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**Modi slams Congress for neglecting NE, promoting insurgency in Assam during its rule** ● **PM's presence boosted morale of BJP workers: Himanta**

## PM confident of BJP retaining power in Assam

GUWAHATI, Feb 14: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday launched an all-out attack on the Congress, accusing it of neglecting the Northeast and promoting insurgency in Assam during its rule, even as he exuded confidence of BJP securing victory in the 2026 Assam assembly polls with a huge margin.

Addressing a public meeting here that also included BJP workers, Modi alleged that the Congress always endangered the nation's security, with fear and insecurity prevailing during its tenure in Assam. "The Congress indulged in polarisation and vote bank politics, and took decisions that promoted these," he said.

"The partition of the country took place due to the Muslim League, but now there is 'MMC' - Maoist, Muslim League, Congress



- and people should be aware," Modi said.

The PM accused the Congress of protecting infiltrators, but the BJP is "committed to end illegal immigration, and so the next five years are very important for the state".

He also claimed that the Congress, being out of power in Assam for 10 years, is "more dangerous than when it was in power, and this is evident from the venomous statements made by its leaders".

For seven decades, the Congress

built only three bridges over the Brahmaputra river, but the BJP government constructed five bridges in 10 years, he asserted.

The PM said all-round development is taking place in Assam due to the efforts of the BJP government.

"The BJP is committed to protecting Assam's identity and its traditions," he said.

Assam is famed for tea, but now the state will be globally renowned for its semiconductor chips, Modi said, referring to the Tata group plant at Jagiroad.

More than 125 people from the North East have been bestowed with Padma awards since 2014, he added.

The PM paid tributes to the bravehearts who were martyred in Pulwama in 2019, and asserted that the world (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

**IIM temporary campus, data centre unveiled**

## PM inaugurates Kumar Bhaskar Varma Setu



the Kumar Bhaskar Varma Setu, built at a cost of around ₹ 3,030 crore.

The six-lane extradosed Prestressed Concrete (PSC) bridge

will connect Guwahati with North Guwahati and is the first extradosed bridge in the Northeast. After the inauguration, Modi

took a walk on the bridge.

Assam Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya and Chief Minister Himanta Biswa were present on the occasion.

The bridge will cut travel time between Guwahati and North Guwahati to just seven minutes. Presently, (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

## India's first road-cum-rail tunnel under Brahmaputra gets green light

NEW DELHI, Feb 14: The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has approved the construction of India's first 34-km-long twin-tube underwater road-cum-rail tunnel between Gohpur and Numaligarh in Assam at a total capital cost of ₹ 18,662 crore.

Addressing mediapersons, Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said on Saturday that the first underwater tunnel in India was constructed in Kolkata under the Hooghly River, and work is currently underway on the first undersea tunnel for the Ahmedabad-Mumbai bullet train project.

Officials said that while the tunnel under the Hooghly River is meant for metro operations, the proposed Gohpur-Numaligarh project will be the first under-river twin tunnel in the country where both rail and road transport will operate side by side.

"Currently, connectivity between Numaligarh on NH 715 and Gohpur on NH-15 is 240 Km from the existing Kaliabhabhara road bridge

near Silghat on NH-52, which takes 6 hours passing through Numaligarh, Kaziranga National Park, and Biswanath Town," a government press note said.

"To address these challenges, the project is proposed to be developed as a 4-Lane Access-Controlled Greenfield connectivity from Gohpur on NH-15 to Numaligarh with road-cum-rail tunnel below the river Brahmaputra," it added.

Talking about the benefits, it stated, "This would be the first underwater road-cum-rail tunnel in India and second in the world. The project will provide significant benefits to Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and other North-Eastern States."

"This will enhance the efficiency of freight movement, reducing logistics cost and driving socio-economic growth in the region," it added.

Officials said that the project alignment integrates with two major National Highways (NH-15 and NH-715) and two Railway lines, which (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

## Modi inaugurates NE's first ELF in Moran

**HT Bureau**  
GUWAHATI, Feb 14: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday made a historic landing at the first Emergency Landing Facility (ELF) in the Northeast, inaugurating the strategic airstrip built on the Moran bypass in Assam's Dibrugarh district.

The Prime Minister arrived at Chabua airfield and boarded an Indian Air Force C-130J aircraft before landing on the 4.2-km reinforced stretch of National Highway-37 at Moran. After touchdown, he proceeded to the nearby venue where he witnessed a 40-minute aerial display by the Indian Air Force featuring fighter jets and transport aircraft, including Tejas, Sukhoi and Rafale platforms.

Developed at a cost of around Rs 100 crore, the ELF has been constructed as a strategic dual-use runway for both military and civilian operations.

Officials said the facility will function as an alternative runway to Dibrugarh airport during emergen-

cies and will strengthen defence preparedness, logistics and disaster response in the region.

In a post on X after the inauguration, Modi said it was a matter of immense pride that the Northeast has received an Emergency Landing Facility, adding that from a strategic perspective and during natural disasters, the infrastructure would be of great importance.

The Prime Minister was received at the site by chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal, Air Chief Marshal A P Singh and other members of the Assam cabinet.

Modi was welcomed with a traditional muga gamosa and felicitated with an Assamese japi and a portrait of the last Chutia queen Sati Sadhini.

In a post on X, Sarma described the landing as a paradigm shift in securing the Northeast frontier, stating that the development marks a decisive step in strengthening national security in a region historically sensitive since 1962.

## Modi witnesses special IAF aerial show at emergency landing facility

MORAN, Feb 14: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday witnessed an aerial show featuring IAF's fighter jets and transport helicopters, engaged for urgent security situations and disaster responses, at the Emergency Landing Facility (ELF) in Assam's Dibrugarh district.

The 4.2-km ELF in Moran - the first-of-its-kind in the northeast region - was earlier in the day inaugurated by Modi, who arrived in Assam on a day-long visit.

In the 20-minute aerial show, the IAF pilots displayed precision take-off and landing on the Moran Bypass, as locals lined up behind barricades to get a glimpse of the event.

A Sukhoi-30 MKI was the first aircraft to take-off from the ELF, followed by a Rafale aircraft. Taking off with a short run-up, both jets are capable of being combat-ready within seconds of being in air.

The An-32 helicopter, dubbed the 'workhorse' of the IAF and designed for both cargo and passen-

gers, performed a 'touch and go'.

A three-jet formation of Sukhoi-30 MKI was the next to fly over the Moran sky, with the pilots displaying difficult manoeuvres, as two of the aircraft performed overshoot on the airstrip while the third landed at the ELF, marking the first touch down after formal inauguration.

A similar manoeuvre was performed by a set of three Rafale jets, with two of the aircraft flying close to the airstrip, while the third making a landing.

Special Heli-Borne Operations (SHBO) and Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) by Advanced Light Helicopter (ALH), crucial for surveillance, search and rescue, medical evacuation and food airdrops in inaccessible and remote areas, were performed by the indigenously-developed copters.

As part of SHBO, a pair of ALH touched down at the ELF and commandos alighted from the choppers and took positions, in a show of (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

## SC to hear on pleas against CM tomorrow

NEW DELHI, Feb 14: The Supreme Court is slated to hear on Monday petitions seeking action against Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma over a viral video allegedly showing him taking aim and firing with a rifle at members of a particular community.

According to the apex court case list, a bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi is likely to hear the matter.

The top court on February 10 had agreed to consider listing a plea of Left leaders seeking action against Sarma.

Referring to the upcoming assembly polls in Assam, the top court said that the problem is that a part of the elections is fought before it.

It had taken note of the submissions of (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

## Northeast's first ELF to strengthen defence, logistics, disaster response: Officials



GUWAHATI, Feb 14: Northeast's first emergency landing facility (ELF), which was inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at Moran in Assam's Dibrugarh district on Saturday, will strengthen defence, logistics and disaster response in the region, officials said.

The Rs 100 crore landing facility will act as a strategic and multi-functional runway for Indian Air Force (IAF) fighter jets and transport aircraft.

The facility has been designed for both civil and military use, serving as an alternative to the Dibrugarh airport dur-

ing emergencies. The ELF has been specially designed and constructed in coordination with the IAF to support the landing and take-off of military and civil aircraft, they said.

It will serve as a critical asset for emergency response, enabling quick deployment of personnel for rescue and relief operations during natural disasters or strategic requirements in the Northeast.

Envisioned as dual-use infrastructure, the ELF is capable of handling fighter aircraft up to 40 tonnes and transport aircraft up to 74 tonnes maximum take-off weight.

India's first ELF was inaugurated in 2021 in Rajasthan's Barmer district. Modi arrived at Chabua and boarded a C-130J aircraft from there. He then landed at the ELF and inaugurated it. The PM will also witness a 40-minute air show comprising Tejas, Sukhoi, Rafale and other fighter jets. Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma had reviewed a stretch of National Highway-37, a part of the ELF, and interacted with IAF personnel on Thursday.

He said all preparations have been completed for the historic landing and take-off demonstration.

The IAF also conducted a rehearsal of the air show on Thursday. (PTI)

## Congress betrayed Assam: Sonowal

**HT Bureau**  
GUWAHATI, Feb 14: Union Minister for Ports, Shipping and Waterways Sarbananda Sonowal on Saturday launched a sharp attack on the Congress, alleging that the party had "betrayed and weakened Assam," while crediting Prime Minister Narendra Modi with restoring security, stability and rapid development across the state.

Addressing public meetings here, Sonowal said Assam's transformation from a state once marked by fear and instability to one witnessing major infrastructure expansion reflects a decisive shift in governance.

He alleged that Congress policies, including the now-repealed Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act, had undermined the rights and security of Indian citizens in Assam, adding that peace and security today have created the foundation for what he described as a historic phase of development.

Sonowal also accompanied Prime Minister Modi and chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma earlier in the day during the inauguration of the Emergency Landing Facility at Moran in Dibrugarh district, stating that the project strengthens both strategic preparedness and regional infrastructure capacity.

He further highlighted recent infrastructure and in-



stitutional developments, including the inauguration of the Kumar Bhaskar Varma Setu connecting Guwahati with North Guwahati, the launch of the Northeast National Data Centre, the commencement of academic activities at IIM Guwahati, and the introduction of electric buses to promote sustainable urban mobility.

Describing the bridge as a symbol of connectivity and aspiration, Sonowal said such initiatives demonstrate a coordinated push (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

## M'laya coal mine blast: 'Dead' labourer returns home in Assam

SRIBHUM/HAILAKANDI, Feb 14: A labourer reported dead in the East Jaintia Hills coal mine explosion in Meghalaya has returned home in Assam's Sribhumi district, officials said on Saturday.

The incident has prompted police forces of both the neighbouring states to launch a joint probe into the circumstances surrounding the labourer's unexpected return after the blast.

"The labourer reached his home at Muliala village in Sribhumi district's Ramkrishna Nagar circle on Thursday. This sent a shockwave as already a body had been cremated," a senior official of the district administration told PTI.

The family of the 44-year-old Shyambabu Singha had gone to Meghalaya to locate him after the blast as his phone was unreachable, he added.

"His wife and daughter were taken to the hospital by the local authorities there after Singha could not be located. Due to the blast, most of blast victims' faces were damaged beyond recognition. His family identified one body as his," the official said.

The authorities then brought the body to his native place and it was cremated as per Hindu rituals, he added.

"Meghalaya and Assam police have jointly started an investigation into the chain of events. We cannot say anything further as it is a very sensitive matter and under probe," the official said.

He also said the family has been requested not to speak to the media due to the unexpected development and until a clear picture emerges.

An explosion at an illegal rat hole coal mine at Thangsku area of Mynsngat village in East Jaintia Hills district of Meghalaya on February 5 has claimed at least 31 lives.

Meghalaya Police has constituted a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to probe the explosion at the mine.

Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma had also announced that a judicial inquiry commission would ascertain the circumstances leading to the blast and fix responsibility for the incident.

On February 9, the state government had called off search and rescue operations at the blast site after assessment teams concluded that there was no further possibility of locating survivors trapped inside the mine.

The state government has assured the Meghalaya High Court (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

## Assam Advantage 2.0 summit pays dividend: Kerala firm to invest ₹ 20 cr

## Deal inked to set up ethanol plant at Mailoo

**HT Bureau**  
DIPHU, Feb 14: The Assam Advantage 2.0 Investment and Infrastructure Summit 2025 has begun yielding investment outcomes for Karbi Anglong, with a Kerala-based private firm signing an agreement to set up an ethanol production unit in West Karbi Anglong.

An MoU and MoA were signed on Friday between West Coast Concrete Products of Kerala and the Assam Hills Small Industries Development Corporation Ltd. (AHSIDC) under the Hill Areas Development Department for establishing a plant at Mailoo.

The agreements were formally signed at the AHSIDC industrial complex in Manja between Beena Thomas, managing director of M/s Karbi Hills Processors Pvt Ltd.—the designated company name for the Mailoo project—and AHSIDC managing director Dhansing Lekhe.

The signing was witnessed by AHSIDC chairman Ratan Teron, vice-



chairman Arun Terang, MLA Bidyasing Englung, and additional secretary Protima Rongpipi, among others.

Officials said the Kerala investor plans to invest around Rs 20 crore in the project.

About 20 bighas of land at a defunct

sugar mill owned by AHSIDC at Mailoo have been allotted to the company for the venture.

Beena Thomas said the company explored investment opportunities in Karbi Anglong after interacting with AHSIDC officials and local leaders

during the Assam Advantage summit in Guwahati.

She added that the firm's primary objective is to establish an ethanol plant, but as the State's ethanol production policy is set to expire in March 2026, the company will initially begin manufacturing polypropylene woven bags and tarpaulin until a new policy is introduced.

Thomas also informed that Aidan Jaisan is a director of the company.

AHSIDC managing director Dhansing Lekhe said several investors had shown interest in the corporation's industrial assets during the Assam Advantage summit, including businessman Jaison Varghese, who later visited Karbi Anglong and selected the Mailoo site for the project.

He said the AHSIDC Land Advisory Committee allotted about 22.5 bighas of land at the defunct sugar mill for the investment. Lekhe described the agreement as a (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

# India raises its commitment to climate action to 5.6% of GDP: FM Sitharaman



**NEW DELHI, Feb 14:** Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Saturday said India has hiked spending on climate action in the last six years to 5.6 per cent of GDP, demonstrating the country's pursuit of meeting nationally deter-

mined goals on curbing carbon emission. Participating in a panel discussion at the Munich Security Conference, she said India has increased its commitment to climate action. "Six years ago, we were spending approxi-

mately 3.7 per cent of our GDP on climate action. Today, that figure is close to 5.6 per cent. We have invested the funds. We are not waiting for financing and technology to come from elsewhere but they must come," she said.

She further said that India will continue to invest in renewable energy, and we have been steadily building on that commitment.

Carbon capture strategies have been funded in the Union Budget 2026-27 so that they can be implemented across the country, she said, adding that they are being incentivised.

Furthermore, she said, India has achieved two-thirds of its nationally determined commitments in the renewable sector and that too four years ahead of the target date.

Making a case for differentiated cost of climate action, Sitharaman said, country which are less polluting should contribute less towards climate action.

"As much attention as we give to emission control, we need to look at resilience and adaptation. Otherwise, you're going to sacrifice a lot. Technologies will have to talk to each other. No one can say they've created a perfect system to counter climate concerns," she said.

And it can't be that countries which have contributed less to emissions are made to pay equally, she said, adding that bearing the cost of climate action will need differentiated treatment. (PTI)

**62% Gen Z and Millennials continue to back gold as safest investment bet, says survey**



**MUMBAI, Feb 14:** Gold remains the most trusted investment for young Indians despite growing access to modern financial products, with 62 per cent of respondents choosing the metal as the first choice for investment, according to a survey.

The survey also revealed that 66.7 per cent of respondents stated that gold purchases are largely their personal decisions, and nearly 62 per cent stated that their most recent gold purchase was below 5 grams, indicating the changing nature of how the Gen Z and Millennials look at gold.

The Smyten PulseAI survey, conducted with 5,000 consumers aged between 18-39, captured how tradition-led buying is steadily giving way to a more individual, logic-driven approach.

According to the survey, 61.9 per cent of respondents would choose gold if they had Rs 25,000 to invest today, far ahead of mutual funds (16.6 per cent), fixed deposits (13 per cent), stocks (6.6 per cent) and crypto (1.9 per cent).

During times of economic uncertainty, 65.7 per cent said gold feels like the safest option compared to bank savings, mutual funds or equities, it stated. These findings underline gold's enduring role as the financial fallback across both Gen Z and Millennials.

The survey pointed to a clear move away from large, infrequent purchases toward lighter, more regular buying, as 61.9 per cent of recent purchases were below 5 grams, with 27.5 per cent buying less than 2 grams and 34.4 per cent buying between 2 and 5 grams.

For many first-time buyers, entry into gold is no longer limited to weddings.

Nearly 24 per cent said their first gold purchase was triggered by their first salary or personal income, while 23.9 per cent cited an investment decision. (PTI)

## NAME CORRECTION

I Mostaque Ahmed son of Late Safiqul Haque a resident of Vill-Dighaljar, P.O.-Dighaljar, P.S.-Murajhar, Dist-Hojai (Assam) That, I am known as Mostaque Ahmed & Md. Mostaque Ahmed but my actual name is Mostaque Ahmed. That, Mostaque Ahmed & Md. Mostaque Ahmed are the names of one and same person i.e. of mine. Mostaque Ahmed S/o-Late, Safiqul Haque Vill-Dighaljar, P.O.-Dighaljar P.S.-Murajhar, Dist-Hojai (Assam)

## Brandman Retail gets listed on NSE, targets 50-plus store network

**NEW DELHI, Feb 14:** Brandman Retail, a distributor and retailer for the premium athleisure and lifestyle brands, has been listed on NSE at a valuation of ₹324.85 crore.

The company, which has an IPO price of ₹176, settled at ₹211.80 on NSE on Friday, up 4.98 per cent.

Brandman Retail, which has raised ₹86 crore through its public issue, will invest the proceeds in store expansion, working capital support, and general corporate purposes, according to a company statement.

Brandman Retail currently operates 21 stores across India, which is a mix of Exclusive Brand Outlets (EBOs) and Multi-Brand Outlets (MBOs).

"As part of its next growth phase, the company plans to open 15 new stores funded through IPO proceeds, forming the first leg of a broader expansion strategy aimed at building a 50+ store national network," it said.

Founded by Arun Malhotra, Brandman Retail has positioned itself as a platform for international sports and lifestyle brands seeking structured entry and expansion in the Indian market.

It operates through a multi-brand retail format as Sneakr. It has global brands New Balance, Saucony, Anta, Wilson, Salomon and Rockport, in its portfolio here.

As Brandman Retail expands into high-growth Tier II & III markets, it expects its revenues to grow over three-

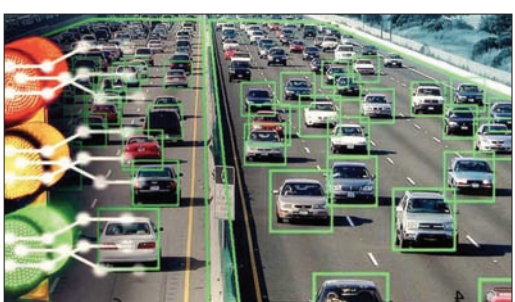


fold in the next five years.

"We see strong demand emerging beyond metros, and our focus is on building a sustainable, multi-city retail platform for global sports and lifestyle brands," said Arun Malhotra.

India's sports and athleisure market is having a double-digit growth, driven by factors including growing trends for athleisure, fitness participation and increasing brand awareness. "With organised sneaker retail still underpenetrated in non-metro markets, Brandman Retail aims to capitalise on the structural shift toward branded retail consumption," it said. (PTI)

## From chaos to coaching: How real-time AI is slashing road fatalities on Indian roads



**NEW DELHI, Feb 14:** As India prepares for the upcoming AI Impact Summit, a quiet revolution is unfolding across its 64-lakh-kilometre road network.

While global conversations often centre on AI's role in automation and productivity, in India, the technology is finding its most profound application in a life-saving mission: curbing the country's staggering rate of road accidents.

With 1,77,177 road fatalities recorded in 2024-averaging roughly 485 lives lost every day-the limitations of traditional enforcement and human monitoring have become starkly apparent.

The challenge is systemic: mixed traffic, varied road conditions, and unpredictable driving patterns make Indian roads some of the most complex in the world.

However, a new wave of vision-based AI is shifting the paradigm from forensic analysis-looking at what went wrong after a crash-to real-time intervention that prevents collisions before they happen.

This technological shift treats the chaos of Indian roads-unmarked lanes, stray animals, and dense traffic-not as a hurdle, but as rich training data.

By processing millions of hours of diverse driving scenarios, AI models are now achieving alert precision, proving that if a safety system can perform reliably in India, it is effectively battle-tested for any environment globally.

"AI cameras function as intelligent, AI-driven coaching systems that analyse driver behaviour in real time. They recognise patterns such as tailgating, lane drifting, harsh braking, distraction, and mobile phone usage.

"And, most importantly, they detect when these behaviours escalate into high-risk situations. When that

happens, then the system issues an immediate in-cab alert. The purpose isn't to punish the driver; it is to intervene," explains Teja Gudena, Executive Vice President of Engineering at Netradyne.

Unlike traditional dashcams that act as simple recording devices with onboard storage, these AI-driven cameras are vision-based systems built "at the edge."

According to MoRTH's Road Accidents in India 2023 report, speeding alone was linked to 63.7 per cent of accidents and 60.8 per cent of road deaths.

The impact of this "safety coach in the cab" is already visible in the data.

Hitachi Cash Management, one of the enterprises utilising Netradyne's vision-based safety system, reported a 50 per cent reduction in accidents.

Beyond the hardware, a significant part of the success of this technology in the Indian market has been overcoming the "spying" stigma. The workflow extends beyond the immediate in-cab alert to a comprehensive "Intelligent Driver Management System" (IDMS).

Post-trip, the AI provides a structured view of driving patterns across different routes and times of day, allowing managers to distinguish between isolated incidents and recurring risks.

This data is used to power a "GreenZone" scoring system, which creates a transparent environment where safe driving is recognised and rewarded. By using contextual video evidence, the system also serves to exonerate drivers in road incidents where they are not at fault, shifting the narrative from a "camera in the vehicle" to a "safety coach in the cab."

While the technology is currently scaling across more than 3,000 fleets, its application is tailored to the specific needs of different commercial sectors. In goods transportation, the focus is on high-stakes environments like hazardous materials, long-haul logistics, and e-commerce.

Conversely, in the realm of people transportation, AI is being deployed by corporate employee transport providers and public transport operators, including buses. The ultimate goal is to serve as a comprehensive safety intelligence layer for all commercial mobility, whether moving cargo or passengers, providing a scalable intervention that human monitoring alone cannot achieve. (PTI)

## TMT maker Kamdhenu Q3 net profit grows 7 pc to ₹ 21 cr

**NEW DELHI, Feb 14:** Leading TMT maker Kamdhenu has posted around 7 per cent year-on-year growth in net profit to ₹ 21 crore in the December quarter, on account of a rise in income.

It had reported a net profit of ₹ 12.45 crore in the October-December period of the preceding 2024-25 financial year, the company said in an exchange filing on Friday.

The company increased its total income to ₹ 175.59 crore from ₹ 172.65 crore in the third quarter a year ago.

In a statement, Kamdhenu Group CMD Satish Agarwal said, "During

the period, we recorded our highest-ever profit before tax and PBT margin (16 per cent), supported by the growth in our franchise volumes and rapidly rising royalty incomes. Royalty income remains highly capital-efficient, allowing us to scale without incremental manufacturing investments." Sharing outlook for the segment, Agarwal said the demand for TMT steel bars is on an upward trajectory, spurred by robust construction activities in both urban and rural areas, driven by government initiatives. Gurugram-based Kamdhenu Group is also into the manufacturing of paints. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

## PM confident of

has seen how the government responded to the terror attack. The country's response was also witnessed during Operation Sindoor following the terror attack in Pahalgam last year, he said. "The Congress did nothing to protect the nation's security but gave only statements and indulged in scams while buying weapons," Modi alleged.

