin): VB - G RAM G

(विकसित भारत - जी राम जी) Act, 2025

Wherever there is work, there should be adequate arrangements for essential facilities, clean water, shade for rest and first-aid box at all times



## Rathnayake, Shanaka, Mendis fire as Sri Lanka hammer Oman by 105 runs

**PALLEKELE (SRI LANKA), Feb 12:** Blazing fifties by Pavan Rathnayake and skipper Dasun Shanaka along with Kusal Mendis' assured half-century helped Sri Lanka register a statement 105-run win over Oman in their T20 World Cup Group B clash, here on Thursday.

Rathnayake (60 from 28 balls) and skipper Dasun Shanaka (50; 20b) returned to form, while Kusal (61; 45b) anchored the innings with successive World Cup half-century as Sri Lanka piled up 225/5 -- their second highest in T20 World Cup and the highest score of this tournament so far -- after Oman opted to bowl.

Oman's chase never quite recovered from early setbacks as they wilted under scoreboard pressure to be restricted to 120/9.

Skipper Jatinder Singh was cleaned up by Dushmantha Chameera in the first over, and Aamir Kaleem and Hammad Mirza soon followed with single-digit scores as Oman slipped to 36/3 inside the power play.

Chameera (2/19) struck twice with the new ball, while spinner Maheesh Theekshana was tidy and incisive, returning figures of 2/11 from his full quota of four overs.

There was brief entertainment when Wasim Ali counter-attacked



Dushan Hemantha, clubbing the leg-spinner for two sixes in a row -- one over deep midwicket and another forward square leg -- lifting Oman to 75/3 in 11 overs.

But the recovery was short-lived as they crashed to 91/6, losing three wickets in six balls.

Theekshana triggered the collapse by dismissing the fluent-looking Wasim for 27 (20 balls; 3x6), caught by Kusal.

A direct hit from Kamil Mishra at deep point ran out Vinayak

Shukla the very next ball, and Jiten Ramanandi was brilliantly stumped by Kusal for a golden duck.

Mohammad Nadeem, back after missing the opener, waged a lone battle with a valiant fifty, as the 43-year-old hit his third T20 fifty in 71 appearances.

The 2014 champions now have two wins from as many matches, topping Group B, ahead of Australia and Zimbabwe, who have one win each.

After a poor World Cup debut

against Ireland where he fell for sloppy upper cut for 5, Rathnayake made amends in style smashing eight fours and one six en route to his maiden fifty that came off just 24 balls.

In the process he overtook his previous best of 40 at this venue earlier this month.

The 23-year-old charged pacer Ramanandi for the innings' first six in the 12th over and hammered Su-fyan Mehmood for three successive fours to reach the milestone.

Rathnayake and the experienced Kusal added 94 runs off just 52 balls, maintaining a run-rate in excess of nine through the middle overs.

They rotated strike smartly as 40 of Sri Lanka's 96 runs at the halfway mark came in singles and twos.

Kusal, playing the senior partner's role to perfection, capitalised on width from the Oman spinners and struck seven fours in his 61 off 45 balls, his second successive fifty and 19th overall.

He was run out in the penultimate over.

Shanaka, who had endured a lean build-up to the tournament with scores of 1, 4 and 0, exploded at the death with a 19-ball fifty -- the fastest by a Sri Lankan in the T20 World Cup. (PTI)

## Italy bowl out Nepal for paltry 123 in T20 World Cup clash

**MUMBAI, Feb 12:** Ben Manenti (2/9) and Crishan Kalugamage (3/18) stifled Nepal batters in a remarkable display of spin bowling as Italy bowled out their opponents for a paltry 123 in their Group C match of the T20 World Cup here on Thursday.

Spinners continued to dominate the proceedings here at the Wankhede Stadium as Italy showed admirable precision with their line and lengths, combined with some terrific fielding, which kept an on-song Nepal constantly under the pump.

