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Two more bodies found; toll rises to 27

Meghalaya coal mine tragedy: Rescue ops continue for third day



SHILLONG, Feb 7: The death toll in the blast at an illegal coal mine in Meghalaya's East Jaintia Hills district rose to 27 on Saturday after two more bodies were recovered, police said, as multi-agency search and rescue operations continued at the site.

The explosion occurred on Thursday at the mine in the

Thangsku area of Umsngat village. The latest bodies were found during ongoing search operations involving multiple agencies. Several people are still reported missing, and the search will continue, police said.

Superintendent of Police Vikash Kumar said efforts are also underway to verify the identities of the deceased.

A suo motu FIR has been registered at Khliehriat police station under provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act and the Explosive Substances Act.

So far, two accused — Forme Chyrmang (36) of Jalaphet Pordung village and Shamehi War (42) of Sunga Pohwailong village — have been arrested in connection with the incident.

Meanwhile, chief minister Conrad K Sangma said the government has zero tolerance for illegal coal mining and that strict action would be taken against all those involved.

He added that the administration has been directed to intensify enforcement and ensure accountability.

Justice (retd) B P Katakey, who is overseeing compliance related to mining issues, visited Thangsku and confirmed that illegal mining was being carried out on a large scale in the locality, officials said. (PTI)

'Gaurav's Pak links' being probed for sake of national security'

SIT findings to be made public today

GUWAHATI, Feb 7: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday said an investigation is being conducted into Congress MP Gaurav Gogoi's alleged Pakistan links for the "sake of national security", and any likely impact on politics is "secondary".

He claimed that two persons -- a Pakistani national and a British citizen -- have "central roles" in this entire matter, though he did not name either of them.

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of a government programme here, Sarma said, "The state cabinet will discuss the SIT report today and decide on the future course of action. One Pakistani citizen and one British citizen are related and have central roles. The British person is wife of an MP."

He maintained that the probe is "not about politics" and said,



"This investigation is for the sake of national security. Its impact on politics is secondary."

The Assam CM and the BJP have been attacking Gogoi, who also heads the state Congress, over his wife's alleged connection with Pakistan's spy agency ISI.

The state government had formed a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to probe a case of alleged interference of Pakistani national Ali Tauqeer Sheikh, who was claimed to have links with Gogoi's British wife Elizabeth Colburn, in India's internal affairs.

The SIT submitted its report to Sarma, who also holds the Home portfolio, on September 10, the date which was initially set by the chief minister for providing evidence to back his accusations against Gogoi.

After several delays, Sarma has now said that findings of the SIT report will be made public on February 8 after discussion in the cabinet.

The chief minister maintained the probe will "go much ahead when it reaches the Centre".

"We have limitations in our probe. Yet, within these limits, what we have gathered is very important. When it reaches the NIA or IB or CBI, they will take it ahead," he said.

"What we have done is just 10 per cent. 90 per cent is yet to be found out," Sarma asserted. Sarma claimed (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Three illegal B'deshi immigrants ordered to leave country within 24 hours

DIPHU, Feb 7: The Assam government has ordered the expulsion of three illegal Bangladeshi immigrants from Karbi Anglong district, officials said on Saturday.

The directive has been issued under Section 2 of the Immigrants (Expulsion from Assam) Act, 1950, after the trio was declared illegal immigrants by Foreigners Tribunal (FT) through three separate orders in December.

The illegal immigrants have been asked to leave the country within 24 hours of receipt of the expulsion orders.

The separate expulsion orders, signed by the district commissioner on Monday, were served on the three foreigners on Saturday, the officials said.

The trio was identified as Md Fakrudin, who was residing in Bokajan police station area, and Md Rafiqul Ali and Md Faizul Haque (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

5,572 young entrepreneurs receive aid under CM-AAA 2.0

CM to youths: Work hard to protect identity

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Feb 7: Stating that a nation cannot survive on slogans alone, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday called upon the youth of Assam to protect their identity through hard work and commitment, as he ceremonially distributed the first tranche of financial assistance under the Chief Minister's Atmanirbhar Assam Abhiyan (CM-AAA) 2.0.

The assistance was distributed to 5,572 young entrepreneurs from Kamrup and Kamrup (Metropolitan) districts at a programme held at Jyoti-Bishnu Antarjatik Kala Mandir in Guwahati.

Of the total beneficiaries, 3,710 were from Kamrup district and 1,862 from Kamrup (Metro).

While 35 beneficiaries belonged to the professional category, 5,537 were from the general category.

Under CM-AAA 2.0, the State government aims to support 74,036 prospective entrepreneurs by releasing financial assistance exceeding ₹

1,482 crore.

Beneficiaries in the general category will receive Rs 2 lakh each, while those in the professional category, including engineers, MBBS and BDS graduates and other professionally trained candidates, will receive ₹ 5 lakh each.

Addressing the gathering, the chief minister urged young men and women to channel their inner strength positively and establish themselves as role models in society.

Describing the age group of 25 to 35 years as the most formidable phase of life, he said the manner in which this energy is utilised during this golden period shapes one's future.

Sarma said that earlier, a large section of the youth expended their energy in movements and similar activities, but in recent years a positive environment has emerged in the state.

He pointed out that MSME registrations on the Udyam portal have

increased nearly 30 times, from 9,371 in 2020 to 2.85 lakh in 2024.

At present, more than 12.7 lakh MSMEs are registered in Assam, generating over 82 lakh jobs.

He further stated that despite being a small state, Assam has disbursed more than ₹ 30,773 crore in loans to small entrepreneurs till March 2025.

During his four financial years as Chief Minister, banks have extended nearly ₹ 1 lakh crore in loans to MSMEs. Under the Assam Credit Guarantee Scheme, around 76,000 MSMEs received loans worth ₹ 6,436 crore during 2024-25.

He also recalled that under CM-AAA 1.0, financial assistance was provided to 25,277 entrepreneurs.

The chief minister said beneficiaries under CM-AAA 2.0 would undergo a three-day training programme to help them establish their ventures effectively, after which the next installment of assistance would be released. He informed (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Himanta slams Cong leaders over 'offensive gestures' towards women

GUWAHATI, Feb 7: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday alleged that senior Congress leaders Bhupen Kumar Borah and Debabrata Saikia made offensive gestures towards women during a recent party rally.

He said that the Congress should expel Borah, a former state party president, and Saikia, the leader of the opposition in the assembly, for "disrespecting women".

Dismissing the allegation, Saikia said the chief minister should concentrate on the many problems the state is facing.

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of a government programme here, Sarma claimed that a hand gesture was made in Guwahati a couple of days ago from atop a bus being used by the Congress for its ongoing state-wide rally.

Maintaining that it was a gesture towards all Assamese girls and women, he said, "If the party doesn't expel them, I don't think they

will be able to go anywhere. It is about all women, not about any 'jati' (community)."

Sarma said that he has directed that the video clip be sent to the women's commission so that cognisance is taken of it.

"I can't even imagine a leader of the opposition, a former party president making such gestures, that too when Mira Borthakur (state Mahila Congress president) was with them," he added.

He said that the matter will be discussed in cabinet meet scheduled for Saturday evening.

The chief minister expressed surprise over the local media not reporting on the incident and claimed that an acquaintance from New Delhi forwarded him the clip.

Reacting to the allegation, Saikia said, "I don't know how he can say something like this. I don't know what he keeps thinking. Nothing like what he is trying to say had (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Indo-US interim trade pact will empower diverse sectors: CM

GUWAHATI, Feb 7: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday said India and the US securing a framework for an interim trade agreement will empower diverse sectors of the country.

He said it would also lead to enhanced innovation, tech partnerships, resilient supply chains and global growth.

"Big Win for Bharat! Under Adamiya @narendramodi ji's leadership, India has secured a framework for an Interim Trade Agreement with the USA," Sarma said in a post on X.

He said the deal boosts 'Make in India', empowering entrepreneurs, MSMEs, startups, fishermen, women and youth with jobs and opportunities.

"It deepens innovation, tech partnerships, resilient supply chains, and global growth, paving the way for Viksit Bharat. It also reduces reciprocal tariffs to the best rates offered to anyone globally, all this while (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

People who came before 1951 are indigenous: CM

GUWAHATI, Feb 7: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Saturday that all 'Miya-Muslims' are not "unknown" people, as those who came before 1951 are indigenous ones.

He maintained that there is no "communal or religious" angle to it, indicating towards his tirade against Miyas as the state prepares for Assembly polls due in the next few months.

"All Miya-Muslims are not 'osinaki' (unknown) people. There are those who came before 1951 and they are indigenous. The AASU and Justice (Retd) Biplab Sharma Committee have also accepted it," Sarma said, talking to reporters on the sidelines of a government programme here.

The All Assam Students' Union (AASU) had spearheaded the six-year-long anti-infliction agitation, which had culminated with

the signing of the Assam Accord in August 1985.

The Justice (Retd) Biplab Kumar Sharma Committee was formed by the Ministry of Home Affairs in 2019 for the implementation of the Assam Accord's Clause 6, which deals with Constitutional, legislative and administrative safeguards to protect, preserve and promote the culture, social, linguistic identity and heritage of the Assamese people.

Sarma maintained that opposition to Miyas is "not a communal thing and is not related to religion".

"I speak within the ambit of law," he said, in an apparent reference to his recent comments against the Bengali-speaking Muslims and how they will have to face "trouble" till he remains in power.

"Miya" is originally a pejorative

term used for Bengali-speaking Muslims in Assam, and the non-Bengali-speaking people generally identify them as Bangladeshi immigrants.

In recent years, activists from the community have started adopting this term as a gesture of defiance.

The chief minister further maintained that 95 per cent of the new recruits in the state police force and 92 per cent in Grade 3 and 4 government jobs are "our children".

"No unknown person has been recruited," he asserted.

"During the last five years, our administration has worked for the people in an unprecedented manner. No government has been able to work with such courage. This is the first government which is not afraid of anything," Sarma added. (PTI)

Skill development is backbone of India's maritime growth story: Sonowal



PALGHAR/MUMBAI, Feb 7: Union minister Sarbananda Sonowal on Saturday said skill development was the backbone of India's maritime growth story.

He made the statement during his interaction with students in Mumbai at an event hosted by the Vadhvan Port Project Ltd (VPPL) to felicitate the local youth under its comprehensive skill development programme.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the VPPL and the Maharashtra government's Directorate of Vocational Education and Training (DVET). This partnership will facilitate

short-term skill courses at ITIs under the PM-SETU scheme, providing free training to students from 44 selected villages in the Vadhvan region, an official release said.

During the programme, Sonowal awarded certificates to the second batch of the Custom Documentation course. He also presented confirmation letters to 11 students for the GP Rating Pre-Sea Training Course, conducted with the Shipping Corporation of India (SCI). The VPPL is bearing the Rs 2.5 lakh fee per candidate for this six-month residential course, it said.

Sonowal, minister of ports, shipping and waterways said, "Skill development is the backbone of India's maritime growth story. Through the Vadhvan Port Skilling Program, we are equipping local youth with globally relevant skills and meaningful employment opportunities, fulfilling Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of a future-ready India."

Currently, 6,000 students across 162 batches are undergoing training in 28 diverse courses. To streamline the process, VPPL has launched a dedicated AI chatbot for real-time registration (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Tiger carcass recovered in Kaziranga

NAGAON, Feb 7: The carcass of a tiger was recovered from the Burapahar range of Kaziranga National Park in Assam on Saturday, a forest department official said.

Burapahar forest range officer Niloy Baruah said the carcass of the 12-year-old male tiger was spotted in Banesar forest camp area in a watershed near the Brahmaputra river.

On being informed by forest guards, senior officials rushed to the spot and recovered the carcass.

"Autopsy was conducted on the spot and infighting between the big cats is suspected to be the reason. Injury marks were also visible," Baruah said.

"The carcass was buried near the incident site as per due procedure," he added. (PTI)

'Colour My Grave Purple'

An anthology of historical fiction from Assam spanning a century

NEW DELHI, Feb 7: A new collection of stories, spanning from 1855 to 2019, takes the well-worn terrain of historical fiction, especially from Assam, and excavates from it the sedimented lives that can often be left neglected.

The 10 stories in "Colour My Grave Purple" by Shehnab Sahin are not simply episodes in Assam's long, restless march toward modernity but serve as acts of reclamation.

Sahin's project is clear - to recenter Assamese experiences within the nation's literary imagination and to contest the reductive narratives of insurgency and exoticism that have long shadowed it.

The author is a former civil services officer who now works in the international humanitarian sector, implementing programmes for people displaced by wars and conflicts.

What distinguishes Sahin's debut collection, published by Niyogi Books, is its refusal to treat the



Northeast as a "problem" to be solved.

In the author's note, which is a lucid self-critique of regional representation, Sahin declares her intent to "diffuse the stronghold of insurgency as a dominant theme" and to present instead the "broad spectrum of experiences" that have shaped Assamese life.

The stories deliver on that promise, moving across centuries with a historian's eye and a storyteller's empathy.

From the tea plantations of colonial Assam in "Two Leaves and a Bud" to the queer awakening of a young man in the 1970s in "Devo-

tional Defiance", each narrative becomes a window into the layered negotiations of identity, memory, and belonging.

The opening story, "Two Leaves and a Bud (1855)", sets the tone for the entire collection. It revisits the history of the plantation economy through the eyes of a British manager whose fascination with Assam's tea industry slowly curdles into an encounter with the spiritual and the uncanny.

The story's gothic undertones are more than stylistic flourishes and signify a deeper haunting of the Empire and its perception of local customs.

Sahin turns the tools of colonial realism against itself, allowing the reader to witness the violence of possession of land, people and narratives.

If the above example examines Assam as a site of imperial exploitation, (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

NFR plans underground rail line through Siliguri Corridor to boost northeast connectivity

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Feb 7: In a major move to strengthen strategic connectivity to the Northeast, Indian Railways has decided to construct a new underground railway line through the Siliguri Corridor, popularly known as the 'Chicken's Neck'.

The proposed line will run from Tinnile Hat to Rangapani and further up to Bagdogra, ensuring secure and uninterrupted rail access to the northeastern states.

Speaking during a media interaction, Union Minister for Railways, Information & Broadcasting and Electronics & Information Technology Ashwini Vaishnaw said the project is aimed at strengthening reliable rail connectivity in this strategically sensitive region.

The project will fall under the Katihar Division of the Northeast Frontier Railway and will pass through parts of Darjeeling and

Uttar Dinajpur districts of West Bengal, along with Kishanganj district of Bihar.

The proposed underground railway line will have a total length of 35.76 km between Dumdangi and Bagdogra, with the Dumdangi-Rangapani stretch measuring 33.40 km.

The alignment has been designed primarily as an underground corridor to ensure resilient and uninterrupted connectivity through the Siliguri Corridor, a narrow land strip of about 22 km that links mainland India with the northeastern states.

Given the corridor's proximity to international borders with Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh, and its susceptibility to congestion, natural disasters and security-related disruptions, the underground alignment assumes critical importance.

The concealed route will provide a protected alternative for

uninterrupted movement of defence personnel, military equipment and emergency relief materials during exigencies.

The project will also enhance air-rail logistics integration due to its strategic proximity to Bagdogra Air Force Station and the Bengdubi Army Cantonment, home to the Indian Army's 33 Corps.

Advanced engineering and modern railway technology have been planned for the project.

These include a 2x25 kV AC electrification system, Automatic Signalling (Standard-IV) with VOIP-based communication over optical fibre and quad cables, bridges designed to RDSO standards for 25-ton axle loads, and twin tunnels to be constructed using Tunnel Boring Machine (TBM) methodology, with NATM tunnels for crossovers.

The Tinnile Hat-Rangapani-Bagdogra (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

No duty concessions on sensitive grains, fruits, dairy, meat under trade pact with US

NEW DELHI, Feb 7: Under the interim trade agreement with the US, India has fully protected sensitive agricultural and dairy products such as maize, wheat, rice, soya, poultry, milk, cheese, ethanol (fuel), tobacco, certain vegetables and meat as no duty concessions will be granted to America on these goods.

India and the US on Saturday announced that they have reached a framework for an interim trade agreement. Under this, the US will reduce tariffs on Indian goods to 18 per cent from the earlier 50 per cent.

"The agreement reflects India's commitment to safeguarding farmers' interests and sustaining rural livelihoods by completely protecting sensitive agricultural and dairy products, including maize, wheat, rice, soya, poultry, milk, cheese, ethanol (fuel), tobacco, certain vegetables and meat," Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said in a social media post.

These goods are sensitive as they involve the livelihood of small and marginal farmers of the country.

The interests of farmers remain paramount in all trade negotiations, he said, adding the Modi-government remains fully committed to protecting farmers and securing rural livelihoods.

"No concessions have been extended to sensitive agricultural sector produce in grains, fruits, vegetables, spices, oilseeds, dairy, poultry, and meat amongst many



others while securing preferential access for Indian goods through the India-U.S. Interim Agreement framework," Goyal said.

In other Free Trade Agreements (FTA) also, India has not extended any import duty concessions on sensitive agri and dairy products. It has recently finalised FTAs with the European Union, the UK and Australia.

Under such trade pacts, while import duties are eliminated in certain areas on the day the agreement comes into force, in others they are phased out over time. In some sectors, duties are reduced, while in others, quota-based concessions are

provided.

India has always kept out sensitive sectors such as dairy, rice, wheat, meat, poultry, cereals, GM foods, soymeal, and maize out of the ambit of its trade agreements.

Agriculture and allied activities such as animal husbandry form the backbone of India's rural economy, providing employment to over 700 million people. Unlike in developed economies, where agriculture is highly mechanised and corporatised, in India it is a livelihood issue.

India's agriculture sector is currently protected by moderate to high tariffs or import duties and

regulations to shield domestic farmers from unfair competition.

The US agri exports to India were USD 1.6 billion in 2024. Key exports include almonds (in shell, USD 868 million); pistachios (USD 121 million), apples (USD 21 million), ethanol (ethyl alcohol, USD 266 million).

Given that over 50 per cent of India's population relies on agriculture for its livelihood, India treats the entire sector as sensitive. Import or customs duties are particularly important for staple crops, dairy and key farm products that sustain rural livelihoods.

In FY 2025, India's total agricultural exports increased to over USD 51 billion from USD 45.7 billion in 2023-24, with a portion of this going to the US (USD 5 billion). India's total exports in FY25 were USD 437 billion.

India aims to reach USD 100 billion in combined exports of agriculture, marine products and food and beverages in the next four years. The main exports include tea, coffee, rice, some cereals, spices, cashew, oil meals, oil seeds, fruits and vegetables.

As per a joint statement issued by both the nations, India will eliminate or reduce tariffs on a wide range of US food and agricultural products, including dried distillers' grains, red sorghum for animal feed, tree nuts, fresh and processed fruit, soybean oil, wine and spirits, and additional products. (PTI)

Rajasthan Lime Udyog brings Nilkamal Homes' first large-format store to Guwahati

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 7: Rajasthan Lime Udyog, a trusted name in home improvement solutions in Assam and the Northeast for over three decades, has forayed into the lifestyle segment with the launch of Nilkamal Homes, the largest furniture studio in Guwahati.

With this expansion, Rajasthan Lime Udyog has broadened its portfolio beyond building materials and home solutions such as tiles and sanitaryware.

The association with Nilkamal Homes brings premium furniture, décor and lifestyle products under one roof, with the aim of offering complete home solutions at a single destination.

Nilkamal Homes, the retail arm of Nilkamal Limited, inaugurated its first large-format store in Guwahati on February 7.

According to an official statement, the store was opened by Veenugopal, chief business officer of Nilkamal Homes, marking a significant milestone in the brand's national expansion. With this launch, Nilkamal Homes' pan-India presence has expanded to over 60 large-format stores.

Located at Universal Metro Walk, opposite Maniram Dewan Trade Centre on NH-37 at Betkuchi, the new outlet spans a large area and offers an extensive range of furniture and décor for every part of the home.

The collection includes sofa sets, dining furniture and bedroom ranges, along with furnishings,



wall accents and accessories designed to combine comfort with aesthetics.

Speaking on the occasion, Shubhomoy Biswas, Manager of the Furniture Division, said in a statement, the launch of the Guwahati store reflects the company's commitment to reaching customers across India with premium home lifestyle offerings.

He added that with more than 60 large-format stores nationwide, the focus remains on delivering an enhanced shopping experience and high-quality products that help customers create homes they truly cherish.

Rajasthan Lime Udyog, the franchisee owner of Nilkamal Homes in Guwahati, said the collaboration would enable city residents to access the Nilkamal legacy locally.

Jagdish Prasad Bharuka of Rajasthan Lime Udyog said the store offers a one-stop solution for furniture and home décor needs, combining design, quality and value.

With this partnership, Rajasthan Lime Udyog aims to further strengthen its long-standing relationship with customers by extending its offerings from construction and interior solutions to complete lifestyle and living solutions.

Classic Legends unites Jawa, Yezdi and BSA Riders under 'Nomads'

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 7: Riders of Jawa, Yezdi and BSA motorcycles rode out across India on January 26, 2026, celebrating Republic Day with a shared belief that motorcycling, much like the nation itself, draws strength from unity in diversity.

Marking the occasion, Classic Legends announced the launch of its community page titled 'Nomads: Ride as One, Ride the Legacy' on its official website.

The newly launched page is designed to bring riders closer to their local Jawa-Yezdi-BSA riding communities, enabling easy discovery and connection with both independent rider clubs and dealership-led groups through a single digital platform.

The Republic Day rides, themed Nomads for Unity in Diversity, spanned the length and breadth of the country, from Jammu to Tamil Nadu and Gujarat to Manipur, reflecting India's vast geography united by a common passion for performance classics from Jawa, Yezdi and BSA.

More than 2,000 riders participated in the nationwide rides, representing over 20 independent riding communities and more than 150 dealership-led riding groups, cutting across age groups, professions and riding styles.

Seasoned riders rode alongside first-time tourers, with legacy machines sharing the road with modern-day performance classics, symbolising continuity across generations.

These independent and dealership-led riding groups will now be further unified under Classic Legends' riding collective, 'Nomads', which consolidates all brand riding communities on a common platform.

Spanning Jawa, Yezdi and BSA riding communities, Nomads has been positioned as a shared identity that transcends brands, regions and motorcycle choices.

Built by riders rather than campaigns, the collective reflects inclusiveness, independence and the joy of riding with one's tribe.

The Republic Day launch was seen as a fitting moment to introduce the platform nationally, making it easier for riders to find nearby clubs and ride together more frequently.

Speaking on the initiative, Anupam Thareja, co-founder of Classic Legends, said that while motorcycling is driven by the pursuit of freedom, it is also deeply rooted in the human need to belong.