Modi said, "The BJP is committed to ensuring the speedy development of Assam and also protecting its identity and traditions. It is, therefore, very important that the double-engine BJP government returns to power in Assam." The party considers the NE as the 'Ashtalakshmi' and is focused on its development to make it 'Atma Nirbhar and Viksit', he said. The focus of this year's budget is on improving connectivity, which will lead to an increase in employment opportunities, the PM said.

"The last time I had come to Guwahati, I engaged with students in the 'Pariksha pe Charcha' on a cruise over the Brahmaputra river and today, I walked on the newly inaugurated Kumar Bhaskar Varma bridge, connecting Guwahati and North Guwahati, over the mighty river to give a message to people in the rest of the country to come here so that it will encourage river tourism," the PM said.

Modi said he had the firm belief that the BJP will secure victory by a huge margin in the 2026 Assam assembly polls, but it is "not just about winning elections alone, we must win the hearts and minds of the people".

The credit for BJP's success goes only to party workers as "we believe in organisational strength: My biggest qualification and source of pride is that Narendra Modi is a BJP party worker," he added.

"Party workers are the oxygen of the BJP, and I urge them to reach out to the people of the state not only before the elections but even after the next government is formed," Modi said.

He assured the people that he will "return their love for BJP with interest through development".

He also paid his tributes to former Union Minister Kabindra Purkayastha, who died last month, saying that he had devoted his life to the party and the state.

Chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, in his address, said the presence of the Prime Minister had significantly boosted the morale of party workers and reaffirmed the BJP's resolve to secure a record mandate in the 2026 Assam elections. He also said the government remains committed to creating opportunities so that Assamese youth can find employment within the state and live with dignity and security.

State BJP president Dilip Saikia, who delivered the welcome address, called upon karyakartas to take the message of development and the party's ideology to every voter at the booth level, saying that the upcoming election would revolve around booth-level mobilisation. (PTI & Our Reporter)

## PM inaugurates Kumar

only the Saraghat Bridge in Jalukbari area connects the two banks of the Brahmaputra in the capital region, with travel time taking around 30 minutes.

Considering the high seismicity of the region, the bridge incorporates base isolation technology using friction pendulum bearings, according to a statement issued by the prime minister's office.

High-performance stay cables were used to ensure durability and long-term structural performance, it added. "A Bridge Health Monitoring System (BHMS) has also been incorporated for real-time condition monitoring, early damage detection and improved safety and service life of the extradosed bridge," the PMO statement said. Modi had laid the foundation stone for the bridge on February 9, 2019 and construction started on March 1, 2020 by the then Assam chief minister Sarbananda Sonowal.

The initial cost of the bridge was ₹ 2,608 crore, which escalated to ₹ 3,030 crore, and the project was estimated to be completed within four years. The length of the bridge is 7.75 km, including approach roads and flyovers on both sides of the Brahmaputra, while the actual bridge over the river is 1.24 km long.

The project was implemented by the Assam Public Works Department with consultancy services from Systra Engenharia Consultoria Ltd of Brazil. The contractor for the bridge was S P Singla Construction Pvt Ltd and the funding agency was the New Development Bank, with 20 per cent of the total project cost borne by the Assam government. (PTI)

## Modi witnesses special

operational preparedness of the IAF.

As the two ALHs made a quick take-off after dropping the personnel, two other helicopters displayed the HADR operation by demonstrating medical evacuation, bringing the aerial show to an end.

The PM, accompanied by Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, Union minister Sarbananda Sonowal and Air Chief Marshal A P Singh, among others, witnessed the show from a special platform.

Modi then flew to Guwahati for the next leg of his visit on the IAF's C-130J Super Hercules aircraft, on board which he had landed on the ELF from the Chabua air base.

Sarma had said earlier that it will be the first such 'elaborate' exercise at an ELF, with around 16 aircraft participating. The ELF, developed at a project cost of nearly Rs 100 crore, has been specially designed and constructed in coordination with the IAF to support landing and take-off of military and civil aircraft during emergencies, an official statement said. (PTI)

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As the two ALHs made a quick take-off after dropping the personnel, two other helicopters displayed the HADR operation by demonstrating medical evacuation, bringing the aerial show to an end.

The PM, accompanied by Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, Union minister Sarbananda Sonowal and Air Chief Marshal A P Singh, among others, witnessed the show from a special platform.

Modi then flew to Guwahati for the next leg of his visit on the IAF's C-130J Super Hercules aircraft, on board which he had landed on the ELF from the Chabua air base.

Sarma had said earlier that it will be the first such 'elaborate' exercise at an ELF, with around 16 aircraft participating. The ELF, developed at a project cost of nearly Rs 100 crore, has been specially designed and constructed in coordination with the IAF to support landing and take-off of military and civil aircraft during emergencies, an official statement said. (PTI)

## Modi inaugurates NE's

role during any eventuality, adding that the Indian Air Force is among the best in the world and fully capable of responding to any war-time situation. (With Inputs from PTI)

## India's first road

include Rangia-Mukongselek Railway Section under Rangia Division of NFR on Gohpur Side and Furkating-Mariani loop line section under Tinsukia Division of NFR on Numalgarh side.

According to the officials, the project will provide seamless connectivity to key economic, social, and logistics nodes across Assam. "Additionally, the project will enhance multi-modal integration by connecting with 11 Economic Nodes, 3 Social Nodes, 2 Tourist nodes and 8 Logistic Nodes, providing enhanced connectivity with 4 major railway stations, 2 airports, and 2 inland waterways, thereby facilitating faster movement of goods and passengers across the region," the press note said.

"Upon completion, the project will play a pivotal role in strategic considerations, regional economic growth, strengthening connectivity between major economic centres, and opening new avenues for trade and industrial development," it added. Highlighting new opportunities, it stated, "The project will also generate approximately 80 lakhs person-days of direct and indirect employment, and will open new avenues of growth, development and prosperity in surrounding regions." (PTI)

## SC to hear on

lawyer Nizam Pasha, appearing for a few CPI and CPI(M) leaders, against Sarma and said it will consider listing the plea.

The video of Sarma purportedly taking aim with a rifle and firing at two people, one wearing a skull cap and the other with a beard, was shared by the Assam BJP on its official X handle on February 7.

The controversial post sparked widespread outrage and political condemnation. It was deleted by the BJP after it was accused of inciting violence and communal hatred.

Separate pleas have been filed by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and CPI leader Annie Raja seeking the registration of FIRs against Sarma for alleged hate speech aimed at communal polarisation.

They also sought setting up of a special investigation team (SIT) by the top court on the ground that an independent probe was not expected from state and central agencies.

The pleas listed in chronological order alleged provocative speeches and statements made by Sarma. Earlier, a separate petition was filed by 12 people on the issue, seeking directions to prevent divisive comments by persons holding constitutional posts. (PTI)

## Congress betrayed Assam

toward building a modern and future-ready Assam.

The Dibrugarh Lok Sabha MP said that where there was once neglect, corruption and misgovernance, there is now transparency, investment and nation-building under the present leadership.

He also claimed that improved peace and stability have boosted investor confidence, with industries and institutions increasingly looking at Assam as a promising destination.

Calling upon party workers to prepare for the upcoming elections, Sonowal reiterated that the BJP's guiding principle places the nation first, followed by the party and the individual, and stressed the need to work with dedication while preserving Assam's heritage and cultural identity.

He asserted that Assam is no longer defined by instability but by infrastructure growth, confidence and development, adding that under Prime Minister Modi's leadership, the Northeast is emerging as a key driver of the country's progress.

## M'laya coal mine

that strict action will be taken against those involved in running the illegal mine and that four persons have been arrested. The National Green Tribunal (NGT) had banned rat-hole mining in 2014. However, coal is still extracted through this dangerous method in the Northeast. (PTI)

## Deal inked to

historic step for AHSIDC and credited the State government's investment summit initiative for bringing Karbi Anglong into the industrial spotlight.

AHSIDC chairman Ratan Teron also said the summit helped showcase business opportunities in the district and expressed hope that the investment would boost local industrial growth.

The MoU signing ceremony was attended by district industries officials, AHSIDC board members, and other stakeholders.

**E-AUCTION FOR MULTIUTILITY OF WAREHOUSE FOR MUSTARD OIL CUM ELECTRONIC ACCESSORIES**

e-Auction for "Miscellaneous Static Service Assets" over Lumding Division. Details are as under: Auction Catalogue No.: MSS-LMG-APU-04-; Auction Start Date & Time (All Lots): 12:00 hrs. on 27-02-2026. Auction Close Date & Time: 12:30 hrs. on 27-02-2026. Rate Unit: Annual Licensing Fee. Trips/Days: 1826.

Seq No.	Lot No./Category	Description
AA/1	MSS-LMG-APU-STGen-29-26-1 (Misc-Static-Services-Static General)	A proposal for Calling e-Auction for multiutility of warehouse for mustard Oil cum electronic accessories for a Period of 05 (Five) Years.

Prospective bidders are requested to visit e-Auction leasing Module of IREPS website [www.ireps.gov.in](http://www.ireps.gov.in).

Divisional Railway Manager (C), Lumding

**NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY**  
"SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE"

## Union Minister expresses satisfaction over progress, assures resolution of MSME and loan issues Khadse reviews central schemes in Hojai

**HT Correspondent**  
**HOJAI, Feb 14:** Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Youth Affairs and Sports, Raksha Nikhil Khadse, visited Hojai district on Saturday on the instructions of the Prime Minister's Office. She attended a key review meeting held at the District Commissioner's office hall, which was chaired by District Commissioner Bidyut Bikash Bhagwati. During the meeting, the minister reviewed the progress of various Central government schemes being implemented in the district. She expressed satisfaction over their successful execution and thanked the district administration and concerned departments for their efficiency and dedicated efforts in ensuring effective implementation.

Minister Khadse assured that she would take up issues related to MSME schemes and difficulties faced by beneficiaries in securing bank loans with the Prime Minister's Office and the concerned ministries. She stated that these problems would be addressed at the earliest to ensure smoother de-



livery of benefits to eligible beneficiaries.

The minister also highlighted that the February 1, 2026 Union Budget is favourable for the North-east, particularly Assam. She said that an allocation of ₹ 49,725 crore has been earmarked for the overall development and growth of Assam, which would further

strengthen infrastructure and welfare initiatives in the state.

All district department officers were present at the meeting and made detailed PowerPoint presentations outlining the status of their respective schemes, progress achieved so far, future plans and challenges faced during implementation.

Following the review meeting, the minister visited the newly constructed Lamding Mini Stadium, Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya in Lamding and houses built under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Rural), where she interacted with officials and reviewed the facilities and development works on the ground.

## Free bicycles distributed to 68 students in Biswanath

MLA Pramod Borthakur lauds student welfare initiatives at Dakhin Nagsankar High School

**HT Correspondent**  
**BISWANATH CHARIALI, Feb 14:** Biswanath MLA Pramod Borthakur on Saturday attended the free bicycle distribution ceremony held at Dakhin Nagsankar High School, Samar Dalani. Inaugurating the programme, the MLA lauded the state government for adopting and implementing a series of student-centric welfare schemes aimed at encouraging education and reducing dropout rates.

He highlighted that free bicycles have been distributed among Class IX students of government and provincialised schools under the Chief Minister's special scheme for several years, benefiting thousands of students across the state. The initiative, he said, has significantly helped students, particularly those from rural areas in commuting to school with ease.

The ceremony was attended by ZPC member Dipali Devi; president of No 2 Dakhin Nagsankar Gaon Panchayat, Shantaram Lama; SMDC president Chandan Upadhyaya; Headmaster Ballav Chapagain; village headman Premal Dahal; former headmasters Lila Kanta Sara and Bhabani Sarma; SMDC members; parents and guardians; representatives of the Alumni Association and teachers and staff of the school.

All proceedings were conducted by Anjan Baskota. A total of 68 students of the school received free bicycles under the scheme.



## People celebrate additional train stoppages across Assam and North Bengal



**HT Bureau**  
**GUWAHATI, Feb 14:** The decision by Indian Railways to introduce several additional train stoppages at 82 stations across Assam, West Bengal and Bihar under Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) has been met with widespread appreciation and celebration. Citizens across towns and rural areas expressed happiness over improved access to Mail/Express and premium trains, viewing the new stoppages as opportunities for easier, faster and more dignified travel.

At Dhemaji Railway Station, the stoppage of Train No 20505/20506 Dibrugarh-New Delhi-Dibrugarh Rajdhani Express was hailed as a historic milestone. Similarly, Sivasagar Town Railway Station saw celebrations for the new stoppage of Train No 20503/20504 Dibrugarh-New Delhi-Dibrugarh Rajdhani Express, with residents welcoming the train with flowers, sweets and applause.

Excitement was also visible at Kamarbandha Ali Railway Station for the 15603/15604 Guwa-

hati-Ledo-Guwahati Intercity Express, at Kalchini Railway Station for the 15467/15468 Siliguri-Bamanhat-Siliguri Express and in New Coochbehar for the inaugural stoppage of the 22449 Guwahati-New Delhi Express. In Lower Assam, the Saraighat Express (12346/12345) stoppage at Goalpara Town Railway Station and the Silghat Town-Tamaram Express stoppage at Nalbari station drew similar appreciation. The 15769/15770 Alipurduar Jn.-Mariani Jn - Alipurduar Jn. Intercity Express stoppage at Sorupeta Railway Station was also warmly welcomed.

Across the region, the additional stoppages have been seen not just as improved transport facilities but as recognition of local aspirations and growing regional importance. Indian Railways and NFR have strengthened both connectivity and public confidence, reinforcing their commitment to inclusive service and citizen welfare.

## Former Bodo Sahitya Sabha president Toren Chandra Boro passes away

Assam mourns the loss of a literary stalwart and promoter of Bodo language



**HT Correspondent**  
**KOKRAJHAR, Feb 14:** Eminent literary figure and former president of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha (2017-2023), Toren Chandra Boro, passed away on Saturday afternoon in Guwahati.

A noted writer and respected personality, Boro was known for his lifelong work in promoting Bodo language and literature, both within the Bodo community and across Assam. He also served as the Convener of the Sahitya Akademi Bodo Advisory Board.

According to family sources, he was taken to Wintrobe Hospital, Ambari, Guwahati, after a sudden drop in his blood sugar level, where he was declared dead. He was about 70 and is survived by his wife, two daughters and a son.

Born in 1955 in Kokrajhar, Boro completed his graduate and postgraduate studies from Gauhati University and retired as a Manager at the State Bank of India, Guwahati. Throughout his life, he was actively involved in social and literary activities and made significant contributions to the development of Bodo language and literature. He authored numerous books in Bodo and Assamese and wrote several Bodo-language dramas. He was also a well-known public speaker.

Chief Minister Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma expressed deep sorrow over Boro's demise. In a condolence mes-

sage shared on social media, he described Boro as a prominent literary personality whose contributions to Bodo and Assamese society would be remembered for generations. He also highlighted Boro's role as convener of the Bodo Language Advisory Committee of the Sahitya Akademi, acknowledging his efforts in promoting the Bodo language nationally. Remembering him as a calm and simple-minded person, the Chief Minister prayed for peace to the departed soul and extended condolences to his family.

Condolences have poured in from literary bodies, student organisations, political parties and cultural groups across the state. Various social organisations and student bodies, including the Bodo Sahitya Sabha and the All Bodo Students Union, along with BTC chief Pragrama Mohilary and former CEM of BTR and UPPL president Pramod Boro, expressed deep mourning.

Pramod Boro stated that the Bodo community, as well as the entire state, lost a significant literary figure with Toren Chandra Boro's demise. "Your immense contribution and unparalleled services shall be remembered. Bodo language and literature took a giant leap towards progress during your tenure as president of Bodo Sahitya Sabha", he added.

Our Tezpur Correspondent adds: The Asam Sahitya Sabha has expressed deep sorrow over the demise of eminent litterateur, organiser, writer and researcher Toren Chandra Boro, former president of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha and Convener of the Bodo Language Advisory Council of the Sahitya Akademi.

In a condolence message, Asam Sahitya Sabha president Dr Basanta Kumar Goswami, vice-president Padum Rajkhowa and principal secretary Debajit Bora said that Boro's death was an irreparable loss to the literary, cultural and social life of Assam. "Through his lifelong work, he not only strengthened the Bodo Sahitya Sabha but also contributed significantly to the consolidation of the broader Assamese identity," the message stated.

The dignitaries prayed for the eternal peace of the departed soul and conveyed their heartfelt condolences to the bereaved family. As a mark of respect, the flag at the Asam Sahitya Sabha's central office in Jorhat, along with all regional and district offices of the Sabha will be flown at half-mast on February 15.

## Five-day e-content development workshop concludes at KKHSOU

**HT Bureau**  
**GUWAHATI, Feb 14:** A five-day Workshop-cum-Capacity Building Programme on "e-Content Development for Teachers and Teacher Educators of North Eastern States of India" concluded on Friday at Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University (KKHSOU), Guwahati. Organised by CIET-NCERT, New Delhi in collaboration with

KKHSOU, the programme ran from February 11 to 14, 2026. The workshop aimed to enhance digital teaching competencies of educators from NE focusing on digital pedagogy, instructional design and technology-enabled teaching strategies. Participants were trained in DIKSHA and PM e-Vidya. The programme saw participation from 49 school educators representing

DIETs, state government schools, Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas and Kendriya Vidyalayas. Technical sessions were led by eight resource persons from CIET-NCERT under VC Prof Rajendar Pal, covering e-content development, using tools like CapCut, InShot and VN Video Editor.

The programme concluded with a vote of thanks by Dr Indrani Kalita, Joint Coordinator of the workshop.

## Illegal coal syndicate thrives despite transport suspension

**HT Correspondent**  
**KHERONI, Feb 14:** Despite past tragedies in Meghalaya's coal mines, illegal coal operations continue unabated in the region with a massive black-market syndicate reportedly running smuggling networks under the cover of darkness.

Although coal transportation from Meghalaya is currently suspended, a new route has allegedly emerged. Every night, dozens of trucks loaded with suspected illegal coal from Ledo in Upper Assam are said to move through Lanka and Karbi Anglong toward the hill district of Dima Hasao.

Sources claim that the smuggling process involves a startling loophole. Trucks reportedly travel from Ledo to Lanka without valid documentation or challans. However, upon reaching Lanka, drivers are allegedly provided with transit permits that allow them to proceed further. According to drivers involved in the trade,

while the coal originates from Ledo, the paperwork handed to them in Lanka is issued under the jurisdiction of Nagaland.

The alleged use of Nagaland-issued challans within Assam has raised serious concerns about regulatory oversight and inter-state coordination. Questions are being raised over how trucks manage to travel long distances from Ledo to Lanka without interception by law enforcement agencies and who is facilitating the issuance of transit permits midway through the route.

Further concerns revolve around the role of alleged middlemen who reportedly ensure the smooth passage of these vehicles through Karbi Anglong into Dima Hasao during night hours.

Despite claims of strict vigilance, the "dust in the eyes" of the administration seems to be getting thicker as the coal mafia continues to exploit the state's highways for illegal gain.

## Leaders urge India and UN to support separate state for Hindu minority in Bangladesh

### Banga Sena demands creation of 'Bongobhumi'

**HT Correspondent**  
**HOWRAGHAT, Feb 14:** A Bangladeshi Hindu Bengali speaking group has raised the demand for the creation of an independent "Bongobhumi" by carving out six districts from Bangladesh "for protection of the Hindu minority" in Bangladesh. It has called a special meeting of the Banga Sena held on Friday at Shimulguri Garubandha village in Nagaon district.

Addressing the gathering, Banga Sena Commander Narayan Das and Vice-Commander Nakul Das formally urged the Government of India and the United Nations to support the formation of a sovereign "Bongobhumi" state comprising these specific Bangladesh districts.

The leaders stated that the organisation is operating under the direct instructions of Bimal Majhi. The group revealed plans to take their movement to the national capital, Delhi, to pressure the central government. The demand for a separate Bongobhumi was framed as a necessary step for the "protection and rights of the Hindu minority" in the region.

The Banga Sena leaders emphasised through the media that their movement is a struggle for justice and the fundamental rights of the community. The meeting has sparked significant discussion across the region due to its geopolitical implications and the boldness of the separatist rhetoric.

## RTU hosts national conference on multidrug-resistant tuberculosis

Experts stress collaborative research to achieve TB-Free India mission

**HT Correspondent**  
**HOJAI, Feb 14:** Rabindranath Tagore University (RTU), Hojai, successfully organised a two-day National Conference on "Multidrug-Resistant Tuberculosis and Other Bacterial Infections" on February 13 and 14, 2026, at its Sir J C Bose Campus. The event was a collaborative initiative between RTU and Assam University, sponsored by the Department of Biotechnology (DBT), Government of India and the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR).

The conference witnessed wide participation from across the country, with delegates representing premier institutions such as Indian Institute of Technology Delhi, Indian Institute of Technology Kharagpur, Banaras Hindu University, Vellore Institute of Technology, University of North Bengal, North-Eastern Hill University, Dibrugarh University and Silchar Medical College and Hospital.

Aligned with the National Mission of TB-Free India envisioned by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the conference provided a platform for intensive academic exchange and research collaboration. A total of 10 in-



vided lectures and 53 scientific papers were presented, covering diverse aspects of multidrug-resistant tuberculosis and other bacterial infections. Contributions came from scholars and researchers representing 11 different states of India.

The inaugural session was graced by Prof Rajive Mohan Pant as the Chief Guest, while Prof Binoy Kr Saikia, a Bhatnagar Awardee, attended as the Guest of Honour. Both digni-

tified dignitaries and the rendition of the university anthem, state anthem and national anthem, along with other cultural presentations.

Technical sessions were held separately, during which delegates presented their research findings and scientific papers. Participants appreciated the university's initiative in organising the conference and highlighted its importance in strengthening research collaboration. Delegates also visited local tourist attractions, including the waterfalls of Kanti Langchoo, Koka and Bhelughat, as well as Kaziranga National Park, among other notable sites.

The Vice Chancellor and Chairman of the National Seminar expressed gratitude to all delegates, their respective institutions, sponsoring departments and agencies, as well as the faculty members, administrators, officers and staff of the university for their cooperation in fostering a vibrant research and academic ecosystem on the campus. The conference concluded with a vibrant cultural programme, reflecting the university's commitment to blending academic excellence with cultural enrichment.

## Editor's Pick

## Trump's push for nuclear tests and the erosion of the nuclear taboo

By: Shravishtha Ajaykumar

In late October 2025, United States (US) President Donald Trump announced through a social media post that US forces may begin testing nuclear weapons to remain at par with rival nuclear powers. This statement signalled a grave shift in the global nuclear security landscape, as more than three decades of voluntary restraint on nuclear weapon tests had come to an end. Since the original announcement, US officials have clarified that the planned actions do not include explosive nuclear detonations, yet the ramifications of this policy shift are profound and far-reaching.

Since 1992, there has effectively been a moratorium on nuclear explosive testing in the United States, following its last underground nuclear explosion at the Nevada Test Site. The moratorium continued from the previous to the current administration, complemented by internal projects such as the Science-Based Stockpile Stewardship program, which assesses the safety, security, and efficacy of the US nuclear stockpile through simulation and laboratory testing without conducting an explosive test.

However, this practice ended with President Trump's public statement in October last year, declaring an urgent need to continue the tests "immediately," implying that other nations were also conducting secret tests. US Energy Secretary Chris Wright clarified that the tests referred to are now understood as "system tests" of delivery systems and non-nuclear materials, rather than nuclear explosions. Nevertheless, this distinction does little to mitigate the political and strategic implications of the statement.

In the global arena, no nuclear-armed state, aside from North Korea, has conducted a nuclear test since the 1990s. This is reflected in the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), adopted in the mid-1990s, which has yet to enter into force pending ratification by certain nuclear-armed states. Public statements supporting the resumption of nuclear testing, even if not initially seen as significant, risk eroding the longstanding taboo on nuclear tests and may prompt other states to reassess their own policies.