Manenti strangled the Nepal batters from one end, returning 4-0-9-2 while Kalugamage also bowled his heart out to finish with three wickets.

Former South African player JJ Smuts claimed 1/22 from his four overs for the T20 World Cup debutants as Nepal crumbled against pressure from Italian spinners.

Manenti's exploits off the surface with his orthodox off-spin also made his younger brother Harry's job much easier, who has stepped in after Italy lost their skipper Wayne Madsen to a dislocated shoulder.

But Madsen's absence was far from being felt in a unit which functioned like a well-oiled machine, with their fielders being present every time there was an opportunity of a catch.

Kalugamage trusted the grip off the surface to beat Dipendra Singh Airee (17) with a wrong-un that crashed into his off-stump, while opener Asif Sheikh's innings was cut-short with a brilliant stumping from wicketkeeper Gian-Piero Meade off Manenti in the eighth over.

It was as clinical a bowling performance as it gets from Italy, as they allowed no freebies from the outset and did not drop a single catch, keeping the partisan crowd largely silent.

The innings ended with a run-out via a direct hit from the stand-in skipper Harry, as Nepal were shot out for 123 in 19.3 overs.

None of the specialist Nepal batters could counter



Italy's charge on what remained a true batting wicket providing grip and turn when England and West Indies had played here on the same surface on Wednesday night.

Nepal, who had come agonisingly close to beating England in their last outing here, began with an early dismissal of Kushal Bhurtel and since the beginning of the contest remained under pressure.

Only Rohit Paudel appeared to be counter-attacking when he smacked two sixes, but the Nepal skipper was caught at the ropes despite having picked Kalugamage's googly.

Aarif Sheikh (27) hit three fours to lead the scorers for Nepal while Karan KC was left stranded on 11-ball 18 not out with one six and a four when the final wicket fell. (PTI)

## In the absence of accommodation, Pakistan's hockey players spent several hours on the road

**KARACHI, Feb 12:** The players of the Pakistan hockey team were forced to spend several hours on the road upon reaching Canberra, as their hotel bookings in the Australian capital were cancelled after the Pakistan Hockey Federation failed to pay the bill due to a lack of funds.

They are in Australia for the second leg of the FIH Pro League event in Hobart.

According to sources close to the team, the players and team officials were left with no option but to "roam on the roads" before finding accommodation.

"Apparently the players and officials were booked in a four star hotel in Canberra and were told that the Pakistan Sports Board and Pakistan Hockey Federation had made all upfront payments for their stay in Canberra," a source said on Thursday.

"But when they reached Canberra last week, they found no bookings for them at the designated hotel. The team's head coach, Tahir Zaman, faced problems getting in touch with PSB and PHF officials back home because of the time difference," he added.

"Tahir messaged them about the awkward situation the players were facing and had no place to stay and rest after a long journey from Lahore," the source said.

The incident has been seen as a major source of embarrassment for Pakistan's national sport, with the team struggling to compete against top-ranked sides like Australia and Germany in the Hobart leg of the Pro League. The source said that after waiting outside

for several hours, the hotel management was eventually convinced and gave the payers some rooms.

"Because of unavailability of required rooms the players and officials were accommodated in a lesser number of rooms than they were told. As a result two-three players occupied one room and next day, they went straight to the ground to play their first match against Australia, which they lost 3-2," the source said.

This is not the first time the Pakistan hockey players have faced such situations in recent past. During the first phase of the FIH Pro League held in Argentina, the players were not paid their daily allowances, putting them in a tight financial situation in a foreign country. The team is without a manager in Canberra after the regular manager, former Olympian Anjum Saeed, was removed by the PHF and not sent with the team this time.

Anjum was removed after he was caught smoking on the flight while returning home and got into an altercation with airport security officials who held him back for a day, as the team resumed its onward journey to Dubai and Lahore. Before the team left for Canberra, the PSB had increased the daily allowances to USD 115 for each player.