He said Republic Day rides have always brought together diverse riders as a close-knit tribe, and the launch of Nomads takes that spirit forward by enabling riders, both new and experienced, to discover and connect with riding communities near them.

Throughout the day, rider stories from across the country were shared in real time on Jawa, Yezdi and BSA Motorcycle social media platforms, celebrating the spirit of riding together as Nomads.

Republic Day rides remain an annual tradition for the Jawa, Yezdi and BSA riding communities.

This year's celebrations marked a larger and more unified Nomads presence, deeper collaboration with independent rider groups, and the launch of a platform aimed at sustaining community engagement well beyond the annual rides.

Kotak Flexicap Fund marks 15 years of long-term wealth creation journey



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 7: Kotak Mahindra Asset Management Company Ltd (KMAMC), also known as Kotak Mutual Fund, on Saturday announced the completion of 15 years of Kotak Flexicap Fund, marking a significant milestone in its long-term wealth creation journey.

Since inception, the scheme has delivered a compounded annual growth rate (CAGR) of 16.59 per cent, reflecting consistent performance across multiple market cycles.

Nilesh Shah, managing director of Kotak Mahindra Asset Management Company Ltd, said the completion of 15 years was a moment of pride for both the fund house and investors who have remained committed to the scheme.

He said flexicap funds continue to play an important role as they allow investors to participate in India's growth across market segments while leaving market capitalisation allocation decisions to an experienced investment team.

As of December 31, 2025, the Kotak Flexicap Fund Direct Plan - Growth Option has generated a CAGR of 15.70 per cent over 10 years and 16.87 per cent over five years.

The fund is managed by Harsha Upadhyaya, Chief Investment Officer of Kotak Mahindra AMC, whose investment philosophy focuses on

sustainable earnings, strong corporate governance and capital efficiency.

Upadhyaya said the fund has successfully navigated 15 years of diverse market conditions by remaining anchored to businesses with durable earnings potential and strong capital efficiency.

He said the strategy has consistently prioritised stock selection backed by in-depth research rather than short-term market trends, enabling the fund to participate meaningfully in India's growth while seeking to deliver steady long-term outcomes for investors.

Flexicap funds offer flexibility to adapt to changing market environments through investments across large-, mid- and small-cap segments.

As of December 2025, Kotak Flexicap Fund had an allocation of around 73 per cent in large-cap stocks, 19 per cent in mid-cap stocks and 5 per cent in small-cap stocks.

The portfolio combines top-down sectoral insights with bottom-up stock selection and has key exposure to financial services, automobiles and auto components, capital goods, chemicals, construction materials and consumer services.

The fund follows a research-driven approach aimed at identifying long-term opportunities supported by sound valuations and earnings visibility.

SBI reports all-time high standalone profit of ₹21,028 cr in Q3

MUMBAI, Feb 7: State Bank of India on Saturday reported an all-time high profit of ₹21,028 crore in December quarter FY26 on a standalone basis.

On a consolidated basis, the state-owned lender reported a 13.06 per cent increase in profit at ₹21,317 crore, as per a regulatory filing.

The bank's core net interest income on a standalone basis grew 9.04 per cent to ₹45,190 crore from ₹41,446 crore in the year-ago period on the back of 15.14 per cent loan growth and a 0.03 per cent compression in the domestic net interest margin at 3.12 per cent.

Non-interest income grew 15.65 per cent to ₹8,404 crore during the quarter. Overall expenses were up at ₹1,08,052 crore as against ₹1,04,917 crore in Q32024-25.

The bank reported a 9.02 per cent deposit growth during October-December period. Fresh slips came in at ₹4,458 crore, as against ₹3,823 crore in the year-ago period.

Gross non-performing assets ratio improved to 1.57 per cent as of December 31, 2025 from 1.73 per cent in September, while overall provisions were at ₹4,507 crore as against ₹911 crore in the year-ago period. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

An anthology of

"Bellows of a Wilted Poppy (1860)" turns inward, probing the collision between indigenous medical knowledge and colonial modernity.

Through Rebo, the traditional healer experimenting with opium, Sahin explores how epistemologies are colonized long before territories are.

The story's attention to language and its use of untranslated Assamese embodies the tension between the oral and the written, the local and the imperial. In doing so, Sahin positions her fiction as counter-history by speaking out in her own voice.

Throughout the collection, Sahin's characters, from tea workers, soldiers, missionaries to lovers and bureaucrats, are full of cultural intrigue and depth. In "Ursula (1943)", the real-life anthropologist Ursula Graham Bower is reimagined through the eyes of the Naga people she once studied and ends up as a sort of meditation on the ethics of empathy.

Similarly, in "Freedom in My Blood (1920)", the story of a young woman's encounter with nationalist fervour doubles as a commentary on gender and the limited emancipations available to women in revolutionary times.

The title story "Colour My Grave Purple" brings the collection full circle and crescendos with an emotional fervour few can manage to create. It situates grief and the death of a father as both personal and political inheritance. Here, Sahin's prose achieves its most lyrical register and the purple of the grave becomes both elegy and assertion where she refuses to let the dead remain uncoloured, unnamed, or unremembered. It's a gesture toward beauty as resistance against those who seek to keep her from her father, even in his death. (PTI)

NFR plans underground

underground rail project reflects Indian Railways' commitment to strengthening strategic infrastructure in the Northeast.

Anchored in national interest, the project is expected to play a vital role in enhancing security, resilience and long-term connectivity of the region, in line with the Government of India's vision for integrated and secure infrastructure development.

Skill development is

and course information.

Gaurav Dayal, chairperson of Jawaharlal Nehru Port Authority (JNPA) and CMD of VVPL, said the project aims to invest in the entire port ecosystem, from technical maritime roles to essential support trades.

The development of a Rs 76,200 crore all-weather greenfield deep draft major port at Vadivan in Palghar district was approved by the Union Cabinet in 2024.

The project is being constructed by the VVPL, a special purpose vehicle (SPV) formed by JNPA and Maharashtra Maritime Board (MMB), with a shareholding of 74 per cent and 26 per cent, respectively. (PTI)

Indo-US interim

protecting the interests of our farmers," Sarma added.

India and the US reached a framework for an interim trade agreement under which both sides will reduce import duties on a number of goods to boost two-way trade. (PTI)

Himanta slams Cong

happened. There was some conversation going on and I had only laughed." "There are so many problems in the state. The chief minister should focus on those," the Congress leader added. (PTI)

Three illegal B'deshi

from Manja police station area.

The expulsion orders stated that the presence of a declared foreigner is "detrimental to the interest of the general public and also for the internal security of the state".

It asked the foreigners to leave the state and country through Dhubri or Sribhumi or South Salmara-Mankachar route within 24 hours of being served the order.

If the trio fails to comply with the expulsion orders, the government will initiate "appropriate action" to remove them from the state and country, the orders added. (PTI)

SIT findings to

that Gogoi gave out incorrect information to defend himself in front of local TV channels when the allegations of his Pakistan links were first brought.

"Whether the TV channels will now play his old statements and expose him, it is upon the media houses," the chief minister added.

Hitting back, Gogoi had slammed Sarma over his accusation and said the CM's remarks were "ridiculous, baseless, insane and nonsense" and that he was behaving like an "IT cell troll" without talking with facts. (PTI)

CM to youths: Work

that 'CM Fellows' have been appointed in all Assembly constituencies to remain in direct contact with entrepreneurs and provide handholding support.

Expressing confidence in the youth, Sarma said the government had received over one lakh applications for CM-AAA 2.0 and expected at least five lakh applications in the next phase.

"We have set a target to support 10 lakh young men and women by assisting two lakh beneficiaries every year over the next five years," he said.

He also urged the beneficiaries to disprove the perception that Assam's youth are unwilling to work.

"A nation does not survive on slogans alone. We must all resolve to protect our identity through hard work," the chief minister said.

Highlighting future employment potential, Sarma said major upcoming projects such as the thermal power plant at Dhubri, the fourth unit of the Namrup fertiliser plant and the semiconductor unit at Jagraod would create demand for transport, services and small businesses, offering fresh opportunities for entrepreneurs.

Revenue and disaster management minister Keshab Mahanta, cooperation minister Jogen Mohan, industries, commerce and public enterprises minister Bimal Bora, MP Bijuli Kalita Medhi, several MLAs, Guwahati mayor Mrigen Sarania, chief secretary Dr Ravi Kota, additional chief secretary J B Ekka and other senior officials were present at the programme.



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SHORT TENDER NOTICE NO. APGCL/MSHEP/GM/Tech-10(E)/2025-26/19 Dated: 09/02/2026

Name of work: Servicing and Load Testing of EOT Crane at MSHEP Stage-I & Stage-II.
Financial Involvement: Rs. 19,11,600.00 (Rupees Nineteen Lakhs Eleven Thousand Six Hundred) only

Tender Paper Issue: Up to 13:00 hrs. of 17-02-2026
Tender receiving: Up to 14:00 hrs. of 18-02-2026
Tender Opening: At 15:30 hrs. on 18-02-2026

Details tender documents may be obtained from the O/O The General Manager, KLHEP, APGCL, Lengery, West Karbi Anglong, Assam during working hours. The tender inviting authority reserves the right to accept or reject any bid/tender and to cancel the bidding process and reject all bids at any time prior to contract award.

Sd/-
General Manager KLHEP, APGCL

BTC farmers' produce to reach the US, Germany, Japan, and China Bodoland's organic turmeric and ginger ready for global export



HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, Feb 7: From a land once disturbed by the sounds of bullets and conflict, Bodoland region is now witnessing the rise of a new generation of confident, hardworking and enterprising youth who are moving forward with hope for a brighter future.

Among them is Atish Basumatary, Director of Bodoland Agro Organic Producer Company. Through agriculture-based initiatives, especially organic farming, the locally rooted com-

pany has prepared to export organic turmeric and ginger produced in the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTC) to foreign countries for the first time.

Speaking to the media, Atish Basumatary informed that the Bodoland Agro Organic Producer Company was formed in Kokrajhar in 2017. Under the company, around one thousand farmers from different parts of Kokrajhar district are engaged in organic farming, mainly cultivating organic turmeric and ginger. The

company supports farmers in producing turmeric and ginger strictly through organic methods in line with international standards and also purchases the organically produced raw turmeric and ginger from them.

He said it is a matter of great joy that, for the first time, organic turmeric and ginger produced in the Bodoland region have received an excellent opportunity for export to foreign markets.

For this purpose, Bodoland Agro Organic has signed a memorandum of understanding with the Jodhpur-based company "Save the Nature." Under this agreement, organic turmeric and ginger marketed under the brand name "Megha One," after meeting international quality standards and undergoing laboratory testing, will be sent to the United States.

In the current year, Bodoland Agro Organic Producer Company has received approval to export 170 metric tonnes of turmeric and 200 metric tonnes of ginger.

On the other hand, Lalit Kumar, Director of "Save the Nature," Jodhpur, described the development as truly encouraging. He stated that before exporting to overseas markets, the organic turmeric and ginger produced in the Bodoland region are tested for international standards and quality at laboratories in Jodhpur, Rajasthan. After completing all quality checks, the products are packaged and exported to around thirty countries worldwide, including the United States, Japan, Germany and China.

Six development projects inaugurated in KA villages

Projects worth ₹3.22 crore aim to boost rural infrastructure and livelihoods

HT Correspondent
HAMREN, Feb 7: Six newly completed developmental projects were inaugurated across villages under Rongmongwe Development Block in Karbi Anglong, marking a boost to rural infrastructure and livelihoods. Funded by the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (MDoNER) through the North Eastern Council (NEC) for 2021-2025, the projects were opened by Longki Phangocho, Member Secretary of NEC and retired IAS officer. The total investment amounted to ₹3.22 crore.

Facilities handed over include: a Multipurpose Training Centre in Rongmongwe Block, mushroom farms at Dalamara and Kohora Chandra Sing Rongpi Village, an open market shed with water and sanitation at Dalamara, a piggery farm for Self-Help Groups at Diring



Village and a training centre with hostel and market shed at Kohora Chandra Sing Rongpi Village.

Phangocho, accompanied by NEC officials, KAAC members, Rongmongwe Block leaders, engineers and community representatives, in-

spected the projects. He praised the quality of construction and potential impact on the local economy, assuring residents of continued NEC support and future developmental schemes to improve living standards.

STEM lab inaugurated at Demow Higher Secondary School

HT Correspondent
DEMOW, Feb 7: A Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) laboratory was inaugurated at Demow Higher Secondary School on Friday under the Oil Jigyasa Project, an initiative of Oil India Limited aimed at promoting scientific learning among students.

The lab was inaugurated by Nayana Madhu Dutta, Chief Manager (Public Affairs-CSR), Oil India Limited and Joint Secretary, OIRDS, who also cut the ribbon during the ceremony. The ceremonial lamp was jointly lit in the presence of dignitaries.

Among those present were Arijit Pritam Sharma, Senior Manager (HR), Moran; Shatabdi Mahanta, Manager (Public Affairs-CSR), Oil India Limited and Co-opted Member, OIRDS; Naranath Gohain, Block Elementary Education Officer, Demow; Bokul Dutta, Principal of Demow Higher Secondary School; Anju-

moni Gogoi, SMDC president; Ghana Kanta Gogoi, retired principal of the school; Arup Dutta, retired science teacher and other invited guests.

Principal Bokul Dutta delivered the welcome address and expressed gratitude for the establishment of the STEM lab under the Oil Jigyasa initiative, highlighting its importance in enhancing students' interest and skills in science and technology. The programme was anchored by Nirmali Borah, a teacher of the school. Nayana Madhu Dutta, Naranath Gohain and Ghana Kanta Gogoi also addressed the gathering, underlining the role of STEM education in preparing students for future academic and career opportunities.

The vote of thanks was delivered by Abhishek Biswas, Manager, CRY-Child Rights and You, who acknowledged the support of Oil India Limited, district authorities, partner organisations and the local community in making the initiative a success.

Diphu observes World Cancer Day with walkathon

HT Bureau
DIPHU, Feb 7: World Cancer Day 2026 was observed with an awareness programme and walkathon organised by the Diphu Cancer Centre, Assam Cancer Care Foundation (ACCF), sponsored by Pfizer, in line with this year's global theme, "United by Unique."

Rebika Teronpi, District Coordinator, ACCF, opened the programme, highlighting the importance of collective action in cancer awareness, prevention and early detection. District Commissioner Aranyak Saikia, IAS, addressed the gathering, stressing early detection and timely care and appreciated ACCF's efforts in strengthening cancer services in the district. Dr Vezokhoto Phesao, Oncologist at Diphu Cancer Centre, spoke on prevention, screening and community participation. Cancer survivors shared personal journeys, inspiring hope and acknowledging the support received from the Centre.

The event saw active participation from Diphu Athlete Academy members and NCC cadets of Diphu Government Boys' Higher Secondary School. The programme concluded with the District Commissioner flagging off the World Cancer Day Walkathon, symbolising unity and commitment towards a cancer-aware society.

Food Fair draws crowds at Kokrajhar Girls' College

HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, Feb 7: An Indigenous Community Food Fair and Exhibition was held at Kokrajhar Girls' College on Saturday, coinciding with the conclusion of the 37th College Week festival.

Organised by the Student Body, the four-day festival featured students from nine departments showcasing traditional dishes from Bodo, Assamese, Garo, Adivasi, Rabha, Bengali and Gorkha communities. Highlights included Bodo pork and dried pork, silk-worm larvae, snails, shukuti, Maibra Bidai, Assamese pitha, Garo steamed pork, sweets and roti.

The festival, titled "Gambari", attracted enthusiastic responses from faculty, students and visitors alike, celebrating traditional foods and local culinary heritage.

AAU hosts national seminar on AI and Big Data in education

HT Correspondent
JORHAT, Feb 7: Dr Bidyut Chandan Deka, Vice-Chancellor, Assam Agricultural University (AAU), Jorhat, emphasised the importance of accurate and authentic data analysis for informed decision-making, cautioning against data manipulation and stressing the ethical use of big data to ensure credibility, transparency and trust in scientific research and governance.

The Viksit Bharat Cell, College of Community Science, AAU, organised the two-day National Seminar on "Upskilling Students with AI and Big Data Science in Education: Building Future-Ready Innovators", sponsored by ICAR. The seminar aimed to sensitise students, researchers and academicians about emerging technologies and their transformative role in education and research.

Dr Mamoni Das, Dean, Faculty of Community Science, highlighted AI and big data analytics as

powerful tools redefining education, research and development sectors. The inaugural session included addresses by Dr Lipi B Mahanta, Retired Professor, IASST, Guwahati and Dr Mira Kalita, Organising Secretary, who stressed interdisciplinary research and integrating AI and big data into educational frameworks.

Technical sessions featured keynote lectures by Dr Nayanmoni Kakoty and Dr Riku Chutia on AI concepts and computation models, while Dr Lipi B Mahanta and Dr Tapan Das elaborated on big data computing, personalised learning and digital pedagogy. A poster presentation session showcased 24 student and young researcher projects.

On the second day, Dr Arpan Bhowmik discussed data analysis, Principal Component Analysis and machine learning applications, followed by hands-on training on robotics and AI-based systems conducted by Sudhansu Pratim Saikia.

CTET conducted smoothly amid poor sanitation at Silchar's School

HT Correspondent
HOWRAGHAT, Feb 7: The Central Teacher Eligibility Test (CTET) was conducted smoothly at Dinanath Nabakishore Higher Secondary Girls' School in Silchar on Saturday, but the institution came under heavy scrutiny for poor maintenance and unhygienic conditions.

Established in 1921, the 105-year-old school's campus was littered with garbage and a dead rat was found decomposing near the entrance, emitting a foul stench. Despite the auditorium being designated as the CTET centre, no cleaning was done prior to the candidates' arrival.

The unsanitary conditions drew immediate criticism from parents and educated youth who had traveled for the exam. One concerned guardian said, "It is deeply unfortunate to see a century-old institution in this state. The school authorities should have ensured a clean environment for the candidates."

Beena Patangia to receive Bhola Kalita Memorial Award



HT Correspondent
TEZPUR, Feb 7: Noted theatre and film actress Beena Patangia will be conferred the 'Bhola Kalita Memorial Award' on February 28 in Tezpur, marking the birth anniversary of theatre personality Bhola Kalita.

The award will be presented at 4 PM at the Tezpur Sahitya Sabha Bhawan, organised by Tezpur Sahitya Sabha with Baan Theatre and the family of late Bhola Kalita. The award recognises Beena Patangia's con-

tribution to Assamese theatre and cinema.

A resident of Bam Bacheria, Tezpur, she began acting in Class VII and has acted in 12 feature films, 15 television serials and over 25 stage plays, including mobile theatres like Asomi Theatre and Kohinoor Theatre. She has received multiple Best Actress awards, including for Juye Pora Xon and the Jyoti Rupa Award for Be-Taal.

Her notable films include Kushal, Pakhi, Bandhon, Bhoga Khiriki, Juye Pora Xon, Jatinga Ityadi, Jangfai Jonak, Deuta Diya Biday, Seema: The Untold Story, Dai, Seujiya Patar Kahini, Chobua Tamolar Daag, Dipen Gandhi, Barasun, Rodor Paakhi and the yet-to-be-released Bhakutkut.

She has appeared in serials such as Be-Taal, Bhara Ghar, Uday Bhanu'r Charitra, Shiyali, Nibhuti Rati, Ghar Jowai, Parashu Patar Naad, Ghar Sansar, Xonar Kharu Nelage Mok, Sendur, Shahu-Bowari, Umal Bukur Hazar Kahini, Beharbari Outpost, Aparadh, Enekoiey Bhagene Xopun, Barlakai and Deuta.

Her theatre journey began at Bishnujyoti Natya Mandir with Karengor Ligiri and since 1986 she has been a prominent performer at Baan Theatre in plays including Siraj, Kiyu, Emuthi Chaul, Rupalim, Bhogjora, Mulagabharu, Miri Jiyori, Sagarat Suryasta, Ulonga Nachan, Nabour Biya, Gaonburha, Sendur, Kaboror Kambal, Mahendra Master, Agrigarva, Lakhimi, Sariyabar Dulit Bhoote, Kalu Gunda, Phulan Devi, CID, Chilarai, Bastab, Dhritarashtra and Bharaghar.

Locals allege violation of rules at Raimona National Park

HT Correspondent
GOSSAIGAON, Feb 7: Serious allegations of violations of national park regulations have surfaced at Raimona National Park, western Assam's only national park, with locals accusing the Forest Department of failing to enforce its own guidelines. Residents and environmental activists alleged that political leaders and senior government officials have repeatedly entered the protected area using private vehicles, despite a strict ban on such access under forest rules.

The allegations have also been directed at the Ranger-in-Charge of the Raimona West Range, who is responsible for enforcing conservation norms. Activists claimed that while common citizens face action for minor violations, influential individuals are allegedly allowed free entry, triggering resentment among villagers and wildlife lovers.

Some residents further alleged that departmental rules were ignored to facilitate the movement of private vehicles inside the park. Concerned citizens warned that such practices pose a serious threat to wildlife and natural habitats and undermine the purpose of declaring Raimona a national park. They have urged the concerned minister, the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) executive member and senior officials of the Kachugaoon Forest Division to intervene and order a thorough inquiry into the matter. Locals demanded strict action against those responsible and called for uniform enforcement of rules, stressing that no individual, regardless of status, should be allowed to violate park regulations.

Akhil Gogoi's fiery rally in Dalgou, announces opposition candidate

HT Correspondent
DALGAON, Feb 7: In a high-stakes rally at Nepali Bazar in the Dalgou Assembly constituency, Rajior Dal leader Akhil Gogoi unleashed criticisms against the BJP and Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, calling him "Assam Mother's worst son" and "most wicked, deceitful and bad person." He urged uprooting communal forces like the BJP and AIUDF for lasting peace and questioned rising prices of diesel, petrol and essential commodities. Gogoi targeted Dalgou MLA Mazibur Rahman as an "agent" of Sarma and endorsed Rajior Dal's Azizur Rahman, whose candidacy is "90% confirmed" as the opposition unity nominee. On illegal immigration, he challenged the Chief Minister to deport illegal Muslim Bangladeshis while questioning whether Hindu Bangladeshis would face the same fate, accusing BJP of targeting the Miya community and orchestrating recent eviction drives in Upper Assam. Gogoi also alleged BJP attacks on Congress's Parivartan Yatra and misrepresentation of his biyani remarks. Sherman Ali Ahmed, Bagbar legislator, supported Gogoi's stance, urging a firm stand against communal forces and accusing Mazibur Rahman of siding with BJP and ignoring Miyan Muslims' concerns.