This is particularly significant given that Russia has already instructed its agencies to develop proposals for a possible resumption of nuclear tests if the United States takes such action. Resuming such testing would undermine long-standing taboos and could prompt other nuclear-armed states, including Russia and China, to reconsider their moratoriums, potentially reigniting competition in the nuclear sphere. While the Chinese and Russian governments have reaffirmed their commitment to existing moratoriums, they are closely monitoring US actions.

### Eroding Confidence in Non-Proliferation Frameworks

The US decision comes at a time when the global arms control architecture is already under strain. A key pillar of this framework is New START, the bilateral treaty between the United States and Russia that limits both nations' deployed strategic nuclear warheads and delivery systems. New START is set to expire in February 2026, and as of mid-January 2026, Russia was still awaiting a US response to a proposal to extend the treaty for another year. The potential lapse of New START would leave the world's two largest nuclear arsenals without binding constraints for the first time in over a decade, and US statements on resuming testing risk undermining the transparency and accountability mechanisms that have helped stabilise US-Russia nuclear relations.

### Regional and Global Security Impacts

A renewed US testing program could have ripples far beyond Washington, Moscow, and Beijing. Beyond these nuclear powers, countries in regions of actual or potential nuclear tension—especially in South Asia, including India and its neighbourhood—could face new pressures to reconsider their nuclear postures if major powers visibly depart from the restraint that has governed nuclear policy for more than three decades.

Diplomacy based on mutual restraint, such as efforts to strengthen the CTBT and broader non-proliferation norms, requires credible commitments from the major powers. With the US, a leading nuclear power, signalling its willingness to reverse a long-standing moratorium, the leverage of global disarmament advocacy is weakened. Trust built over decades—both among nuclear states and between nuclear and non-nuclear states—is further undermined among States Parties that have upheld these norms despite the treaty's non-entry into force.

This is not limited to nuclear detonations; even underground testing carries environmental risks, including land disruption and radioactive contamination, affecting civilians near test sites, as evidenced by the Nevada National Security Site, which the US extensively used for testing. Such activities introduce new ethical and security considerations that should be addressed in future treaties and non-proliferation frameworks.

Arms control experts have strongly criticised the signal sent by the US regarding nuclear testing. Daryl Kimball, Executive Director of the Arms Control Association, stated that the prospect of restarting nuclear explosive tests lacks any technical, military, or political justification and could be highly damaging to international security.

### Conclusion

The international nuclear order faces a significant shift with public orders from the US President to restart nuclear testing. This development comes at a time when existing controls, such as the nuclear test moratorium and the New START treaty, appear to be under pressure. This development will not only contribute to the erosion of established norms but also precipitate similar action from other nuclear-weapon states.

The outcome will depend on how soon testing begins and its scale, but the announcement ending decades of nuclear restraint has already triggered strategic recalculations in capitals worldwide. While the nuclear age has avoided full-scale testing for over thirty years, returning to such restraint will require more than mere rhetoric. (Courtesy: ORF)

## Ballots and the balance of power

# BNP sweeps post-uprising Bangladesh poll

By: Dipak Kurmi

Bangladesh has delivered a political earthquake. The Bangladesh Nationalist Party has emerged from a landmark general election with a commanding mandate, claiming more than two-thirds of the seats in parliament in what is being described as the most consequential vote in a generation. The scale of the victory marks a dramatic reversal of fortunes for BNP leader Tarique Rahman, who spent 17 years in self-imposed exile in London and once faced life imprisonment in absentia. These were the first national polls since the student-led protests of 2024 forced Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina from office amid allegations of a brutal crackdown that left an estimated 1,400 people dead—charges she has denied. With Hasina's Awami League barred from contesting and Jamaat-e-Islami emerging as the second-largest force, Bangladesh now stands at a pivotal crossroads, navigating domestic repair and delicate regional recalibration.

The election was held alongside a referendum endorsing sweeping constitutional reforms, underscoring the electorate's appetite for systemic change after years of political turbulence. The Chief Election Commissioner, Nasir Uddin, called the process "neutral and credible," asserting that authorities had delivered a festive, participatory exercise that met national expectations. He publicly thanked voters, political leaders and journalists for their cooperation, insisting the outcome reflected a broadly acceptable mandate. Yet the boycott by supporters of the banned Awami League cast a long shadow, and Jamaat-e-Islami later voiced dissatisfaction with aspects of the vote-counting process, urging patience even as it consolidated its strongest parliamentary showing to date. The tension between celebration and contestation captures the paradox of this transition: a decisive result achieved amid lingering mistrust.

The numbers themselves tell a layered story. Official tallies show the BNP securing 151 of the 300 seats required to form government, while other updates indicated 130 seats confirmed at one stage, placing the party within 21 seats of a majority before subsequent results edged it past the threshold. Jamaat-e-Islami stands in second place with 46 seats, a significant leap from its previous high-water mark of 18 seats and roughly 6 percent of the vote in 1991. Analysts attribute Jamaat's surge to a convergence of structural opportunity and strategic agility. With the Awami League barred, Jamaat became the only large alternative on the ballot outside the BNP and its allies, drawing voters reluctant to back Rahman's party. The Islamists also mounted an early and sophisticated social media campaign, critics say amplified by misinformation, while religious messaging resonated in key constituencies. In several districts, rebel BNP candidates split the anti-Jamaat vote, further magnifying its gains.

For Tarique Rahman, the ascent is both personal and political. Once arrested on corruption charges in 2007 and sentenced to life over an attack on a Hasina rally—allegations he dismissed as politically motivated—Rahman left for London in 2008 and remained abroad for nearly two decades. The upheaval that followed Hasina's ouster in August 2024 saw multiple convictions overturned, enabling his return to Dhaka. His trajectory is inseparable from a storied and turbulent family legacy. His father, Ziaur Rahman, a leading figure in Bangladesh's war of independence, served as president until his assassination in 1981. His mother, Khaleda Zia, was a three-time prime minister who herself endured repeated arrests and imprisonment under Awami League rule. Khaleda Zia had intended to contest the latest election but died in December, days after her son returned home, adding an elegiac note to the BNP's resurgence.

The political transformation has unfolded against a fraught economic backdrop. Before the pandemic, Bangladesh was among Asia's fastest-growing economies, with projections suggesting it would overtake several larger emerging neighbors in income growth within a few years. Covid-19 disrupted vital export industries and arrested momentum, while the instability following Hasina's ouster further eroded business confidence and slowed investment. The incoming government inherits stubborn inflation of 8.5 percent—the highest in South Asia—intensifying cost-of-living pressures that dominated voter concerns. The garment sector, which accounts for roughly 80 percent of exports, has also faced external headwinds. Former U.S. President Donald Trump imposed a 37 percent tariff on Bangladeshi imports last year, later easing it in stages before agreeing this week to a reduced 19 percent under a new trade arrangement. The tariff turbulence has compounded anxieties in a sector that anchors employment and foreign exchange earnings.

BNP leaders have framed the victory not as triumphalism but as a solemn trust. Senior figure Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury said the party's immediate priority would be to restore democratic and financial institutions "destroyed over the last decade," emphasizing stability and peace as prerequisites for reform. He indicated that members of parliament could take their oaths between February 14 and 16, paving the way for government formation. Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, the BNP's secretary-general, went further, contending that the suppression of democracy under the Awami League created the conditions for the rise of Jamaat-e-Islami. "Whenever democracy is obstructed, other extremist forces start to rise," he argued, casting Jamaat's surge as a byproduct of authoritarian drift. Whether this diagnosis proves persuasive will depend on the BNP's capacity to reconcile pluralism with order

in a society strained by polarization.

Regional diplomacy now enters a sensitive phase. India, where Sheikh Hasina sought refuge after fleeing Dhaka, has watched relations plummet amid accusations among many Bangladeshis that New Delhi enabled her authoritarian consolidation. Prime Minister Narendra Modi congratulated Rahman, affirming India's support for a democratic, progressive and inclusive Bangladesh and expressing readiness to strengthen multifaceted ties. Yet trust will not be rebuilt overnight. The BNP has pledged friendly and constructive relations with all neighbors, insisting that foreign policy will rest on mutual respect, mutual interest, non-interference and strategic autonomy rather than country-centric alignments. Delhi's anxieties are sharpened by Dhaka's parallel thaw with Islamabad. Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and President Asif Ali Zardari both congratulated Rahman, voicing hopes for deeper cooperation in trade, defense and cultural exchange. In recent months, direct flights resumed between Dhaka and Karachi for the first time in 14 years. Pakistan's former minister visited Bangladesh after a 13-year hiatus, and bilateral trade reportedly rose by 27 percent in 2024-25. The recalibration with Pakistan marks a striking departure from the frost that defined relations during Hasina's 15-year tenure. For Delhi, which regards Islamabad as its principal regional adversary, a closer Dhaka-Islamabad axis introduces new strategic complexity. Historically, the BNP has maintained warmer ties with Pakistan than the Awami League did, yet it cannot afford to alienate India, a key trading partner and the regional power that geographically envelops Bangladesh. The new government will thus have to walk a diplomatic tightrope, balancing competing expectations while projecting sovereign agency. Chowdhury's formulation of strategic autonomy suggests an effort to de-ideologize foreign policy, but the

domestic optics of engagement—particularly with a former adversary—will require careful choreography.

At home, the euphoria of victory coexists with sober warnings. Dhaka's newspapers herald a "big win," a "landslide," and a "certain victory," celebrating festive queues and the return of long-denied ballots. Yet commentators caution that the first test will be restoring law and order after 18 months of turbulence marked by mob violence, fraying social cohesion and early signs of armed extremism. Women and minorities have borne disproportionate burdens during the unrest, and the durability of reform will hinge on whether the new administration can guarantee security without repeating the heavyhandedness it decried. Jamaat's assertion that it dissatisfied with aspects of the vote-counting process injects another note of vigilance, reminding the government that legitimacy is sustained not merely by margins but by the perception of fairness.

Bangladesh's electoral upheaval is therefore more than a transfer of power; it is a reckoning with the architecture of governance and the geometry of the region. The BNP's parliamentary dominance, achieved in the absence of its principal rival, offers both opportunity and risk: opportunity to enact constitutional reform and institutional repair, risk of overreach in a landscape where opposition has been thinned. Tarique Rahman's return from exile to the threshold of the premiership symbolizes a generational shift and the resilience of a political dynasty, yet it also reopens debates about accountability and the uses of power. As inflation bites, exports recalibrate under revised tariffs, and neighbors recalibrate their expectations, the mandate delivered at the ballot box will be measured less by its scale than by its stewardship. In that stewardship lies the promise—or the peril—of Bangladesh's next chapter. (The writer can be reached at dipakurmi@gmail.com)

## Aatmanirbhar Frontier Nagaland Territorial Authority: Institutionalising self-reliant governance

By: Dr Aniruddha Babar

"Aatmanirbharta is the need of the times. Self-reliance is the cornerstone of building a Viksit Bharat."  
— Prime Minister Narendra Modi, 79th Independence Day address, 15 August 2025.

The Frontier Nagaland Territorial Authority derives its mandate from the Tripartite Memorandum of Agreement signed on 5 February 2026 between the Government of India, the Government of Nagaland and representatives of the Eastern Nagaland Peoples' Organisation. The Agreement establishes an executive administrative authority for the six eastern districts of Tuensang, Mon, Kiphire, Longleng, Noklak and Shamator and records that powers relating to forty-six subjects will be devolved to this Authority. It further affirms that the arrangement does not affect the provisions of Article 371(A) of the Constitution of India. Through this affirmation, the constitutional perimeter within which the FNTA must function stands clearly defined, and its legitimacy as a decentralised governance institution within the framework of the State is firmly secured.

With this legal foundation established, attention necessarily turns from institutional creation to institutional responsibility. The transfer of forty-six subjects represents not merely administrative scope but a substantive obligation to deliver measurable governance outcomes. To discharge this obligation with credibility, statutory notifications, executive rules and operational protocols must demarcate transferred functions with precision and clarity. When authority is structured transparently and responsibilities are clearly assigned, accountability becomes enforceable and governance acquires coherence. Through such coherence, decentralisation evolves from formal arrangement into effective administration.

Administrative coherence must be reinforced by fiscal alignment, for responsibility cannot be sustained without adequate and disciplined financial architecture. Structured budgeting, predictable financial flows and disciplined utilisation systems must therefore anchor implementation. Transparent procurement procedures, digital expenditure monitoring and outcome-based review mechanisms will embed fiscal integrity within routine administration. As financial discipline strengthens, institutional credibility deepens, and upon that credibility rests the foundation of durable self-reliance.

Institutional credibility also depends upon principled governance. The Frontier Nagaland Territorial Authority shall serve its people under a singular and unambiguous principle: the "Rule of Law" shall prevail above all other considerations. No tribal affiliation, clan alignment, partisan calculation or transient sentiment shall influence the discharge of its responsibilities. Administrative decisions must derive exclusively from constitutional mandate, statutory authority and established procedure. Political convenience, sectional advantage, personal ambition and social-political-tribal ego shall find no place within its institutional framework. Public office under the FNTA shall be exercised as a solemn trust, anchored in neutrality and equal treatment, ensuring that governance re-

mains disciplined, impartial and constitutionally grounded.

To preserve this principled foundation, the Authority must remain insulated from informal influence and extra-institutional control. Decision-making must remain insulated from "legacy influence" and non-statutory intervention, parallel power structures, emotional blackmailing or advisory dominance exercised outside constitutional mandate. The FNTA shall function strictly within its legally defined framework, guided solely by duly empowered office-bearers, advisors, Special Purpose Vehicles and accountable administrative processes. No individual, irrespective of prior office or influence, shall exercise shadow authority over institutional decision-making. Authority must flow from law and established process alone, thereby ensuring that administration remains institution-centred and rule-bound.

Such ethical insulation must be matched by uncompromising financial probity. From its very inception, including the interim administrative phase, the FNTA shall operate under a non-negotiable regime of institutional discipline. The Authority must ensure with absolute certainty that no financial misappropriation, diversion of funds, collusive procurement, abuse of authority or corrupt practice is permitted within its framework. Integrity standards established during the interim phase shall define the enduring character of the institution and shape its long-term culture. Comprehensive internal audit systems, statutory audit compliance, real-time financial monitoring, transparent procurement procedures and embedded vigilance oversight must be instituted at the foundational stage. Any instance of misconduct shall invite immediate suspension pending inquiry, time-bound disciplinary proceedings and initiation of penal action under applicable statutory provisions. Administrative response shall be swift and decisive, reinforcing institutional seriousness and deterring recurrence. The confidence reposed by the Government of India through devolution of authority constitutes a solemn institutional responsibility that must remain inviolate. Zero tolerance to corruption shall therefore operate as a binding and enduring governing doctrine.

With legality secured, fiscal discipline embedded and ethical clarity established, the doctrine of self-reliance acquires substantive meaning. "Aatmanirbhar governance" in Eastern Nagaland signifies progressive strengthening of internal administrative capacity, local economic resilience and service delivery efficiency. Absolute self-reliance must evolve through constitutionally grounded and fiscally prudent measures that build durable capability within the six districts. This evolution unfolds within cooperative federalism and contributes to the broader developmental architecture of the Union. Through sustained institutional strengthening, decentralisation matures into disciplined and confident governance.

The pursuit of self-reliance requires measurable direction so that aspiration is translated into evidence-based progress. The eastern districts have historically experienced disparities in connectivity, access to advanced education, availability of specialised healthcare and participation in for-



mal enterprise networks. Comprehensive baseline assessment using district-level indicators must therefore precede implementation. Time-bound targets in infrastructure expansion, educational retention, health outcomes, electrification coverage, potable water access and enterprise registration will define the pathway of advancement. Public dashboards, independent audit review and structured citizen engagement will ensure that implementation remains transparent and accountable.

Economic revitalisation forms the productive extension of this measurable framework. The eastern districts possess comparative advantages in upland agriculture, horticulture, bamboo-based industries and artisanal production. Structured producer aggregation, systematic skill enhancement and improved market access will elevate productivity and income stability. Institutional facilitation of micro and small enterprises will broaden formal economic participation and stimulate entrepreneurship. As economic capacity strengthens, administrative self-reliance gains material reinforcement and governance outcomes acquire durability.

Institutional durability further depends upon coordinated administrative alignment. Clear delineation of functional interfaces between the FNTA and State departments will maintain coherence and prevent duplication. Structured executive coordination platforms will sustain policy continuity and operational harmony. Synchronised planning and budgeting will reinforce unity of direction and preserve efficiency. Through anticipatory coordination, decentralised governance secures stability and consistency in execution.

Legal precision consolidates this stability by codifying composition, tenure, safeguards and review mechanisms through enabling legislation. Defined institutional processes reduce uncertainty and strengthen continuity. Once legal certainty is secured, institutional execution must proceed with corresponding discipline, ensuring that statutory design and operational practice remain aligned.

The operational nucleus of the FNTA will rest upon structured coordination mechanisms that translate legal mandate into effective governance. Strategic oversight, fiscal supervision, compliance assurance and performance evaluation must function within a streamlined and accountable framework. A

staffing architecture combining experienced officers with locally recruited professionals will harmonise administrative rigour with contextual awareness. Fixed tenure norms and sustained capacity-building initiatives will cultivate institutional memory and leadership continuity. Digital governance will further strengthen this institutional architecture. Electronic office systems will accelerate administrative processes, transparent procurement platforms will enhance fiscal integrity and geo-tagged monitoring will deepen accountability. Accessible grievance mechanisms will strengthen citizen engagement and responsiveness. Through technological integration, efficiency and transparency advance together, reinforcing governance quality and public trust.

In this continuum of legality, integrity, capacity and execution, the Frontier Nagaland Territorial Authority shall rise to become a demonstrative standard for the nation, exemplifying how an absolutely clean, incorruptible, rule-bound and citizen-oriented administration can function with precision and integrity. Through disciplined execution and measurable service outcomes, it shall present a working model of governance that commands respect and sustains trust.

Ultimately, the Authority's success will be reflected in tangible improvements in the daily lives of citizens across the six districts. Enhanced connectivity, strengthened education systems, accessible healthcare services, expanded enterprise activity and transparent fiscal reporting will collectively signify institutional achievement. Tangible progress will validate the constitutional assurance embedded in the Agreement and demonstrate that disciplined decentralisation can effectively address regional disparities while reinforcing state cohesion.

The FNTA thus stands at a defining institutional juncture. The Tripartite Agreement provides the legal basis; Article 371A secures the constitutional framework; the mandate of self-reliance defines the strategic destination. Through coherent execution, uncompromised integrity and sustained strengthening of local capacity, the Authority can achieve absolute self-reliance grounded within cooperative federalism. The FNTA shall march to its final destination, and in that march shall rise the glory of a New Nagaland and a rising Bharat.

# Mythological narratives of Mahashivratri

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

Mahashivratri forms an inseparable part of Indian spiritual philosophy and the Sanatan tradition. It is not merely confined to a religious ritual but stands as a profound symbol of the elevation of human consciousness. Celebrated on the Chaturdashi tithi of the Krishna Paksha in the month of Phalgun, this great festival offers a cosmic opportunity to journey from darkness to light, from ignorance to knowledge, and from death to immortality. It is believed that on this special occasion dedicated to the worship of Devadevi Mahadev, an extraordinary union of Prakriti (Nature) and Purusha (Consciousness) takes place, sustaining the equilibrium of the entire universe. The spiritual significance of this night is so profound that it liberates the human mind from worldly attachments and illusions, guiding it toward a higher divine experience. The very term "Shivratri" conceals a deep serenity; "ratri" does not signify mere darkness but serves as a foundation for rest and renewal, where the soul finds refuge in the lap of Shiva, free from all the sorrows and afflictions of worldly existence. Each word and sequence of events described in the Puranas and scriptures has given rise to a vast philosophy of life that continues to inspire human society toward the path of truth and justice even today. Shiva's majestic personality, his spirit of sacrifice, detachment, and simultaneous sense of responsibility toward the world teach us the art of leading a complete and balanced life.

According to the Linga Purana, the origin story of Mahashivratri presents a timeless philosophy of renouncing ego

and seeking truth. In the beginning of creation, when a fierce dispute arose between Brahma and Vishnu over supremacy, a radiant pillar of light manifested to resolve the conflict. This beginningless and endless fiery pillar was the symbol of the formless Parabrahman Shiva. To prove their power and superiority, Brahma flew upward in search of the top of the pillar, while Vishnu descended toward the netherworld in search of its base. Yet, despite thousands of years of effort, neither could find the beginning or the end of this Jyotirlinga. This event proved that the Supreme Truth has no limits and that divine power cannot be measured merely by ego or limited knowledge. Because Brahma falsely claimed to have seen the top, he did not receive worship, whereas Vishnu, by honestly accepting his defeat, became revered throughout the world. A philosophical analysis of this narrative reveals that only when a person surrenders the sense of "I" or ego and bows before truth does he become capable of attaining the true light of knowledge. It is believed that this Jyotirlinga appeared on the Krishna Chaturdashi night of Phalgun; hence, on this night devotees worship both the formless and manifest aspects of Shiva, praying for the destruction of inner darkness.

Another deeply touching and philosophically rich narrative associated with Mahashivratri is the churning of the ocean by the gods and demons, and Mahadev assuming the form of Neelakantha. When the devas and asuras churned the Kshira Sagara in search of amrita (nectar), before the nectar emerged, the deadly Halahala poison arose from the depths of the ocean. The intense burning of that poison threatened

to reduce the entire creation to ashes, causing cries of despair across the three worlds. At that moment of crisis, when no other deity could find a solution, it was only Mahadev who stepped forward for the welfare of all living beings and agreed to drink the poison. Although he consumed it, he did not swallow it completely but held it in his throat, causing his neck to turn blue and earning him the name Neelakantha. This story reflects a harsh truth of social life: a leader or anyone working for the welfare of society must always be ready to endure poison or criticism. By keeping the poison in the throat without allowing it to enter the body, it signifies that we should neither permit negative influences to corrupt our inner being nor expel them outward to harm others. According to yogic scriptures, this act represents the highest form of emotional control and restraint. To soothe the burning of the poison that night, the gods sang praises of Shiva throughout the night and performed abhisheka with water and milk—an tradition that continues as the central ritual of Shivratri event today.

The marriage of Shiva and Shakti, that is, Mahadev and Devi Parvati, is another principal narrative of Mahashivratri, beautifully bridging household dharma and spiritual practice. Through her intense austerity and unwavering concentration, Parvati, the daughter of the Himalayas, eventually compelled the ascetic Shiva to enter worldly life. This marriage was not merely the union of two deities; it represented the eternal conjunction of Prakriti and Purusha, without which the continuity of creation would be impossible. The Puranas describe how Shiva's wedding pro-

cession included not only the gods but also ghosts, goblins, yakshas, and rakshasas. This illustrates Shiva's impartial nature, embracing every class and every kind of being in society equally. On this sacred occasion devotees pray for an ideal married life and family happiness like that of Shiva and Parvati. From a spiritual perspective, this marriage symbolizes the awakening of Kundalini Shakti and its union with the Supreme Shiva in the Sahasrara chakra. The process of awakening the dormant energy within the human body and merging it with supreme consciousness is what seekers practice through this festival. The primary purpose of staying awake on Shivratri night is also to prepare oneself for this spiritual union, calming the restlessness of the mind and attaining steadiness.

The story of Lubdhaka, the hunter, is one of the most popular and meaningful narratives to illustrate the greatness of the Shivratri vow. A simple hunter, having lost his way in the forest and fearing wild animals, took shelter in a tree. To stay awake, he plucked leaves from the tree and dropped them below. Unknowingly, the tree was a bel (bilva) tree, and beneath it stood a Shivalinga. The water from his mouth and the bel leaves fell upon the Shivalinga, and he remained without food throughout the night. Though he knew no mantras or rituals, through this unintentional act he received Shiva's grace and attained liberation. This story proves that Shiva is not fond of ostentation; he is a connoisseur of feeling. Even the smallest offering made with sincerity and a simple heart is extremely dear to him. In the court of the Lord there is no discrimination between rich and poor, learned and ignorant; who-

ever takes refuge in him with devotion is uplifted by him. This narrative establishes the superiority of simple devotion over religious fanaticism and assures the common people that elaborate sacrifices or strict rituals are not required to receive the Supreme Lord's grace—only a pure heart and surrender are sufficient. In today's complex social system, this message provides mental relief and highlights the true essence of spirituality against the commercial mindset prevalent in the name of religion.