"Some local Pakistani people were contacted in Canberra who came to their rescue at the hotel after players spent time on the roads," the source said.

Pakistan have so far lost all six of their matches in the Pro League. (PTI)

## Income Tax Dept issues ₹ 4.62 crore demand notice to Equestrian Federation of India

**NEW DELHI, Feb 12:** The Income Tax Department has, for the first time, issued a demand notice of ₹ 4.62 crore to the Equestrian Federation of India for the assessment year 2024-25 under Section 156 of the Income-Tax Act, 1961, according to official documents.

The notice, dated February 9, 2026, states that a sum of ₹ 4,62,18,102 has been determined as payable by the federation for the assessment year 2024-25.

As per the notice, which is in possession of PTI, the amount is to be paid within 30 days of service to an authorised bank.

According to correspondence from EFI's Chartered Accountant to the federation's office-bearers, certain compliance documents -- including a Non-Utilisation/Accumulation Certificate -- were required to be signed and furnished to enable submission before the Income Tax Department.

A final accumulation certificate has also been prepared in connection with the matter but EFI Secretary General Col Jaiveer Singh told PTI that delays by the EFI Executive Committee in completing documentation and securing necessary approvals contributed to the present situation.

"This accumulation certificate duly signed in ink by all EC members was required to be submitted to the IT department. Non-submission of this document has resulted in issuance of the letter. Recourse available to the Federation as per relevant provisions of IT rules will be undertaken," Col Jaiveer Singh said.

An "accumulation certificate" generally refers to



the documentation filed by organisation to set aside income for future use without it being taxed in the current year.

EFI sources also said approval from the Central Board of Direct Taxes under provisions linked to Section 11 of the Act, required in cases involving certain foreign transfers, was also not obtained by the Col. Jagat Singh-led federation.

EFI, as a National Sports Federation affiliated to international equestrian bodies, makes overseas remittances towards affiliation fees, participation expenses and related international commitments.

However, the requisite CBDT approval for such foreign transfers for the relevant financial year was not obtained. (PTI)

## Afghanistan players withdraw from PSL auction

**KARACHI, Feb 12:** The Afghanistan players withdrew their names from the first-ever Players' auction held ahead of the 11th edition of the Pakistan Super League (PSL). A franchise owner confirmed initially that players like Mujeeb ur Rehman, Seddiqullah Atal, Muhammad Nabi, Waqar Salamkheil, Fazal Haq Farooqi had registered for the auction held in Lahore on Wednesday.

But they withdrew their names following the backlash over the direct signing of Afghanistan opener Rahmanullah Gurbaz by Peshawar Zalmi. However, Salman Naser, the CEO of the PSL, said there were some players from Afghanistan who were on the roll but no franchise picked them. "They were a few Afghanistan players in the auction but no franchise went for them," Naser claimed. But Naser said the strained relation between the two nations reflected in the auction.

"There was a severe backlash after Zalmi signed Gurbaz because of the fractured relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan, and after Gurbaz pulled himself out of the PSL. So, the other players also decided better to avoid backlash," he said. (PTI)

## Jay Shah helped us build stadium: Cricket Namibia prez

**NEW DELHI, Feb 12:** Namibia will be hosting the men's ODI World Cup games in 2027 and a lot of credit for constructing a brand new stadium goes to ICC chairman Jay Shah, Cricket Namibia president Rudie van Vuuren said on Thursday.

Van Vuuren was all praise for Shah for his efforts in empowering associate nations and improving their cricket infrastructure.

"The ICC has adopted a policy of empowering associate members. Jay Shah has really brought significant change there. He was in Windhoek visiting our new stadium, and how the ICC has helped us develop that facility," Van Vuuren said. In fact, with the 2027 World Cup in mind, the ICC has also developed high-performance facilities which will help Namibia grow as a cricketing nation.