Samajwadi Party demands CBI probe into Zubeen Garg case

HT Correspondent
DHUBRI, Feb 7: The Samajwadi Party (SP) intensified its 2026 Assam Assembly election campaign in Dhubri district on Saturday, focusing on opposition unity and justice in the Zubeen Garg case.

Mahavir Singh, SP's Northeast in-charge, visited the region and reaffirmed support for Congress to oust BJP from Assam. Paying tribute to late singer Zubeen Garg, Singh demanded a CBI investigation into his death, questioning why central agencies had not yet taken over the case. The SP aims to combine regional alliances and local issues to strengthen its foothold in Dhubri's five assembly segments ahead of the polls.

Abhi-Neel murder case: 3-day hearing concludes

HT Correspondent
NAGAON, Feb 7: The three-day final argument hearing in the Abhi-Neel murder case concluded at the Nagaon District and Sessions Court. The hearing was conducted virtually, with 45 accused in Nagaon Central Jail and three in Jorhat Juvenile Jail. The prosecution, led by government advocates Jiyaur Kamar, Suman Chakraborty and Bhaskar Dutta, demanded maximum punishment, while the defense also presented arguments.

The court has scheduled the next hearings for February 24, 26 and 27, after which the final verdict is expected. Victims' families, including Abhijit Nath's father Ajit Kumar Nath and Nilutpal Das's father Gopal Chandra Das, expressed faith in the judiciary and demanded the death penalty for the accused.

Brahmaputra Literary Festival rekindles hope among new writers and artists

Sessions on children's literature, war narratives and creative voices draw diverse participation

HT Correspondent
SIVASAGAR, Feb 7: On the second day of the Brahmaputra Literary Festival 2026, reputed children's author Arup Kumar Dutta addressed the session on "Children's Literature, Imagination and the Future", saying the digital generation, addicted to Rowlingian fantasy, is far removed from real life. The Shankar Literary Award winner noted he has largely stopped writing novels due to limited readership for real-life stories.

Held for the first time in Sivasagar and organised by Adharxila in association with Sivasagar Girls' College, the festival brings together authors and artists from across the world. Sessions are being held simultaneously in four venues.

In the children's literature session, editor Santanu Tamuli emphasised writing with sincerity, while Shamim Nashrin highlighted parental influence on reading habits. Author Madhurima Gharphalia said each generation has its own tastes and priorities.

In another session, BBC correspondent Sachin Gogoi hosted war veterans Brigadier Ranjit Borthakur and Air Vice Marshal Sanjib Bordoloi, who discussed narratives on war, moral dilemmas



and modern battlefronts. The session also featured children Martin Moran, Jhini Paarin and Subhrajit Goswami. Prof Sonaram Baruah's translation of Mow Yan's novel Change (Paribartan) was released by Dutta.

The inauguration on February 6 at Sivasagar Girls' College featured Hungarian poet Daniel Levente

Paul as Chief Guest, with Jana Bednarva (Slovakia), L So I Roy (Manipur) and Hrishikesh Baruah (Gauripur). Dr Rita Chowdhury, Director of Adharxila Trust, said the festival aims to rediscover humanity in literature for the next generation. A Walk of Humanity followed the event, anchored by Dr Shivaprasad Mili and Dr Kritanjoli Konwar.

2nd North East Social Work Conclave 2026 held at KKHSOU

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Feb 7: The 2nd North East Social Work Conclave 2026 was successfully organised by the Indian Awaz Foundation in partnership with Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University (KKHSOU) at the KKHSOU campus in Guwahati.

The day-long event brought together academicians, development professionals, government officials, NGOs, CSR leaders and students to discuss emerging challenges and opportunities in social work in the Northeast. Md Nazim Ahmed, Founder & MD of Indian Awaz Foundation, highlighted the need for a strong professional social work ecosystem, while Prof Rajendra Prasad Das, VC of KKHSOU, emphasised universities' role in community development.

The conclave featured two panel discussions. Panel I, moderated by Dr Mridusmita Duara, focused on career pathways in child

protection, law and social justice, with panelists including Debasish Bhattacharjee, Dr Shyamal Prasad Saikia and Lakshminarayan (UNICEF). Keynote sessions were delivered by Meraj Ahmed (NEAID) and M Adil Mustak Shahar (ISDM), addressing strategic capacity building in non-profits.

Post-lunch sessions included NGO and government presentations, youth engagement activities and a special address by Dr Syed Kazi (Council for Social Development) on strengthening social development through research, policy, practice and digital technology. Panel II, moderated by Pradyut Bhattacharjee (SeSTA), focused on New-Age NGOs and CSR partnerships with participation from Assam Startup - The Nest, DXC Technology and Slice Small Finance Bank.

The conclave concluded with the Vision 2030 roadmap for building a Northeast Professional Social Work Network, institutional facilitation and networking.

Advocating for traditional Assamese performing arts: Sajan Nayak

By: Prantik Deka

In Assam, there are certain individuals whose valuable contributions to the cultural landscape frequently go unnoticed. Their efforts play a crucial role in preserving and promoting the region's rich heritage. These committed individuals are involved in a variety of art forms like traditional music, dance, crafts, and literature, ensuring that Assam's cultural legacy remains vibrant.

Among them, Sajan Nayak stands out in Assam's cultural landscape, recognised for his significant contributions to Assamese music and dance. He is acknowledged for his promotion of the musical traditions of Adivasi, Baganiya (tea tribe), Sadri, and Assamese musical traditions. Through his multifaceted talents as a lyricist, composer, music director, actor, and dancer, he has carved out a special place for himself. A prolific songwriter, Sajan has penned numerous melodies that have struck a chord with audiences far and wide. Popular songs such as "Chai Gori", "Ekadashi Ratiya", and "Assam Desh" have garnered admiration beyond Assam, reaching audiences throughout the country. Notably, Assam's beloved artist Zubeen Garg has performed numerous songs rooted in the tea-tribe community, penned by Sajan, thereby enhancing the visibility of his artistic abilities.

In addition to his musical talents, Sajan Nayak has demonstrated considerable proficiency in dance. Through his artistic expressions in both music and dance, he has contributed to the enrichment of society. He has showcased his performances on various stages across Assam and in multiple regions of India, effectively promoting Assamese culture on a national platform. In order to motivate the youth, he has facilitated numerous dance and music workshops across various locations. These workshops have served as a platform for him to mentor and inspire many gifted students, aiding them in their pursuit of a constructive path.

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that he has showcased his dance performances for distinguished figures including the Hon'ble President of India, Smt. Droupadi Murmu, the Union Home Minister Amit Shah, and the King of Bhutan, Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck. Additionally, he has participated in prominent events in Assam, such as the Filmfare Awards and Khelo India, where he garnered significant attention.

In a significant and challenging endeavour, Sajan Nayak displayed his remarkable talents as the lead trainer and music director at a grand cultural spectacle held in Guwahati on February 24, 2025. This remarkable event prominently featured an astounding assembly of 8,000 tea tribe performers, each elegantly presenting the exquisite traditional Jhumur dance as part of the captivating dance-music presentation titled "Jhumoir Binandini", commissioned by the Government of Assam, which captivated audiences both in India and internationally. He additionally provided his voice for three songs, reaffirming his remarkable versatility. In 2024, he was designated as a Jhumoir Guru by the Ministry of Culture, Government of India.

Sajan's contributions to society and culture at such a young age are truly noteworthy. His artistic journey showcases his unwavering commitment to promoting Assamese culture and the performing arts, serving as a source of inspiration.

Shrimanta Shankaradeva Sangha's 'Seva Bahini'

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

The Shrimanta Shankaradeva Sangha is a vast and tree-like institution in the social life of Assam which has not confined itself merely to the propagation of religious ideals, but has established itself as the bearer and carrier of a profound social and cultural movement. The most important aspect of this immense organisation's organisational strength and its mode of functioning is its disciplined "Seva Bahini". How spirituality can be fused with strict discipline and the concept of social service is vividly exemplified by this Bahini. Formed by integrating genuine devotion to the Guru with a sense of responsibility towards society, this Seva Bahini has given birth to a new work culture and sense of discipline in Assamese society. In contrast to the disorder and selfishness commonly seen in society, the sacrifice, endurance, and spirit of service displayed by the members of the Seva Bahini are truly a rare phenomenon. The credit for the smooth and efficient conduct of the Sangha's various programmes, attended by thousands upon thousands of people, without any need for administrative or police intervention, belongs solely to the members of this Bahini. Their service is not merely physical labour; it is a mental and spiritual practice that teaches a person to become free from ego and inspires one to dedicate oneself to the welfare of the collective amidst the multitude.

The origin and development of the Seva Bahini are rooted in the core philosophy of Shrimanta Shankaradeva's Eka-sarana Nama Dharma—"Dasya Bhakti". Here the devotee or servant regards himself as the servant of God and considers service to living beings as service to God. When this spiritual philosophy is applied in practical life, it gives birth to a powerful force like the Seva Bahini. In the sessions and other programmes of the Sangha, the members of the Seva Bahini do not regard the lakhs of assembled devotees merely as visitors; they consider each one of them as an integral part of the Divine. This mindset keeps them free from fatigue, reluctance, or irritation. A closer observation reveals that when an ordinary young man or individual puts on the prescribed uniform of the Seva Bahini, a profound transformation occurs in his mental world. His personal identity, social status, or sense of ego disappears behind that uniform and he becomes an active part of a vast

disciplined machinery. This process of transformation is not easy; it requires long-term mental preparation and spiritual practice. The Seva Bahini has demonstrated that religion is not confined merely to chanting the Name or reading scriptures; rather, religion is a harmonious blend of conduct and action. Every member of the Seva Bahini reflects the ideals of the Guru in society through his behaviour, which serves as an extremely essential lesson for the present-day society that is dominated by mere words.

The annual sessions of the Shrimanta Shankaradeva Sangha are the finest demonstration of the efficiency and capability of the Seva Bahini. In the session venue, which rises like a temporary city, the responsibility of welcoming lakhs of people, providing accommodation and food, supplying water, managing vehicular movement, and ensuring security is performed with utmost precision by this Bahini—a matter that could also be a subject of research even for modern management science. What the governmental administrative machinery requires thousands of policemen and crores of rupees to accomplish, the Seva Bahini achieves effortlessly and without any expenditure, solely through the power of reverence, devotion, and discipline. The key to this success lies in their mindset of unquestioningly following instructions. There is no place for argument or reasoning here; there is only an intense desire to fulfil one's duty. Serving food to thousands of people in the dining area in a matter of moments, supplying water, and cleaning the place immediately after the meal—all these processes appear to move in perfect rhythm. There is no chaos, no jostling or pushing. Even in the shoe and sandal storage area, the patience and memory they exhibit while locating the correct pair among thousands of shoes are truly astonishing. This skill not only establishes the organisational strength of the Sangha but also gives an indication of the latent collective work energy of the Assamese nation. The Seva Bahini practically proves that the allegation that Assamese people do not know how to work or are lazy in performing tasks is completely false; given proper leadership and ideals, this nation too can move mountains.

From a social perspective, it becomes evident that the Seva Bahini is not merely a tool for conducting sessions; it is a strong foundation for protecting the youth of today from going astray. Here they learn punctu-

ality, respect for elders, affection for juniors, and the ability to work as a team. In the training camps of the Seva Bahini, apart from physical exercise, various lessons are also imparted for mental excellence. This training not only makes a young person physically strong but also plays an important role in shaping his character. At a time when drugs and degenerate culture are engulfing the younger generation, an institution like the Seva Bahini binds them to a healthy social life. When the members of the Bahini toil under sun and rain for the sake of society, a deep sense of affection for society awakens in their minds. This affection shapes them into responsible citizens in the future. Therefore, the Seva Bahini can also be described as an informal human resource development centre. It is a school where real-life, practical education and the practice of human values receive greater emphasis than bookish knowledge. The character formed here becomes an asset not only for the Sangha but for the entire nation and country.

Another highly significant aspect of the Seva Bahini is the social equality and dignity of labour it creates. In ordinary society, people often feel ashamed or inferior to perform small tasks or physical labour. But in the Seva Bahini there is no room for such notions. Here a high-ranking government officer, a wealthy businessman, and an ordinary farmer—all wear the same uniform and work together. If one person is carrying buckets of water, another may be cleaning discarded waste or polishing devotees' shoes. No one feels any hesitation while performing these tasks, because they know that this service is for the Guru. This environment silently but powerfully strikes at the artificial class divisions and caste discrimination prevalent in society. When people from different strata of society work shoulder to shoulder, a spiritual bond develops among them which is highly essential for peace and harmony in society. The Seva Bahini has truly established the dignity of labour. It teaches that no work is small, and any work performed with the spirit of service is equivalent to the worship of God. In applying this egalitarian philosophy not merely on the pages of books but in real life, the role of the Seva Bahini is unparalleled. In a land of diverse ethnic groups like Assam, such a liberal and universal platform has made an important contribution to building bridges of harmony.

The Seva Bahini can be said to present a brilliant example of dutifulness. They perform their duty without expecting any reward or waiting for recognition. This ideal of selfless action is comparable to the Karma Yoga of the Shrimad Bhagavad Gita. The members of the Seva Bahini constantly remain alert every moment so that their conduct does not tarnish the dignity of the Sangha or the Guru. This vigilance and self-control distinguish them from ordinary crowds. Even when an unforeseen situation arises, they do not lose patience but try to control the situation with humility. Apart from the Sangha, during natural calamities such as floods or pandemics, the members of the Seva Bahini have stood by the people. This work proves that their service is not confined to religious functions alone; rather, it extends to a broad sphere of human service. They have shown society that an organisation does not merely mean a platform for raising demands; an organisation means a medium for contributing to society. The positive outlook of the Seva Bahini can inspire many newly formed organisations in Assam and help create a constructive environment in society.

In conclusion, it can be said that the Seva Bahini of the Shrimanta Shankaradeva Sangha is a consolidated form of the spiritual and social strength of Assamese society. It is not merely a group of volunteers; it is a living embodiment of sacrifice, restraint, and discipline. Embracing the great philosophy of the great saint in their hearts, the way this Bahini has presented an example of service in society will remain a guiding legacy for future generations. In the present mechanical and fragmented age, the need for such a selfless force to bind people with the thread of unity and to maintain peace and order in society is immense. The Seva Bahini reminds us that true strength does not lie in weapons; it lies in service and humility. Their silent dedication and work continue to sanctify the sky and air of Assam and help keep the flame of human values burning in society. As long as dedicated workers with such committed minds as those of the Seva Bahini exist in Assamese society, the foundation of our society can never be shaken. It is befitting that we respectfully acknowledge this great contribution of the Seva Bahini of the Shrimanta Shankaradeva Sangha. *(The author is the recipient of the 'Yuba Lekhak Sanman - 2025' from the Government of Assam)*

Jamugurihat's Sacred Convergence

The 95th State Conference of the Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha

By: Dipak Kurmi

The Jyoti Vishnu Samanway Kshetra at Jamugurihat is undergoing a remarkable transformation, slowly evolving into a vibrant landscape of faith, discipline, and collective anticipation as it prepares to host the 95th State Conference of the Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha from 6 to 8 February. What might outwardly appear as a scheduled organisational gathering has, in reality, assumed the dimensions of a profound spiritual congregation, drawing together thousands in shared devotion and cultural consciousness. The sacred ground, once quiet and unassuming, now pulses with purpose as roads grow busier, conversations more animated, and the air itself seems charged with expectation. Jamugurihat is not merely preparing for an event; it is readying itself for a convergence of memory, identity, and moral reaffirmation rooted deeply in the Vaishnavite heritage of Assam.

As the days draw closer, the rhythm of preparation has become unmistakable across the region. Volunteers move with quiet determination, elders deliberate with composed authority, and young participants offer their strength with visible pride. Everywhere, purposeful movement reflects disciplined coordination rather than hurried chaos. The organising committee, along with numerous branch committees, has been engaged tirelessly from early dawn until late at night, overseeing every dimension of the arrangements. The construction of the main stage balances dignity with simplicity, embodying the aesthetic restraint long associated with the Ekasarana Nama Dharma propagated by Mahapurush Srimanta Sankaradeva. Parallel efforts focus on accommodation, sanitation, drinking water, electricity, and food distribution, ensuring that the logistical backbone of the conference reflects the Sangha's long-standing commitment to order and service.

One of the most extraordinary undertakings of this conference is the preparation of accommodation facilities for nearly fifteen thousand members of the central service corps. The sheer scale of this arrangement is staggering, yet it has been approached not as a burden but as a sacred responsibility. Camps are being constructed methodically, designed to ensure cleanliness, discipline, and mutual respect among volunteers. These temporary settlements are expected to become living classrooms of fraternity and self-control, reflecting the Sangha's emphasis on service as an expression of devotion. In providing shelter and sustenance to such a vast gathering, the organisers are reaffirming the participatory ethos that has defined the Sangha since its institutional consolidation in the twentieth century.

The spirit of innovation blended with emotional tribute is embodied in the construction of the Mayabinbridge, a special structure built to facilitate the movement of volunteers between accommodation camps and dining areas. While its functional purpose is clear, its symbolic resonance is equally powerful. Dedicated to the memory

of the beloved Assamese artist Zubeen Garg, the bridge stands as an evocative homage to a cultural icon whose music has long served as an emotional bridge across communities. By naming the structure Mayabini, the organisers transform infrastructure into remembrance, aligning artistic legacy with spiritual gathering. It becomes a reminder that faith and culture are intertwined streams within the Assamese consciousness, each sustaining the other.

The three-day conference promises to unfold as a layered experience of prayer, dialogue, and artistic expression. Religious discourses, naamkirtan, organisational deliberations, and cultural performances will together shape an atmosphere of reflection and renewal. Among the most symbolically significant moments will be the flag hoisting ceremony scheduled for 9 a.m. on 8 February, when senior office bearer Bhubendra Nath Deka will raise the flag of the Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha. The act carries meaning beyond ceremonial observance, representing collective recommitment to ideals of equality, compassion, and moral responsibility. In the context of contemporary social challenges, such reaffirmation acquires renewed relevance.

This year's conference introduces an unprecedented cultural dimension through the synchronized performance of ninety-five gayanbayan artists to commemorate the ninety-fifth edition of the state gathering. Organised under the initiative of the Tezpur district cultural wing, this collective presentation promises to be both visually striking and spiritually profound. Gayanbayan is not merely musical accompaniment; it is an embodied discipline rooted in the Vaishnavite Satriya tradition, requiring coordination, humility, and intense spiritual focus. The meticulous training sessions held at the regional kirtan hall in Jamugurihat have cultivated not only musical precision but also ethical discipline among participants. Such preparation mirrors the broader objective of the conference, which seeks to nurture character alongside cultural continuity.

The architectural dimension of the event further amplifies its symbolic depth. The arch construction committee has been working relentlessly to erect a massive gateway measuring one hundred and six feet in length and twenty-eight feet in height. Designed as more than a physical entrance, the gateway narrates the literary and cultural contributions of Srimanta Sankaradeva while incorporating elements of the district's heritage. In addition to the main structure, four large arches and nearly thirty additional decorative gateways are being constructed, bringing the total to thirty-four. Together, these arches transform the surrounding landscape into a corridor of celebration, visually affirming the continuity of faith and identity across generations.

Beyond physical preparations, the emotional participation of the local population lends the conference its deepest significance. Residents of Jamugurihat have embraced the gathering as a collective responsibility, preparing homes to welcome

guests and contributing resources according to their means. Shops, transport services, and food providers are witnessing increased activity, creating a sense of economic vitality. Yet the most profound impact remains intangible, visible in the renewed unity and pride that animate conversations and daily interactions. The conference has become a catalyst for community solidarity, echoing the Sangha's foundational vision of social cohesion through spiritual practice.

Historically, state conferences of the Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha have functioned as vital forums for moral introspection and cultural affirmation. Established in the 1930s during a period of social uncertainty, the Sangha has consistently sought to translate the egalitarian teachings of Sankaradeva into structured organisational practice. Its conferences have reaffirmed the principles of naam dharma, social equality, and human dignity while confronting contemporary issues ranging from ethical education to communal harmony. In an era marked by rapid technological change and social fragmentation, such gatherings offer rare moments of collective pause, inviting individuals to listen, reflect, and reconnect with foundational values.

The upcoming 95th State Conference thus represents both continuity and renewal. It carries forward ninety-five chapters of service and spiritual discipline while addressing the aspirations of a new generation. For young participants, the event offers a tangible encounter with tradition, allowing them to experience Vaishnavite culture not as distant history but as living practice shaped by communal participation. Discussions on social responsibility, ethical living, and cultural preservation are expected to complement devotional observations, ensuring that spirituality remains inseparable from civic consciousness. In its essence, the convergence at Jyoti Vishnu Samanway Kshetra bolises harmony between devotion and organisation, between heritage and modern coordination. The combined efforts of committees, volunteers, artists, and ordinary citizens reveal the enduring vitality of the Sangha's participatory ethos. Each contribution, however modest, becomes part of a larger narrative of unity. As thousands gather under newly erected arches and across carefully prepared camps, the sacred ground will witness not merely a conference but a reaffirmation of shared purpose.

When the echoes of naamkirtan reverberate across Jamugurihat and the flag rises against the February sky, the 95th State Conference will stand as testimony to the enduring relevance of Srimanta Sankaradeva's teachings. It will demonstrate that faith, when grounded in equality and disciplined service, continues to illuminate the moral imagination of a people. Long after the temporary structures are dismantled and the crowds disperse, the spiritual imprint of this convergence is likely to endure, strengthening the thread of unity that binds Assam's past, present, and future. *(The writer can be reached at dipakkurmi@gmail.com)*

Dalai Lama's Grammy Award: Celebration of healing power

By: Dr Ratan Bhattacharjee

The announcement that the 14th Dalai Lama has won a Grammy Award created a moment of universal astonishment, admiration, and reflection. In a world fractured by political divisions, mistrust, and cultural polarisation, the idea that a global spiritual leader known more for his monastic robes than for musical compositions could be honoured at the world's most influential music awards carries more cultural symbolism than merely a trophy. The Grammy Award, traditionally celebrating musicians, performers, and producers, has found one of its most unexpected recipients in the Dalai Lama, whose album Inner World brought together age-old Buddhist mantras, meditative chants, and soothing instrumentals to create a rare blend of spiritual artistry. The recognition is not just a nod to a musical product; it is a celebration of the healing power of spiritual expression at a time when humanity deeply seeks solace.