While discussing the significance of Mahashivratri, it is essential to mention Shiva's cosmic dance or Tandava in his Nataraja form. It is believed that on this night Mahadev performs a rhythmic dance of creation and destruction, symbolizing the ever-changing nature of the universe. The damaru in one of his hands represents the primal sound or "nada" of creation, while the fire in the other hand signifies the destruction of the old and decayed to make way for the new. The demon Apasmara lying beneath his feet symbolizes human ignorance and forgetfulness, which Shiva subdues to illuminate the world with knowledge. This dance indicates the cyclical motion of life—where birth, sustenance, and dissolution form an uninterrupted process. From a scientific viewpoint, parallels can be drawn between Nataraja's dance and the vibration of the smallest particles or atoms of matter. The dance teaches how to remain steady amid the ups and downs of life, joy and sorrow, accepting them as rhythm. Mahashivratri night offers an opportunity to align one's breath, consciousness, and being with this cosmic rhythm, enabling oneness with the vastness of the universe.

From a geographical and astronomical perspective too, Mahashivratri holds special importance, providing a scientific foundation for its spiritual influence. On this particular night, the position of the Earth in the northern hemisphere is such that nature itself assists in elevating the energy levels within the human body. Normally, energy in the body flows downward, but due to the special planetary and stellar influences on this night, this energy moves upward along the spine. Therefore yogis and seekers emphasize sitting with a straight spine in meditation on this night. It is believed that lying down may obstruct this energy flow. The scientific rationale for staying awake lies here—it naturally aids in elevating the level of consciousness. In modern busy life, when people become disconnected from the rhythm of nature, festivals like Mahashivratri provide an opportunity to reconnect with that biological and cosmic rhythm. Meditation and worship performed at this time are said to help reduce mental stress, enhance concentration, and strengthen the body's immunity.

In the context of Assamese society and culture, the influence of Mahashivratri is profoundly deep and intricately linked with folk life. In this eastern region of India, the influence of Shaivism has existed since ancient times, as evidenced by various monasteries, temples, and archaeological remains. At temples such as Shivalol in Sivasagar, Umananda and Sukreswar in Guwahati, and Mahabhairav in Tezpur, the massive gatherings on this tithi are not merely religious congregations but also venues of cultural convergence. In Assamese folk belief, Shiva is affectionately addressed as

"Burha Dangoriya" or "Bholanath," regarded as the protector of an agrarian society. In rural folk songs and biyanam, the narratives of Shiva and Parvati are presented in a very homely and human form, where Shiva appears as a farmer and Parvati as an ordinary housewife. This simplification eliminates the distance between deity and devotee. The fairs of Mahashivratri unite people from various ethnic and tribal communities of Assam, where everyone participates irrespective of religion or caste. In Shankari literature and philosophy too, the oneness of Hari and Hara is proclaimed, laying a strong foundation of religious tolerance and harmony in Assamese society.

In conclusion, the messages conveyed through the mythological narratives of Mahashivratri are self-purification and the awakening of universal consciousness. In today's divided and conflict-ridden world, Shiva's philosophy can show the path to peace and fraternity. The lessons we receive from this festival—renouncing ego and embracing truth, being ready to drink poison for the welfare of society, preserving family values, and living with simple devotion—are essential for the upliftment of human society. Merely performing external rituals and observances cannot fulfill the purpose of Shivratri; rather, subduing the animalistic tendencies within our hearts and developing humane qualities constitute its true essence. When every individual realizes the Shiva within and nurtures compassion and love toward others, only then will the celebration of this sacred tithi become truly meaningful. (The author is the recipient of the 'Yuba Lekhak Sanman - 2025' from the Government of Assam)

## Shivaratri: The union of renunciation, austerity and consciousness

By: Satvabrat Borah

Mahashivratri is one of the most profound and inward-looking festivals in the Hindu spiritual tradition. It is not merely a night of ritual worship or a date marked on the religious calendar. It is an invitation to pause, to turn inward, and to reflect on the deeper currents that shape human life. Celebrated on the fourteenth night of the dark fortnight of the month of Phalgun, Mahashivaratri is dedicated to Lord Shiva, a deity who represents not luxury or power, but silence, renunciation, balance, and awakened consciousness. The word Shiva itself means auspiciousness or well-being, and Shivaratri therefore signifies a night devoted to inner purification, self-realization, and spiritual awakening.

In Hindu philosophy, Shiva is revered as the Adi Guru, the first teacher, the originator of yoga, meditation, and ascetic wisdom. He is not just a god who resides in temples or scriptures, but a state of being that transcends ego, desire, and fear. Shiva symbolizes the still center of existence, where the noise of the world dissolves and pure awareness remains. Mahashivratri is believed to be the most powerful night to experience this state, because nature itself is said to be especially conducive to spiritual growth on this occasion. According to traditional belief, cosmic energies are heightened during this night, and those who remain awake and aware can align themselves more easily with higher consciousness.

Several ancient stories explain the significance of Mahashivaratri, each revealing a different layer of its meaning. One of the most popular legends describes this day as the divine marriage of Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati. On the surface, this is a celebration of sacred union between husband and wife. At a deeper level, it symbolizes the union of consciousness and energy. Shiva represents pure awareness, while Parvati represents Shakti, the dynamic energy of creation. When consciousness and energy unite, life flows in harmony. Mahashivaratri thus becomes a reminder that balance between inner awareness and outer action is essential for a meaningful life.

Another widely known story is linked to the churning of the cosmic ocean, the Samudra Manthan. During this event, a deadly poison called Halahala emerged, threatening to destroy all creation. To protect the universe, Lord Shiva consumed the poison and held it in his throat, turning it blue and earning the name Neelkanth. This act represents supreme sacrifice and compassion. Shiva absorbed the poison of the universe so that others might survive. On Mahashivaratri, devotees remember this act and resolve to consume and transform their own inner poisons such as anger, jealousy, greed, and ego, rather than allowing them to

harm others.

There is also the story of the infinite pillar of light, known as the Lingodbhava. According to this legend, Lord Vishnu and Lord Brahma once argued over who was superior. To dissolve their pride, Shiva appeared as an endless column of fire, with neither beginning nor end. Both gods tried to find its limits but failed. This revealed Shiva as the infinite, formless reality beyond all comparisons. The Shiva Linga, worshipped on Mahashivaratri, represents this eternal truth. It is not an idol in the conventional sense, but a symbol of the limitless nature of existence itself. Worshipping the Linga is an attempt to recognize the infinite within the finite.

The rituals of Mahashivaratri carry deep symbolic meaning. Devotees begin the day with purification through bathing and take a vow of fasting. This fast is not just about abstaining from food. It is a discipline of the body, mind, and speech. By reducing physical indulgence, the senses become calmer, and awareness sharpens. Some observe a strict fast without even water, while others consume fruits or light food. The essence lies not in severity, but in sincerity and self-control.

Bel leaves hold special importance in Shiva worship. The three leaves are said to represent Shiva's three eyes or the three fundamental qualities of nature known as sattva, rajasa, and tamasa. Offering these leaves signifies the surrender of all aspects of one's personality to the divine. Similarly, the ritual bathing of the Shiva Linga with water, milk, curd, honey, and clarified butter represents inner purification. Each substance symbolizes a human aspiration. Water stands for life and flow, milk for purity, curd for stability, honey for sweetness, and ghee for strength and vitality. Together, they express a prayer for balance and harmony within.

One of the most distinctive features of Mahashivaratri is the practice of staying awake through the night. In everyday life, night is associated with rest and unconsciousness. On Shivaratri, however, devotees are encouraged to remain awake and alert. This wakefulness symbolizes spiritual awareness. The four watches of the night during which Shiva is worshipped are often interpreted as the four stages of human life, childhood, youth, maturity, and old age. Worshipping Shiva during all four stages suggests that awareness and devotion should accompany a person throughout life, not just in moments of crisis or old age.

Meditation and mantra chanting play a central role on this night. The mantra Om Namah Shivaya is considered the heart of Shiva worship. Its meaning goes beyond words. Om represents the ultimate reality, Namah expresses surrender, and Shivaya points to the source of all auspiciousness. Repeating this mantra calms the mind and gradually dissolves the sense of separateness. Through repe-

tion, the devotee is reminded that the divine is not distant, but present within.

In Assam, Mahashivaratri is celebrated with deep faith and cultural richness. Ancient temples like Shiva Dol at Sivasagar, Umananda Temple in Guwahati, and Sukreswar Temple witness large gatherings of devotees. From early morning till late night, prayers, offerings, and chanting fill the air. In rural areas, families perform simple worship at home, offering flowers, water, and bel leaves with devotion. The presence of Shiva worship in both Shakta and Vaishnava traditions of Assam reflects his universal appeal as a yogi, protector, and embodiment of spiritual depth.

The relevance of Mahashivaratri extends far beyond religious boundaries, especially in the modern world. Today's life is marked by constant movement, pressure, competition, and mental exhaustion. People are often disconnected from themselves, even while being constantly connected to technology. Shivaratri offers a rare opportunity to slow down and reflect. Fasting gives rest to the body, meditation quiets the mind, and introspection awakens the soul. The festival gently reminds us that true happiness does not come from accumulation, but from inner peace.

Shiva's way of life is itself a powerful teaching. He lives on Mount Kailash, far from royal comforts. He wears ashes, symbolizing the impermanence of the body. He sits in deep meditation, unmoved by praise or blame. This does not mean withdrawal from life, but freedom within life. Mahashivaratri invites devotees to understand this philosophy, to live fully yet remain unattached, to act responsibly yet remain inwardly free.

Charity and compassion are also considered important on this day. Helping the poor, feeding the hungry, and offering support to those in need are seen as acts that please Shiva, who is often called Bholenath or the simple-hearted one. He is believed to be easily pleased by pure intention rather than elaborate rituals. This teaches that spirituality is incomplete without kindness and empathy.

Mahashivaratri is not a festival trapped in the past. It is a guide for the future. It teaches restraint in a world driven by excess, silence in a world full of noise, and awareness in a world often lost in distraction. Shiva does not speak much, yet his silence communicates profound truths. By observing Shivaratri, one learns to listen to that silence.

Mahashivaratri is a night of inner awakening. The external practices are only tools. The real celebration happens when anger is replaced by calm, ego by humility, and greed by generosity. When the mind becomes still and the heart becomes open, Shiva is realized not as a distant deity, but as the living presence within. Mahashivaratri offers this sacred possibility, a chance to transform not just religious identity, but human consciousness itself.

## Shiva: The Supreme Force of transformation and the significance of Maha Shivratri

By: Jova Saikia

Hinduism, one of the most ancient and profound spiritual traditions in the world, is not merely a religion but an intricate tapestry of philosophical thought, mythology, and divine worship. Among the countless deities that grace the Hindu pantheon, Lord Shiva stands as a figure of unparalleled significance. He is not just a god of destruction, as commonly perceived, but a divine force that governs creation, dissolution, and regeneration—the very cycle of existence. His presence transcends mere mythology, embodying the essence of cosmic balance, spiritual asceticism, and ultimate liberation.

The importance of Shiva in Hinduism is profound, as he represents both the transcendental and the immanent aspects of divinity. He is Mahadeva, the Great God, whose dance of Tandava dictates the rhythm of the cosmos. At the same time, he is the benevolent Bholenath, the compassionate lord who grants his devotees wisdom, strength, and salvation. His divine form, often depicted with matted hair, the crescent moon, the river Ganga flowing from his locks, the third eye, and the powerful Trishul, is rich in symbolism, conveying deeper truths about life, death, and eternity.

Shiva: The Cosmic Principle  
Shiva is not bound by the rigid definitions of conventional divinity. Unlike Brahma, the creator, or Vishnu, the preserver, Shiva is an all-encompassing force that embodies paradoxes—he is both the ascetic and the householder, the destroyer and the benefactor, the terrifying Rudra and the serene yogi in meditation. He is Adiyogi, the first yogi, who imparted the knowledge of self-realization to the Sapta Rishis (Seven Sages), thus laying the foundation of yogic sciences.

Shiva's destruction is not a mere act of annihilation but a necessary transformation. Without destruction, there can be no new creation. He dissolves what is outdated, illusory, and binding, allowing for the renewal of life and consciousness. His third eye, which opens only in moments of divine wrath, signifies the supreme knowledge that burns away ignorance and reveals ultimate truth. His blue throat, a result of consuming the deadly poison Halahala during the churning of the ocean (Samudra Manthan), symbolizes his role as the protector who absorbs the world's negativity to ensure cosmic harmony.

Unlike many gods who reside in opulent abodes, Shiva chooses the solitude of Mount Kailash, reflecting his transcendence beyond material existence. He is also worshipped in the formless representation of the Shivalinga, a sacred symbol that embodies infinite cosmic energy, devoid of beginning or end. The Shivalinga is not merely an object of devotion but a spiritual gateway that guides the seeker towards the realization of the self as one with the divine.

The Significance of Maha Shivratri  
Among the numerous festivals dedicated to Shiva, Maha Shivratri holds unparalleled spiritual importance. Celebrated annually on the 14th night of the lunar month of Phalgun, this night marks the convergence of Shiva's cosmic



energy with the consciousness of his devotees. Unlike other Hindu festivals that emphasize grand feasts and celebrations, Maha Shivratri is a night of deep introspection, fasting, and prayer, signifying the triumph of light over darkness, knowledge over ignorance, and spiritual awakening over worldly illusions.

There are several legends associated with the significance of Maha Shivratri. According to one popular belief, this is the night when Lord Shiva performed the Tandava, the divine dance that represents the cosmic cycles of creation, preservation, and destruction. Another legend states that Maha Shivratri is the night when Shiva and Parvati were united in sacred matrimony, symbolizing the union of Purusha (consciousness) and Prakriti (nature), the fundamental duality of existence.

A more mystical interpretation suggests that Maha Shivratri is a time when the planetary alignments create an energy conducive to heightened spiritual awareness. Yogic traditions believe that on this night, the natural flow of energy in the human body is upward, making it an ideal time for meditation and self-realization. This is why devotees observe night-long vigils, chanting "Om Namah Shivaya" and performing Rudrabhishek, the ritualistic bathing of the Shivalinga with sacred substances such as milk, honey, and water.

Fasting on Maha Shivratri is considered highly auspicious, as it detoxifies the body and sharpens the mind, enabling deeper spiritual focus. Many devotees practice complete abstinence from food, while others consume simple, sattvic foods like fruits and nuts. The night is spent in devotion, with temples resonating with Vedic hymns, bhajans, and the rhythmic sounds of the damaru, invoking the divine presence of Shiva.

Shiva's Relevance in Modern Times  
Shiva is not just an ancient deity confined to mythological scriptures; his teachings and essence remain profoundly relevant in modern life. In an era marked by material distractions, emotional turmoil, and existential crises, Shiva's wisdom offers a path to inner peace and self-mastery. His fearless embrace of adversity teaches resilience, his detachment

from worldly pleasures teaches contentment, and his destruction of illusion teaches the importance of seeking the eternal truth beyond the transient.

The modern world, much like the cosmic cycles governed by Shiva, undergoes constant creation and destruction. Societies evolve, ideologies transform, and personal identities shift. Just as Shiva sheds his old self to embrace renewal, individuals must learn to let go of outdated beliefs, ego-driven desires, and fears that hinder spiritual growth. Maha Shivratri serves as a reminder to look within, to dissolve the barriers of ignorance, and to emerge with newfound wisdom and strength.

Moreover, Shiva's concept of Ardhanarishvara, where he is depicted as half-male and half-female, signifies the necessity of balance—not just between genders but between opposing forces in life. It teaches the importance of harmony between logic and emotion, strength and compassion, action and stillness.

Shiva's presence can be felt in the breath of the yogi, the chants of the devotee, the dance of the cosmos, and the silence of meditation. Maha Shivratri is not just a festival—it is an opportunity to connect with the infinite, to surrender the ego, and to recognize that beyond all dualities, the soul and Shiva are one.

Lord Shiva is the timeless embodiment of divine wisdom, ascetic power, and cosmic equilibrium. He is the destroyer of ignorance, the granter of liberation, and the ultimate source of spiritual enlightenment. Maha Shivratri, the sacred night dedicated to his worship, is more than a religious observance; it is a gateway to transcendence, a call to awaken the inner Shiva within.

To worship Shiva is to embrace transformation, to walk the path of fearlessness, and to seek the highest truth. Whether through the meditative chant of "Om Namah Shivaya," the sacred anointment of the Shivalinga, or the silent contemplation of one's own existence, every act of devotion to Shiva brings the seeker closer to liberation—Moksha, the ultimate union with the divine. (Serving as a Sub Editor at Niyomyia Barta since 2014, blending the roles of a writer and journalist with expertise.)

# Trump says he's sending second aircraft carrier to Mideast as he seeks Iran deal

WASHINGTON, Feb 14: President Donald Trump said Friday that he decided to move a second aircraft carrier into the Middle East as he presses Iran to make a deal over its nuclear program.

The USS Gerald R. Ford, the world's largest aircraft carrier, is being sent from the Caribbean Sea to the Mideast to join other warships and military assets the US has built up in the region.

The planned deployment comes just days after Trump suggested another round of talks with the Iranians was at hand. Those negotiations didn't materialise as one of Tehran's top security officials visited Oman and Qatar this week and exchanged messages with US intermediaries.

"In case we don't make a deal, we'll need it," Trump told reporters about the second carrier as he left the White House for a military base in North Carolina. He added, "It'll be leaving very soon."

Already, Gulf Arab nations have warned any attack could spiral into another regional conflict in a Mideast still reeling from the Israel-Hamas war in the Gaza Strip. Meanwhile, Iranians are beginning to hold 40-day mourning ceremonies for the thousands killed in Tehran's bloody crackdown on nationwide protests last month, adding to the internal pressure faced



by the sanctions-battered Islamic Republic.

The Ford, whose new deployment was first reported by The New York Times, will join the USS Abraham Lincoln and its accompanying guided-missile destroyers, which have been in the region for over two weeks.

US forces already have shot down an Iranian drone that approached the Lincoln on the same day last week that Iran tried to stop a US-flagged ship in the Strait of Hormuz.

**Ford had been part of Venezuelan strike force**

It is a quick turnaround for the

Ford, which Trump sent from the Mediterranean Sea to the Caribbean last October as the administration built up a huge military presence in the lead-up to the surprise raid last month that captured then-Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro.

It also appears to be at odds with the Trump administration's national security and defense strategies, which put an emphasis on the Western Hemisphere over other parts of the world.

In response to questions about the movement of the Ford, US Southern Command said American forces in Latin America will continue to "counter illicit activities

and malign actors in the Western Hemisphere."

"While force posture evolves, our operational capability does not," Col. Emanuel Ortiz, spokesperson for Southern Command, said in a statement. US "forces remain fully ready to project power, defend themselves, and protect US interests in the region."

Trump, who is in Fort Bragg to celebrate members of the special forces who captured Maduro, warned Iran this week that failure to reach a deal with his administration would be "very traumatic." Iran and the United States held indirect talks in Oman last week.

"I guess over the next month, something like that," Trump said Thursday when asked about his timeline for striking a deal with Iran on its nuclear program. "It should happen quickly. They should agree very quickly."

Trump held lengthy talks with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Wednesday and said he insisted to Israel's leader that negotiations with Iran needed to continue. Netanyahu is urging the administration to press Tehran to scale back its ballistic missile program and end its support for militant groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah as part of any deal.

The USS Ford deployed in late

June 2025, which means the crew will have been deployed for eight months in two weeks time. While it is unclear how long the ship will remain in the Middle East, the move sets the crew up for an unusually long deployment.

**Ford's deployment comes as Iran mourns**

Iran at home faces still-simmering anger over its wide-ranging suppression of all dissent. That rage may intensify in the coming days as families of the dead begin the traditional 40-day mourning for loved ones. Already, online videos have shown mourners gathering in different parts of the country, holding portraits of their dead.

One video purported to show mourners at a graveyard in Iran's Razavi Khorasan province on Thursday. There, with a large portable speaker, people sang the patriotic song "Ey Iran," which dates to 1940s Iran under the rule of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. While initially banned after the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Iran's theocratic government has played it to drum up support.

"Oh Iran, a land of full of jewels, your soil is full of art," they sang. "May evil wishes be far from you. May you live eternal. Oh enemy, if you are a piece of granite, I am iron." (AP)

# African Union summit opens as youth anger grows over 'bloc of old leaders'



NAIROBI, Feb 14: Africa's top regional body is hosting its annual summit in Ethiopia this weekend to discuss the future of the continent of some 1.4 billion people, but across the continent the organisation is becoming less popular.

Set up to "promote the unity and solidarity of the African States," analysts say the African Union is facing a legitimacy crisis among the continent's youth after failing to meet their expectations.

African countries are battling military coups, disputed elections and protests inspired by hardship worsened by foreign aid cuts.

**'A bloc of old leaders'**

Africa has the youngest population in the world with more than 400 million people aged 15 to 35 years old. But it is also home to several of the world's oldest and longest-serving leaders — a paradox that has contributed to an upsurge in coups.

With a young population set to double by 2050, it is the only rapidly growing region where its people are getting poorer. In different countries and on social media, African youths view the AU as a bloc of old leaders and one which sees their interests as less of a priority.

The organisation has missed opportunities to be people-centred and citizen-driven and has instead focused largely on governments and leaders, said Liesl Louw-Vaudran, a senior analyst with the Crisis Group.

"What the youth is really asking and why people are frustrated is because this is not an African Union for citizens. It's not a people-driven African Union," Louw-Vaudran added.

**Elections are one example of the AU's loopholes**

As several African countries held elections for new presidents over the last year, there was a clear pattern of sidelined opposition candidates, disputed results and protests from mostly young voters after incumbents were reelected.

Despite the election outcomes, the AU was often accused of being quick to side with reelected incumbents and slow to call out flawed processes.

As authorities in Uganda shut down the internet and clamped down on the opposition during the

East African country's presidential election in January, the African Union Commission issued a statement "commending" the conduct of the poll.

A day after, the AU election observer mission issued a preliminary report noting "reports of harassment, intimidation and arrest of opposition leaders, candidates, supporters' media and civic society actors" in the election.

The AU social media post commending the election enraged many youths, with one person retorting: "Dictatorship club has spoken."

One key challenge the AU has battled with over the years is weak enforcement of resolutions, according to Macharia Munene, a professor of history at the United States International University in Nairobi. And that's because "not all members meet their dues or fully accept what is generally decided," he said.

**An AU Summit coming amid a new world order**

At the 39th African Union Summit being held in Ethiopia's capital of Addis Ababa on Saturday and Sunday, the theme is water and sanitation. Discussions will feature the continent's response to climate change and humanitarian crises following foreign aid cuts from international partners such as the United States.

Observers say the AU Summit will provide an opportunity to align continental priorities with international partners, especially at a time of discussions around a new world order stirred by US President Donald Trump with foreign leaders signalling shifting global alliances.

Still, critics urge the African Union to look inward by paying closer attention to the continent's most pressing challenges and doing more to hold leaders accountable when they fail to meet expectations.

In Nigeria's capital of Abuja, resident Chima Ekwueme said the African Union does not care about holding leaders accountable, citing Nigeria's deadly security crises and economic hardship despite its rich mineral wealth.

"They are there for their own interests," Ekwueme, 32, said of the AU. "In Nigeria, we have all it takes to put things in order (but) look at how difficult things are and where is the AU." (AP)

# US dollar transactions do not contradict Russia's policy of trade in national currencies



MOSCOW, Feb 14: The trade with the US in dollars does not contradict Russia's principle policy of use of national currencies in foreign transactions, the Kremlin said Saturday.