"Now, all of a sudden, we have those high-performance facilities. Africa has nations like Namibia coming through because of the ICC's backing, so that gap will become smaller and smaller. "We must make use of these opportunities to showcase our talent and show the world that associate members are the future of cricket," Van Vuuren. (PTI)

## Rivaan Dev signed by Minardi's Management

**CHENNAI, Feb 12:** Promising Indian racer Rivaan Dev Preetham has been signed by Minardi Management, becoming the first Indian to join the programme led by renowned mentor Giovanni Minardi.

The agreement comes just days before the 12-year-old departs for Valencia, Spain, for the opening round of the 2026 Champions of the Future Academy series. "When I hear the name Minardi, I immediately think of my hero Fernando Alonso, which makes this even more special for me," said Rivaan.

Under the Minardi family's stewardship, drivers such as Fernando Alonso, Mark Webber and Alex Yoong progressed to Formula One.

The partnership provides Rivaan with a structured European pathway, including the Champions of the Future Academy calendar and potential progression into Formula 4. (PTI)

## Harry Brook defends England as spin hurts former T20 World Cup winners once again

**MUMBAI, Feb 12:** Defeated yet defiant, England captain Harry Brook rejected criticism that his batters are susceptible to quality spin bowling even though their frailties stood thoroughly exposed in the 30-run loss to the West Indies in a group C clash of the T20 World Cup here. As many as six England batters fell to spinners here as England rolled over for 166 in 19 overs in reply to the West Indies' formidable 196/6 here at the Wankhede Stadium on Wednesday night.

The surface remained true for batting, but also provided significant amount of grip and turn to the spin bowlers. Gudakesh Motie (3/33) broke the back of England's chase while Roston Chase (2/29) made the most of the conditions with Akeal Hosein (1/32) also keeping a tight leash.

"I don't think so," Brook retorted when asked if England continue to struggle against spin. He instead pointed out their 3-0 victory over a spin-heavy Sri Lanka just before the T20 World Cup.

"... that series against Sri Lanka showed that. I thought we played spin really well out there. They bowled (West Indies) well. They kept themselves in the game the whole time. We lost quite a few wickets in clusters, which never really helps," he said.

England had just about managed to beat minnows Nepal in their lung-opener, scampering home by four runs. The West Indies, in



contrast, have looked solid with two consecutive wins now. Brook said England had planned for dew to come into play in the second half but the conditions did not change as per their expectations.

"We didn't quite execute well enough with the ball and they probably got 15-20 (runs) too many," Brook said.

"We thought it (197-run target) was chaseable, definitely. We planned for dew and it didn't quite get as dewy as we thought, and it didn't quite slide onto the bat as much as we

were expecting.

"Chasing nearly 200 is always a big ask and we thought the pitch would get a little bit better and it'd slide onto the bat a bit more, that didn't happen," the England captain added.

**Hope pleased with Windies show**

In contrast, West Indies captain Shai Hope was quite pleased with the fact that his team had now recorded two confident wins in the tournament.

"Maybe (our score) was just around par,

but still happy to get something on the board. It is a World Cup game and that in itself could be extra 10-20 runs. So just important for us to make sure we try to maximise as best as we can and then execute with the ball after," he said. Hope said the inclusion of Test skipper Chase, who played an all-round part in West Indies' win, was meant to maximise the skills of the playing eleven and the move got the desired result.

"It was a tactical change. He's one of those players who can come in and call at any moment in time. We understood the threat that they have with some of those left-handers who can take the game away from us," Hope said.

"He's one of those bowlers who can come in and (we can) depend on any point in time. We saw he was very crucial and essential with the bat in our batting innings as well.

"He gave us some stability (and) he's one of those utility players that you can never neglect," he added.

Hope also praised Sherfane Rutherford for his unbeaten 76 which set up the game for the Caribbean side.

"He's been always a hard worker, especially when it comes to his batting. He's always very diligent with the way he goes about his preparation, and he would back from his start of his session all the way through to the end if he's really working on something," Hope said. (PTI)