The album Inner World, released on the occasion of the Dalai Lama's 85th birthday, is a contemplative creation filled with ancient Tibetan Buddhist teachings set to contemporary soundscapes. The work is not meant to mesmerise through classical musical mastery, nor does it seek to impress through the virtuosity of instrumental technique. Instead, it is a profoundly gentle expression of compassion, kindness, and healing values that the Dalai Lama has advocated throughout his life. The Grammy Award has, in a sense, validated the universal appeal of spiritual wisdom when expressed through artistic forms. The world, which often idolises musical icons for their commercial achievements, has momentarily paused to acknowledge the therapeutic potential of wisdom wrapped in sound. The Dalai Lama's Grammy win represents a renewed embrace of music as a vehicle not only of entertainment but also of emotional restoration.

At its core, Inner World is a collaboration between cultures, generations, and spiritual dispositions. Produced by Junelle and Abraham Kunin from New Zealand, the album meticulously weaves together traditional chants of the Dalai Lama with soft ambient music and modern arrangements. It carries within it the Dalai Lama's resonant voice reciting mantras like 'Compassion,' 'Wisdom,' and 'Courage' concepts that have shaped his philosophical and humanitarian views. The album does not attempt to be commercially competitive, nor does it pursue the glamour typically associated with

Grammy winners. Rather, it is a project of profound sincerity, intended to bring peace to listeners across the globe. The Grammy recognition thus signals that the world appreciates creativity that transcends conventional boundaries. While the Dalai Lama is unlikely to appear on pop charts next to mainstream stars, his work has found its rightful place in the cultural imagination of people yearning for inner calm.

The Grammy category in which the Dalai Lama won Best Spoken Word Album or Best New Age Album, depending on the category specified by the Recording Academy has historically served as a bridge between literature, philosophy, and spirituality. The award has previously gone to presidents, poets, and authors, such as Barack Obama, Jimmy Carter, and Maya Angelou. The inclusion of the Dalai Lama among such figures reinforces the idea that spoken word albums are a powerful medium for sharing transformative ideas. What differentiates this win, however, is its distinctly spiritual dimension. The Dalai Lama's album is not merely an articulation of political ideas or personal memoirs. It is an invitation to meditate, to slow down, and to reconnect with the essence of human existence. That the global music community would honour such an introspective work speaks volumes about the shifting priorities of a world grappling with pandemics, climate anxieties, mental health crises, and existential fears.

It is also important to understand the broader cultural context into which this award has been received. Modern civilisation, despite its material prosperity, finds itself psychologically weary. Anxiety, depression, and stress disorders have risen dramatically across societies. The digital age, while offering unprecedented connectivity, has also fragmented human attention and deepened feelings of isolation. In such an environment, the popularity of mindfulness practices, meditation apps, and spiritual retreats has grown exponentially. The Dalai Lama, as a global ambassador of compassion, embodies the search for inner balance in an external world of chaos. The Grammy Award for his album therefore aligns with a wider global movement that values mental well-being and emotional healing as much as material advancement. The music of Inner World becomes a mirror in which listeners see their own longing for peace reflected.

Beyond personal well-being, the Grammy honour carries significant philosophical symbolism. The

Dalai Lama's life has been defined by exile, perseverance, and the quest for non-violent resolution to political conflict. Forced to flee Tibet as a young man, he carried with him not only the spiritual heritage of his people but also a message of non-violence that resonates across borders. His teachings, grounded in Buddhist philosophy yet presented in deeply human terms, have appealed to individuals of all faiths and cultural backgrounds. The Grammy recognition therefore extends beyond Tibet, China, or Buddhist communities. It becomes a marker of global respect for a man whose moral influence surpasses political boundaries. At a time when public discourse is increasingly polarised, the award reminds us that voices rooted in compassion remain profoundly relevant.

The Dalai Lama's Grammy triumph is also a moment of triumph for the idea that art is not merely a medium of entertainment but a catalyst for social and moral reflection. Music, from ancient times, has been used to accompany rituals, transmit knowledge, and evoke spiritual experiences. In Indian, Tibetan, and many Asian traditions, sound itself is considered a form of divine energy. The mantras chanted in Inner World are steeped in centuries of contemplative practice. When these chants find a place at the Grammy Awards a stage more frequently associated with powerful vocals, high-energy performances, and global pop phenomena it signals a beautiful convergence of tradition and modernity. It reflects the possibility of a world where cultural heritage can coexist harmoniously with contemporary artistic expressions.

The Recording Academy's decision to honour the Dalai Lama also strengthens the idea that global platforms must be inclusive. Western musical culture, which dominates award ceremonies, often overlooks non-Western voices unless they fit neatly into established categories. By awarding the Dalai Lama, the Academy affirms that the Grammy Awards can be a space for cultural dialogue and spiritual expression, not merely a measurement of commercial success. It illustrates the global nature of music and the universal appeal of a message rooted in compassion. As debates about representation and diversity continue to shape cultural institutions, this award creates a precedent for recognising works that enrich the world not through mass popularity but through introspection and wisdom.

(CONTD. ON NEXT ISSUE)

Arundhati Roy and the power of conscience

By: Satvabrat Borah

Arundhati Roy stands as one of the most distinctive and uncompromising voices in contemporary literature and public life. She is not only a novelist of rare linguistic beauty but also a moral presence who insists that writing cannot be separated from responsibility. In her work the act of storytelling becomes an act of witness. Every sentence she writes carries the weight of lived experience, historical memory and ethical urgency. To read Arundhati Roy is not simply to enjoy literature but to enter a space where comfort is questioned, silence is broken and easy answers are refused.

Her emergence as a writer reshaped the expectations placed on Indian English literature. When her first novel appeared it was immediately clear that this was not a conventional literary debut. The language was playful yet precise lyrical yet deeply political. It carried childhood innocence and adult brutality in the same breath. The world she created was intimate and local yet it echoed far beyond its geographical setting. From that moment onward Arundhati Roy was no longer just a writer. She became a conscience that many found unsettling and others found necessary.

Roy's life experiences played a crucial role in shaping her worldview. Growing up she witnessed social inequalities not as abstract ideas but as daily realities. She saw how caste class gender and power shaped destinies long before individuals could choose their own paths. These early encounters with injustice did not harden her into cynicism. Instead they sharpened her sensitivity. They taught her that suffering is often quiet and that violence does not always announce itself loudly. This understanding would later become

central to her literary vision where the smallest moments often carry the greatest weight.

Her landmark novel *The God of Small Things* is perhaps the clearest expression of her unique approach to storytelling. At its surface the novel tells the story of a family in southern India. Beneath that surface it examines how rigid social rules govern love relationships and belonging. The novel explores how transgression is punished not only by society but by time, memory and guilt. What makes the work extraordinary is not only its themes but its structure. Time moves back and forth, memory interrupts the present and language bends itself to reflect the fractured inner worlds of its characters. Roy does not explain emotions directly. She allows images, repetitions and silences to speak. Through this method the novel reveals how deeply personal lives are shaped by political realities.

The success of this novel brought Roy international recognition. Awards praise and global attention followed quickly. Yet instead of retreating into the safety of literary acclaim she chose a far more difficult path. She began to use her platform to speak openly about issues that many preferred to ignore. Large development projects state violence militarization, environmental destruction and the marginalization of vulnerable communities became central concerns in her essays and public speeches. For Roy, writing fiction was never an escape from reality. Writing was a way of entering reality more fully.

Her nonfiction essays demonstrate a different but equally powerful aspect of her literary craft. In these works she combines careful research with moral clarity. She does not write as a distant observer. She writes as someone who feels implicated in

the world she describes. Her prose in these essays is sharp, direct and often urgent. Yet it never abandons literary sensibility. Metaphor rhythm and narrative flow remain present even when she is addressing complex political issues. This blend of art and argument makes her essays compelling to readers who might otherwise avoid political writing.

In collections such as *The Algebra of Infinite Justice* and *An Ordinary Person's Guide to Empire* Roy examines the structures of power that shape the modern world. She questions the idea of progress that sacrifices human lives and ecosystems in the name of growth. She challenges the assumption that democracy automatically guarantees justice. She exposes how language is used to normalize violence and erase suffering. What distinguishes her critique is not only its intensity but its humanity. She constantly returns to the experiences of ordinary people whose lives are disrupted by decisions made far away from them.

Roy's commitment to speaking truth has often placed her at odds with powerful institutions. She has faced criticism, legal challenges and public hostility. Yet she has never retreated into silence. For her silence is not neutrality. Silence is complicity. This belief drives her to continue writing even when the cost is high. She understands that literature cannot stop wars or dismantle empires on its own. But she also understands that without voices that name injustice, cruelty becomes normal and forgettable.

After a long gap Roy returned to fiction with *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. This novel reflects the evolution of her artistic and political vision. It is broader in scope, more fragmented in form and more openly engaged with contemporary realities. The novel weaves together multiple narratives, voices and

histories. It moves through cities, graveyards, conflict zones and intimate domestic spaces. Through its characters the novel explores questions of identity belonging to faith and resistance. It gives space to those who exist outside conventional categories and whose lives are often erased from dominant narratives.

What makes this novel significant is its refusal to offer a single perspective. Roy allows contradictions to exist side by side. She does not present victims as pure or villains as simple. Instead she shows how violence distorts everyone it touches. The novel insists that hope can exist even in the darkest circumstances but that hope is fragile and must be protected. In doing so Roy affirms her belief that literature can hold complexity without collapsing into despair.

Across both her fiction and nonfiction Roy demonstrates a deep respect for language. She treats words as living entities that carry history, emotion and power. She is acutely aware of how language can be used to conceal as much as it reveals. This awareness leads her to experiment with form rhythm and voice. She breaks grammatical rules when necessary, reshapes familiar expressions and invents new ways of seeing. Through these choices she reminds readers that language is not neutral. It reflects the values of those who use it.

Roy's relationship with criticism has always been complex. Some accuse her of being too political, others argue that she allows activism to overshadow artistry. Yet such critiques often misunderstand the nature of her work. For Roy art and politics are not separate domains. They are intertwined aspects of human experience. To write about love without acknowledging the structures that shape who is allowed to love is in her view a form of dishonesty. To write about beauty



without recognizing the conditions under which beauty is destroyed is an act of evasion.

As a woman writer Roy also confronts expectations placed on female voices. She refuses to conform to the idea that women should write softly or avoid confrontation. Her work challenges patriarchal norms not only through its themes but through its very existence. She occupies public space unapologetically and speaks with authority on issues that many believe should be left to experts or leaders. In doing so she expands the possibilities for what women writers can be and do.

At the heart of Roy's work lies a profound sense of empathy. Even when she writes with anger that anger emerges from care. She is not interested in abstract debates divorced from human

consequences. She wants readers to feel the weight of decisions, policies and histories on individual lives. This emotional engagement is what gives her writing its enduring power. Readers may disagree with her positions but they cannot easily dismiss her moral seriousness.

Over time Roy's voice has become even more relevant. In a world marked by increasing polarization, environmental crisis and the erosion of democratic values, her insistence on critical thinking feels urgent. She does not offer comfort in the form of easy optimism. Instead she offers clarity. She reminds readers that injustice does not disappear when ignored and that hope requires effort, courage and imagination.

Arundhati Roy's legacy cannot be measured solely by awards or sales figures. It lies in the conver-

sations she has forced into the open and the silences she has disrupted. Her work challenges readers to examine their own assumptions and complicities. It asks uncomfortable questions and refuses to answer them on our behalf. In doing so it honors the intelligence and moral agency of its audience.

Arundhati Roy represents a rare fusion of literary brilliance and ethical commitment. Her writing insists that stories matter because lives matter. She shows that literature can be a space where beauty and pain coexist where imagination serves truth and where conscience finds a voice. In an age that often rewards conformity and silence, her relentless insistence on speaking out stands as a testament to the enduring power of the written word.

The Journey

By: Meenakshi Gogoi

The bus was moving at its speed along the soft rhythm of cool breeze. The sky turned shadowy, with grey clouds hovering overhead. A heavy downpour would soon appear on Earth. Neelima, sitting on the moving bus, gazed at the green surroundings, moist with drizzling raindrops, while listening to soft music on her recorder. The lofty trees, the shrubs and creepers growing by the roadside and on the hilltops looked quite fascinating. She felt the same nostalgia and joy as she travelled from her hostel to her hometown during her secondary school days. After some time, the misty rainfall was followed by thunder and heavy showers. The bus was moving a little slower than usual to avoid potholes and to navigate slanted roads at specific points. The vehicles crossed and gave way to each other. The water flowing through the narrow passages from the hilltops and the big rocks lying along the roadside added to the scenic beauty.

The rain soon became milder after a sudden heavy shower. A little later, the bus stopped at an eating joint for fifteen minutes for a tea and toilet break. The two eateries nearby were almost full of passengers travelling on that rainy day. Adults and older men surrounded a few betel-nut vendors for their turn to buy betel-nut pouches. Some of them were under umbrellas. Neelima's wandering eyes spotted them from a little distance while sipping her hot cup of ginger tea. Suddenly, a woman passenger put her bag on the table and, facing her with a hoarse tone, said, "What a bad day! One of the bus tyres busted. The driver will fix a new tyre. We have to wait a little longer." Neelima, not knowing how to react, softly nodded and got up. She threw her disposable cup and went near the bus conductor. Some men had surrounded the driver and were trying to help him fix the new tyre.

The conductor, when asked, told her the driver would soon fix the tyre. It was nothing to worry about. Neelima was relieved, and she went to the eatery and sat on a chair waiting for the bus to restart. Some women sat around a round table nearby, busy indulging in talks about sudden weather changes and flooding, family and health issues, the neighbourhood, and nostalgia of adulthood in middle age. They laughed at intervals, waiting for the bus to restart. Neelima smiled at the patience women show in sharing their thoughts and feelings among themselves, which binds them to sisterhood. As she lifted the second cup of tea, Neelima spotted a tall man her age carrying a young boy on his shoulders, both of them having fun. At first, she smiled at him. Slowly, as the man approached her, Neelima found somebody's resemblance in him. It was him, Aarnav, her high school friend. He could recognise

her and waved his hand. Neelima reciprocated, and soon Aarnav was standing before her with the young boy. Aarnav said, "Hi, aren't you Neelima? Do you remember me?" "Oh, yes. Aarnav. You haven't changed much. How are you doing?" "All good. Meet my nephew, Nikhil," replied Aarnav. Neelima smiled and exchanged greetings with Nikhil. Nikhil soon went to buy some chocolates and Chips from the nearby shop. Neelima was curious about Nikhil and did ask Aarnav about him. Aarnav told her that Nikhil's parents died in a car accident two years ago. He had been staying with him and his mother in Guwahati. Neelima expressed her concern and was really surprised to learn about young Nikhil. Aarnav said they were travelling to attend his maternal uncle's daughter's marriage in Jorhat. His mother was already at his uncle's house. Neelima nodded and said, "Alright, I have come home on vacation. Will stay for a fortnight and leave for Delhi." Aarnav nodded, and soon, Nikhil joined them. He offered Neelima a chocolate bar, which she happily accepted. Nikhil liked her in the first meeting. Nikhil asked, "Aarnav mama, is she your good friend? Can she come along with us?" Aarnav nodded and realised it was a good idea to spend some more time with Neelima, his childhood crush, whom he had written a love letter to once when in school. But she didn't respond to it. She used to be a highly studious, no-nonsense girl in her school days. Every boy in her class knew it, so they preferred to keep their distance from her.

Neelima, too, in her mind, thought about how Aarnav used to be naughty and talkative in school. He had written her a love letter, and she got so angry that she stopped talking to him until the board exams, and even after that. Neelima recalled meeting him at a few friends' get-togethers during college, but they had not spoken for a long time. Aarnav insisted that she come along with them in his car. The bus was about to restart the journey. Neelima took her call and got in his car without thinking much. The tiny raindrops started falling again, accompanied by a cool breeze.

Neelima sat in the front of the car. Nikhil insisted and sat in the back. He could not resist showing her his drawing copy of the sketches he had made during the journey. Neelima was overjoyed to find Nikhil in the process of becoming an artist in future. She praised his artistic talent and encouraged him to draw more sketches and colour paintings. Aarnav was enjoying the ride, feeling good about the bonding forming among the three of them. Neelima's mind, though, was occupied with childhood thoughts about her and Aarnav's friendship. It was not a close one as she maintained a distance from him after his love letter. It was really childish of him, she felt. Neelima saw a changed Aarnav, a

mature man taking care of and fulfilling his responsibilities towards Nikhil.

In between, Nikhil asked Neelima some questions about her favourite colour, food, game, hobby, where she lives in Delhi, and whether she misses her home. Neelima answered all his queries, quenching his childhood thirst of questioning elders and showing off his thoughtful mind. Aarnav was always impressed by her dedication to her studies and her career. They would smile whenever their eyes met in silence. The playing of soft music, the drizzling rain, eating Chips and chocolates on the way, they had a wonderful time together.

By the time the car stopped at a Dhaba for lunch, the rain had stopped. Suddenly, the rays of sunlight appeared, beating the hovering clouds to their amazement. Nikhil ate his favourite gobi paranthas. Neelima and Aarnav had sumptuous veg thalis. After lunch, the car set out again, and Nikhil fell asleep. Neelima was clueless on what to talk about, as a few hours remained before they reached their hometown. Aarnav broke the silence and hesitantly asked, "Did you mind my childhood stupidity of writing a letter to you? I am really sorry for that. I wanted to be the hot guy to propose to the best girl in my class." He laughed and said, "But it didn't turn out that way. It was highly stupid of me to chase childhood love." Neelima laughed, too. She said, "Funny things happen at school. But we move on. Forget it." Aarnav asked, "Did you fall for somebody? I mean, you stay in Delhi. Do you have a boyfriend?" "No, not yet. I will get married directly. No time for love," and Neelima smiled. Aarnav paused for a second and said, "Well, that's a mature thought." Neelima asked, "What about you? Do you have a girlfriend?" "No. I have good female friends, but no love interests. Yes, I would like to fall in love with a sensible person." "Okay. Good thought," replied a cautious Neelima. They wanted to revive their old friendship and exchanged cell numbers to stay in touch.

Meanwhile, Nikhil woke up. After some time, he started drawing his next sketch while sitting in the car. It was the sketch of Neelima and Aarnav talking to each other. They found him seriously engaged in his work. Hours passed, and the car reached their hometown. Neelima got down in the main market area of their hometown, as she had to purchase sweets for home. Aarnav could not convince her to drop her off at home. Nikhil gifted her his sketch painting of them. They were happily surprised to see the beautiful sketch painting, a token of love from Nikhil. Neelima promised to frame the artwork and hang it on her home wall. Nikhil exchanged a warm hug with Neelima and sat in the car's front, promising to meet her again. Aarnav waved at her, and soon the car left for its journey.

Jatin Bora's Agnibaanhit screens in Assam - Why is it worth watching?



By: The Cinema Guy

Filmmaker Mrinmoy Arun Saikia's *Agnibaan*, which was released on February 6, 2026, experiments with a scale and form that are not routine in Assamese cinema. It is not a perfect film, but it is certainly an ambitious one. As it opens in the theatres of Assam, it is sure to uplift the production of action genre movies in Assamese cinema. Given below is a list of reasons why *Agnibaan* should be on your watchlist this season:

1. Jatin Bora Returns to Action Cinema

One of *Agnibaan*'s strongest draws is Jatin Bora's return to a full-fledged action role. This is a modern take on the Assamese action hero that we have all grown up watching. The film features tightly choreographed hand-to-hand combat sequences, stylised gunfights, and explosive set pieces that are shot in a manner closer to contemporary Bollywood action films, technically and thematically. Leading a covert team, operating outside the law to neutralise threats to Assamese society, Bora carries the action sequences like a seasoned performer and a leading man. The vigilante-like structure also gives the film a darker and a more complex moral landscape and Jatin Bora fits perfectly at its center.

2. Kamal Lochan's Jahangir Is a Solid Antagonist

Every great action film needs a villain who truly terrifies and *Agnibaan* delivers that in Jahangir. *Agnibaan* benefits from actor Kamal Lochan's performance, a villain who is written and performed without hesitation. Jahangir is openly psychotic,

unpredictable, and violent, and the film allows him to remain so without justification or redemption. Actor Kamal Lochan is clearly in strong form. He kills without remorse, reacts violently to the smallest provocation, and dominates every scene he appears in. With a cool new look, it is a performance that adds real weight to the conflict and raises the stakes for the protagonists. Unhinged, uncontrolled and unpredictable, Jahangir also deserves a film of his own. Makers of the film, please take note.

3. Engagement with Contemporary Social Issues

One of the more notable aspects of *Agnibaan* is its direct engagement with the present-day socio-political concerns of Assam. The film addresses issues such as drug trafficking, illegal immigration and social media hate situating the antagonism within a clearly defined social and political context. While the film takes a firm stand, it also attempts to reflect the complexity of the environment it portrays. In addition, *Agnibaan* also touches upon questions of feminism and the position of modern women in society, acknowledging their agency as well as the pressures they face.

4. The Zubeen Garg and Kulada Kumar Bhattacharya Factor

The film marks the last time Zubeen Garg sang for Jatin Bora after nearly two decades of cinematic collaborations of the duo. The romantic track *Jonome Jonome* from the film is a straight up nostalgic trip that represents a final moment in itself. This emotional aspect of the film also overlaps with another moment of significance - *Agnibaan* is the final screen appearance of veteran actor Kulada Kumar

Bhattacharya - a respected figure in Assamese theatre and cinema who passed away in 2024. He plays the role of a politician cum political kingmaker in the film.

5. Technical Ambition and Ensemble Support

From a technical standpoint, *Agnibaan*'s cinematography is slick and stylised. Moreover, there is also an emphasis on the scale and mood which sidelines the film from similar productions of the action genre. The film is also helped by an amazing supporting cast, that includes Himanshu Prasad Das, Kankana Chakraborty, Preeti Kongana, Siddharth Mukherjee, and Bobbeeta Sharma. Their performances help to ensure that the film maintain a constant momentum through the plot.

6. A Soundtrack with Gen Z Swagger

The film also taps into the pulse of a younger audience with an edgy, snazzy, and snappy soundtrack. Featuring tracks by Bishrut Saikia and Khogen famed Mxm (Mridul), the music choices in the film lends the film an uber-cool edge that aligns neatly with Gen Z sensibilities. It smartly captures some contrasting sensibilities, for example, Bishrut Saikia's sweet melodies on one end and Mxm's stylishly sung rap-song on the other.

7. End Note

Produced by Mayurakshee Sharma and Saiten Sharma, *Agnibaan* may divide opinion, but it deserves to be taken seriously for what it attempts. With a few sequences shot in foreign locations, it is bold, loud and ambitious in ways that Assamese films don't always try to be. The runtime even goes up to three hours expressing immense faith in an audience that struggles to watch a thirty seconds social media reel straight. *Agnibaan* proves that Assamese cinema can deliver action with style, ambition and confidence. It is also well promoted with posters for the film bringing a new wave of stylish poster design for Assamese cinema.