Russia switched to the use of national currencies in foreign trade after its USD and Euro accounts were frozen by the West following the outbreak of the 2022 conflict with Ukraine and has been pushing for a global de-dollarisation trend.

In an interview to the state-run TASS news agency, the Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov pointed that the dollar is the national currency of the United States, so its use in transactions with Washington will not conflict with the principle of transitioning to national currencies.

"In general, yes," the Kremlin spokesman agreed with the thesis about the dollar as the national currency in Russian-American trade and that its use will not fundamentally affect Russia's interactions with its current partners.

Amid reports of bilateral negotiations to expand economic cooperation between Moscow and Washington, Peskov recalled that Russia did not abandon the use of the dollar—it was the US that imposed the relevant restrictions.

Peskov noted that if the dollar becomes attractive, its use will return—but only alongside other currencies. However, the American currency will have to face serious competition from alternative and national currencies that are already in active use, he said.

Since the outbreak of armed conflict with Ukraine in 2022, Moscow has been demanding payment for its hydrocarbons into rouble as its USD and Euro accounts were frozen in the West.

Russia is mostly trading with India and China in rupees and yuan, noted officials. (PTI)

# Trump says Maduro raid showed 'full military might' of US and means 'we are feared'

FORT BRAGG (NORTH CAROLINA), Feb 14: President Donald Trump celebrated the special forces members who ousted Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro, saying last month's audacious raid means "the entire world saw what the full military might" of the US can do and ensured "we are feared" by potential enemies around the world.

Addressing soldiers and their families at Fort Bragg, one of the world's largest military bases, Trump declared, "Your commander in chief supports you totally." Then, drawing on one of his own campaign slogans, he implored them, "When needed, you're going to fight, fight, fight. You're going to win, win, win."

The president and first lady Melania Trump also met privately with military families. But the visit felt more like a political rally than an official visit to celebrate the US armed forces. Trump's lauding of the raid that toppled Maduro came only after he called to the stage Michael Whatley, a former Republican National Committee chair who has the president's endorsement as he now runs for Senate in

North Carolina. Whatley thanked Trump and suggested that the president "is giving me an opportunity to represent you" — even though the election isn't until November.

Later, Trump said of the raid on Jan. 3 that whisked away Maduro to face US drug smuggling charges, "It was a matter of minutes before he was on a helicopter being taken out." He called the forces involved "some of our greatest soldiers to ever live, frankly", while dismissing Maduro as an "outlaw dictator".

"That night, the entire world saw what the full military might (of) the US military is capable" of, the president said. "It was so precise, so incredible." Trump also vowed, "As long as I'm president, we will be the best led, the best trained, the best equipped, the most disciplined and the most elite fighting force the world has ever seen" and noted of would-be U.S. adversaries, "Everybody knows it."

"They know exactly what they would be up against. Hopefully, we'll never have to test them and, because of our strength, and because of what we do, we probably won't have to be tested," Trump

said. Even still, the president mentioned sending a second aircraft carrier group to the Middle East amid rising tensions with Iran and said, "America's respected again. And, perhaps most importantly, we are feared by the enemies all over the globe." "I don't like to say fear," he said. "But, sometimes, you have to have fear because that's the only thing that really will get the situation taken care of."

Trump lately has traveled more frequently to states that could play key roles in November's midterm congressional elections, including a stop before Christmas in Rocky Mount, North Carolina. The White House has been trying to promote Trump's economic policies, including attempts to bring down the cost of living at a time when many people are growing frustrated with his efforts to improve affordability.

The president didn't spend a lot of time on his economic policies on Friday, though he did mention how a White House-backed tax and spending package is increasing funding for military housing.

As he left the White House to make the trip, meanwhile, Trump

cheered data released Friday showing that inflation fell to nearly a five-year low last month.

"The numbers were surprising, except to me they weren't surprising," Trump said. "We have very modest inflation, which is what you want to have."

The president also spoke at Fort Bragg in June at an event meant to recognise the 250th anniversary of the Army. But that celebration was overshadowed by his partisan remarks describing protesters in Los Angeles as "animals" and his defence of deploying the military there.

This time, Trump evoked the fatal stabbing of a Ukrainian refugee on a North Carolina commuter train and called the man accused of committing it a "monster".

Also Friday, Trump praised Maduro's replacement, acting Venezuelan President Delcy Rodríguez. Rather than push for elections in Venezuela, Trump says his administration is inviting top oil companies there to rebuild its energy industry. US officials also have seized tankers as part of their broad oversight of the country's oil industry. (AP)

# Law & order must be maintained at any cost in Bangladesh: BNP's Tarique Rahman

DHAKA, Feb 14: BNP chairman Tarique Rahman on Saturday called for maintaining law and order "at any cost" and sought cooperation from all in building a safe and humane Bangladesh. Rahman's Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) on Friday secured a sweeping victory with more than two-thirds majority in the landmark parliamentary elections. The BNP leader is set to become the prime minister for the first time. He will replace the interim government chief Muhammad Yunus.

Addressing a press conference a day after the landslide victory in the 13th parliamentary polls, Rahman said, "We need everyone's cooperation to build a safe and humane Bangladesh. This time, everyone

must play a responsible role in rebuilding the country."

"No injustice can be done to anyone on any excuse. Law and order must be maintained at any cost," Rahman was quoted as saying by The Dhaka Tribune.

Rahman said the freedom-loving people of the country had made BNP victorious, describing the outcome as "the victory of the people."

"From today, everyone is free. Congratulations to all. With the participation of all, the journey of a fascism-free state has begun in the country," the BNP chairman said.

"Everyone's thoughts are important in building the country. We will build the country based on everyone's opinions," he said.

The 13th Parliamentary elections assumed significance as they were held after a period of tumultuous political vacuum, instability and fragile security situation, including widespread attacks on minorities after the student-led protests brought down the 15-year rule of Sheikh Hasina in August 2024. According to the Election Commission (EC), the BNP has bagged 209 out of 297 seats, while right-wing Jamaat-e-Islami secured 68 seats. Hasina's Awami League party was barred from contesting the polls, which recorded 59.44 per cent voter turnout. The EC postponed the announcement of results in two seats - Chattogram-2 and Chattogram-4 while the election in one seat was postponed due to the death of a candidate. (PTI)

# Indian national accused of murder-for-hire plot against Sikh extremist in US pleads guilty

NEW YORK, Feb 14: Indian national Nikhil Gupta, accused of being involved in a murder-for-hire plot against a Sikh extremist on American soil, on Friday pleaded guilty to the charges.

Gupta, 54, pleaded guilty to charges of murder-for-hire, conspiracy to commit murder-for-hire, and conspiracy to commit money laundering, in connection with his efforts to murder Khalistani separatist Gurbatwant Singh Pannun in New York. Pannun holds dual American and Canadian citizenship.

Gupta pleaded guilty before US Magistrate Judge Sarah Netburn and is scheduled to be sentenced by US District Judge Victor Marrero on

May 29.

Gupta pleaded guilty to murder-for-hire, which carries a maximum sentence of 10 years in prison, conspiracy to commit murder-for-hire, which carries a maximum sentence of 10 years in prison, and conspiracy to commit money laundering, which carries a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison, United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York Jay Clayton said in a statement.

According to the allegations contained in the indictment, other public court documents, and statements made in court, Gupta worked together with others in India and elsewhere, including, with co-defendant

Vikash Yadav to plot Pannun's assassination on US soil.

At Yadav's direction, Gupta contacted an individual whom he believed to be a criminal associate, but who was in fact a confidential source working with the Drug Enforcement Administration for assistance in contracting a hitman to murder Pannun in New York City.

Yadav subsequently agreed, in dealings brokered by Gupta, to pay the undercover officer USD 100,000 to murder the victim.

On or about June 9, 2023, Yadav and Gupta arranged for an associate to deliver USD 15,000 in cash to the undercover officer as an advance payment for the murder. (PTI)

# Trump admin urges nations to call for the withdrawal of UN climate proposal

UNITED NATIONS, Feb 14: The Trump administration is urging other nations to press a tiny Pacific island country to withdraw a United Nations draft resolution supporting strong action to prevent climate change, including reparations for damage caused by any nation that fails to take action.

In guidance issued this week to all US embassies and consulates abroad, the State Department said it "strongly objects" to the proposal being discussed by the UN General Assembly and that its adoption "could pose a major threat to US industry".

"President Trump has delivered a very clear message: that the UN and many nations of the world have gone wildly off track, exaggerating climate change into the world's greatest threat," according to the cable sent Tuesday and obtained by The Associated Press.

It is the latest move by the Trump administration to distance the US from climate change efforts at home and around the world. A day ago, the government revoked a scientific finding that long has been the central

basis for US action to regulate greenhouse gas emissions. The US last month also announced plans to withdraw from the UN treaty that establishes international climate negotiations.

The draft resolution sponsored by Vanuatu, which like many island nations fears for its survival because of climate change, is being circulated among the 193-member General Assembly and stems from a landmark advisory opinion by the UN's top court last July.

The International Court of Justice said countries could be in violation of international law if they fail to take measures to protect the planet from climate change, and nations harmed by its effects could be entitled to reparations.

All UN member states, including major greenhouse gas emitters like the US and China, are parties to the court. The opinion is not legally binding but was hailed as a turning point in international climate law.

The draft resolution expresses determination to translate the ICJ's findings in to "concrete multinational



action" and calls on all nations and regional organisations to comply with their obligations under international law related to climate change.

The proposal says that includes adopting a national climate action plan to limit global temperature rise to below 1.5 degrees Celsius; phasing out subsidies for fossil fuel exploration, production and exploitation; and urging those in violation to "provide full and prompt reparation for

damage". It would establish an International Register of Damage to record evidence and claims.

Vanuatu's UN Ambassador Odo Tevi, who said his island country wants a vote on the resolution by the end of March, has stressed that it would ensure that the clarity in the ICJ ruling "strengthens global climate action and multilateral cooperation".

Louis Charbonneau, UN director

of Human Rights Watch, urged support for the draft resolution Friday and said "governments should live up to their obligation" to protect human rights around the world by protecting the environment.

"Responsible governments shouldn't allow themselves to be bullied by those that reject the global scientific consensus and continue to support reliance on harmful fossil fuels," he said.

While General Assembly resolutions also are not legally binding, the ICJ said taking action to deal with the climate crisis is an international obligation.

"The resolution attempts to turn the ICJ's interpretation of key legal standards into a practical roadmap for state accountability, which is likely to trigger political pushback from higher income high emitting countries wary of their historical responsibility and financial liability," Candy Ofime, climate justice researcher and legal adviser at Amnesty International, said in a statement Friday.

The State Department cable outlined plans to tell other countries to

urge Vanuatu to withdraw its draft — which the US says is "even more problematic" than the court opinion — from consideration by Friday, when informal consultations began.

It asserted that other Group of 7 economic powers as well as China, Saudi Arabia and Russia have all indicated to the US Mission to the UN that they share Americans' concerns with "aspects" of the draft.

"This UNGA resolution is another example of UN overreach, part of a broader pattern of trying to use speculative climate models to fabricate purported legal obligations that seek to assign blame and encourage baseless claims, and to infer human rights obligations to which states have not agreed," according to the cable, which tells US diplomats to use it as a talking point with representatives of other countries.

Many mainstream scientists have continuously warned that climate change is behind increasing instances of deadly and costly extreme weather, including flooding, droughts, wildfires, intense rainfall events and dangerous heat. (AP)

# Paris police shoot, injure knife-wielding man

PARIS, Feb 14: A man wielding a knife tried to attack police during a ceremony beneath the Arc de Triomphe monument in Paris on Friday, and was shot and injured by a police officer, officials said. The attacker targeted an officer securing the ceremony for re-lighting the eternal flame honouring unknown soldiers at the Napoleon-era landmark, according to a Paris police official. Another officer shot the attacker, who was hospitalised, the official said. No bystanders or police officers were injured in the incident, the official told The Associated Press.

The French counterterrorism prosecutor's office said it is investigating the case and sent an investigator to the scene. The Arc de Triomphe is one of Paris' most famous sites, and sits atop the busy Champs-Élysées avenue.

A large police presence was visible Friday evening near the monument, which was closed to the public. The traffic circle surrounding the Arc de Triomphe remained open to vehicles. The nearby metro station was closed for security reasons at the request of police, Paris public transport operator RATP said. (AP)

# Manipur CM also recalls sacrifices made by jawans that will never be forgotten

## Arunachal CM pays tributes to CRPF personnel killed in Pulwama attack



**ITANAGAR/ IMPHAL, Feb 14:** Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu on Saturday paid heartfelt tributes to the 40 CRPF personnel who lost their lives in the Pulwama terror attack in 2019. He also commemorated the historic legacy of Major Ralengnao 'Bob' Khathing, whose peaceful expedition to Tawang in 1951 secured the region's inte-

gration with India. Khandu said the nation remains forever indebted to the sacrifice of its heroes and the courage of those who safeguarded its borders.

The chief minister remembered the CRPF personnel who were killed in the Pulwama attack on February 14, 2019, describing their sacrifice as the highest ex-

pression of love for the nation.

"Today, we bow our heads in honour of the 40 bravehearts of the @CRPFIndia who made the ultimate sacrifice in Pulwama on this day in 2019," Khandu said in a post on X.

"While the world marks February 14 as a day of love, we remember the greatest love of all, the love for one's nation. Their bravery will never be forgotten and their families will always be in our prayers. The nation remains forever indebted to the heroes of Lethpora," the chief minister added.

The Pulwama attack, one of the deadliest terror strikes on Indian security forces, took place in 2019 when a convoy of CRPF personnel was targeted at Lethpora in Jammu and Kashmir.

The incident shook the entire country, triggering nationwide mourning and a renewed commitment to honour the courage and sacrifice of the fallen soldiers.

Each year, February 14 is observed across India as a day of remembrance for the jawans who laid down their lives in the line of duty.

In another post, Khandu highlighted the significance of the day in Arunachal Pradesh's history, saying that February 14 is also observed as Major Bob Khathing Day.

He recalled the historic expedition led by the decorated officer to Tawang in

1951, which led to the peaceful integration of the region into the Indian Union.

"February 14th isn't just about roses; it's Major Bob Khathing Day. On this day in 1951, Major Ralengnao 'Bob' Khathing led a historic expedition to Tawang, peacefully hoisting the tricolour and integrating the region into India without firing a single shot," the chief minister said.

He further paid tribute to Khathing's remarkable service to the nation, both as a soldier and a diplomat.

"From being a decorated WWII hero to a brilliant diplomat, his bravery and tact secured our borders and won the hearts of the local Arunachali community. Today, we honour the man who redefined courage and diplomacy," Khandu added.

Major Ralengnao 'Bob' Khathing is widely remembered as a pioneering figure in the history of Arunachal Pradesh.

His 1951 mission to Tawang, carried out with foresight and restraint, played a decisive role in establishing administrative presence and strengthening India's hold in the frontier region without conflict. His legacy continues to inspire generations in the state and beyond.

Also, Manipur Chief Minister Y Khemchand Singh on Saturday said sacrifices made by CRPF personnel in the Pulwama attack will never be forgotten.

He said the legacy of the slain jawans will continue to inspire generations to

serve the nation with honour and devotion.

Singh, in a post on X, said, "On this solemn day, we bow our heads in profound respect and remembrance of the brave martyrs who made the supreme sacrifice in the tragic terror attack at Pulwama."

"Their unparalleled courage, unwavering dedication and love for the nation will forever remain etched in our hearts. The people of Manipur stand in complete solidarity with the families of our fallen heroes and reaffirm our collective resolve to uphold the unity, integrity and sovereignty of our great nation," the CM said.

"Their sacrifices will never be forgotten, and their legacy will continue to inspire generations to serve the nation with honour and devotion," he added.

Former chief minister N Biren Singh also offered his tributes to those killed in the attack.

In a post on X, he said, "As the nation remembers the martyrs of Pulwama, I offer my humble tributes to those bravehearts who chose duty over life. Their sacrifice strengthened the soul of our nation. The nation shall forever remain indebted to our martyrs, whose legacy will continue to guide and inspire generations to come."

Forty CRPF personnel were killed in a suicide bombing on the Srinagar-Jammu national highway at Lethpora in Pulwama district of Jammu and Kashmir on this day in 2019. (PTI)

## 48 injured in Maova village clash over land dispute

**DIMAPUR, Feb 14:** A violence broke out at Maova village, Chumoukedima near Dimapur in Nagaland between members of "Chakroma organisation" and Moava villagers at around 10:30 AM on Friday, an official report said.

The incident occurred due to issues from land related matters and misunderstanding escalated between the two groups which subsequently turned violent, the official report further said. The situation intensified as both groups engaged in stone pelting. During the course of violence, 48 people were injured from both parties, 6 vehicles were burnt down and 15 vehicles damaged, 5 houses burnt, 20 private houses damaged and 7 shops including Moava Community Hall was burnt down, the report also said. One executive magistrate on duty and one security personnel also sustained major injuries while performing official duties, the official report added.

On receiving the information, the district administration and security forces rushed to the spot and necessary measures were taken to control the situation and restore law and order to prevent any further violence, the report further added.

Meanwhile, the Chakroma Public Organisation (CPO) lodged a complaint to the additional deputy commissioner of Chumoukedima district which said that when the CPO leaders went to Maova village for a dialogue on some land issue this morning, they were greeted by "belligerent attitude" of the "Kuki miscreants".

The CPO said that this morning its leaders, accompanied by some few youth volunteers went to the Maova village for dialogue with the council chairman and the GB.

"However, on reaching the village we were met with people with aggressive behaviour. They greeted the negotiating party (CPO) with stones and batons. The CPO president was pushed around by Kuki miscreants and had to be pulled to safety by our volunteers. Due to their belligerent attitude and in defense of Chakroma leaders, youth volunteers retaliated. In the ensuing scuffle", the CPO alleged. The CPO also said, "Kuki miscreants injured the EAC of Medziphema and a police personnel".

On the other hand, Maova Village Council said, "What began as a private land dispute between involving individuals from Maova village and Sobu Rio and the Chathe Prayer Centre was deliberately escalated into a large scale attack against an entire village where innocent villagers who had no connection to the dispute were made to suffer". (NNN)

## Arunachal Governor flags China's long-term strategy along frontiers

### Parnaik calls for integrating security, development, diplomacy and community empowerment

**ITANAGAR, Feb 14:** Arunachal Pradesh Governor Lt Gen (Retd) KT Parnaik on Saturday claimed that China was pursuing a long-term strategy along India's frontiers, using border infrastructure, dual-use settlements and renaming of places to influence narratives across the LAC.

He emphasised that to ensure deterrence, stability and lasting control along the state's sensitive frontier, security, development, diplomacy and community empowerment must advance together through a whole-of-nation approach.

Delivering the keynote address at the two-day seminar 'Arunachal Pradesh - India's Dynamic Frontier', held at the headquarters of 2 Mountain Division, at Dinjan, in Assam's Tinsukia district, the governor described the state as a strategic buffer as well as a land of immense human, cultural and economic potential.

Sharing his perspectives of security and development, Parnaik observed that the two are deeply intertwined in a frontier state like Arunachal Pradesh and that one cannot progress without the other, a Raj Bhanu statement said.

He stressed that the state's challenges, whether external threats or internal development gaps, require a unified and coordinated response from all stakeholders.

Highlighting border dynamics, the governor said along the Myanmar and Bhutan frontiers, culture and security intersect in complex ways.

"The Indo-Myanmar border, which cuts through forests and hills has remained socially open under the Free Movement Regime (FMR), sustaining livelihoods and ties, but has also created vulnerabilities as insurgent groups exploited the routes, prompting India to review the arrangement to rebalance tradition and security," he pointed out.

The governor said the resilience of people living in border areas, coupled with sustained efforts towards inclusive and sustainable development will firmly establish Arunachal Pradesh as a strategic powerhouse and an emerging economic hub.

"Strengthening security ensures stability and confidence, while inclusive development brings opportunity, dignity and resilience to the people, shaping the state's present and future as a strong pillar of the nation," he added.

Parnaik further stated that Arunachal Pradesh is witnessing a transformative phase aligned with the national vision of Viksit Bharat 2047 and highlighted the state's strategic location in advancing India's Act East Policy by fostering connectivity and trade with Southeast Asia.

## Nagas call for peace, restoration of normalcy ahead of Lui-Ngai-Ni 2026

**SENAPATI, Feb 14:** The United Naga Council, the apex body of Nagas in Manipur, said on Friday that the declared position of the Nagas on the ethnic conflict that has engulfed the state since May 3, 2023, remains "neutrality," without fear or favour toward either the Meiteis or the Kuki-Zo Hmar in the interest of peace and restoration of normalcy. This stance, the UNC affirmed, remains unchanged.

On the eve of Lui-Ngai-Ni 2026, the UNC expressed concern over recent incidents of violence. It highlighted the attack on Starling Shimray of Shakarphung by a group of Kuki youths on February 7, 2026, which triggered unrest in Litan, Ukhrul, resulting in violence, burning of houses and loss of property affecting both Naga and Kuki communities. The UNC also condemned the torching of the house of Azan Abonmai in the early hours of February 9, 2026, at K Lungwiram village, urging that the situation must be resolved and not allowed to escalate further. (NNN)

## Mein hails historic twin-tube Brahmaputra tunnel as a game-changer for NE infrastructure

## Centre's underwater tunnel project to boost Arunachal connectivity: Dy CM

**ITANAGAR, Feb 14:** Arunachal Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Chowna Mein on Saturday termed the Centre's approval for India's first twin-tube underwater road-cum-rail tunnel in Assam as a historic milestone that will significantly enhance connectivity and accelerate economic growth in the Northeast.

Reacting to the decision of the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Mein said the ambitious project would transform regional logistics and improve access between key locations in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.

"The Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi ji has approved a 33.7 km four-lane access-controlled greenfield National Highway, including a 15.79 km underwater twin-tube tunnel beneath the Brahmaputra River, with railway provision in one tube," Mein said in a post on X.

Describing the project as a landmark



development, the deputy chief minister said it marks a major leap in infrastructure growth for the Northeast region. "This landmark initiative will significantly enhance connectivity between Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, strengthen border infrastructure, improve logistics from Guwahati and Dibrugarh to Itanagar and accelerate economic growth while advancing India's Act East Policy," he said.

Mein emphasised that the tunnel, to be constructed between Gohpur and Numaligarh in Assam at an estimated cost of ₹ 18,662 crore will play a crucial role in strengthening strategic and economic linkages in the region. He added that the improved connectivity would ease movement, support trade and commerce and contribute to faster development across the northeastern states, particularly Arunachal Pradesh. (PTI)

## Citizens urged to contribute ideas for a people-centric, inclusive budget

### Khandu invites public suggestions for Arunachal Budget 2026-27

**ITANAGAR, Feb 14:** Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu on Saturday invited citizens to actively participate in shaping the state budget 2026-27 by sharing suggestions, ideas and feedback, stressing that the government aims to make the process more inclusive, participatory and people-centric.

In a message shared on social media, the chief minister called on people from all sections of society to contribute their inputs as the state prepares its annual financial roadmap.

He emphasised that public participation is key to building a stronger, progressive and inclusive Arunachal Pradesh.

"As we prepare the Arunachal Budget 2026-27, the government of Arunachal Pradesh invites valuable suggestions, ideas, and feedback from all citizens," Khandu said in a post on X. He urged people to be active partners in the development process. Highlighting the importance of



collective effort in governance, the chief minister added, "Let us work together to build a stronger, inclusive and progressive Arunachal. Share your suggestions and be a part of the budgeting process."

According to the information shared by the government, sugges-

tions for the state budget can be submitted through the dedicated portal, with the last date for entries set as February 20.

To encourage wider participation, the top five suggestions will be awarded a cash prize of ₹50,000 each. (PTI)

## 3 militants arrested in Manipur

**IMPHAL, Feb 14:** Security forces arrested three militants belonging to two proscribed outfits in Manipur, police said on Saturday. All the arrests were made on Friday, they said.