The film also teases a strong cameo by actor Ravi Sharma who appears as the Legend, the criminal mastermind behind all things immoral in the film, as it ends with the promise of a sequel. Now we only hope that the sequel comes out soon. Also not to miss, a very special cameo by Bhaimon Da fame Bondip Sarma in the film.

Social media and the legacy of Zubeen Garg

By: Rupak G. Duarah

The unparalleled contributions made by Zubeen Garg to Assamese music, culture and society is widely acclaimed and remembered forever. He was not just a singer and composer but a true cultural icon whose melodious voice and heartfelt creations touched millions of hearts across generations. His songs have been an integral part of our festivals, emotions and identity as Assamese people.

It is deeply distressing to witness recent attempts by certain individuals on social media to deliberately diminish his reputation through controversial, derogatory, and defamatory comments. Following his unfortunate demise in the month of September, 2025, while the state and his fans continue to mourn and seek justice, a section of people has resorted to spreading baseless allegations, character assassination, and offensive remarks targeting not only Zubeen Garg but also his family. Such posts, including those questioning his legacy, personal life and the circumstances of his passing in a provocative manner have caused immense pain to his grieving family, fans and the entire Assamese community.

These malicious efforts appear aimed at distorting public sentiment, provoking division, and undermining the dignity of a departed legend who dedicated his life to promoting Assamese culture through his art. It is particularly regrettable when such comments cross the line into hate speech, defamation and attempts to disturb public harmony—actions that have already prompted legal complaints from his wife, Garima Saikia Garg, the Zubeen Garg Fan Club and others, leading to police action in some cases.

Social media, while a powerful tool for expression, should not become a platform for unchecked toxicity or character assassination, especially against someone who brought so much pride and joy to Assam. The authority must continue taking swift and firm action against those who indulge in such cyber offenses, ensuring that the law deters future attempts to malign revered personalities. Moreover, all citizens, netizens and media platforms are also required to uphold respect for Zubeen Garg's memory. We must remember him for his immense talent, humility and love for Assam rather than allowing fringe voices to overshadow his legacy. (The author can be reached at ritu.duarah@gmail.com)

Prime Minister in Malaysia; cites trade deals with EU, US Trust has become India's strongest currency, says Modi

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 7: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday said India is seen as a "trusted partner for growth" and it was reflected in the recent trade deals it has agreed with various countries, including the UK, USA and the EU.

Addressing a community programme here, Modi said the Indian diaspora served as a living bridge between India and Malaysia and announced a new consulate in the archipelago nation and the Thiruvalluvar Scholarship to enable students to study in India.

Modi, who arrived in Kuala Lumpur on Saturday on a two-day visit, referred to the trade deals India agreed with various countries and said India is seen as a "trusted partner for growth".

"Trust has become India's strongest currency," Modi said, citing trade deals with the UK, UAE, Australia, New Zealand, Oman, the EU and the US. Malaysia is home to nearly three million people of Indian descent, the second largest in the world, with an overwhelming majority of Tamil origin.

Greeting the Indian community members in different languages, the prime minister made it a point to highlight the singing abilities of his Malaysian counterpart Anwar Ibrahim, particularly his love of Tamil songs of legendary actor-politician M G Ramachandran (MGR).

"Tamil is India's gift to the world. Tamil literature is eternal, and Tamil culture is global. Tamil people have served humanity with their talents," Modi said, recalling that India's Vice President C P Radhakrishnan and Union ministers S Jaishankar, Nirmala Sitharaman and L Murugan, were from Tamil Nadu.

"The Tamil diaspora has been here for many centuries. Inspired by this history, we are proud to have established the Tiruvalluvar chair at the University of Malaya. We will now set up our Tiruvalluvar Centre to further strengthen our shared heritage," the prime minister said.

Modi said he was very delighted to be in Malaysia which is his first foreign visit in 2026. "India will always embrace you with open arms. That is why, just a few months ago, we took a historic decision to extend OCI card eligibility to Malaysian citizens of Indian origin up to the sixth generation," he said.

Modi said the Malaysian prime minister, who was present at the event, and he have been friends even before Ibrahim became prime minister. "India's success is Malaysia's success, and it is Asia's success," Modi said, adding that the guiding word of the relationship was IMPACT - India-Malaysia Partnership for Advancing Collective Transformation.

The prime minister said India and Malaysia walk hand-in-hand as partners for progress and prosperity, celebrating each other's successes as their own. "I was deeply touched by Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim's warm wishes on the historic success of Chandrayaan-3. I fully agree with my dear friend, India's success is Malaysia's success, and Asia's success. This spirit of shared impact defines our relationship," he said.



Earlier, Modi and his Malaysian counterpart received a rousing welcome at the event. Over 800 dancers showcased a tapestry of Indian classical and folk dances, including Bharatanatyam, Kathak, Kathakali, Kuchipudi, Yakshagana, Lavani and Odissi.

Modi and Ibrahim, who travelled to the venue in the same car, arrived on the stage amid slogans of 'Bharat Mata Ki Jai' and chants of 'Modi, Modi'. An announcement was made that the dance performance had entered the Malaysian Book of Records for the most number of performers in an Indian dance performance.

"I am personally excited to have a great friend from India joining us in Malaysia," Ibrahim told the gathering. The Malaysian prime minister recalled ancient ties between the two nations "long before embassies and trade agreements" came in vogue.

Yemen's ruling council names new cabinet after deadly clashes in south

CAIRO, Feb 7: The head of Yemen's ruling leadership council has named a new cabinet, weeks after deadly clashes in the country's south and the dissolution of a separatist group.

The escalation has exposed cracks in a Saudi-led coalition fighting Iranian-backed Houthi rebels. Rashad al-Alimi, head of the Presidential Leadership Council, announced the cabinet in a presidential decree published by the country's state-run SABA news agency late Friday.

The 35-member cabinet is chaired by Prime Minister Shae' al-Zandani, who also serves as foreign minister. It included only two women: Afrah al-Zouba, minister of planning and international cooperation, and Ahd Jaasous, state minister for women's affairs.

Maj. Gen. Taher al-Aqli was appointed defence minister and Maj. Gen. Ibrahim Haidan will lead the Interior Ministry. Both will oversee Saudi-backed efforts to dismantle militias of the separatist Southern Presidential Council, which is supported by the United Arab Emirates.

Yemen has been mired for more than a decade in a civil war that involves a complex interplay of sectarian and tribal grievances and the involvement of regional powers. The Iran-aligned Houthis control the most populous regions in the north, including the capital Sanaa. Meanwhile, a loose regional coalition of powers — including Saudi Arabia and the UAE — has backed the internationally recognised government in the south.

The Southern Transitional Council is part of the anti-Houthi camp, but it seeks an independent state in southern Yemen. In December, STC forces advanced into the provinces of Hadramout and Mahra, where they seized oil-rich areas and facilities and the presidential palace in the main southern city of Aden. They pushed out forces affiliated with the Saudi-supported National Shield Forces, another group aligned with the anti-Houthi coalition.

Drone attack by paramilitary group in Sudan kills 24, including 8 children, doctors' group says

CAIRO, Feb 7: A drone attack by a notorious paramilitary group hit a vehicle carrying displaced families in central Sudan Saturday, killing at least 24 people, including eight children, a doctors' group said, a day after a World Food Program aid convoy was targeted.

Saturday's attack by the Rapid Support Forces occurred close to the city of Rahad in North Kordofan province, said the Sudan Doctors Network, which tracks the country's ongoing war. The vehicle was transporting displaced people who fled fighting in the Dubeiker area, the group said in a statement.

Among the dead children were two infants. Several others were wounded and taken for treatment in Rahad, which suffers severe medical supplies shortages, like many areas in the Kordofan region, the statement said.

The doctors' group urged the international community and rights organisations to "take immediate action to protect civilians and hold the RSF leadership directly accountable for these violations." There was no immediate comment from the RSF, which has been at war against the Sudanese military for control of the country

for about three years. Sudan plunged into chaos in April 2023 when a power struggle between the military and the RSF exploded into open fighting in the capital, Khartoum, and elsewhere in the country, leaving tens of thousands dead and millions displaced.

WFP aid convoy attacked An attack on Friday on a WFP aid convoy in North Kordofan province, which killed one and wounded several others, said Denise Brown, the UN humanitarian coordinator in Sudan. Brown said the convoy was heading to deliver "life-saving food assistance" to displaced people in the city of Obeid in North Kordofan when it was struck. The attack burned the trucks and destroyed the aid, he said.

"Attacks on aid operations undermine efforts to reach people facing hunger and displacement," he said in a statement. Last week, a drone strike hit close to a WFP facility in the Blue Nile province, wounding a WFP worker, Brown also said.

Emergency Lawyers, an independent group documenting atrocities in Sudan, blamed the RSF for the attack, while the Sudan Doctors Network called it a "flagrant violation of international humanitarian law and amounts to a full-fledged war crime."

Massad Boulos, a US adviser for African and Arab affairs, condemned the attack on X and called for holding those responsible accountable. "Destroying food intended for people in need and killing humanitarian workers is sickening," he said. "The Trump Administration has zero tolerance for this destruction of life and of US-funded assistance; we demand accountability."

In recent months, Kordofan has become a flashpoint in the war, and the army managed to break the RSF siege of two major cities in the region earlier this year. The devastating war has so far killed more than 40,000 people, according to UN figures, but aid groups say that is an undercount and the true number could be many times higher.

It created the world's largest humanitarian crisis with over 14 million people forced to flee their homes. It has fueled disease outbreaks and pushed parts of the country into famine that still spreads as the war shows no sign of abating. (AP)

Justice Dept will allow lawmakers to see unredacted versions of released Epstein files

WASHINGTON, Feb 7: The Department of Justice will allow members of Congress to review unredacted files on the convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein starting on Monday, according to a letter that was sent to lawmakers.

The letter obtained by The Associated Press says that lawmakers will be able to review unredacted versions of the more than 3 million files that the Justice Department has released to comply with a law passed by Congress last year.

To access the files, lawmakers will need to give the Justice Department 24 hours' notice. They will be able to review the files on computers at the Department of Justice. Only lawmakers, not their staff, will have access to the files and they will be permitted to take notes but not make electronic copies.

The arrangement, first reported by NBC News, showed the continued demand for information on Epstein and his crimes by lawmakers, even after the Justice Department devoted large numbers of its staff to comply with the law passed by Congress last year.

The Justice Department has come under criticism for delays in the release of information, failing to redact the personal information and photos of victims and not releasing the entire 6 million documents collected in relation to Epstein.

Still, lawmakers central to the push for transparency, described the concession by the Justice Department as a victory. "When Congress pushes back, Congress can prevail," Rep Ro Khanna, who sponsored what's known as the Epstein Files Transparency Act, posted on social media.

Khanna has pointed to several e-mails between Epstein and individuals whose information was redacted that appeared to refer to the sexual abuse of underage girls. The release of the case files has prompted inquiries around the world about men who cavorted with the well-connected financier. Still, lawmakers are pressing for a further reckoning over anyone who may have had knowledge of Epstein's abuse or could have helped facilitate it.

Three arrested in Peshawar linked to suicide attack at Shia mosque in Pakistan's capital

ISLAMABAD/PESHAWAR, Feb 7: Pakistan's police have arrested two men and a woman in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Peshawar linked to a suicide attack at a Shia mosque in Islamabad on Friday. At least 31 people were killed and 169 others injured when a suicide bomber blew himself up at Khadijah al-Kubra mosque-cum-inmabargah in the Tarlari area of Islamabad, in one of the worst terror attacks targeting the community in recent years.

A police official said that during the operation late on Friday night, two brothers of the alleged suicide bomber and a woman were arrested and interrogation is currently underway. According to investigation officials, an identity card recovered from them helped establish the attacker's identity as Yasir. Official records show that his permanent address was Abbas Colony, Shiro Jangi, Charsadda Road, Peshawar, while his temporary residence was in Ganj Mohalla Qaziyan, Peshawar.

Investigators have also revealed that prior to the Islamabad suicide bombing, the attacker had remained in Afghanistan for approximately five months where he allegedly received formal training in weapons handling and suicide attacks. (PTI)

Iran, US hold indirect talks in Oman

America's military leader in Mideast joins talks



MUSCAT, Feb 7: Iran and the US have held indirect talks in Oman, in negotiations that appeared to return to the starting point on how to approach discussions over Tehran's nuclear programme. But for the first time, America brought its top military commander in the Middle East to the table.

The presence of US Navy Adm Brad Cooper, head of the military's Central Command, in his dress uniform at the talks in Muscat, the Omani capital, on Friday served as a reminder that the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln and other warships were now off the coast of Iran in the Arabian Sea.

President Donald Trump said the United States had "very good" talks on Iran and said more were planned for early next week. But he kept up the pressure, warning that if the country didn't make a deal over its nuclear programme, "the consequences are very steep".

"Iran looks like they want to make a deal very badly — as they should," Trump told reporters aboard Air Force One as he headed to his Florida golf club late Friday. He suggested Iran was willing to "do more" than in previous talks but did not give details. Asked how long he was willing to wait for a deal, Trump said: "We have plenty of time. If you remember Venezuela, we waited around for a while. We're in no rush." The Trump administration built up a huge military presence in the Caribbean Sea in the months before a US raid captured then-Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro in January.

Trump has repeatedly threatened to use force to compel Iran to reach a deal on the programme after earlier sending the carrier to the region amid Tehran's bloody crackdown on nationwide protests that killed thousands and saw tens of thousands of others detained in the Islamic Republic.

Gulf Arab nations fear an attack could spark a regional war that would drag them in as well. That threat is real — US forces shot down an Iranian drone near the Lincoln and Iran attempted to stop

a US-flagged ship in the Strait of Hormuz just days before Friday's talks in this sultanate on the eastern edge of the Arabian Peninsula. "We did note that nuclear talks and the resolution of the main issues must take place in a calm atmosphere, without tension and without threats," Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi later told journalists.

"The prerequisite for any dialogue is refraining from threats and pressure," he added. Araghchi said diplomats would return to their capitals, signalling this round of negotiations was over. The US was represented by Mideast special envoy Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law.

In a display of force, the US military published photos on X of the Lincoln carrier group sailing in the Arabian Sea with aircraft flying overhead, with the message "Peace through Strength!". Araghchi offered cautious optimism as he spoke in a live interview from Muscat on Iranian state television. He said Friday's talks were focused primarily on finding a framework for further negotiations.

"We will hold consultations with our capitals regarding the next steps, and the results will be conveyed to Oman's foreign minister," Araghchi said. "The mistrust that has developed is a serious challenge facing the negotiations," Araghchi said. "We must first address this issue, and then enter into the next level of negotiations."

Omani Foreign Minister Badr al-Busaidi, who oversaw multiple rounds of negotiations before Israel launched its 12-day war on Iran in June, called the talks "useful to clarify both the Iranian and American thinking and identify areas for possible progress."

The talks had initially been expected to take place in Turkey in a format that would have included regional countries as well, and would have included topics like Tehran's ballistic missile programme — something Iran apparently rejected in favour of focusing only on its nuclear programme. (AP)

France urges Iran-backed groups to show restraint if US-Iran tensions escalate

BEIRUT, Feb 7: Iran-backed groups in the Middle East should exercise the "greatest restraint" if there is regional escalation between Iran and the United States to avoid destabilising the region, France's foreign minister said on Friday.

Jean-Noël Barrot made his comments in Beirut, where he arrived earlier in the day after visiting Syria and Iraq. His visit also comes as the US and Iran held indirect talks in Oman on how to approach discussions over Tehran's nuclear programme. There have been concerns in the region that if the United States attacks Iran, Iran-backed groups in Iraq, Yemen and Lebanon could join the war, worsening the situation.

to exercise the greatest restraint in the whole region so as not to worsen a situation," Barrot said after holding talks with Lebanese leaders. "That would profoundly destabilise the Near and Middle East," he warned. He added that a military escalation in the region is a risk that must be avoided at all cost, adding that it is neither in the interest of the countries in the region, nor in the interests of France.

The French official discussed the ongoing process to disarm Lebanon's Iran-backed Hezbollah group and a conference that is scheduled to be held next month in France to support the Lebanese army that has been expanding its presence in southern Lebanon along the border with Israel after the 14-month Israel-Hezbollah war. (AP)

US approves weed killer dicamba for two common genetically modified crops

WASHINGTON, Feb 7: The Environmental Protection Agency has reapproved the weed killer dicamba for use on genetically modified soybeans and cotton, a pesticide that has raised widespread concern over its tendency to drift and destroy nearby crops.

The agency on Friday said dicamba was critical for farmers who would otherwise have their crops threatened by fast growing weeds. To ensure the pesticide is used safely, the agency said it imposed strong protections and limits on its use. Dicamba is a common weed killer that can be sprayed on top of genetically engineered crops. It kills the weeds but doesn't hurt the crops. It has been in use for decades, but it has become more widespread on farms in recent years.



Advocates sharply criticised the agency, saying they are moving forward after courts blocked similar efforts in 2020 and 2024. Allowing its use on these two common crops will drastically expand how much is applied and increase harm, advocates say.

ical treadmill where many farmers are trapped." The EPA said growers want the weed killer and they need to be supported — and that isn't a MAHA versus EPA issue.

The agency said concerns about dicamba drifting to places where it was not intended are real and must be managed. It set limits on how much can be applied per acre, how much can be applied on hot days and established buffer zones to prevent harm to nearby crops. If followed, the chemical can be used without threatening humans or the environment, according to EPA.

The American Soybean Association applauded the decision, saying clear rules would help farmers prepare for the next growing season and control destructive weeds. Environmental groups said dicamba drift has damaged immense acreage, devastating vegetable farms, trees and other critical plants.

"When push comes to shove, this administration is willing to bend over backward to appease the pesticide industry, regardless of the consequences to public health or the environment," said Nathan Donley, environmental health science director at the nonprofit Centre for Biological Diversity.

Environmentalists said the EPA's use restrictions are insufficient, allowing application for too much of the time and for too many days of the year. The buffer the agency uses to prevent harm to nearby plants has already proved ineffective, they said.

Researchers have been working to better understand its health risks. A 2020 study in the International Journal of Epidemiology found that dicamba exposure was linked to an increased risk for some cancers, including liver cancer and a type of leukemia affecting the blood and bone marrow.

Arunachal CM says framework will ease exports, cut costs and spur tech growth India-US interim trade pact will make country's businesses more competitive: Pema Khandu



ITANAGAR, Feb 7: Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu on Saturday said the India-US interim trade framework will make Indian businesses more competitive in global markets.

He said the framework has the potential to reduce compliance burdens, streamline export procedures and bring down costs for consumers.

He credited the initiative to the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"Under the leadership of PM Narendra Modi ji, the India-US trade framework is making it easier, faster and more competitive for Indian businesses to reach global markets," Khandu said in a post on X.

Emphasising practical benefits for exporters,

he said the arrangement would help eliminate repetitive testing and certification processes.

"Indian exporters will face fewer duplicate procedures, saving time, cost and effort," he said, adding that alignment of standards would improve efficiency and competitiveness.

"Smoother trade pathways and reduced tariff barriers will help Indian digital products and technology components integrate deeper into global value chains," he said.

Khandu said the development would encourage the growth of startups, artificial intelligence, electronics, SaaS and fintech sectors, creating high-quality jobs for the country's youth while strengthening India's position as a trusted global technology partner and digital innovation hub. (PTI)

Tripura Police arrests Myanmar national staying illegally in Agartala

AGARTALA, Feb 7: Tripura Police on Saturday arrested a Myanmar national for illegally staying in Hapania area here without any valid documents, an officer said. The accused, identified as Kabil Anam, had been residing in the area for the past two months without valid documents, police said.

Acting on a specific tip-off, a team from Amtali police station conducted a raid and detained him from Hapania area.

A case has been registered against him under relevant sections of the law and an investigation has been started, the officer said.

Officer-in-Charge of Amtali Police Station, Paritosh Das, said further details would emerge during the course of the investigation. (PTI)

Nagaland University professor receives ISEE Fellow Award

HT Correspondent
DIMAPUR, Feb 7: Dr KK Jha, professor in the department of agricultural extension education, Nagaland University, has been conferred with the prestigious Indian Society of Extension Education (ISEE) Fellow Award 2026-27 in recognition of his outstanding contributions to the field of extension education and professional service. The award was conferred by the Indian Society of Extension Education (ISEE), New Delhi, during the ISEE national seminar on 'Digital technologies for sustainable food systems and Atmanirbhar Bharat', held recently in Goa, a varsity release said on Friday.

Dr Jha is currently serving as the vice-president of the ISEE, New Delhi. With decades of academic and professional experience, his areas of expertise include agricultural extension, technology transfer, agro-ecological studies, impact assessment of development programmes, entrepreneurship development and sustainability of farming systems.

Nagaland University vice-chancellor Prof. JK Patnaik congratulated Dr Jha on being conferred the prestigious ISEE Fellow Award 2026-27 and said the university is proud of the achievement. Prof Patnaik stated that the honour reflects Dr Jha's outstanding contributions to extension education and his dedicated professional service. He added that as vice-president of the ISEE, New Delhi, Dr Jha has consistently demonstrated leadership, scholarship and commitment to national development through education.

Sikkim govt sets up board to facilitate overseas employment for youth New body to train, mobilise and ensure ethical foreign placements

GANGTOK, Feb 7: The Sikkim government has constituted a board to train youth and facilitate ethical and remunerative employment opportunities in foreign countries, officials said on Saturday.

The Foreign Employment and Recruitment Facilitation Board has been set up under the Skill Development Department, they said.

The board aims to create a robust institutional mechanism to support mobilisation, training and placement of skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled youth from Sikkim for overseas employment, they added.

MLA Madan Cintury, who is also the advisor to the Skill Development Department, will head the five-member board. The Skill Development Secretary will be among its members, while one member will be nominated by the state government as a domain expert.

The board will formulate policies, frameworks and strategies to promote safe, lawful and ethical overseas employment, according to a notification issued by Chief Secretary R Telang on February 5.

It will facilitate international placements through partnerships with empanelled recruitment agencies registered with the Protector General of Emigrants under the Ministry of External Affairs, the notification said.



The board will also oversee mobilisation, counselling, skill development and foreign language training of prospective candidates through empanelled training partners. In addition, it will supervise placement, migration support and post-placement assistance, besides facilitating employer engagement, recruitment drives and MoUs with foreign agencies.

The notification further stated that the board will ensure pre-departure orientation, awareness on safe migration and counselling on rights, obligations and working and living conditions abroad in coordination with training partners and recruitment agencies under the supervision of Niyukti Kendra.