Two active cadres of the banned Kangleipak Communist Party (Apunba) were apprehended from Imphal West and Imphal East district, while a member of the PREPAK was nabbed from his residence at Moirang Khunou in Bishnupur district, a police statement said.

During an operation on Friday, the security personnel also recovered arms and ammunition from the Khulsaubing hill range in Tengnoupal district.

The recovered arms include a single-barrel gun, two pistols and eight IEDs, the statement said. (PTI)

## Students form human chains across Tripura over Roman script demand for Kokborok language

**AGARTALA, Feb 14:** Thousands of Kokborok-speaking students formed human chains across Tripura on Saturday to press their demand for the adoption of the Roman script for the language. The Kokborok, the second official language of the northeastern state is the mother tongue of most of the 19 tribes.

The students under the banner of the United Movement Committee for Roman Script (UMCRC) formed human chains at 11 locations across Tripura and raised slogans for the introduction of the Roman script for the Kokborok language.

"The government must respect the sentiment of Kok-

borok-speaking people and introduce the Roman script," John Debbarma, the convener of UMCRC, a joint platform of Kokborok-speaking students, told reporters.

He expressed disappointment over Chief Minister Manik Saha's recent statements on the demand for the Roman script for the Kokborok language.

"A democratically elected chief minister can't ignore the aspirations of the people. We hope that he will allow Roman script for the Kokborok language," he said.

Responding to the protest, the chief minister alleged that "some people with vested interests" were behind organis-

ing the human chains.

"I am not against Kokborok or English, but the script for Kokborok shall not be Roman script. Under the 8th Schedule of the Constitution, a foreign language is not allowed. There is no bar in writing examinations for the Kokborok language in Bengali or Roman script," he said. Saha exhorted the Kokborok-speaking people to discover their own script for the language because there is "no dearth of resourceful persons to do the job".

"Some people are trying to politicise the issue. There must be some persons behind the scenes, who are instigating the students to launch a movement," he claimed. (PTI)

## Manipur Deputy CM Dikho pledges to restore peace

**CHURACHANDPUR, Feb 14:** Manipur Deputy Chief Minister Losii Dikho on Saturday said the state government is committed to restoring peace, while also encouraging sports among the youth.

Speaking at the closing ceremony of the 78th Zomi Nanni Football Tournament at Lamka Public Ground, Dikho said, "The present government is keen to restore peace and development,

which is very much in line with our Christian ethics." The Naga People's Front leader said peace could be fostered through sports and the government is committed to enhancing opportunities for young athletes in the district.

Dikho also said Churachandpur has many young sports prodigies and said existing playgrounds, which are numerous in the district, need to be upgraded. (PTI)

### WALK-IN-INTERVIEW

In order to empanel teachers for appointments on Part-time contractual basis for the session 2026-27, a walk-in interview will be held in the Vidyalaya on 23rd and 24th February, 2026 (offline Registration 8:00 AM-9:30 AM on the day of interview) for the following post:-

Date	Post
23.02.2026 (Monday)	3. PGT (English (I) Hindi (II) Mathematics (iv) Physics (v) Chemistry (vi) Biology (vii) History (viii) Geography (ix) Computer Science (x) Economics 2. TGT (English (I) Hindi (II) Mathematics (iv) Science (v) Social Science (vi) Sanskrit 3. Computer Instructor 4. Balvatika teachers 5. Nurse 6. ATL Instructor
24.02.2026 (Tuesday)	1. Primary teacher 2. PRT Music 3. Dance Coach 4. Game Coach 5. Counsellor 6. Special Educator (PRT & TGT)

For the application form, required qualifications, and other details, please visit our website: <https://dihw.kvs.ac.in/detailed-advertisement-for-panel-of-contractual-teachers-2026-27/>. For online submission, please fill out the Google Form available on the school website on or before 21.02.2026 (23:59 hrs) using the link below: [https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScj6hQFgY\\_Qhe8CaVqgXORT0\\_0veurTgnz2-uF7AppyCrIQ/viewform?usp=publish-editor](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScj6hQFgY_Qhe8CaVqgXORT0_0veurTgnz2-uF7AppyCrIQ/viewform?usp=publish-editor)

The original documents and self-attested photocopies of the relevant certificates attached with the application form must be presented on the day of the interview.

Principal

Modi has worked to provide 100 per cent protection to farmers, brothers and sisters involved in animal husbandry and fishermen

## Rahul's policy is to lie loudly, repeat it; people have identified his factory of lies: Shah

**KARAIKAL (PUDUCHERRY), Feb 14:** Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Saturday asserted that the interests of Indian farmers and fishermen have been fully secured in the recent FTAs and the Indo-US trade deal signed by the country, and slammed top Congress leader Rahul Gandhi for misleading them with "lies" and trying to create an "illusion".

Also, Shah praised Prime Minister Modi's decisive leadership by taking resolute action against terrorism--the surgical strikes after the Pulwama attack, and later Operation Sindoor. He paid Shradhanjali (tributes) to the CRPF jawans who made the supreme sacrifice for the nation.

Launching a scathing attack on the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Shah charged that Gandhi "has started a new tradition of telling lies daily" and asked him to "carefully" go through the fingerprint of the recent deals clinched with the UK and EU, besides the US, which has particularly come under sharp attack from the Congress MP.

"Is Rahul Gandhi's policy to lie, lie loudly, repeat it. But people have identified your lie manufacturing factory," he said in his address at a well-attended BJP rally in this poll-bound Union Territory. "Rahul Gandhi wants to mislead the country's fishermen and farmers. He intends to spread illusion by telling lies," Shah charged.

In the Free Trade Agreements



signed with the UK and the EU, besides the Indo-US trade deal, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has ensured "100 per cent protection" for farmers, fishermen and livestock breeders, Shah said.

Asking Gandhi to go through the provisions in the FTAs and the trade deal carefully, Shah reiterated that the interests of the Indian stakeholders has been ensured "100 per cent." Fishermen would benefit from the FTAs.

He charged that farmers' interests were "sold off" during the UPA regime headed by the late Manmohan Singh.

"The FTAs and trade deal will not cause any harm to our farmers. The harm to farmers was done during your Manmohan Singh government. Several global agreements were signed back then in which the interests of farmers were sold off.

Delhi high command, Shah charged.

"They openly auctioned off PG and diploma seats. They even sold the reserved seats for SC and ST to wealthy people out of greed for money. They did the Centac scam, (medical admission scam) and the CBI is investigating it. They left the transport mafias free to trouble the public," he alleged.

For five years, the Congress government created an atmosphere of corruption and disorder in Puducherry. In those years of bad governance, not only was there corruption, but institutions here did not function properly, he said, adding, disorder was at its peak. "Earlier, Puducherry's decisions were taken by the Gandhi family in the Delhi court, but now Puducherry's decisions are being taken by Puducherry itself."

In the last five years, the AINRC-BJP regime ended corruption, and "we have changed disorder into order." And now is the time, in the next five years, to make Puducherry a developed territory, he said, adding, there was a need to move forward with the resolve to make the UT developed in every aspect.

The leader emphasised that in the coming five years, the primary concentration would be on building an ecosystem that connects the products of Puducherry's fishermen to the international market. Furthermore, he asserted that Puducherry would be transformed

into a center of excellence for IT software, AI, and data centers, ensuring that every youth in Puducherry is provided with ample employment opportunities."

Days ago, PM Modi visited Malaysia where Tamils live in large numbers. There, he announced the establishment of a Tiruvallur chair at a Malaysian varsity, Shah said. Modi has also assured scholarships to the Malaysian Tamils. And in Malaysia, the Tamil language has now received the status of an official minority language, he added.

Shah said the PM would visit Puducherry, where polls are due in April, soon to announce and inaugurate various development schemes. He appealed to Puducherry voters to elect again, the AINRC-BJP government under Chief Minister N Rangaswamy and Modi's leadership for the region's development. He expressed confidence in the NDA forming a government, by securing more than 24 seats in the 30-member Assembly. He underscored the "double-engine government's" achievements; of ending corruption and ensuring political stability.

The BJP veteran also expressed confidence that in 2029, under PM Modi, BJP-led NDA will assume power again at the Centre.

Meanwhile, as part of the BJP's election campaign, Shah painted the party's lotus symbol on a wall in the UT. (PTI)

## Cabinet approves ₹ 10k cr fund for startups to mobilise venture capital



**NEW DELHI, Feb 14:** The government on Saturday said it has approved a ₹ 10,000 crore Fund of Funds to mobilise venture capital and support deep tech, tech-driven innovative manufacturing startups, and early-growth stage enterprises. This was the second part of the Fund of Funds (FoF) scheme under the Startup India initiative. The first was established in 2016.

The FOF 2.0 has been designed to continue the momentum of investments in startups, with an expanded scope over FFS 1.0.

"The Union Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has approved the establishment of the Startup India Fund of Funds 2.0 with a total corpus of ₹ 10,000 crore for the purpose of mobilising venture capital for the startup ecosystem of the country," a government statement said.

The Cabinet approved the second tranche of the Startup India Fund of Funds Scheme on Friday.

The scheme, it said, is designed to accelerate the next phase of India's startup journey by mobilising long-term domestic capital, strengthening the venture capital ecosystem, and supporting innovation-led entrepreneurship across the country.

In 2016, the government constituted a Fund of Funds worth ₹ 10,000 crore to provide seed capital and enable startups to take calculated risks.

Following the successful utilisation of the first tranche, a second phase of ₹ 10,000 crore was sanctioned in the Union Budget for 2025-26. There are about 100 unicorns at present. A unicorn refers to a startup valued at USD 1 billion or more.

Since the launch of Startup India in 2016, the number of government-recognised startups has risen from about 500 units recognised as startups to over two lakh at present. More than 49,400 startups were recognised in 2025, the highest in a single year.

"The Startup India Fund of Funds 2.0 follows the strong performance of the Fund of Funds for Startups (FFS 1.0), which was launched in 2016 to address fund-

ing gaps and catalyse the domestic venture capital market for startups," the statement said.

Under the part of the fund, the entire corpus of ₹ 10,000 crore has been committed to 145 Alternative Investment Funds (AIFs).

Such supported AIFs have invested over ₹ 25,500 crore in more than 1,370 startups across the country in various sectors, such as agriculture, artificial intelligence, robotics, automotive, clean tech, consumer goods and services, e-commerce, education, fintech, food and beverages, healthcare, manufacturing, space tech, and biotechnology, amongst others.

This fund played a key role in nurturing first-time founders, crowding in private capital, and helping build a strong foundation for India's venture capital ecosystem.

While the first phase built the ecosystem, the second phase is designed to take Indian innovation to the next level.

The new fund will have a targeted, segmented funding approach to support deep tech and tech-driven innovative manufacturing.

It will prioritise breakthroughs in high-tech areas that require long-term capital.

The focus will also be on empowering early-growth stage founders to provide a safety net for new and innovative ideas, reducing early-stage failures caused by a lack of funding.

Further, it will encourage investments beyond major metros so that innovation thrives in every corner of the country.

The statement said it has been designed to address high-risk capital gaps and strengthen India's domestic venture capital base, particularly smaller funds, to further boost the domestic investment landscape.

Startup India FoF 2.0 will have an Empowered Committee to provide guidance and directions.

Recently, the government has expanded the criteria for recognising entities as startups by doubling the turnover threshold to ₹ 200 crore. (PTI)

## VP, PM pay homage to Pulwama terror attack martyrs

**NEW DELHI, Feb 14:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday paid homage to the CRPF personnel who lost their lives in a terror attack in Jammu and Kashmir's Pulwama on this day in 2019 and said every Indian draws strength from their enduring courage. Vice President C P Radhakrishnan also paid tributes to the personnel who laid down their lives in the attack.

In a post on X, Modi said, "Remembering the brave heroes who laid down their lives in Pulwama on this day in 2019. Their devotion, resolve and service to the nation remain forever etched in our collective consciousness. Every Indian draws strength from their enduring courage". VP Radhakrishnan said the supreme sacrifice by the CRPF personnel will forever remain etched in the nation's memory. "I pay homage to the brave personnel who laid down their lives in the Pulwama terror attack. Their supreme sacrifice will forever remain etched in the nation's memory and continues to inspire us to build a strong and secure India," he said. (PTI)

## SIR weakened democratic participation SC order doesn't address Bengal govt grievances: Chidambaram

**KOLKATA, Feb 14:** Senior Congress leader P Chidambaram said the Supreme Court's recent order on SIR did not address the grievances raised by the West Bengal government, contending that "specific directions" from the top judiciary were required to make the EC resolve the issues.

Criticising the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in West Bengal by calling it an exercise that "weakened democratic participation" and one that intends to "alter the electoral balance in the state", Chidambaram said he looked forward to further directions from the apex court to be issued to the Election Commission. "The challenge before the Hon'ble Supreme Court was the last effort to introduce transparency and accountability in SIR. An order has been passed by the court to the effect that it will not allow any 'impediment' to the SIR process and extended the deadline to complete the process," the former finance minister told PTI in an interview.

"This order does not address the grievances brought to the court by the Government of West Bengal. Specific orders or directions are required to make the EC address those grievances. Whether the Hon'ble Supreme Court will

pass further orders, I do not know. I sincerely hope that further orders/directions will be issued to the EC," he said.

A Supreme Court Bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and N V Anjarlia had on Monday ordered an extension of the time for objections by a week from February 14 in the West Bengal SIR case, while simultaneously sending a strong message to states that the exercise cannot be obstructed. The matter is listed to be heard next on February 25.

The order followed an earlier hearing on the matter on petitions filed by West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and others. Banerjee became the first serving CM to argue in the top court, urging it to intervene in the ongoing SIR exercise to "save democracy", alleging that Bengal was being unfairly targeted and its people bulldozed.

Chidambaram maintained that the issue of electoral roll revision was not merely administrative, but goes to the heart of democratic governance and federal principles.

"It goes to the root of democracy, federalism and the dictum 'government of the people'. If large numbers of people are disenfranchised,

how can it be an election to elect a government of the people? The autonomy of the EC must serve the cause of democracy," he asserted.

On the conduct of SIR across states, the Congress leader said a clear and consultative template is needed to avoid controversy.

"Of course, there must be a template arrived at after wide consultation with the stakeholders, especially the political parties. The Census exercise, with its questionnaire, methodology and training of enumerators, is a good example to follow," he said.

Commenting on the ongoing SIR in West Bengal, Chidambaram said his assessment of the exercise was consistent across states.

"My view on SIR in all states is the same. SIR did not have a consensual template; it was hurried, the EC made changes arbitrarily, and it was not a transparent exercise that would win the confidence of people. It weakened democratic participation," he said.

Asked whether the exercise in West Bengal could alter the electoral balance ahead of the assembly polls, he said, "It was intended to affect the electoral balance. How much it has achieved, I cannot say until the final rolls are published." (PTI)

## US-India interim agreement expected to enhance market access for Indian exporters: Govt

**NEW DELHI, Feb 14:** Issues in India-US ties in recent times have included the imposition of elevated tariffs by the United States on India's exports and changes implemented by the US in its visa regulations, which have affected students and professionals, the government informed Parliament on Friday.

Notwithstanding these developments, the two sides have continued to engage, and agreed to a framework for an interim agreement, under which reciprocal tariffs on Indian goods will be reduced to 18 per cent, Minister of State for External Affairs Kirti Vardhan Singh said in a written response to a query.

The Ministry of External Affairs was asked the reasons behind the "apparent strain" in India-US relations, particularly the "lack of progress" on trade negotiations and the continuing restrictions and uncertainty around work visas for Indian professionals. "Issues in India-US bilateral ties in recent times have included the imposition of elevated tariffs by the United States on India's exports and changes implemented by the US in its visa regulations, which have affected students and professionals," he said.

"Notwithstanding these developments, the two sides have continued to engage and on February 2, 2026, India and the US agreed to a framework for an interim agreement, under which reciprocal tariffs on Indian goods will be reduced to 18 per cent," Singh said. This is expected to "enhance" market access for Indian exporters, particularly MSMEs, support employment generation, especially for women and youth and safeguard farmers' interests and rural livelihoods, the government said.

The MEA was also asked the concrete diplomatic steps being taken to safeguard India's economic and people-to-people interests with the US.

"On the visa front, stakeholders on both sides remain engaged and representations by the government have led to the issuance of clarificatory FAQs, providing greater light for impacted applicant categories," Singh said.

The MEA was also asked the details of tangible gains which India has delivered for the Global South in terms of development finance, technology access and debt relief beyond summit-level declarations of announcements.

India remains committed to advancing human-centric development in the Global South through concrete infrastructure and community projects, financial and humanitarian assistance, and capacity-building via



scholarships and training programmes, the Centre said. During India's G20 Presidency, sustained efforts were made to mainstream Global South priorities, including through the Voice of the Global South Summits.

"The admission of the African Union as a permanent G20 member reflects India's commitment to amplifying developing country voices in global decision-making. India continues to be a large provider of development finance to the Global South and is a model for technology deployment, including in the fintech space," Singh said.

The government was also asked about the safety of its diaspora amid escalating conflicts in West Asia.

The government said it continuously monitors geopolitical developments affecting India's national interests and the welfare and safety of Indian nationals abroad.

"Missions and Posts regularly issue advisories, provide consular assistance and facilitate evacuations where required, supported by 24x7 helplines and platforms such as MADAD, CPGRAMS and eMigrate. Energy security remains among India's highest priorities," Singh said.

The government is pursuing a "multi-pronged strategy" covering diversification of supply sources, enhanced domestic production, expansion of alternative energy and advancement of the energy transition, while remaining engaged with partner countries to ensure uninterrupted access to affordable energy, he said. (PTI)

## Sharad Pawar discharged from Pune hospital: Supriya Sule

**PUNE, Feb 14:** NCP (SP) president Sharad Pawar, who was undergoing treatment for a chest infection at a private hospital here, was discharged from the facility on Saturday afternoon. The 85-year-old Rajya Sabha member left the hospital around 1 pm.

Pawar's daughter and NCP (SP) working president Supriya Sule said he has been advised to rest for three to four days. "Accordingly, he will rest at home and will resume his daily work thereafter," she said in a social media post.

Pawar was brought to Ruby Hall Clinic here earlier this week from his residence in Baramati town, Pune district, after he complained of difficulty in breathing and a persistent cough. (PTI)

## Akhilesh Yadav slams BJP, claims Kanpur turned into 'Badnampur'

**KANPUR (UP), Feb 14:** Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav on Friday hit out at the BJP, alleging that the ruling party has pushed Kanpur into decline and turned the once-thriving industrial hub into "Badnampur" (a city of ill repute).

Addressing a press conference in Civil Lines here, Yadav said, the city is now making headlines for car overturns, police-lawyer feuds and scripted encounters.

He said Kanpur, once renowned for its textile mills and manufacturing base, is now associated with road accidents, clashes and

administrative lapses, which he claimed reflected a "breakdown" in governance.

Referring to the closure of the historic Lal Imli textile mill and the issue of untreated sewage flowing into the Ganga, the SP chief accused the government of undermining the city's legacy through corruption and inefficiency. Promising a turnaround if the Samajwadi Party returns to power, Yadav said his government would develop a riverfront project "better than Lucknow's", revive the Lal Imli mill and create an environment for major industrial investment. (PTI)

## Substantial reduction in out-of-pocket expenditure on healthcare over past decade, says Nadda

**NEW DELHI, Feb 14:** Union Health Minister J P Nadda on Saturday said India has witnessed a substantial reduction in out-of-pocket expenditure on healthcare over the past decade, easing the financial burden on households, particularly among economically-vulnerable sections.

He made these remarks while addressing the 8th convocation ceremony of Swami Rama Himalayan University in Dehradun.

Highlighting the transformative strides made in India's health sector over the past 11 years, Nadda stated that the number of AAIMS has increased from 6 to 23, substantially expanding access to advanced tertiary healthcare services across the country. He further informed that institutional deliveries have risen to nearly 89 per cent, reflecting strengthened maternal healthcare systems.

Emphasizing financial protection in healthcare, Nadda spoke about Ayushman Bharat-Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY), which provides health



cover of Rs 5 lakh per family.

He stated that the scheme now benefits nearly 62 crore people, covering approximately 40 per cent of India's population. Referring to evidence from reputed international medical journals and independent evaluations, he noted that AB-PMJAY has significantly improved access to timely cancer care and strengthened financial protection for eligible beneficiaries across the country. "India has witnessed a substantial reduction in out-of-pocket

expenditure on healthcare over the past decade, easing the financial burden on households, particularly among economically vulnerable sections," Nadda said.

Despite accounting for nearly one-sixth of the global population, India has made significant progress in reducing malaria incidence and mortality through sustained vector-borne disease control efforts in line with WHO-reported trends, he highlighted.

Underscoring the importance of

comprehensive primary healthcare, the minister informed that more than 1.82 lakh Ayushman Arogya Mandirs have been operationalized nationwide as the first point of contact for citizens. Of these, 50,000 centres have already been certified under National Quality Assurance Standards, with a target to scale up to 1 lakh NQAS-certified Ayushman Arogya Mandirs in the near future.

Nadda noted that the Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) has declined from 130 per lakh live births a decade ago to 88 per lakh live births, while the Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) has reduced from 39 per thousand live births to 27 per thousand live births, demonstrating sustained progress in maternal and child health outcomes. Citing estimates from the World Health Organization and UN agencies, Nadda stated that India has achieved a significantly faster decline in the Under-5 Mortality Rate over the past decade compared to the global average, underscoring the impact of focused policy interventions and expanded healthcare access. (PTI)

## The fund aims to build resilient, productive, inclusive and climate-responsive cities

# Cabinet approves ₹ 1 lakh crore Urban Challenge Fund to drive market-led urban transformation

**NEW DELHI, Feb 14:** In a major boost to urban infrastructure, the Union Cabinet has approved the launch of the Urban Challenge Fund (UCF) with a total central assistance of ₹ 1 lakh crore, Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said on Saturday.

Under the scheme, central assistance will cover 25 per cent of a project's cost, provided that at least 50 per cent of the funding is mobilised from the market.

In a statement, the government said the initiative will lead to a total investment of ₹ 4 lakh crore in the urban sector over the next five years. The move marks a paradigm shift in India's urban development approach from grant-based financing to a market-linked, reform-driven and outcome-oriented infrastructure creation, it said. The UCF will leverage market financing, private sector participation and citizen-centric reforms to deliver high-quality urban infrastructure, it said.

The fund aims to build resilient, productive, inclusive and climate-responsive cities, positioning them as key drivers of the country's next phase of economic growth, according to the statement.

The UCF will be operational from FY 2025-26 to FY 2030-31, with an extendable implementation period up to FY 2033-34.



It gives effect to the government's vision announced in Budget 2025-26 to implement proposals relating to cities as growth hubs, creative redevelopment of cities, and water and sanitation.

According to the government, a minimum of 50 per cent of project financing must be mobilised from market sources, including municipal bonds, bank loans and Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs). The remaining share can be contributed by states, Union Territories, Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) or other sources.

Projects will be selected through a transparent and competitive challenge mode, ensuring support to high-impact and reform-oriented

proposals, it said. The fund will cover cities with a population of 10 lakh or more (2025 estimates); all state and Union Territory capitals not included in that category, and major industrial cities with a population of 1 lakh or more, the statement said.

Additionally, all ULBs in hilly and northeastern states, as well as smaller ULBs with a population below 1 lakh, will be eligible for support under the Credit Repayment Guarantee Scheme. In principle, all cities will be covered under the UCF, it said.

"Projects will be evaluated on their ability to deliver transformative outcomes — economic, social and climate, including revenue

mobilisation, private investment, job creation, improved safety, inclusiveness, service equity and cleanliness," it said.

The UCF is expected to catalyse large-scale private investment, strengthen urban governance, and accelerate the creation of future-ready cities aligned with national development priorities, it said.

To facilitate first-time access to market finance for cities/ULBs in northeastern and hill states, and for smaller ULBs (with population less than 1 lakh) in other states/UTs, a Credit Repayment Guarantee Scheme of ₹ 5,000 crore has been approved.

The scheme will provide a central guarantee of up to ₹ 7 crore or 70 per cent of the loan amount, whichever is lower, for first-time loans. Upon successful repayment of the first loan, a central guarantee of ₹ 7 crore or 50 per cent of the loan amount, whichever is lower, will be provided.

This will effectively support projects of a minimum of ₹ 20 crore for the first time and ₹ 28 crore for subsequent projects in smaller cities.

According to the government, projects under the fund will be selected through a challenge-based framework including transformative impact, sustainability and reform orientation. (PTI)

## Rahul Gandhi immature, lacks understanding of economy: Goyal

**MUMBAI, Feb 14:** Union Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal on Saturday described Congress leader Rahul Gandhi as "immature" and lacking an understanding of the economy and accused the opposition party of spreading misinformation as it had no constructive agenda to criticise the Narendra Modi government.

Speaking to reporters here on the Union Budget, Goyal said Rahul Gandhi is "thousands of miles away from the truth" and asserted that "discredited leaders" like him may try but would not be able to stop Prime Minister Modi and his service to the nation.

"The Congress is frustrated. It has no other scheme or solution except spreading misinformation and fabricated claims. It does not have any point to criticise us. They are trying to mislead our farmers by spreading wrong and false information," he said.

"I am confident that discredited leaders like Rahul Gandhi of the Congress and its allies, including TMC, DMK and SP, which are parties rejected by the people, can try hundreds of thousands of times, but nobody can stop PM Narendra Modi and his service to the nation," the minister further said. The Mumbai North BJP Lok Sabha MP said the Congress has failed to understand its own limitations.

"Rahul Gandhi does not have any understanding of the economy, only tweeting false and misleading information on social media. He is thousands of miles away from the truth. India's cotton cultivation capacity and requirement both would grow. This policy of importing material and processing it for export is an old practice in global trade," the minister said. When immature people come into politics, allegations of such levels are made, he said, attacking Rahul Gandhi over the latter's criticism of the Indo-US trade deal with regard to cotton cultivation and the textile sector.

Textiles are a shining example in the country's overall exports, accounting for nearly ₹ 3.60 lakh crore of the total, which would more than double in the coming time, Goyal said, responding to a question.

"Among the FTAs that India has pushed forward in the last few months, the textile sector's contribution would be nearly USD half a trillion, which comes to



about ₹ 45 lakh crore. With the textile market now open for us, it will benefit us. The US alone procures textile products worth around ₹ 9 lakh crore annually. Moreover, reciprocal tariffs on Indian goods have been reduced to 18 per cent from the earlier 50 per cent," he pointed out. Roughly half of the total exports to the US from India will go at zero duty, and the 18 per cent tariffs on the rest are the lowest when compared to any other competing nation, Goyal asserted.

"We are lower than China, Vietnam, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Indonesia and Malaysia. India has received the lowest tariffs from the US compared to its competitors, and it has opened a USD 30 trillion market for India. I think it is a game-changer for the future progress of India," he said. The Union minister also noted that the European Union procures around ₹ 22-23 lakh crore worth of goods from India, adding that textile products would be exported at zero duty to markets such as the EU, New Zealand, and the UK.

"The US produces around 480 million bales of cotton every year, which is valued at ₹ 1.25 lakh crore. It cannot damage the interests of India's cotton growers. The US exports around ₹ 45,000 crore worth of cotton. In my guess, India's one region produces more cotton than that," the minister said. (PTI)

## Over 6.5 kg heroin dropped by drone from Pak seized

**JAMMU, Feb 14:** A major cross-border narcotics smuggling attempt was foiled along the International Border on Saturday with the seizure of over 6.5 kg of heroin worth over ₹ 40 crore in the R S Pura sector here, officials said.

The contraband was recovered during a joint operation of the 165th battalion of Border Security Force (BSF) and police from Nai Basti Karotana village in Baspur area, following information about a drone dropping material from across the border, they said.

Police received information about the suspected drone movement on the intervening night of February 13 and 14, a spokesperson said.

Two yellow-coloured packets containing 6.582 kg heroin were found in the fields near the International Border during the search and subsequently seized, he said, terming the seizure as a "significant achievement" on the anti-drug trafficking front.

A case under the relevant section of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act was registered, and further investigation is underway to trace the exact source and destination of the recovered contraband, he said, adding that a breakthrough is expected as the investigation progresses. Police urged the citizens, especially those residing near the International Border, to come forward with any information regarding illegal drug activities in their localities. "With continued public cooperation, sincere efforts are being made to build a drug-free and crime-free society," the spokesperson said.

The recovery comes a day after police arrested two people for allegedly smuggling heroin from Pakistan using a drone in the border areas of Kathua district.

Jatin, a resident of Pathankot in Punjab, and Danish Dogra alias Sajan of Jakhbar in Kathua, were arrested in connection with a case related to drone-dropping near Nagri and the recovery of 150 grams of heroin. (PTI)

## Welfare, development push: Andhra govt presents ₹ 3.32 lakh cr budget for 2026-27

**AMARAVATI, Feb 14:** Striking a balance between welfare and development, the Andhra Pradesh government on Saturday presented a Budget of over ₹ 3.32 lakh crore for 2026-27, up by ₹ 10,000 crore from FY26, with an estimated revenue expenditure of ₹ 2,56 lakh crore and capital expenditure of nearly ₹ 54,000 crore.

While presenting the Budget in the state assembly, Finance Minister Payyavula Keshav said the estimated revenue deficit would be around ₹ 22,000 crore (1.11 per cent of the GSDP) and the fiscal deficit is pegged at nearly ₹ 76,000 crore (3.84 per cent of the GSDP).

"From the financial standpoint, we are yet to come out of the woods. Things are not all that rosy. I still have my times of struggle while sorting the financial mess left behind by the previous regime. But our intentions are uncompromising," said Keshav.

According to the Finance Minister, the southern state will launch 'AP (Andhra Pradesh) Wealth Fund', which would become 'big' like the Norway and Abu Dhabi sovereign wealth funds, to 'run the whole state'.

"It is proposed to set up an AP Wealth Fund with a seed corpus of ₹ 100 crore..." said Keshav.

Thanking Prime Minister Narendra

Modi for initiating the process to introduce legislation to accord statutory status to the greenfield capital city of Amaravati, he said administrative sanction was given for 97 works worth ₹ 57,868 crore there.

As per FY27 budget figures, the state government is expected to raise ₹ 76,000 crore through open market loans and ₹ 19,000 crore from the Centre, while the GSDP during 2026-27 is pegged at ₹ 19,75 lakh crore.

The public debt is estimated to be ₹ 7.11 lakh crore in fiscal 2026-27, rising from ₹ 6.35 lakh crore in FY26, ₹ 5.68 lakh crore (FY25) and ₹ 4.91 lakh crore (FY24).

Public debt as a percentage of GSDP is expected to remain 36 per cent in the financial year 2026-27, maintaining the same level seen in the past two financial years and 35 per cent in FY24 at ₹ 4.91 lakh crore.

The budget proposed ₹ 51,021 crore for the BC component, while School Education has been allocated ₹ 32,308 crore. It allocated ₹ 19,306 crore for the Health, Medical & Family Welfare Department.

The Panchayati Raj & Rural Development Department, held by Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan received nearly ₹ 23,000 crore.

Allocations to major departments include ₹ 18,224 crore for Water Resources,

followed by Municipal Administration and Urban Development (Rs 14,539 crore), Agriculture (₹ 11,745 crore), Social Welfare (₹ 11,119 crore) and Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) Welfare (₹ 10,700 crore).

Regarding welfare schemes, the southern state has earmarked ₹ 27,719 crore for the NTR Bharosa scheme, which offers ₹ 4,000 welfare pension to eligible beneficiaries per month.

Besides, ₹ 2,601 crore has been allocated to Deepam 2.0 scheme, which offers three free cooking gas cylinders per annum and ₹ 2,320 crore as economic support to various communities. Stree Shakti, a free bus journey scheme for women received an allocation of ₹ 1,420 crore, and ₹ 600 crore was designated for power subsidies for weaker sections.

Thaliki Vandanam, which offers ₹ 15,000 rupees per annum per school-going child, got ₹ 9,668 crore, followed by Woman and Child Welfare (4,581 crore) and scholarships (₹ 3,838 crore).

Annadata Sukhibhava, which offers ₹ 20,000 per annum to farmers, received an allocation of ₹ 6,600 crore.

Likewise, Higher Education received ₹ 2,566 crore, Rs 707 crore has been set aside for PM Schools for Rising India and ₹ 438 crore for Youth Advancement and Sports, among others. (PTI)

## Derogatory language against Shankaracharya is verbal violence: Akhilesh Yadav

**LUCKNOW, Feb 14:** Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav on Saturday said that using derogatory language against Shankaracharya constitutes both verbal violence ('shaabdik hinsaa') and a sin.

"Using highly derogatory language against Shankaracharya is both verbal violence and a sin. Along with the person who said this, those who thumped the tables in flattery will also be guilty. When BJP MLAs leave the House and face the public, the public will throw their houses out on the streets," Akhilesh said in a post on X in Hindi, on Saturday. His comments came a day after Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath addressed the UP Legislative Assembly, stating that not everyone is entitled to use the title of "Shankaracharya" and that religious decorum and the rule of law must be upheld during all events.

"Those who do not disclose the true figures regarding deaths during the Maha Kumbh, who find ways to corrupt even the payments made in compensation, and who do not reveal where the money went for those who did not receive compensation, do not possess the moral right to question anyone else's religious standing," Yadav said. In his statement, he also referenced the "rule of law" ("kanoon kaa shaasan"), asking, "Once this becomes evident, will he summon the House again to invoke the 'rule of destiny' ("vidhi kaa shaasan")? This is what occurs when ego, rather than

humanity, speaks. Ego converts culture into vice, causing the individual to lose respect in society, leading to the saying: 'Whenever he opens his mouth, he speaks ill!'"

Yadav further accused Adityanath of dabbling in hate politics, even on matters of religion.

The SP chief asserted that the "indecent" remark made about Shankaracharya has been permanently recorded in the House. "If we call his statement condemnable, even the term 'condemnable' will feel condemnable," he remarked. His statement followed a dispute between the district administration and Swami Avimuktsharananand Saraswati during the Magh Mela in Prayagraj. Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Friday told the Assembly that not everyone could use the title of 'Shankaracharya', and asserted that religious decorum and rule of law must be upheld during all events.

Adityanath, addressing the Assembly without naming anyone, said, "Not every person is entitled to write 'Shankaracharya' before their name. Not everyone can claim to be the acharya of a 'peeth' and disrupt the atmosphere at will. Everyone must adhere to certain limits."

Adityanath's remarks arose from the earlier controversy where Saraswati was stopped while heading towards the Sangam for a holy dip on Mauni Amavasya on January 18. (PTI)

## Women's security top priority for govt: Minister Annpurna Devi

**NEW DELHI, Feb 14:** Women's security is the first step towards national development and remains a top priority for the government, Union Women and Child Development Minister Annpurna Devi said on Friday, asserting that women are now at the centre of policy-making and governance.

Addressing a national conference on safety of women at workplaces, the minister said women's participation in decision-making processes is steadily increasing and they are playing a growing role in strengthening families, institutions and the nation.

"Women's security is a priority because it is the foundation of national development. Women today are at the centre of policy, and their participation in decision-making is rising," the minister said.

She said India is undergoing unprecedented change, opening new avenues for women. The prime minister's vision of women-led development has given new

dimensions to the country's growth model, with women increasingly driving social transformation.

"We have adopted a holistic approach to women's empowerment, focusing on safety, opportunity, dignity and participation," she said. Highlighting workplace safety measures, Devi said the Ministry of Women and Child Development, as the nodal ministry for implementation of the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, has worked to ensure organisations comply with the law.

She noted that the upgraded SHE-Box portal launched on August 29, 2024, has strengthened institutional mechanisms to address workplace harassment complaints. Nearly 1.5 lakh government and private organisations have registered on the platform, indicating growing awareness and sensitisation towards women's security. (PTI)

## Duty-bound to wipe out all forms of terrorism from nation: CRPF DG

**PULWAMA (J-K), Feb 14:** On the anniversary of the deadly Pulwama attack, Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) chief Gyanendra Pratap Singh emphasised the force's commitment to eliminating all forms of terrorism in the country.

"The CRPF is duty-bound to wipe out all forms of terrorism from the country," Singh told reporters after paying tributes to the 40 CRPF personnel, who were killed in the terror attack at Lethpora here in south Kashmir district.

The CRPF top brass, along with senior officers from the army and the Jammu and Kashmir Police, laid floral tributes to the fallen CRPF personnel on the seventh anniversary of the attack.

"We lost our 40 brave jawans on this day. We are here near the spot (of the attack) to pay homage to the martyrs," the CRPF DG said.

Singh highlighted that the CRPF family and the CRPF Pariwar Kalyan Sanastha are standing firmly with the families of the martyrs.

"During this period, we have provided several resources to the families of the martyrs. We allocated housing where needed; a total of 19 families have been provided homes, and land has been given to several other families in coordination with the respective state governments," he added.

He further noted that the CRPF and CRPF Pariwar Kalyan Sanastha are covering the full cost of education for the children of these families and will continue to do so.

"All children will receive compassionate appointments as they reach adulthood. Families have been granted approximately Rs 2.25 to Rs 3 crore in relief from the government," he said. (PTI)

## The first cycle of chemotherapy will be administered at the mentor institute

# 466 cancer care centres functional across country, says Govt

**NEW DELHI, Feb 14:** More than 450 Day Care Cancer Centres are functional across the country, reflecting a steady expansion and strengthening of district-level chemotherapy services, Union Health Ministry sources said.

The government, in the Union Budget 2025-26, had announced the establishment of Day Care Cancer Centres (DCCCs) in district hospitals across the country over the next three years, with 200 centres to be set up during the current fiscal.

This initiative was introduced in response to the rising burden of cancer and the need to strengthen the public health system so that chemotherapy services are available closer to patients' homes.

"The objective is to decentralise routine cancer treatment and re-

duce dependence on tertiary hospitals for scheduled chemotherapy," a source from the health ministry said.

Elaborating on it, the source said that cancer treatment typically requires multiple hospital visits over several months. Regular follow-ups and timely chemotherapy cycles are essential for effective outcomes.

For many patients, especially those in rural areas or belonging to economically weaker sections, travelling repeatedly to tertiary hospitals in cities can be financially and physically demanding, he said.

Expenses related to travel, accommodation, food, and loss of daily wages add to the burden.

Additionally, patients undergoing chemotherapy are often weak

and require a companion or caregiver during hospital visits. This means that both the patient and the caregiver incur travel costs and often experience wage loss, increasing the overall financial strain on households, the source said.

"By making chemotherapy services available at district hospitals, DCCCs significantly reduce travel distance, indirect expenditure, and disruption to family income, thereby easing the socio-economic impact of treatment," he said.

Sources in the ministry said that before sanctioning new centres, a detailed gap analysis was undertaken in consultation with states and Union Territories based on the cancer burden, patient load, infrastructure readiness, etc.

"Capacity building has been a central element of the programme.



To ensure safe and standardised chemotherapy services, medical officers and staff nurses from iden-

tified districts underwent structured hands-on training for four to six weeks at mentor institutes iden-

tified by the respective state governments," another source informed.

These institutes included government medical colleges, regional cancer centres, state cancer Institutes, and tertiary cancer hospitals with adequate oncology expertise.

Training included chemotherapy administration, patient assessment, dose calculation, management of side effects, emergency response, infection control, safe handling of cytotoxic drugs, biomedical waste management, counselling of patients and caregivers, and referral coordination.

This systematic preparation has strengthened district-level clinical competence and ensured uniform standards of care, he added.

He further said that free provision of essential chemotherapy

drugs at public health facilities is another key component of the initiative.

Since medicines account for a major share of cancer treatment costs, ensuring their availability through government supply systems significantly reduces out-of-pocket expenditure, the source said. Patients are initially diagnosed, and treatment plans are formulated at Tertiary Care Cancer Centres (TCCC), State Cancer Institutes (SCCI), or other higher oncology facilities, sources in the ministry said.

The first cycle of chemotherapy will be administered at the mentor institute. Once stabilised and the chemotherapy regimen is finalised, subsequent cycles are administered at the district-level cancer centres, they added. (PTI)

## O'Romeo box office: Shahid Kapoor-starrer gets a single digit opening at Indian box office

Sajid Nadiadwala's production O'Romeo directed by Vishal Bhardwaj, was released in theatres on February 13 in time for the Valentine's Day weekend. The film brings together Shahid Kapoor and Vishal who have earlier delivered hits like Kaminey and Haider. O'Romeo also stars Triptii Dimri, Avinash Tiwary and Farida Jalal in pivotal roles. The box office result of the film has now come in, and the movie has made a promising start.

Shahid Kapoor-starrer has earned Rs 9.01 crore nett in India on Day 1. The Vishal Bhardwaj-Shahid Kapoor collaboration has once again delivered a strong opening, marking Shahid Kapoor's biggest day 1 collection post-pandemic.

The film is being appreciated for its intense action-drama, layered romance, and a standout ensemble cast that includes Nana Patekar, Farida Jalal, Avinash Tiwary, Vikrant Massey, Tamannaah Bhatia, Disha Patani. Audience response towards the pairing of



Shahid Kapoor and Triptii Dimri has been particularly positive, with the background score and music adding to the film's appeal.

With the Valentine's weekend ahead and favourable word of mouth, O'Romeo is expected to witness growth over the weekend and emerge as a preferred theatrical pick for moviegoers.

Ahead of the film's release, Kapoor expressed his gratitude to filmmaker Vishal Bhardwaj for giving him another memo-

orable character with their upcoming drama, O'Romeo".

A proud Shahid penned a special note for Vishal on the Stories section of his Instagram handle that read, "Ye hai from me as an actor for this man vishalrbhardwaj... Thank you for OROMEO!! Another character for me that's etched in my filmography. So proud so happy and so grateful (sic), along with a red heart emoji.

Earlier, after wrapping the shoot of the film, Shahid penned, "And it's a WRAP. My

4th collaboration with this special man vishalrbhardwaj. Excitement levels are off the charts. Our secretly titled soon to be announced film is done. As always it's a new world and a madly different character for me to play. A titular part from him for the 3rd time. I am one of the KAMINEY I am HAIDER and now I am."

Praising his co-stars, he went on to write, "This post can't be complete without including the stellar cast triptii\_dimri who I had a total blast with. Watch out for her act in this one. iamnana-patekar thank you for those oh so layered scenes we got together official\_farida\_jalal ji for your warmth and grace avinashitiwary15 for your playlist on that drive can't reveal much more here brother.

Have to say dishapatani you and me killed the 2 songs and I can't wait to collaborate again you are so much fun. And there's is one more actor one of my favs who can't really be revealed but it is such a pleasure to have him with us on this one." (PTI)

## 'Border 2' an ode to my father, he fought in 1971 war: Mona Singh



Mona Singh was busy promoting a show when she got a call from the makers of "Border 2" and the actor says she jumped at the chance to do the film as the daughter of a soldier who fought the 1971 war and lost his foot in a mine blast.

Singh plays Simi Kaler, the wife of Sunny Deol's character of Lt Col Fateh Singh Kaler, in the movie, which has turned out to be a major blockbuster this year by earning close to Rs 500 crore at the box office since its release on January 23.

"I believe sometimes you don't choose the script, it chooses you. And that's exactly what happened to me for 'Border 2'... When I read the script, I thought, 'This was meant for me and I must do it'. It was just a week before the shoot. I was busy somewhere else promoting another show. I thought I have to match the dates and I must do it. Not just because of the script but because of the background. I am a

fauzi's daughter," Singh said at the success press conference of the movie. The actor, who is winning accolades for her portrayal of a cop investigating a murder in Sudip Sharma's "Kohrra 2", said the emotions that her character goes through, she has already lived with them because of her father.

"My dad fought the '71 war. The way it is shown in the first scene of the movie, when Sunny sir enters that minefield, that's exactly what happened to my father and to many other soldiers when they stepped on the mines. My father lost a foot.

"I, honestly, feel that when soldiers go to the border to fight, they don't go there alone. Their families stand with them in that moment and we have seen that first hand. I loved every scene.. Like Nidhi (Dutta, producer and daughter of director J P Dutta) was talking about her father's legacy. It was the same feeling (for me). It's a tribute and ode to my father," Singh said. (PTI)

## EMERALD FENNELL'S 'WUTHERING HEIGHTS' AN EMOTIVE AND VISCERAL EXPERIENCE: MARGOT ROBBIE

Hollywood star Margot Robbie says Emerald Fennell's "Wuthering Heights" isn't just another faithful adaptation of author Emily Bronte's classic novel as the filmmaker has tried to recreate the feeling she had when she first read it as a teenager in her version.

The Oscar-nominated actor has produced and headlined the film, which is set to open in Indian theatres on Friday. She stars alongside fellow Australian star Jacob Elordi.

Bronte's 1847 novel is considered one of the most intense and haunting love stories in English literature as it traces the destructive, all-consuming bond between Heathcliff and Catherine Earnshaw, a relationship driven as much by obsession, pride and revenge as by love.

Fennell, known for directing critically-acclaimed movies "Promising Young Women" and "Saltburn", has adapted the screenplay and directed the new movie.

"It's a bold interpretation of one of the greatest love stories of all time, a book that she (Fennell) loves dearly and I love, too. It has been adapted and interpreted many, many times over the years. I think what Emerald wanted to do was recreate the feeling the book gave her the first time she read it when she was 14 years old.

"And so, what you get with Emerald's 'Wuthering Heights' is a very emotive and visceral experience. It's very much focusing on how what's happening is making you feel," Robbie said in a transcript shared by Warner Bros India.

As a filmmaker, Fennell puts a "distinctive and unique stamp" on her work that is able to elicit a visceral reaction from the audience, Robbie added.

"She does that in a different way in this film, but it is, like I said, a very visceral experience. It's very emotional. It's very romantic. And it's epic, it's storytelling on a really big scale," she said.

The novel has been adapted in Hollywood in 1920, 1939, 1970, 1992, 2011 and 2022. The story has had multiple adaptations in Bollywood as well with Dilip Kumar starring in three -- "Arzoo" in 1950, "Hulchul" in 1951 and "Dil Diya Dard Liya" in 1966.

Robbie, who broke out as a star with Martin Scorsese's "The Wolf of Wall Street" and has solidified her career with "I, Tonya", "Once Upon a Time in Hollywood", "Bombshell" and "Barbie", said she has often wondered what makes "Wuthering Heights" a story that filmmakers keep returning to.

"The answer is, I don't know, and if I did know, I don't know if we'd still be examining it 200 years later. But I suspect it's got something to do with how challenging these characters are, how much you want things to work out for them, how their relationship is so difficult and complex and yet so straightforward at the same time."

Robbie and Elordi's chemistry has garnered a lot of attention in the film and the actor said Fennell, who worked with Elordi earlier in "Saltburn", wrote Heathcliff with him in mind.

"...It's because she said he looked like the illustration of Heathcliff on the cover of the book that she read when she was a teenager, which I love. For me, Heathcliff is a lineage of actors... I think of Laurence Olivier famously playing Heathcliff, and Ralph Fiennes and Tom Hardy, and it feels fitting to me

that Jacob should play Heathcliff, given that I think he is going to be one of the great actors of our generation. He's already proving to be that," she said. (PTI)



## 'Tu Yaa Main made me take extra dose of my...': Karan Johar

Shanaya Kapoor and Adarsh Gourav's exciting film, Tu Yaa Main released in theatres on February 13, ahead of Valentine's Day. It may have clashed with Shahid Kapoor and Triptii Dimri's O'Romeo, but it has managed to stand out so far, and the positive reviews on social media are proof. Amid receiving all the love and appreciation, ace filmmaker Karan Johar took to social media and shared a long, heartfelt review. He heaped praises on the entire team and went on to call it a "must-watch".