A grievance redressal mechanism for emigrants will also be established. The board will be empowered to take necessary steps for complaint resolution, provide repatriation assistance and initiate corrective action against erring recruitment agencies or employers. (PTI)

Kuki-Zo students' body opposes new government in Manipur; demands separate administration

NEW DELHI, Feb 7: The Kuki Students' Organisation (KSO), Delhi and NCR, has expressed "firm opposition" to the installation of a new government in Manipur saying it lacks "moral or political legitimacy" in the eyes of Kuki-Zo people, who continue to endure displacement, insecurity and trauma.

Members of the students' organisation held a protest at Jantar Mantar here on Saturday, seeking justice, rehabilitation and accountability for victims of the ethnic violence in Manipur.

In a statement, the group said the imposition of administrative normalcy without justice, accountability and the consent of the affected communities is unacceptable, demanding a separate administration for the hill districts.



"The scale and sustained character of violence inflicted since May 2023 have created an irreversible political rupture," the students' body said, adding that the Kuki-Zo people no longer consider themselves as belonging to the political and administrative framework of the violence-torn state.

The KSO opposed the recent installation of a "so-called popular government" in Manipur, urging the Centre for immediate acceleration of political dialogue toward a Separate Administration under a Union Territory with Legislature (Article 239 A, Pondicherry model), ensuring autonomy and constitutional safeguards.

"This government does not carry moral or political legitimacy in the eyes of the Kuki-Zo people, who continue to live under displacement, insecurity and trauma.

The imposition of administrative normalcy without justice, accountability and the consent of the affected community is unacceptable," the statement said.

The students' body also sought arrest and investigation against individuals and groups responsible for violence, including the leadership of Arambai Tengol and legal action to prevent further extremist activity.

It called for an investigation into the alleged leaked audio recordings involving former Chief Minister N Biren Singh and accountability under due process of law, seeking justice and prosecution in all crimes committed against Kuki-Zo victims.

Sanctioning of critical infrastructure, including an airport in Kuki-Zo areas, to address severe transportation challenges, also found mention in its demands.

BJP leader Y Khemchand Singh was sworn in as chief minister of Manipur on Wednesday, ending nearly a year of President's Rule in the state.

BJP MLA Nemcha Kipgen, who belongs to the Kuki community and Naga People's Front legislator L Dikho took oath as deputy chief ministers of Manipur.

President's Rule was imposed in the state after the BJP-led government headed by N Biren Singh dissolved on February 9 last year, following months of ethnic violence. The 60-member assembly, with its tenure till 2027, was put on suspended animation after imposition of President's Rule.

Manipur has been gripped by ethnic conflict between the Meitei and Kuki communities since May 2023, after a 'Tribal Solidarity March' organised in the hill districts in protest of the Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe status.

Since then, at least 260 people, including members of both communities as well as security personnel, have been killed in the violence, while thousands become displaced. (PTI)

Mizoram health minister bats for behavioural approach to prevent HIV

AIZAWL, Feb 7: Amid growing concern over the rising HIV cases in the Northeast, Mizoram Health Minister Lalrinpui stressed the need for a behavioural approach as the first line of defence against new infections.

Addressing the North-East Multimedia Campaign (Red Fest) in Aizawl on Friday, the minister called for a renewed focus on the ABC approach -- abstinence, being faithful to one partner and correct and consistent use of condoms, which she described as the most effective method to prevent and control HIV transmission.

"The ABC approach remains the core principle in our fight against HIV. Returning to these basics is essential to ensure a risk-free future for our youth," Lalrinpui said.

The event was jointly organised by the Mizoram State AIDS Control Society (MSACS) and the National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO) to promote HIV/AIDS awareness across the Northeastern states.

The minister said the campaign aims to educate young people about HIV/AIDS, encourage healthy lifestyles and risk-free behaviour, ensure easier access to treatment for those affected and eliminate stigma associated with the disease.

Expressing concern over the high HIV prevalence in the region, Lalrinpui urged Northeastern states to intensify collective efforts as a shared commitment to halt further spread of the infection.

"The Northeastern states continue to record the highest HIV prevalence rate in the country. With unity, sustained effort and hope, controlling HIV/AIDS is an

achievable goal," she said.

Chief Secretary Khilli Ram Meena, who was also present at the event, said discrimination continues to be a major barrier to HIV testing and treatment.

"Collective responsibility and empathy are essential to building a society where people living with HIV can live with dignity and equal opportunity," he said.

Mizoram, Nagaland and Manipur are the only states in the country with HIV prevalence rates near or exceeding 1 per cent, making them the highest-burden states nationally, officials said.

Despite improvements in preventive measures, Mizoram continues to record the highest adult HIV prevalence rate in the country at 2.73 per cent, compared to the national average of 0.20 per cent, they said. (PTI)

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Arunachal Guv stresses need to strengthen border roads

Parnaik reviews BRO projects, stresses quality and timely completion

ITANAGAR, Feb 7: Arunachal Pradesh Governor Lt Gen K T Parnaik (Retd) on Saturday stressed the need to strengthen border road infrastructure in the state, stating that strategic roads are vital lifelines for national security and the well-being of frontier communities.

He said that roads must be built to the highest standards and completed on time.

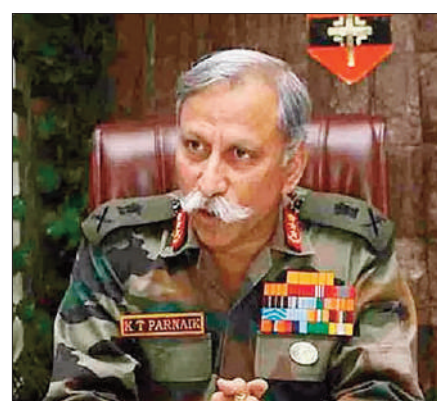
During a meeting with Director General of Border Roads (DGBR) Lt Gen Harpal Singh at Lok Bhavan here, the governor said that any delay or substandard execution directly affects connectivity, emergency response and the daily lives of people in remote and difficult terrain.

The two held detailed discussions on the progress of border road projects and their role in accelerating socio-economic development and improving the quality of life in remote and border areas, an official statement said.

The DGBR apprised the governor of future plans related to the Frontier Highway and other sensitive road alignments, which are being taken up on priority.

The governor appreciated the high-quality roads constructed by the Border Roads Organisation (BRO), noting that improved connectivity has transformed border villages by enabling better access to education, healthcare, markets and livelihood opportunities.

He said enhanced mobility has boosted economic activity, strengthened social integration and reinforced national presence in far-flung areas of the northeastern state.



Parnaik added that the improved road network is providing strong momentum to the Centre's vibrant village programme by turning border settlements into centres of growth, resilience and opportunity.

The governor also commended the BRO for its goodwill initiatives, including organising medical camps for workers, setting up play and learning rooms for labourers' children and carrying out cleanliness drives along riverfronts, reflecting its commitment to social responsibility alongside infrastructure development.

Singh assured Parnaik that the BRO remains fully committed to delivering its best for Arunachal Pradesh, with a continued focus on strengthening connectivity, welfare and overall development of the people of the frontier state. (PTI)

Body of missing Tripura tourist recovered from Dzukou Valley

HT Correspondent
DIMAPUR, Feb 7: The body of a tourist from Tripura who had gone missing at Dzukou Valley in Kohima district on January 4 has been recovered.

The Kohima police on Saturday confirmed the recovery of the body of Pranab Das (22), son of Niranjan Das, of Malayanagar, Nepali Tilla, under Srinagar district of Tripura.

Kohima police PRO, in a release, said information was received at around 4.20 PM on Friday regarding the presence of a dead body on the riverbank below Dzukou Valley helipad.

A team comprising Kohima police, district administration, Southern Angami Youth Organisation (SAYO) and volunteers from neighbouring villages reached the location in the early hours of Saturday and recovered the body.

Police said during an inquiry at the spot in the presence of the district administration and independent witnesses, personal belongings, including a Dzukou Valley entry slip in the name of Das, two mobile handsets with mouthpieces, a brown wallet containing cash and identification documents were recovered.

The body was shifted with the assistance of SAYO volunteers and later brought to the South police station.

The family members of the deceased were informed accordingly, who requested that no post-mortem examination be conducted till their arrival in Kohima.

The body is presently being kept at the police station morgue awaiting the arrival of the relatives for further legal formalities.

The police said it is too premature to arrive at any definitive conclusion regarding the cause of the death. However, based on the preliminary observations at the scene and available materials, there was no indication of foul play at present.

During the investigation of the case No 0005/26 U/S 140(2) BNS at South Police Station, lodged on January 6, relating to the

disappearance of Das, it was established that he checked into a home stay at Lerie Colony in Kohima on January 2 and was last seen leaving the premises early morning on January 4.

Das had booked an entry ticket to Dzukou Valley on the same day from the Viswema entry point.

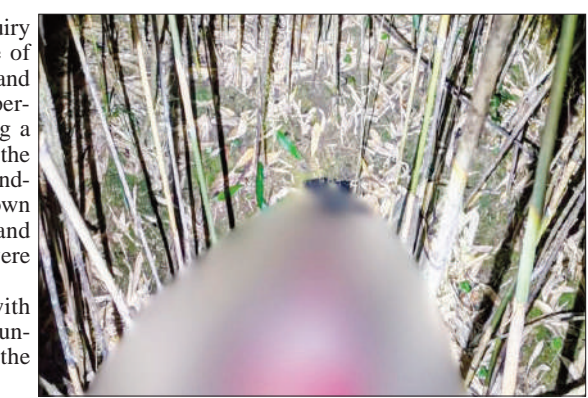
Police said statements of the caretaker of the home stay, taxi driver, family members and other relevant witnesses were recorded after registration of the case.

Technical analysis, including CDR, CAF, bank account verification and examination of available CCTV footage from nearby establishments, was also carried out.

The Kohima police, in close coordination with the SAYO, district administration and Nagaland State Disaster Management Authority, conducted multiple search and recovery operations at Dzukou Valley. Drone-assisted searches were also undertaken, covering difficult and inaccessible terrains. Despite sustained efforts, the missing person could not be traced during earlier operations, the police said.

The Kohima police thanked the SAYO and the volunteers of neighboring villages for their tireless efforts, coordination and local knowledge in locating and retrieving the body from the difficult terrain of Dzukou Valley.

Police also acknowledged the support extended by the district administration, NSDMA and all involved in the prolonged search and recovery operations.



Churachandpur limps back to normalcy after two days of protests

IMPHAL, Feb 7: Normalcy began returning to parts of Manipur's Churachandpur district on Saturday morning after two days of protests, police said.

The violent protests began on Thursday after three BJP legislators from the Kuki-Zo and Hmar communities joined Meitei MLAs to form a government in the ethnic strife-hit state.

MLA Nemcha Kipgen joined the Y Khemchand Singh-led government as deputy chief minister, while LM Khaute and N Sanate supported her.

The demonstrations were largely confined to the stretch between Tuibong and Kangvai in Churachandpur town, unlike earlier instances when disturbances had spread across the district headquarters, police said.

While most areas of Churachandpur town witnessed a resumption of business activities, several shops in the Tuibong area remained closed, they said.

Additional security forces have been deployed to prevent any untoward incidents, they added.

Two tribal bodies imposed a "total shutdown" in Kuki-dominated Churachandpur, while rallies were held in Kangpokpi and Tengnoupal districts, alleging that the legislators betrayed their community.

The Kuki-Zo groups have been demanding a separate administrative unit for them, as the violence that broke out in May 2023 deeply divided the state on ethnic lines, with members of the two communities not venturing into each other's areas.

Over 260 people have been killed and thousands displaced in the ethnic clashes. The state has been under the President's Rule for one year, before Singh took oath as the chief minister on Wednesday. (PTI)

No. KED/NIT-66/2025-26/244 Dated, Kokrajhar the 7th February, 2026

DETAILS TENDER NOTICE

Sealed tender in prescribed form affixing non-refundable Court Fee Stamp of Rs 8.25 (Rupees Eight & twenty five paisa) only subsequently to be drawn up in printed "F-2 Form" Documents with validity period of 90 (Ninety) days from the date of receipt of Tenders are Invited from the Registered Class-I (A, B, C) & Class-II PWD Electrical Contractor under the Addl. Chief Engineer, (Electrical) Chandmari, Guwahati-3, Superintending Engineer, PWD Guwahati Electrical Circle, Fancy Bazar, Guwahati-1 and the Registered Class-III, PWD Kokrajhar Electrical Division, Kokrajhar of 2025-26 and having valid Electrical Contractor License for the following electrical works and will be received in the Office of the undersigned up to 2.30p.m. on 14-02-2026 and will be opened at 3.00p.m. of the same date. The Contractors or their authorized agents may be present at the time of opening tender.

Sl. No.	Name of work	Approx. Estimated Value	Time of Completion	Cost of Tender document (in Rs.)	Earnest Money
1	Installation of Chimney at the Residential Quarters of the Judicial Officers at Dhubri	11,05,812.00	6 (six) months	Rs. 1000.00	General 2% (P.C) of Tender value 1% of Tender value in case of SC/ST/BC
2	Installation of Geysers in each Govt Residential Quarters of the Judicial Officers, Dhubri under District & session Judge, Dhubri	7,92,275.00	3 (three) months	Rs. 1000.00	

The Contractors shall be received the Tender Documents forms the Office of the Executive Engineer, PWD Kokrajhar Electrical Division, Kokrajhar during working hour by submitting the cost of Tender Document with a non-refundable fees as indicated in the table above, by Indian crossed Order payable to the undersigned up to 3.00p.m. Dated 13-02-2026 on application mentioned registration No. etc. No. application for issue of tender document will be received after the deadline as mentioned.

Sd/- Executive Engineer, PWD,
Kokrajhar Electrical Division, Kokrajhar

IPR(BTC)/C/2025-26/3942

Oppn to be squarely blamed for PM skipping debate in Lok Sabha: Rijju

PATNA, Feb 7: Union Minister for Parliamentary Affairs Kiren Rijju on Saturday squarely blamed the opposition for Prime Minister Narendra Modi skipping the reply, in Lok Sabha, to the debate on Motion of Thanks to the President's address.

The BJP leader claimed that before Modi was scheduled to make his speech, "40-50 MPs" had barged into Speaker Om Birla's chamber where they "spoke in a nasty way", which "made us decide that it would be better if the PM stayed away".

Rijju, who addressed a press conference at the BJP office here, was responding to a query about the opposition's charge that the PM did not face the Lok Sabha as he was wary of charges levelled by Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi, who had cited remarks about skirmishes with Chinese forces in a book authored by former Army chief M M Naravane.

"Let me be very clear that we are not afraid of anything. We are in power. We could have simply smothered our detractors inside the House by calling in the marshals. But we do not believe in such undemocratic behaviour. So, initially, we tried to get the opposition at the negotiation table," Rijju said.



"But we took a different decision after 40-50 opposition MPs stormed into the chamber of Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla and spoke nastily ('anap shanap bole'). We realised they were itching for a fight and it would be better if the PM did not come to the House," he added. "As a result, the PM, who went on to give a detailed speech in the Rajya Sabha, skipped the debate in the Lok Sabha, upon our request. Of course, we had the numbers so the Motion of Thanks was passed in Lok Sabha through voice vote," the minister said.

Earlier, talking to reporters at the

airport, Rijju had charged Gandhi, a former Congress president, with indulging in "frivolous rhetoric to remain in headlines" by claiming that his attacks on Modi had made the PM "flee the Parliament and he would be made to flee the country, too". "The nation has made so much progress under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Now, the people of the country will never again repose their trust in the Congress which has weakened the country so much in the 60 years it enjoyed power," he alleged.

At the press conference that he

addressed after taking part in a function on the Bihar Assembly premises, Rijju also underscored that economic reforms will take place at a faster rate in Modi's third consecutive term in office.

"We call it a Reforms Express. It will not stop and move ahead at a fast pace to achieve the goal of Viksit Bharat by 2047. The budget presented recently has a lot to offer, especially to states like Bihar, where the requisite infrastructure has been developed and a vast population is ready to enter the job market," he said.

Rijju also rubbished the opposition's charge that Bihar was getting a raw deal from the Centre which has been shying away from announcing a special economic package for the impoverished state. "A package is a tokenism which governments resort to when there is nothing substantial to offer. We are squarely addressing the needs of the state. Our style of functioning is different from that of the freebies culture promoted by Congress and Arvind Kejriwal (former Delhi Chief Minister who heads Aam Aadmi Party). We did bring in free ration, but it was during the COVID pandemic when normal life has come to a standstill," the minister added. (PTI)

J&K must harness full hydropower potential: Shah

JAMMU, Feb 7: Union Home Minister Amit Shah reviewed the progress of development projects in Jammu and Kashmir on Saturday, highlighting the need to utilise the full potential of hydropower projects in the Union Territory.

Chairing a high-level review meeting at the Lok Bhawan here, Shah said under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership, the Centre is firmly committed to the vision of building a developed and prosperous Jammu and Kashmir. The meeting continued for nearly two hours and was attended by Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha, Chief Minister Omar Abdullah, Union Home Secretary Govind Mohan, Chief Secretary of the Union Territory Atal Dulloo and Director General of Police (DGP) Nalin Prabhat, among others, officials said.

"Due to the continuous and dedicated efforts of the Modi government to accelerate development, the development projects in Jammu and Kashmir have made unprecedented progress. Jammu and Kashmir needs to develop the full potential of its hydropower projects," the home minister said.

Shah arrived here late on Thursday evening and kicked off his two-day visit to the region by touring the forward outposts of the Border Security Force (BSF) at Gurnam and Bobiyian along the International Border in Kathua district on Friday.

On his return from Kathua, he chaired a security review meeting, which, among others, was attended by Army chief General Uday Kumar Singh, with a focus on freeing Jammu and Kashmir from terrorism. During the meeting on projects, Shah undertook a comprehensive review of key sectors, such as road infrastructure,



power, industry, tourism, 4G and optical-fibre connectivity. He said a special focus should be laid on achieving 100 per cent saturation of the government's welfare schemes and ensuring that the benefits of all development projects reach the intended beneficiaries.

The home minister stressed the importance of developing sports infrastructure and setting up sports academies to connect youngsters with development.

"In this regard, efforts will be made to secure an investment of about ₹200 crore by engaging with various sports bodies," he said. Shah also said efforts should be made to promote the dairy sector in Jammu and Kashmir through the National Dairy Development Board (NDDB).

Marking a significant step, Jammu and Kashmir has been brought under the ambit of the Special Assistance to States for Capital Investment (SASCI) scheme for the first time in Financial Year 2025-26, enabling access to 50-year interest-free loans for capital projects.

Shah underlined that strong fiscal discipline would assist in sta-

bilising the Union Territory's fiscal deficit over time.

"India is steadily progressing towards the goal of Viksit Bharat by 2047, marking 100 years of Independence, and the government will continue to extend wholehearted support to Jammu and Kashmir in the pursuit of this goal," he said.

Shah's visit highlights the Bharatiya Janata Party-led Centre's firm resolve to make Jammu and Kashmir's development, peace and security a foremost national priority, an official spokesperson said. During his two-day tour, the home minister met the families of several police personnel who were killed fighting terrorism and handed over job letters to them.

A BJP delegation also called on the home minister on Friday.

"I held meetings in Jammu with the state office-bearers and MLAs and MPs of Jammu and Kashmir BJP. The BJP will continue working to ensure the ground-level reach of Modi's development initiatives, while expanding the organisation to realise the vision of a developed Jammu and Kashmir, a secure Jammu and Kashmir," Shah said in a post in Hindi on X. (PTI)

Cong sowing seeds of division with 'appeasement' policies: Fadnavis

HYDERABAD, Feb 7: Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Saturday alleged that the Congress in Telangana was sowing the seeds of division among people with its "divisive and appeasement policies".

Addressing a rally at Sirpur Kagaznagar, about 300 km from here, in support of BJP candidates for the February 11 municipal elections in Telangana, he said Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy believed he could remain in power in the state by appeasing certain sections.

"He (Reddy) has started a dangerous game. I would like to remind you that some Congress leaders, in a way, started a similar game before Independence. The result was that the country was divided and Pakistan, and later Bangladesh, were formed," he charged.

He alleged that the Congress government was following similar "divisive policies" by dividing people on religious lines and granting reservations to people of other religions by taking them away from SCs and STs.

"In a way, Congress is sowing the seeds of division," he added.

He said that future generations would ask their parents what they were doing when such divisive talk was going on.

Fadnavis said the wind of the BJP's thumping victory in the recent municipal elections in Maharashtra would reach neighbouring Telangana.

Out of 280 municipalities in the western state, the BJP bagged 240. Of the 29 municipal corporations, the BJP and its allies won mayoral posts in 26, he said.

For the first time, a BJP mayor is being elected in the Mumbai Municipal Corporation, he added.

He expressed confidence that the BJP would make impressive gains in Telangana in the urban local body polls.

Observing that Telangana was a revenue-surplus state when it was formed in 2014, he alleged that it had now become debt-ridden due to "corruption under the BRS and Congress governments."

BJP-ruled states, on the contrary, had achieved rapid progress, he claimed.

Recalling that he had agreed to an inter-state agreement on the use of Godavari river water when he then Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao approached him in 2015, he said the decision helped expand irrigation in the state.

He alleged that the BRS and Congress governments in Telangana did not provide funds for land acquisition in Maharashtra, which he completed.

"You can see the intentions of the BRS and Congress. These people even betray those who gave them water. They cannot do good for the people," he said.

Alleging that municipalities had been neglected for 70 years, he said it was Prime Minister Narendra Modi who ensured funds for towns along with villages. PM Modi ensured funding for the development of towns and cities under schemes such as Smart Cities and Amrit Bharat, he added. (PTI)

BJP set to get its first mayor in Mumbai after 4 decades

MUMBAI, Feb 7: The BJP is set to install its first mayor in Mumbai after a gap of more than four decades, ending the Thackeray family's dominance in the country's richest civic body, with the party's two-time corporator Ritu Tawde filing her nomination on Saturday for the election to the prestigious post.

Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena, the saffron party's ally in the Mahayuti, has declared Sanjay Ghadi as its candidate for the deputy mayor's post.

Tawde and Ghadi filed their nominations at the municipal secretary's office in the presence of Minister Mangal Prabhakar Lodha, BJP's Mumbai unit chief Ameet Satam, former Shiv Sena MP Rahul Shewale, and other leaders of Mahayuti. Saturday is the last day of filing nominations for these posts. Elections will be held on February 11, which is also the last day of withdrawing the nominations.