Karan is known for voicing his opinions, but he is not someone who writes goody-goody things for every movie. On February 13, he took to Instagram and dropped a lengthy note reviewing Shanaya and Adarsh's film. He went on to say that Tu Yaa Main made him "take an extra dose of his BP meds". Apart from appreciating the lead actors, he hailed director Bejoy Nambiar's "solid craft and technical excellence".

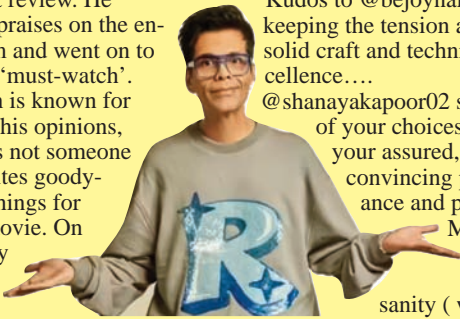
His note read, "NO CARDIO NEEDED! You will physically jump out of your seats right through the second half of this traumatising (in the best way possible) survival croc edge of the seater! Swimming pools will never be the same for me again...."

NEVER! And if you happen to have a partner this Valentine... take them to watch #tuyaa-main and tell them to wear armour because you will clutch onto them in FEAR!!!! I am still stressed and the film got over 30 minutes ago! I feel like a crocodile may appear even in the middle of Mumbai traffic and attack me (I am dramatic I know but this film has made me take an extra dose of my BP meds)."

KJo further continued, "Kudos to @bejoynambiar for keeping the tension alive with solid craft and technical excellence...."

@shanayakapoor02 so proud of your choices and for your assured, hugely convincing performance and playing Miss Van-ity and Miss In-sanity (when the going gets scary and relentless) to perfection! Love you! @gouravadarsh you are JUST BRILLIANT as the Gully boy and as the traumatised victim of the croc attack! I felt every inch of your FEAR!!! Badhai ho @aanandrai for backing and producing this cracker of a clutter breaker! @vinod.bhanushali congratulations! A MUST WATCH IN THE CINEMAS!!!! Have a look:

Earlier today, Shanaya's BFFs Suhana Khan and Ananya Panday gave a big thumbs up to the film, and they simply loved her performance in it. (PTI)



## Film industry realised audience wants to see me on big screen: Sunny Deol BO success



Riding high on the back to back success of "Gadar 2" and "Border 2", superstar star Sunny Deol on Thursday said the Hindi film industry has finally taken notice of the fact that audiences want to see him in theatres.

At the success press conference of "Border 2", Deol expressed gratitude where was the audience "hiding" during his quieter years.

"Where were the (audience) hiding all these years. It's a

lovely thing (that audiences are going to theatres to watch his film). I tell everyone to work hard, love your profession and keep going and don't get disheartened. Time is one such thing which comes and goes no one knows.

"I'm grateful and thankful for the blessing from wahguru. Wherever I go people meet with so much love. I guess the industry also came to know that if the audience wants to see me then why not make films," the 68-year-old actor said.

Deol recalled an emotional moment in London when a fan

touched his feet in respect for his portrayal of a soldier in the 1997 film, "Border".

"When I did 'Border', I didn't know it would impact the audience in such a manner. Later, I realised how unknowingly we give back good things to society. Almost all films of mine are like these only and have some message in it. The audience enjoys these films when they come out of theatres, they want to be like the characters," he said.

"Earlier also, our films were a reflection of our society, both good and bad... Now, we say, it's a true story but earlier films were

based on (true) incidents. Like, my father's films, 'Lalkaar' and 'Haqiqat' from where the excitement started off for such films, then I did 'Border'," the actor added.

A sequel to Deol's 1997 blockbuster "Border", the movie released in theatres on January 23. Backed by T-Series and J P Films, "Border 2" has collected over Rs 426 crores worldwide.

Asked about the trend of filmmakers inflating box office figures in Bollywood, Producer Bhushan Kumar of T-Series said they have maintained transparency. (PTI)

## You can't denigrate section of society by such title: SC raps Neeraj Pandey on 'Ghooskhor Pandat'

Observing that a section of society cannot be denigrated in the name of freedom of expression, the Supreme Court on Thursday rapped filmmaker Neeraj Pandey over the title of his movie 'Ghooskhor Pandat'.

The top court was hearing a plea seeking a stay on the release of the Manoj Bajpayee-starrer film on OTT platform Netflix.

A bench of Justices B V Nagarathna and Ujjal Bhuyan issued notices to the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Central Board of Film Certification and Pandey on a plea against the movie.

"Why should you denigrate a section of society by using such a title. Freedom of expression is one thing. That doesn't give license to denigrate anybody. This is against morality and public order. We will not allow you to release the film unless you tell us the changed title... We thought filmmakers, journalists, etc are responsible people," the bench said.

The top court directed Pandey to file an

affidavit that the film 'Ghooskhor Pandat' doesn't denigrate any section of society.

During the hearing, the counsel appearing for the filmmaker submitted that a new title has not been decided as yet and assured the court that it will be such that there will not be any conflict.

"You make a submission that you will not have this title. We are fully respecting the right under Article 19(1)(a). But there are certain restrictions. We want to include the aspect of fraternity. It is one of the basic principles of the Constitution. We want to relate this matter to fraternity.

"Why can't there be a restraint when you try to make this kind of division when there are already fissures in society. Why should you denigrate anybody? Why should you denigrate a section of society by this kind of title? Being woke is one thing. But denigrating the public and creating this kind of unrest. You are adding to the unrest," the bench observed.

The matter would be heard again on February 19.

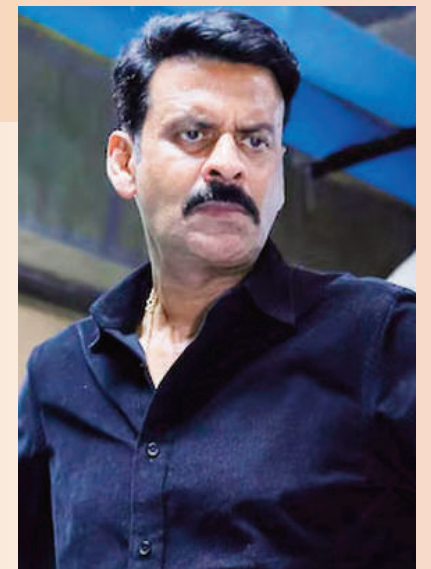
The plea alleged that the movie promotes caste and religion-based stereotyping and threatens public order, communal harmony, and constitutional values.

'Ghooskhor Pandat', produced by Pandey, was announced by Netflix at an event in Mumbai recently. It also stars Nushrat Bharuccha, Saqib Saleem, Akshay Oberoi, and Divya Dutta.

The top court was hearing a PIL filed by Atul Mishra, National Organisation Secretary of the Brahman Samaj of India, seeking directions to stay the release of the movie.

The plea alleged that the movie title and storyline are prima facie offensive and derogatory, which portray the Brahman community in a defamatory manner. The PIL objected to the use of the word "Pandat", a caste and religion-identifying title, alongside "Ghooskhor", which denotes bribery and moral corruption.

On Tuesday, Netflix India had informed the Delhi High Court that the film will be renamed.



"The producer has taken a conscious decision in light of the concern that has arisen to change the title of the film from 'Ghooskhor Pandat' to an alternate title which more accurately reflects the film's narrative and intent," the HC had recorded. (PTI)

# Battle of Nerves: Can India's middle-order calm tame Pak's spin threat?

**COLOMBO, Feb 14:** Amid the still-smouldering embers of an impasse that mixed cricket with politics like never before, India will need middle-order stability and a fully fit Abhishek Sharma to maintain domination over Pakistan when the two bitter rivals clash in the T20 World Cup's marquee fixture, here on Sunday.

A temporary 'peace season' has dawned after Pakistan made a U-turn from its boycott stand and agreed to take the field against India at the Premadasa stadium here.

It came after weeks of intense parleys that involved the International Cricket Council, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

Practically, the whole of South Asia was turning the wheel to make this match happen, should the weather gods allow, because of its power to attract millions -- fans and bank balance alike.

So, a train of events set off by the BCCI-ordered release of Bangladesh pacer Mustafizur Rahman from the roster of Kolkata Knight Riders, that so transformed

into a cross-border crisis has come to halt, for now.

On their part, cricketers from both the teams have also tried to temper down the accompanying swirl of hype, terming this match as just another game in the calendar.

It's hard to fathom the precise nature of their thoughts in that regard, but certainly both sides do not want the result to go against them because of the frenzy of negativity it can kick up.

For that, they will have to push the thoughts of a fan backlash behind and focus on the more controllable factors.

**Will Abhishek and Kuldeep play?**

For India, the worries start with Abhishek as he was forced to skip the match against Namibia with a stomach bug that needed hospitalisation.

If he is not available, then India have the option of either sticking with Sanju Samson or bringing in a fit-again Washington Sundar to open with an on-song Ishan Kishan.

Washington can also offer an off-spin option on the slow and tacky Premadasa pitch.

That nature of the track here also might prompt the management to bring in left-arm wrist spinner Kuldeep Yadav.

But the inclusion of Kuldeep will have to come at the expense of a batter and the unfortunate one missing out could be Rinku Singh.

Bringing in Kuldeep is also because of his hold over Babar Azam and he also had fine figures of 4 for 30 in the Asia Cup final at Dubai -- his last outing against the cross-border rivals.

**Middle-order stutter**

In the run-up to the World Cup, the India batting line-up resembled a bulldozer rolling down a slope, crushing everything in its route.

But the two matches in the marquee event so far have revealed a mild concern -- a propensity to lose wickets in a cluster.

India slid to 77 for six against the USA at Mumbai, while the home side lost five for four against Namibia in the death overs, but its



impact was masked by a 200-plus total and a large 93-run victory at New Delhi.

On both those occasions, India were propped up by skipper Suryakumar Yadav, Ishan Kishan and Hardik Pandya.

But a collective effort is needed to win a long tournament like this, rather than repeatedly relying on individual brilliance.

With four points in the kitty, the management would not be overly

concerned about it, but they certainly would not want another show of profligacy because Pakistan has the capacity to exploit it.

**The Pak threat**

Keeping up with the hybrid model chalked out last year, Pakistan have been stationed in Colombo, and it has given them a better understanding of the pitch and conditions here.

The pitch at the RPKS has been a speed-sucker and the 2009 cham-

pions have five capable spinners in their ranks -- Usman Tariq, Saim Ayub, Abrar Ahmed, Shadab Khan and Mohammad Nawaz.

Tariq's side-arm stop and pause action has already become the talk of the town and battle with the versatile Indian batters would be an intriguing sub-plot of the showdown.

Pakistan's batters led by the irrepressible Sahibzada Farhan, who seemed to have gotten a grip over Jasprit Bumrah during last year's Asia Cup, Ayub, and all-rounder Faheem Ashraf can pack a punch on their day.

Without any disrespect to the Netherlands and the USA, they are yet to be tested by a quality bowling unit and India possesses one.

From Bumrah to Varun Chakravarty, India have proven match-winners in their den and even pace all-rounder Shivam Dube has improved leaps and bounds as a bowler in recent times.

It gives the defending champions immense flexibility while deciding combinations. But all calculations aside, this

match is all about finding that mental equilibrium and rise above multi-pointed pressures -- external and internal.

**Chance of rain?**  
The Sri Lanka Department of Meteorology has cautioned of a developing low-pressure point over Bay of Bengal, which potentially can mean up to 70 per cent chance of rain in the Khetarama area on Sunday evening.

**Teams :**

**India:** Suryakumar Yadav (c), Abhishek Sharma, Tilak Varma, Sanju Samson, Shivam Dube, Ishan Kishan, Hardik Pandya, Arshdeep Singh, Jasprit Bumrah, Varun Chakravarty, Kuldeep Yadav, Axar Patel, Washington Sundar, Rinku Singh.

**Pakistan:** Salman Ali Agha (c), Abrar Ahmed, Babar Azam, Faheem Ashraf, Fakhar Zaman, Khawaja Nafay, Mohammad Nawaz, Mohammad Salman Dube, Naseem Shah, Sahibzada Farhan, Saim Ayub, Shaheen Shah Afridi, Shadab Khan, Usman Khan, Usman Tariq.  
Match starts at 7 pm IST. (PTI)

## India women start key phase of T20 World Cup preparations against Australia

**SYDNEY, Feb 14:** The Indian women's team will start a key phase of its preparation for the 20-over World Cup later this year when it faces Australia in the first T20 International here on Sunday.

India are touring Australia for a multi-format series, featuring three T20Is and as many ODIs, besides a lone Test (D/N) from March 6 in Perth.

The Harmanpreet Kaur-led Indian side will play its first away series since the 50-over World Cup victory, touring six different cities in Australia.

The first T20I will be played at Sydney Cricket Ground before the action shifts to Manuka Oval in Canberra, and the Adelaide Oval for the second and third matches respectively.

The series will be India's first T20 engagement this year. India enter the series as world No. 3 with hosts Australia sitting at No. 1 in the ICC women's T20I team rankings.

The Indians will look to continue the momentum after having won their first-ever ICC trophy in the form of 50-over World Cup and skipper Harmanpreet knows very well the importance of the series.

"We know they (Australia) are a very strong team, they have been playing really good cricket from such a long time and one thing is very clear whenever you go with great mindset and positive approach you can give your best. So our goal would be to bring out our best and play best cricket," the India skipper said on the eve of the match.

"We are really working hard to achieve all our targets, so ODI



World Cup was one of them.

"Before T20 World Cup, every series is important for us. This series is very important for both the teams," she added.

India have retained majority of their 50-over World Cup-winning stars like Jemimah Rodrigues, Richa Ghosh and Deepthi Sharma. They have also introduced some new names to the squad in the form of Vaishnavi Sharma and Sree Charani, courtesy their strong performances in Women's Premier League, and also recalled Shreyanka Patil and Bharti Fulmali into the squad.

India had a disappointing outing in the last two editions of the T20 World Cup as they lack power-hit-

ting strength in the death overs but Fulmali and Ghosh will lend much-needed impetus on that front.

"WPL has really played a big role to improve women's cricket and good to see that everybody is in good touch. The conditions are totally different from back home but these conditions always suit us," Harmanpreet said.

The skipper said the ODI World Cup success will give much-needed confidence to India going into the tour.

"That was a different format and T20 is a different format. But being world champions always give lots of confidence, every time when

you step to the ground you have to start from ball one. It's a different ball game and we are really looking forward to that.

"T20 is something we enjoy playing as a team. Playing against Australia is always fun and we are really looking forward."

Harmanpreet is also excited to feature in the lone pink ball Test against Australia in Perth starting March 6.

"I played lot of cricket here and always enjoyed playing in Australia and it has one of the best cricketing culture we have even seen. Not only me all my teammates love playing in Australia," she said.

"Multi-format is always excit-

ing. Playing T20s and ODIs is always great but Test is something we always want to play and pink ball Test is going to be really exciting."

Australia, on the other hand, will be desperate to prove a point after they were knocked out by India in the semifinals of last year's ODI World Cup.

The series also holds great significance for one of Australia's greatest women cricketers -- Alyssa Healy, who will bid adieu to the game after the rubber.

The veteran wicketkeeper-batter had announced her retirement last month, and will be representing her country for the final time during the three ODIs and lone Test against India.

Sophie Molineux, the new multi-format captain, will lead Australia for the first time during the T20Is against India.

A notable omission for Australia is leg-spinner Alana King, who has been dropped.

The Teams (from):

India: Harmanpreet Kaur (c), Smriti Mandhana (vc), Shafali Verma, Renuka Thakur, Sree Charani, Vaishnavi Sharma, Kranti Gaud, Sneha Rana, Deepthi Sharma, Richa Ghosh, Uma Chetry, Arundhati Reddy, Amanjot Kaur, Jemimah Rodrigues, Bharti Fulmali, Shreyanka Patil.

Australia: Sophie Molineux (c), Ashleigh Gardner (vc), Tahlia McGrath (vc), Darcie Brown, Nicola Carey, Kim Garth, Grace Harris, Phoebe Litchfield, Beth Mooney, Ellyse Perry, Megan Schutt, Annabel Sutherland, Georgia Voll, Georgia Wareham.

Match starts at 1:45pm. (PTI)

## Taylor Swift rumors spiked ticket sales for Pebble Beach golf tournament



**PEBBLE BEACH (USA), Feb 14:** Taylor Swift boosted ticket sales to the AT&T Pebble Beach Pro-am without even being there.

Pebble Beach had an extra buzz Friday morning with rumors swirling in the cool Pacific breeze Swift would be there to watch her fiancé, Kansas City Chiefs tight end Travis Kelce, playing in the PGA Tour event that combines corporate CEOs and celebrities with golf's best.

Alas, Swifties, it was just another pretty day at Pebble Beach.

"It was busy without her," said Mackenzie Hughes, who played in the group. "With her, I think it would have literally been pandemonium."

It still was good news for the Monterey Peninsula Foundation, which runs the event. Tournament Director Steve John said when Kelce was announced as playing in the pro-am, more than \$60,000 in tickets were sold over the next 12 hours.

Swift is rumored to be in town. But she was not at Spyglass Hill on Thursday, where Kelce was playing with pro partner Keith Mitchell along with Hughes and retired NFL quarterback Alex Smith.

No matter. Pebble Beach is the main attraction, and John said some \$21,000 tickets for the sec-

ond round were sold between 6:30 p.m. Thursday and 6:30 a.m. Friday, two hours before Kelce played.

More than 1,000 spectators lined the left side of the first fairway at Pebble Beach, but all they saw was Kelce hitting his tee shot to the right, into and out of the trees, and along the cart path (he made a par).

Sure, there was plenty of Chiefs gear in the crowd, one young girl wearing a Kansas City sweatshirt. The tournament has a long history of athletes over the years, including Ken Griffey Jr. playing in a group with Tiger Woods some 20 years ago, Aaron Rodgers and Roger Clemens, who once made a hole-in-one.

This, however, was clearly a Swift moment. Except that it wasn't.

John and his tournament staff left nothing to chance. When he wasn't busy responding to text messages -- will she be there or not? -- he had plans in place for security, for transportation across the course, even a secure suite overlooking the 18th green.

Even when it was clear Swift was not at Pebble Beach, the tunnel leading from the 18th green to the scoring area included CBS announcer Jim Nantz and CBS Sports president David Berson. Nantz, whose network has the AFC, shared a long chat with Kelce and arranged for a few photos.

Kelce chose not to stop for interviews. Hughes, who described himself as a fringe Swiftie, said it was a treat to play with Kelce, whom he described as a "great personality, great vibe."

"He even said it hasn't always been this way," Hughes said of so much attention on Swift. "But since they're now engaged it's like, My life has changed a little bit." Even for him to say that, that's pretty telling. He's already a pretty big star. (AP)

## Pramod Bhagat clinches SL3 gold, wins record sixth world title

**MANAMA, Feb 14:** India's Pramod Bhagat captured the men's SL3 gold medal with a commanding straight-game win over Muhammad Al Inran of Indonesia at the BWF Para World Championships here on Saturday.

The 37-year-old Bhagat outclassed his opponent 21-12, 21-18 in the final to claim his fourth consecutive singles gold at the world championships and his sixth overall world title in the category.

The victory underlines Bhagat's sustained dominance in the SL3 division, which refers to a classification for standing players with significant lower limb impairment.

Bhagat, who developed polio when he was five, had secured world championship singles gold medals in 2009, 2015, 2019, 2022 and 2024. Following Saturday's win, he surpassed China's legendary Lin Dan, who won five men's singles world titles in able-bodied badminton, making Bhagat the most decorated singles champion across world championship history in the sport.

The triumph also marked a significant redemption for Bhagat, who served an 18-month suspension for violating the Badminton World Federation (BWF) anti-doping whereabouts clause, which forced him to miss the 2024 Paris Paralympics. (PTI)

## From Arena Mexico to the World Cup, a wrestling-mask boom is taking shape

**MEXICO CITY, Feb 14:** Guadalupe Zúñiga has been around wrestling masks for as long as she can remember.

It is a relationship that began when she watched her father performing in the ring and she has now transformed it into a business eagerly awaiting the start of soccer's 2026 World Cup.

The 42-year-old Zúñiga, daughter of the famous late wrestler Angel Azteca, owns a factory in the popular barrio of Iztapalapa on the outskirts of Mexico City, where her team produce an average of 300 wrestling masks a week.

"We expect a very large increase in sales with so many foreigners because wrestling and masks are a Mexican symbol. We hope the stores we work with will ask us for more of this product," Zúñiga told The Associated Press.

Zúñiga works closely with well-known wrestlers like Tinieblas, Blue Panther, Ultimo Guerrero and Mascara Sagrada. She produces customised masks that are hand made and can take up to two days to make.

"There are more collectors now. Fifteen years ago there were not many people saying, I have 30 masks at my place', now you have fans with 50 or 100 masks at home," she said. "I think in the



past six years the business has grown. You have tourists coming and they stop by the shops that sell them to get one."

Around the Arena Mexico wrestling venue, and other tourist spots around the city like the Angel de la Independencia, there are cheaper versions of the masks that sell for as low as 50 pesos (around \$3). Custom-made versions can sell for hundreds of dollars depending on design.

Like Zúñiga, the street vendors outside the Arena Mexico are also aware sales are going to go up during the World Cup.

"We always have many foreign customers, but we expect many

more during the World Cup. We'll try to give them a nice souvenir to take back to their countries," said Clementina López, who sells masks near the Arena Mexico.

Mexico will host 13 World Cup matches. Guadalajara and Monterrey have four games apiece and the capital Mexico City has five.

Authorities expect five million tourists during the tournament.

**History behind the masks**  
Late Mexican writer Carlos Monsivais, a fan of Lucha Libre freestyle wrestling, said wrestlers liked to use masks because it provided them with an intimidating face.

"The mask has magic. It's like

having two identities," wrestler Star Black said. "We can lead a double life, one in the ring and another outside of it."

It is believed the first person to wear a mask in Mexico was American wrestler Corbin James Massey, who in 1933 lost on his debut under the nickname "Cyclone Mackey".

A year later he wanted to fight again but did not wish to be recognized so he asked for a mask made by Antonio Martinez, a local craftsman.

Massey then started wrestling under the alias "Maravilla Enmascarada" (Masked Marvel) to start a tradition that was followed in 1938 by fellow competitor Jesus "Murcielago" Velazquez of Mexico and then in the 1950s by icons Santo, Blue Demon and Huracan Ramirez.

**Crossover to other sports**

It is still unclear the exact moment when fans started wearing masks at soccer matches, but that sport and the lucha libre are two favorite pastimes for Mexicans.

Adidas, the German clothing company that sponsors the Mexican national team, created a jersey inspired by Rey Mysterio, a Mexican-American wrestler popular on both sides of the border, for the 2014 World Cup. (AP)



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Government of Assam

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

# MSP

for Mustard

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Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma  
Chief Minister, Assam

An Endeavour to Boost Farmer's Income

4th Time

Minimum Support Price (MSP) for Mustard offered  
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Period of Purchase

16 February  
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#### Mustard Procuring Agencies

- Assam State Agricultural Marketing Board
- Assam Food and Civil Supplies Corporation Ltd.



#### Other Associated Agency

- Assam State Warehousing Corporation



#### Dos for Mustard Farmers

- Register with e-samridhi portal
- Collect **Farmer's Certificate** from the concerned **Agricultural Development Officer**
- To generate **Farmer's Certificate**, submit **land document of the plot used for mustard cultivation**, along with **PM KISAN enrollment number & Farmer's ID (If available)**

#### Maximum Permissible Limit



Inert matter  
2%



Other crop seeds, including Toria  
10%



Immature, false grains  
4%



Rotten and pest-damaged grains  
2%



Small & weak grains  
10%



Moisture content  
8%

For Details Contact:

- District Agricultural Officer/ Agricultural Development Officer
- Senior Marketing Inspector, Assam State Agriculture Marketing Board (Ph: 8402813003/9435060128)
- Agriculture Inspector, Directorate of Agriculture (Ph: 7002327180) • Concerned Secretary, Regulated Market Committee