In the polls to the 227-member Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), the BJP emerged as the single largest party with 89 seats, while Shiv Sena won 29 seats. The ruling alliance, with a combined strength of 118 corporators, is well past the halfway mark of 114 and is well placed to secure the mayor's and deputy mayor's post.

The Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena (UBT), which ruled the civic body for 25 years from 1997 to 2022, won 65 seats, while its allies, the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) and the Nationalist Congress Party (SP) won six and one seat, respectively.

BJP's mayoral candidate Tawde, who was earlier with the Congress, joined the saffron party in 2012 and was elected as a corporator the same year.

During her first term as a corporator, she chaired the Education Committee and was actively involved in raising issues related to local infrastructure, water supply and public safety.

The corporator from Ghatkopar East (ward 132) was in the limelight during her last tenure for raising the issue of objectionable clothes on mannequins in shops. Ghadi, a corporator from Ward 5, will serve as deputy mayor for 15 months, Shiv Sena secretary Sanjay More has said in a statement.

He was one of the senior Shiv Sena (UBT) corporators who switched sides to join the Eknath Shinde-

led Shiv Sena. By splitting the deputy mayor's term in Mumbai, the Shiv Sena intends to give opportunities to four more of its corporators.

Addressing a press conference, BJP's Satam said Mumbai is set to get a BJP mayor after 44 years.

BJP's Prabhakar Pai had served as the city mayor in 1982-83. Satam said the ruling Mahayuti would work to free the BMC from the clutches of corruption.

"Everyone has the freedom to file nomination papers. We have the backing of 118 corporators and the support of more members," he said.

The BJP leader said the Mahayuti had asserted from day one that Mumbai's mayor would be a Marathi and a Hindu, and pointed out that the city will now get "a Marathi, Malvani, Konkani and Hindu mayor".

Satam said the Shiv Sena may have kept the deputy mayor's tenure for 15 months to give opportunities to more party workers.

Targeting the BJP for nominating Tawde, a former Congress leader, for the mayor's post, NCP (SP) said the move was an insult to the party's loyal and experienced corporators.

NCP (SP) spokesperson and secretary Clyde Crasto said the decision sent a wrong message to BJP workers, who worked for years to strengthen the party at the grassroots level.

"By choosing a former Congress woman as mayor, the BJP has insulted its own faithful and loyal corporators who have given their blood, sweat and tears for the party," he said in a statement. He questioned whether the move reflected the BJP's approach towards its cadre, asking if loyalty and commitment were no longer valued by the party leadership.

In the January 15 Mumbai civic elections, the Congress won 24 seats, AIMIM eight, the NCP (Ajit Pawar faction) three, and the Samajwadi Party two. Two independent candidates also won in the high-stakes election, held after a nine-year gap.

The BMC commissioner has been serving as the state government-appointed administrator since March 7, 2022, following the end of the previous term. The BMC is the country's richest civic body, with its budget for the 2025-26 pegged at Rs 74,450 crore, which is higher than that of some smaller states. (PTI)

Doubts persist over Ajit Pawar's death, will give presentation on Feb 10: Rohit

PUNE, Feb 7: NCP (SP) leader Rohit Pawar on Saturday said everyone has doubts about the circumstances surrounding Maharashtra deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar's death in an air crash, and he would provide a detailed presentation about it on February 10.

Speaking to reporters after casting his vote in the Zilla Parishad polls in Baramati, the MLA said that Ajit Pawar wanted the rival factions of the Nationalist Congress Party to unite, and efforts towards the merger will continue.

Elections for 12 Zilla Parishads and 125 Panchayat Samitis in Maharashtra were underway on Saturday. The polls, originally scheduled for February 5, were deferred after Ajit Pawar's death in the air crash in Baramati on January 28.

"Everyone has questions and doubts in their minds (about the crash). I will give a presentation in Mumbai on February 10. Why the crash happened and how it might have happened, these issues will be raised," said Rohit, nephew of the late NCP chief.

NCP (SP) led by Sharad Pawar and the NCP have joined hands for the Zilla Parishad elections, with their candidates contesting on the latter's "clock" symbol.

Rohit Pawar, who represents the Karjat-Jamkhed assembly constituency in Ahilyanagar district, said Ajit Pawar earnestly hoped that the party would reunite.

"Ajit dada sincerely wished that everyone should come together as one family, and everyone has come together

India-US trade deal surrender by NDA govt: CPI(ML)-New Democracy

NEW DELHI, Feb 7: The CPI(ML)-New Democracy claimed on Saturday that the trade deal between India and the United States is a "surrender" by the NDA government and the provisions of the pact are "anti-people and anti-national".

In a statement issued here, CPI(ML)-New Democracy general secretary Yatendra Kumar strongly disapproved of the framework of the India-US trade deal, claiming that it is full of "ominous signs" for India's industry, agriculture and dairy sectors, and in fact, for the country's economy.

"Framework for interim trade deal reached with the USA is a surrender by the RSS-BJP led government," the statement said.

The Left party added that this "surrender" does not come as a surprise.

"The Union Budget presented on February 1 pointed to a bleak picture of Indian economy with

slow growth of revenue, rising government debt, declining agricultural growth and employment generation and cut-in social expenditure across the board," it said.

The party alleged that despite patting its back on the economic performance, the Bharatiya Janata Party-led government could not hide the "dismal picture" of the Indian economy, with the unorganised industrial sector and agriculture taking the biggest hit.

"This government has pushed Indian economy to this dismal state during 11 years of its rule," it said.

The CPI(ML)-New Democracy strongly condemned the provisions of the India-US framework agreement, branding those "anti-people and anti-national", and asked all opposition parties, including revolutionary Left organisations, to mount a strong opposition to ensure that this framework is "consigned to the dust bin". (PTI)

Congress always opposes India's economic growth: BJP

NEW DELHI, Feb 7: The BJP on Saturday said India has "firmly protected" its agriculture and dairy sectors under the interim trade agreement with the US and accused the Congress of running a propaganda campaign to create "suspicion and confusion" among the people.

The ruling party asserted that the India-US trade framework will "significantly" benefit the country and slammed the Congress for claiming that the odds are "stacked heavily against India", alleging that the opposition party always opposed the country's economic growth. The BJP's response came after the Congress took a swipe at Prime Minister Narendra Modi over the interim trade agreement, claiming that under the deal, the odds are stacked heavily against India, and all the "huglomania and photo-ops" have not amounted to much.

In a post on X, Congress general secretary in-charge of communications Jairam Ramesh also mocked the prime minister with the phrase "Naam Narendra, Kaam Surrender", citing a White House release that said Washington will now monitor whether India is importing oil from Russia.

Rejecting the criticism, BJP national spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi said India has firmly protected its interests in the agriculture and dairy sectors with complete maturity and unwavering resolve under Modi's leadership.

"In simpler terms, those which have been protected include wheat, rice, sugar, pulses, millets, sorghum, pearl millet and dairy products," he told reporters at the BJP headquarters. (PTI)

New dawn of development in Bastar as govt's action against Maoists ended fear: Prez

JAGDALPUR (CHHATTISGARH), Feb 7: President Droupadi Murmu said on Saturday that decisive action by the government against Maoists has ended the atmosphere of fear and distrust in the Bastar region, and a new dawn of development is setting in. The President inaugurated a three-day divisional-level Bastar Pandum festival in Jagdalpur, the headquarters of Bastar district.

She said those who have renounced violence and joined the mainstream should trust the Constitution and democracy and not be misled by attempts to divert them from walking the path of peace.

"Bastar's natural beauty and rich cultural traditions have always attracted people, but the region unfortunately suffered for years due to the menace of Maoism," the President said.

Noting that Naxalism caused the maximum damage to youth, tribals and Dalits, Murmu said that people

associated with Maoist activities are now shunning violence, leading to the return of peace in the region.

"Government of India's decisive action against Maoists resulted in bringing an end to the atmosphere of fear and distrust," she added.

The President said she had been informed that a large number of Naxalites have surrendered, and the government is ensuring that those who return to the mainstream are able to lead a normal and dignified life.

She said several welfare schemes are being run, highlighting the role of the Chhattisgarh government's 'Niyad Nellanar' initiative in empowering villagers.

Villages are gaining access to electricity, roads, and drinking water, while schools that remained closed for years are being reopened, Murmu said, describing it as a "very heartening picture".

"With the government's efforts



and the cooperation of the people, a new dawn of development is rising in Bastar," the President said.

She urged people to have faith in the system and move forward with hard work and dedication, describing democracy as a source of strength.

"I appeal to those who have renounced violence and joined the

mainstream to have faith in the Constitution and democracy, and not be misled by those who seek to divert them," the President added.

The President said backward villages are being connected to development through Central schemes, such as the PM JANMAN and Dharti Aaba Janjatiya Gram Utkarsh Yojana.

Underlining the importance of education as the foundation of individual and community development, the President said Eklavya Model Residential Schools have become operational in tribal areas to promote education among tribal children.

Referring to her own journey to the top Constitutional post, Murmu said it reflected the strength of Indian democracy that a daughter from a small village in Odisha was today addressing you as President. "You have even greater courage and strength. The government is dedicated to you," she said.

Reiterating the government's commitment to the welfare of the poor, deprived and backward sections of society, the President said their upliftment remains a top priority.

"Chhattisgarh was considered backward, but that's not the case. Look at its grandeur. Chhattisgarh is a state full of magnificence and

rich culture. This is because of the tribal people of Chhattisgarh. Their culture is invaluable.

"It's ancient, yet so beautiful. Those who haven't witnessed this inclusivity and equality should see the Pandum festival and learn from it," said Murmu.

She highlighted the immense tourism potential of the Bastar region, attributing it to the enthusiastic people, ancient culture, natural beauty, waterfalls and caves, adding that improved facilities would attract more tourists.

Noting that homestays are popular globally, the President said the Chhattisgarh government has taken appropriate steps in this direction.

Murmu congratulated Dr Budhri Tati, Dr Ramchandra Godbole and his wife, Sunita Godbole, who have been selected for the Padma Awards 2026 for their decades of selfless service in the remote tribal areas of Chhattisgarh. (PTI)

Doctor-led AI platform boosts out-of-hospital care, enables 24x7 supervision

NEW DELHI, Feb 7: In a first-of-its-kind approach towards patient care, a doctor-led AI healthcare ecosystem is providing real-time medical supervision beyond hospitals to people with chronic conditions, preventing their escalation into serious illness, officials said.

At the core of the ecosystem -- iLive Connect -- is a small wireless biosensor patch paired with a wearable wristband, which continuously captures vital physiological parameters.

These include two-lead ECG, heart rate, respiratory rate, oxygen saturation, body temperature, blood pressure trends, physical activity, and heart rate variability.

The data is transmitted wirelessly to a secure Cloud-based platform and further relayed to a dedicated medical command centre, Dr Rahul Chan-

dola, cardiovascular and thoracic surgeon and founder of iLive Connect, said.

The command centre is manned round-the-clock by specialised doctors who proactively monitor patients in real time, Chandola said.

Unlike conventional monitoring systems that respond only after symptoms appear, iLive Connect incorporates AI-driven predictive analytics, enabling detection of subtle physiological changes that may indicate the onset of disease much before clinical symptoms develop. This early identification allows doctors to intervene at a preventive stage, significantly reducing complications, avoiding medical emergencies, and decreasing the need for repeat hospitalisation, Chandola said.

According to Chandola, the system was developed to address one of the biggest gaps in health-



care — the absence of continuous medical supervision once a patient leaves the hospital.

"Most serious medical events do not occur inside hospitals but when patients are at home without medical observation. By combining

continuous biosensor monitoring with predictive analytics and proactive doctor supervision, iLive Connect enables detection of physiological deterioration well before symptoms appear, allowing timely medical guidance and preventing escalation into serious illness," Chandola said.

A study of data from more than 410 patients during a 10-week observational programme found a 76 per cent reduction in repeat hospitalisation with early identification of risks related to cardiac conditions, blood pressure instability, metabolic disorders, and post-discharge complications, the company said in a statement.

The technology has shown particular benefits for senior citizens living alone, patients with chronic illnesses, and individuals recently discharged from hospitals, where the transition from

hospital care to home remains a vulnerable period, Dr Viveka Kumar, co-founder at iLive Connect and senior interventional cardiologist, said.

Kumar highlighted that the integration of AI with continuous clinical oversight has enabled rapid response times and timely medical intervention in several potentially critical situations.

"Unlike conventional wearable devices that only display health data to users, iLive Connect functions as a doctor-led continuous care ecosystem, where technology supports clinical decision-making rather than replacing it," Kumar said.

The platform enables access to specialist supervision irrespective of geography, allowing patients in remote regions of the country to receive advanced medical monitoring without frequent hospital visits, the statement said. (PTI)

Not a deal, but surrender: Cong alleges Indo-US trade pact 'betrayal' with India

'India has been made into a dumping ground by this deal'

NEW DELHI, Feb 7: The Congress claimed on Saturday that the Indo-US trade pact is "not a deal but a surrender" of the country's self-esteem and interests, and that it is a betrayal of India and its people.

Addressing a press conference here, Congress's media and publicity department head Pawan Khera also claimed that India will soon become a dumping ground for American products and it will hurt the interests of the farmers and small and medium industries here.

"This deal is a betrayal to all that India stands for and all that India stood for over the last 75 years. This is not a deal which is in our interest. This is a total surrender by none other than Narendra," Khera said, taking a dig at Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The Congress leader added that he has proved that "Narendar is surrender".

"India has been made into a dumping ground by this deal. I do not want to call it a deal, as a deal is amongst equals and you sit across the table and negotiate. A deal cannot be with a gun held on your head.... It is blackmail, it is a surrender," he said.

Khera also alleged that US is dubbing India as a "thief" as it will keep a close watch on New Delhi buying oil from Russia and showed an order from the United States government.

The opposition party's attack came soon after Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal announced that India has not given any duty concessions on any dairy product and claimed that several Indian goods, including agricultural products, will attract zero reciprocal tariff in the US.



India and the US announced on Saturday that they have reached a framework for an interim trade agreement, under which both sides will reduce import duties on a number of goods to boost the two-way trade.

Khera said this is not a pact with the US, but a "compromise with our self-esteem and the interests of our farmers and MSMEs and the middle-class".

Noting that India has become a dumping ground for the US and it has happened under Modi's rule, he said, "With this deal, the back of farmers would be broken further and the coming days will prove how farming in the country would be destroyed due to this deal."

Taking a swipe at the Bharatiya Janata Party-led government, Khera said it now works according to the US time, alleging that all decisions, whether on announcing a ceasefire of military conflicts or a trade deal, are taken in the US. He said the trade deal was signed between India and the US without Goyal even travelling abroad.

"The government is functioning

in accordance with the American time zone and there cannot be anything more regrettable than this. A deal is between two partners sitting across the table and not due to blackmail.

"That is called surrender. The name is Narendra, the work is surrender. This deal has once again proved this," Khera said, alleging that Modi has "surrendered" before the US.

He said the Congress does not feel good when the prime minister "surrenders" before any other country as "it is unfortunate".

Khera alleged that this was not the first time that Modi was seen "surrendering" India's interests before other countries. "You have seen Narendra Modi giving clean chits to China. Now, we have gone and announced that we will buy products worth USD 500 billion over the next five years from the US. There is no corresponding commitment from the US."

"Your import bill with the US, from USD 40-42 billion a year, will have to go up to USD 100 billion a year. You know about the

health of the rupee and the health of the economy. Where are you getting the money from and what are the products you will buy? Mr Piyush Goyal read out from the list of products that we will not buy. But he, very conveniently and cleverly, hid the list of what all will come and what all will be dumped," the Congress leader said.

He said earlier, India used to hold talks with the US and other countries looking them in the eye. According to a joint statement, India has expressed its intention to purchase US energy products, aircraft and aircraft parts, precious metals, technology products and coking coal worth USD 500 billion over the next five years.

Goyal said the interim pact will open a USD 30 trillion market for Indian exporters, especially for micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), farmers and fishermen, as the US duties on Indian goods will come down to 18 per cent.

Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh alleged that Goyal's defence of the India-US trade deal from the point of view of Indian farmers is "too clever by half". He said the joint India-US statement has something called "additional products" that are not specified.

"This is far too open-ended and shows something is being hidden. It says India has agreed to address long-standing barriers to the trade in US food and agricultural products. What does this mean if not removal of restrictions on GM crops and dairy products? There will be undoubtedly more concerns as fuller details are revealed," Ramesh said in a post on X. (PTI)

51 Naxalites with ₹ 1.61 crore reward surrender in Chhattisgarh's Bastar division

BIJAPUR/SUKMA (CHHATTISGARH), Feb 7: As many as 51 Naxalites, carrying a collective bounty of ₹ 1.61 crore, surrendered before the police in two districts under the Bastar division on Saturday, a senior officer said.

With the March 31, 2026, deadline to eliminate Naxalism closing in, the number of surrenders across Chhattisgarh so far this year now stands at around 300.

The surrender coincided with the inauguration of the Bastar Pandum 2026 festival in Jagdalpur, the headquarters of Bastar district, by President Droupadi Murmu and Union Home Minister Amit Shah's arrival in Raipur on a three-day visit.

The surrendered cadres include 34 women. Inspector General of Police, Bastar Range, Sundarraj Pattilingam said 30 cadres, including 20 women, surrendered in Bijapur district, while 21 others, including 14 female members, joined the mainstream in neighbouring Sukma district under the "Poona Margem rehabilitation initiative of Bastar Police. The ultras said they were impressed by the state government's surrender and rehabilitation policy, he said.

In Bijapur, the cadres belonging to the south subzonal bureau of Maoists shunned violence and joined the mainstream before senior police and CRPF officials, the IGP said.

Among the 30 cadres, Boti Podiyam alias Malla (23), a platoon party committee member, and Sukhran Madkam (24), and Reena Punem (25), both party members of different companies of Maoists, carried a reward of ₹ 8 lakh each, he said.

Five others carried a bounty of ₹ 5 lakh each, 14 Naxalites carried a reward of ₹ 2 lakh each, and eight others a reward of ₹ 1 lakh each. The 30 cadres carried a collective reward of ₹ 85 lakh, he added.

In Sukma, 21 cadres of the Darbha division, south Bastar division, and Kalahandi-Kandhamal-Boudh-Nayagarh (KKBN) division (Odisha) of Maoists turned themselves in before senior police and CRPF officers. Among them, Sodhi Mahesh (35), Podiyam Raju (30), and Karam Mamta (30) - all divisional committee members - carried a reward of Rs 8 lakh each on their heads.

Five other cadres carried a bounty of ₹ 5 lakh each, 12 others ₹ 2 lakh each and one ₹ 3 lakh, the police officer said.

The ultras in Sukma laid down arms, including three AK-47 rifles with 8 magazines, two Self Loading Rifles with two magazines, one Insas rifle, five single-shot guns, three Barrel Grenade Launchers (BGLs) with 20 rounds, ten gelatin sticks and 20 non-electric detonators, he said.

"The achievement was the result of the state gov-



ernment's comprehensive anti-Naxal policy, sustained and effective action by security forces, and coordinated efforts based on peace, dialogue and development, clearly indicating that abandoning the path of violence and choosing a dignified and secure life is the only lasting solution," Sundarraj added.

The surrendered Naxalites were provided with immediate assistance of ₹ 50,000 each and will be further rehabilitated as per the government's policy.

Sundarraj further said the base of Maoists has been shrinking rapidly due to the establishment of security camps in remote and inaccessible areas, improved road connectivity, continuous successful anti-Naxal operations, and the effective reach of the government's development schemes.

He appealed to the remaining Maoist cadres to surrender, saying, a path of violence leads only to destruction, suffering, and darkness. He said the 'Poona Margem' campaign paves the way for peace, a dignified life, and a positive future.

Notably, 52 Naxalists had turned themselves in on January 15 in neighbouring Bijapur district. More than 1,500 Naxalites had surrendered in 2025 in Chhattisgarh.

Reacting to the surrenders in Sukma and Bijapur, Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai said the development marked another significant step towards ensuring peace, trust and development in the Bastar region.

It was a concrete outcome of the government's sustained efforts to restore peace, coupled with the expansion of roads, education, healthcare, communication and basic amenities in remote and sensitive areas over the past two years, he said.

Sai said the state's good governance policy focuses on security along with trust, rehabilitation, and future opportunities. All necessary support will be provided for the rehabilitation, skill development and self-reliance of the surrendered youths.

Bastar was rapidly moving from fear and violence towards trust, development and new opportunities, he added. (PTI)

Debate, discussion part of democratic process, but decorum must be maintained: Om Birla

PATNA, Feb 7: Maintaining that debate and discussion are part of the democratic process, Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla on Saturday said the decorum of the House must be maintained at any cost. Birla was addressing a function on the foundation day of the Bihar assembly, where he unveiled the National e-Vidhan Application (NeVA), aimed at creating paperless legislative processes. "Elected representatives must maintain the decorum of the House. Members of the assemblies and Parliament have the privilege to express their views. They should share their opinions. But they must maintain dignity while sharing their views," he said.

"Debate and discussion are all part of the democratic process, but decorum of the House must be maintained at any cost. They should also learn the rules of legislative functioning," he added. Birla said empowered legislators are the foundation of a strong democracy. He said that public representatives empowered by the trust of the people exercise democracy by taking issues to their resolution and by making law-making meaningful.

"Today we are witnessing a decline in the decorum of legislative chambers," he said, appealing to members to avoid sloganeering, disruptions, and entering the Well of the House, and instead present their views through dialogue and reasoned debate. "The true strength of a legislator comes from moral values, a sense of responsibility, and knowledge of constitutional procedures. A capable legislator makes governance more transparent, accountable, and people-centric," he said. Birla said Bihar has been the birthplace of democratic traditions, and its heritage has provided the ideological foundation for the country's parliamentary system. NeVA is a workflow system deployed on the NIC cloud to help conduct legislative business in a paperless manner. It equips members to handle diverse businesses smartly by putting information regarding rules of procedures, the list of businesses, notices, bulletins, bills, questions and answers, and committee reports, among others, in their hand-held devices, officials said. (PTI)

Gangster Joga Pholriwal among 4 booked for AAP leader's daylight murder in Jalandhar

CHANDIGARH, Feb 7: Punjab Police have registered a case against two named persons, including a foreign-based gangster, and two unknown individuals in connection with the daylight murder of AAP leader Lucky Oberoi in Jalandhar on Friday, with police suspecting personal enmity as the reason behind the killing, officials said on Saturday.

Police have booked gangster Jogra Singh alias Joga Pholriwal, who claimed responsibility for the murder in an unverified social media post, Dalbira and two unnamed persons under the relevant sections of the BNS and Arms Act at the Division 6 police station in the Jalandhar Commissionerate, based on a complaint filed by the victim's family, they said.

However, the assailant and his accomplice, who were captured on a CCTV camera, have not been identified yet, with several police teams deployed to trace them.

In the brazen daylight murder, Oberoi was shot by the unidentified

assailant outside a gurdwara in Jalandhar's Model Town around 7.30 am on Friday, shortly after he stepped out of the shrine after paying obeisance, police said.

CCTV camera footage showed that as Oberoi (43) came out of the gurdwara and sat in his car -- a Mahindra Thar -- the assailant wearing a black hoodie approached him on foot, opened fire and fled along with an accomplice, who was waiting for him on a two-wheeler a short distance away.

Satwinderpal Singh alias Lucky Oberoi, a financier by profession, was a ward in charge for the AAP in Jalandhar Cantonment.

An unverified social media post, purportedly by Joga Pholriwal, claimed responsibility for the murder.

Several allegations were levelled against Oberoi in the post, which claimed that he was killed due to personal enmity linked to a dispute over the presidency of a college.

A police officer on Saturday said

Joga Pholriwal, Dalbira and the two others have been booked for the murder of Oberoi.

Joga, who hails from Pholriwal in Jalandhar district, is believed to be living abroad, the officer said.

Oberoi and Joga had been friends earlier, and can be seen sharing a cake in a Facebook post, police sources said.

However, their relations soured over the election of the students' union president of Khalsa College, they said.

Oberoi's brother, Damandeep Singh, on whose statement the FIR was lodged, named Joga and Dalbira in his complaint, claiming that the duo threatened Oberoi sometime back.

However, police said the family did not file any complaint about the alleged threat at the time.

On Friday morning, Oberoi and Damandeep had gone to the gurdwara in Model Town along with one of their friends when the shooting took place. (PTI)

Bihar MP Pappu Yadav arrested in 1995 forgery case after late-night drama

PATNA, Feb 7: Independent Bihar MP Rajesh Ranjan, popularly known as Pappu Yadav, was arrested by Patna Police late Friday from his residence here in connection with a case dating back to 1995, officials said. High drama unfolded at Yadav's house in Mandir locality when a police team arrived to execute a warrant issued by an MP/MLA court in the case registered under section 467 (forgery of documents) of the Indian Penal Code.

Yadav, who represents the Purnea Lok Sabha constituency, initially refused to accompany the police team, claiming they were carrying a warrant for the attachment of property but not for his arrest. He was, however, later taken into custody and will be produced before a competent court on Saturday.

The police team reached Yadav's residence barely an hour after he returned from New Delhi, where he had at-

tended the ongoing Parliament session.

"A warrant has been issued against the MP by the MP/MLA court here in connection with a 1995 case lodged under Section 467 (forgery of documents) of the IPC. The police team has gone to his house to produce him before the court tomorrow," Senior Superintendent of Police, Patna, Kartikeya Sharma, told PTI before his arrest. A large number of Yadav's supporters had gathered at his residence, and many of them were seen arguing with the police personnel during the operation. Speaking to reporters before his arrest, Yadav said he had already planned to appear before the court on Saturday.

"I have been telling these police personnel that I shall be appearing before the court tomorrow. In fact, that is the very reason I came here today. But, of course, I will not hand myself over to them," he said. (PTI)

Defence conclave lays emphasis on importance of integrated warfighting in future conflicts

NEW DELHI, Feb 6: A high-level Joint Operations Conclave was held on February 5-6 with the objective of deepening intra-service and inter-service interactions at the operational level of warfare, officials said on Friday.

The conclave, hosted by the Headquarters Western Air Command (HQ WAC), also had the objective of strengthening joint operational capabilities across the defence forces in an increasingly complex multi-domain environment, they said.

The high-level conclave was held under the All Domain Joint Operations (ADJO) Exercise 2026 Framework, the defence ministry said in a statement.

The Western Air Command is based at Subroto Park in New Delhi.

"The conclave was focused on deepening intra-service and inter-

service interactions at the operational level of warfare, with the objective of strengthening joint operational capabilities across the Indian defence forces in an increasingly complex multi-domain environment," it said.

The ADJO Exercise 2026 constitutes an important milestone, which is expected to play a decisive role in building a truly interoperable and future-ready joint force capable of prevailing across the full spectrum of modern security challenges, it said.

This initiative reaffirms the steadfast commitment of the defence forces to the principle of jointness, operational synergy and continuous adaptation in pursuit of national security objectives, the ministry said.

The deliberations were attended by senior officers representing the Headquarters Integrated Defence

Staff (HQ IDS), the Army, the Navy, the Defence Space Agency (DSA) and the Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA) alongside senior leadership from the Indian Air Force.

In his inaugural address, Air Marshal J S Mann, Senior Air Staff Officer, Western Air Command, emphasised the paramount importance of jointness and integrated warfighting in contemporary and future conflicts.

He highlighted the pressing requirement for an all-domain operational approach that achieves seamless integration across air, land, sea, space and cyber domains, thereby enabling decisive outcomes in contested and denied environments.

Further, Air Marshal Mann emphasised enhancing interoperability among the services, promoting "domain-agnostic decision-mak-



ing processes", strengthening sensor-to-shooter linkages and refining operational procedures for greater efficiency and effectiveness, the statement said.

Chief of Integrated Defence

Staff, Air Marshal Ashutosh Dixit, highlighted the need to institutionalise joint mechanisms for integrated planning, intelligence sharing and capability prioritisation.

He stressed coherent inter-service responses and structured identification of capability gaps to strengthen comprehensive operational preparedness for future contingencies.

Air Marshal Dixit underscored the importance of advancing all-domain integration to achieve synergistic effects across services and deliver unified operational outcomes.

He advocated accelerated doctrinal evolution and tri-service resource alignment to build a strong unified operational capability and sustained strategic readiness.

warfare.

He underscored the pivotal role of air power in generating decisive strategic effects, the essential need to synchronise surface manoeuvre with offensive air operations, and the strategic advantage offered by the employment of stand-off weapons.

Air Marshal Mishra advocated a "resolute shift" away from legacy attrition-based models characteristic of the 1971 era, as well as from conventional effects-based operations framework, toward a more agile, adaptive and fully integrated joint warfighting paradigm.

He called particular attention to the imperative of identifying and bridging existing capability gaps, reinforcing convergence across all domains and laying a robust foundation for coordinated, effects-driven responses in the all-domain battlespace. (PTI)

Harman Baweja, Arati Kadav to reunite for new film after 'Mrs' success



Producer Harman Baweja and director Arati Kadav have announced that they are reuniting for a new film project, marking their second collaboration following the critically-acclaimed 2025 movie 'Mrs'.

The duo shared the news on so-

cial media to mark the first anniversary of 'Mrs', which was the Hindi-language remake of the 2021 Malayalam film 'The Great Indian Kitchen' and received strong reviews for its sensitive portrayal of invisible domestic labour and gender expectations.

The film was directed by Kadav from a screenplay co-written by Baweja, who also produced through his banner Baweja Studios. It was released directly on the OTT platform ZEE5 on February 7, 2025.

The movie starred Sanya Malhotra as Richa, a newly married woman struggling to balance her dreams and the regressive traditions of her marital home, with Nishant Dahiya and Kanwaljit Singh in prominent roles.

In a statement, Baweja said "Mrs" reaffirmed his belief in audacious, intimate cinema.

"Mrs. was one of those rare films that stays with you long after it's made not just because of the response it received, but because of the honesty with which it was created. Working

with Arati reminded me how powerful cinema can be when everyone involved is aligned in intent and sensitivity.

"Coming together again feels less like a reunion and more like a natural next step in a creative journey we deeply trust. This next project is born from that very faith, and I'm looking forward to once again push boundaries together," he said.

For Kadav, also known for directing 2018 critical hit 'Cargo', working on 'Mrs' was an emotionally demanding but deeply fulfilling experience.

"Returning to collaborate again doesn't feel like starting something new; it feels like continuing a conversation that began with honesty, care, and a shared belief in telling stories that matter," she added. (PTI)

'GHOOSKHOR PANDAT' NOT ABOUT ANY CASTE OR COMMUNITY, WILL TAKE DOWN ALL PROMOS: NEERAJ PANDEY



The story of "Ghooskhor Pandat" is fictional and has nothing to do with any caste or community, filmmaker Neeraj Pandey said on Friday, a day after the Netflix film faced backlash over its title.

In a statement, posted on his social media handles, Pandey acknowledged that the film's title has "hurt" a section of audience and added that all promotional materials of the film will be taken down for the time being.

The film's announcement earlier this week was met with a backlash over the title with many social media users calling it insensitive and offensive.

On Thursday, the National Human Rights Commission issued a notice to the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting in the wake of a complaint alleging that the title of an upcoming movie to be released on a web-based platform, "promotes negative stereotypes" and "vilifies a recognised social group".

Pandey said the film, which he has co-written and produced, is a fictional cop drama and the term "Pandat" is used simply as a colloquial name for a fictional character.

"The story focuses on an individual's actions and choices and does not comment on or represent any caste, religion, or community. As a filmmaker, I approach my work with a deep sense of responsibility - to tell stories that are thoughtful and respectful," the filmmaker said.

Featuring Manoj Bajpayee in the title role, the upcoming crime thriller follows Ajay Dikshit, also known as Pandat, a corrupt police officer whose plans for a lucrative and eventful night are disrupted when he finds himself caught in the middle of a global conspiracy unfolding in the heart of Delhi.

The film, which was announced by Netflix during an event on Tuesday, is directed by Ritesh Shah, who has also penned the story with Pandey. It is produced by Pandey through his banner Friday Filmworks.

The filmmaker, known for directing acclaimed films such as "A Wednesday", "Special 26" and "Baby", said "Ghooskhor Pandat" has been created with sincere intent and solely to entertain audiences.

"We understand that the title of the film has caused hurt to some viewers, and we genuinely acknowledge those feelings.

"In light of these concerns, we have decided to take down all promotional materials for the time being, as we believe the film should be experienced in its entirety and understood in the context of the story we intended to tell, rather than judged on partial glimpses. I look forward to sharing the film with audiences soon," he added. (PTI)

Sanjay Mishra, Neena Gupta urge fans to avoid spoilers for 'Vadh 2'



Sanjay Mishra and Neena Gupta, the lead actors of the crime thriller "Vadh 2", on Friday urged audiences to help preserve the viewing experience for others and avoid sharing spoilers.

The film, which released in cinemas on Thursday, is a sequel to their critically-acclaimed 2022 movie of the same title.

In a statement, posted on their respective social media pages, Mishra and Gupta appealed to fans to not share the spoilers online.

"We request you to please not give away the spoilers or climax of Vadh 2. The film has been made as a thriller mystery, and we hope the experience remains intact for everyone watching it in theatres," read the statement.

Directed by Jaspal Singh Sandhu, "Vadh 2" presents a fresh story, exploring the limits of ordinary people under extreme circumstances.

The film focuses on a complex moral maze centred on a widowed prison guard (Sanjay Mishra) and a soon to be released inmate (Neena Gupta).

Kumud Mishra also stars as a jail superintendent, whose pursuit of truth in a shocking prison crime leads him to a deadly web of lies and justice.

It is produced by filmmaker Luv Ranjan's production banner Luv Films. (PTI)

Austin Butler to play Lance Armstrong in big-screen biopic

The Oscar-nominated actor Austin Butler is scheduled to take on the role of the disgraced cyclist Lance Armstrong in a buzzy new biopic.

According to Deadline, the package has caused a "frenzied" bidding war in Hollywood with the Conclave director Edward Berger at the helm and King Richard's Zach Baylin set to write the script.

Producer Scott Stuber, who recently worked on Springsteen: Deliver Me from Nowhere, has been working to secure Armstrong's life rights for a while and a deal has now finally been agreed. Armstrong will be involved in the film but will not have a producing credit.

The hope is for the film to be a cross between F1 and The Wolf of Wall Street. Brad Pitt's smash-hit racing drama recently scored four Oscar nominations, including a surprise best picture nod.

Armstrong became an international star after winning the Tour de France on seven consecutive occasions between 1998 and 2005. But an investigation in 2012 took away his titles when he was found to have used performance-enhancing drugs. He received a lifetime ban from the sport.

His story was previously told in Stephen Frears' 2015 drama The Program, where he was played by Ben Foster. The film was a box office disappointment and received mixed reviews. The Guardian's Peter Bradshaw called it "workmanlike" in a three star review.

Since receiving a best actor nomination for his role in Elvis, Butler has starred in The Bikeriders, Eddington, Dune: Part Two, and Caught Stealing. He has been at-



tached to play Patrick Bateman in Luca Guadagnino's take on American Psycho and will next be seen in the crime thriller Enemies with Jeremy Allen White.

Berger followed up the critical and commercial success of the papal thriller Conclave with the Netflix drama Ballad of a Small Player starring Colin Farrell. This week, he started filming an adaptation of Tim Winton's acclaimed novel The Riders starring Brad Pitt.

As well as writing the Oscar-nominated script for King Richard, Baylin's credits include Creed III, Gran Turismo, Bob Marley: One Love and recent Netflix series Black Rabbit. (PTI)

CHINMAYI SHARES POST AGAINST ONLINE BULLYING IN SUPPORT OF ARJUN KAPOOR

Singer Chinmayi Sripaada has voiced support for actor Arjun Kapoor and spoke out against online bullying after his emotional note remembering his late mother Mona Shourie Kapoor sparked a wider conversation on sustained trolling.

Chinmayi shared a social media post that criticised the persistent targeting of Kapoor across platforms.

Sharing the post on X, she wrote, "These men are trash." The original post said Kapoor was not trolled on just one occasion, but was repeatedly mocked

under "every single post" for his work, failures and even his existence.

"This is not dark humour.

day something really happens to him, watch how

emotional illiteracy and performative cruelty. And the

fast you will look for a woman to blame. A girlfriend, a co actor, an ex, a so called gold digger. Anyone except the men who kept feeding

this hate every day.

"You cannot bully people publicly for months and then pretend you care when it is too late," the user said.

In Kapoor's note, shared on the birth anniversary of his mother, the actor reflected on the difficult phase in his life.

"Life's been kinda cruel to me lately but it's ok... I've taken the punches before I'll take em again & still rise... Because u taught me how to fight by standing up facing life head on while being graceful & dignified thru it all..."

he wrote on Tuesday. (PTI)

It was life transforming: Marathi actor Adinath Kothare on playing Bharat in 'Ramayana'

Marathi actor Adinath Kothare says working in Nitesh Tiwari's much-anticipated movie "Ramayana", in which he essays the role of Bharat, was a "life transforming" experience and a great opportunity.

The film, billed as an ambitious cinematic event, features Ranbir Kapoor as Lord Ram, "KGF" star Yash as Ravana, Sai Pallavi as Goddess Sita, Sunny Deol as Lord Hanuman and Ravie Dubey as Lord Lakshman.

"It was a life transforming journey, the whole setup, and experience. Unfortunately, I'll not be able to speak much in detail about the character because the cast has not been officially introduced but the cat's out of the bag and everyone's aware (about me being in it).

"It's one of the greatest most privileged opportunities that an actor could get and to witness a cinema of that scale being made on Indian soil and to be a part of

this team was a very educating and humbling experience," Kothare, who shot to fame with Kabir Khan's "83", told PTI.

The actor said he felt "honoured" to be part of an ambitious project like "Ramayana" and to work alongside an impressive ensemble cast.

"It is one of the greatest and biggest ensemble feature films of Indian cinema that we've seen in a long time," he said.

Kothare, a popular name in Marathi cinema with acclaimed films to his credit including "Paani", "Zapatlela", "Majha Chakula", and "Avatarachi Goshta", said he was thrilled yet anxious about stepping into the world of "Ramayana".

"I was excited. I had butterflies when I was on the floor and sharing screen space with one of the greatest of Indian cinema and sharing a screen space with the likes of Ranbir and all these fine people. But I was very, very excited. It was an amazing experience."

He revealed that before "Ramayana", he had auditioned for Tiwari's 2023 production "Tarla", a biopic on Indian chef and author Tarla Dalal. He tested for the part of actor Huma Qureshi's husband in the movie but it ultimately went to seasoned actor Sharib Hashmi.

"I had auditioned at Mukesh Chhabra's office for 'Ramayana' and had been short-listed for one of Nitesh sir's films a year-and-a-half ago. It was a very beautiful film and I wished I could have gotten that part but I'm happy with the way it turned out. I think that's where Nitesh sir saw my work," he said.

"Ramayana", a two-part live-action saga, is produced by Namit Malhotra's Prime Focus Studios and DNEG, in association with Yash's Monster Mind Creations.

The first part is set to be released worldwide in IMAX during Diwali 2026, with part two following on Diwali 2027. (PTI)



Brook hopes focus to shift to on-field action as formidable England face Nepal in T20 World Cup

MUMBAI, Feb 7: An embattled Harry Brook will hope England hit the top gear and the focus shifts from the incident at a Wellington club to cricket when the two-time champions take on Nepal in their T20 World Cup opener, here on Sunday.

Brook is at the helm of a formidable England side which has had a successful run in the T20i format, but the talk around the camp has also been around the incident at the nightclub where the English captain was reportedly involved in an altercation with a bouncer during a night out in the pre-Ashe tour.

The England captain fielded a question related to the incident during the Captains' Press Conference along with his peers, while all-rounder Will Jacks too had to confront those in their pre-match media commitment here on Friday. "I wasn't actually in New Zealand, so I don't know anything about it. It's just one of those things that he obviously made a wrong decision and he accepted that. He has went out trying to move forward in a positive direction with that," Jacks said.

"He knows what he has done and there's nothing you can change about that, so there's no point focussing on it too much. On his perspective, he wants his cricket to do the talking," Jacks added.

Away from the off-field episode, England have had a perfect build-up to the World Cup and will be one of the teams to beat in the competition.

Placed in Group C along with debutants Italy, Nepal, Scotland and the West Indies, England know they will have to hit the top gear from the word go.

England won 11 out of their 17 T20is while losing only two last year and the team has tremendous fireworks across the board to pile up, or even chase bigger totals. However, bowling in dewy conditions would be a challenge and England will need their experienced campaigner in Adil Rashid to come up with solutions.

For Nepal, it is another opportunity to make a strong



dent on the world stage. In the last edition, they almost got the better of South Africa with the Proteas winning by a mere one run and Bangladesh were shot out for 106.

Among their most recent achievements is a 2-1 victory over two-time T20 World Cup winners the West Indies, a feat that would certainly fuel Nepal's fire.

Nepal also have fared well in the past, making the final of a tri-series last June which involved the Netherlands and Scotland. They had also made the summit clash of a T20i Quadrangular series featuring Qatar, Hong Kong and Kuwait.

Teams (from):

England: Harry Brook (c), Tom Banton (wk), Jos Buttler (wk), Ben Duckett, Phil Salt (wk), Jacob Bethell, Sam Curran, Liam Dawson, Will Jacks, Jamie Overton, Rehan Ahmed, Jofra Archer, Adil Rashid, Josh Tongue, Luke Wood.

Nepal: Rohit Paudel (c), Arif Sheikh, Asif Sheikh (wk), Dipendra Singh Airee, Basir Ahamed, Kushal Bhurtel, Sudneep Jora, Lokesh Bam, Gulsan Jha, Karan KC, Sompal Kami, Sandeep Lamichhane, Sher Malla, Lalit Rajbanshi, Nandan Yadav.

Match starts at 3:00pm. (PTI)

New Zealand eye all-round improvement against tricky Afghanistan

CHENNAI, Feb 7: An underwhelming New Zealand will be hoping to rediscover their explosive game against a dangerous Afghanistan in the opening Group D match of the ICC T20 World Cup here on Sunday.

The Kiwis went through a rather unstable preparatory phase ahead of the ICC showpiece, going 1-4 down to India, and Afghanistan are no less a threat.

The arrival of Tim Seifert and Finn Allen have given their top order a tad more firepower, but they need more substantial and consistent contributions from Rachin Ravindra, Mark Chapman and Devon Conway to capitalise on the starts given by the openers.

The sub-par effort by the middle-order was a huge missing link for New Zealand in the series against India as they struggled to force pace while setting or chasing.

An encore will have far reaching consequences for the Kiwis in a group that also has South Africa. Therefore Mitchell Santner and company do not want a slip-up in the first match and land in a marshy place.

Along with their batting, New Zealand will also hope for their



bowlers to return to their thrifty selves after the series against India, where they proved expensive against a set of marauding home batters.

Even though he played just one match against India, Lockie Ferguson showed the virtue of having extra pace and, more welcomingly, he seemed to have added some more variations to his craft.

Ferguson will have to play a lead role to keep Afghanistan on the back foot here, along with Santner and leg-spinner Ish Sodhi.

But that's a job easier said than done. Afghanistan is a capable T20 outfit, evidenced in their rout of the West Indies in a bilateral series last

week.

Their strength is in the presence of handy cricketers throughout the 11, and any of them can be a match-winner.

However, the bigger of that lot is Rashid Khan. The spinner no longer carries the mystery element as he once used to, but the will to compete has not diminished one bit, keeping him a foremost name in T20s.

He will need copious help from other bowlers such as Mujeeb ur Rahman and Noor Ahmad to make

an impact.

As such, spinners from both the teams can expect some assistance from the Chepaupitch, particularly because the match starts at 11 am and there will not be any dew.

The Afghanistan batting will revolve around Rahmanullah Gurbaz and Ibrahim Zadran, and the consistent Sediquallah Atal too will be one to watch out for.

They have the power and skill to give some harsh times for opposition bowlers, and it should make for an intriguing and interesting match.

Teams (from):

New Zealand: Mitchell Santner(c), Finn Allen, Michael Bracewell, Mark Chapman, Devon Conway, Jacob Duffy, Lockie Ferguson, Matt Henry, Kyle Jamieson, Daryl Mitchell, James Neesham, Glenn Phillips, Rachin Ravindra, Tim Seifert, Ish Sodhi.

Afghanistan: Rashid Khan(c), Noor Ahmad, Abdullah Ahmadzai, Sediquallah Atal, Fazalq Farooqi, Rahmanullah Gurbaz, Mohammad Ishaq Rahimi, Shahidullah Kamal, Mohammad Nabi, Gulbadin Naib, Azmatullah Omarzai, Mujeeb ur Rahman, Darwish Rasooli, Ibrahim Zadran, Zia Ur Rahman Sharifi.

Match starts at 11 am. (PTI)

Raja takes 65kg gold in weightlifting Nationals, Jeremy settles for bronze

MODINAGAR, Feb 7: Tamil Nadu's M Raja out-classed a field that included Commonwealth Games champion Jeremy Lalrinnunga to clinch the men's 65kg gold medal at the National Weightlifting Championships here on Saturday.

The 26-year-old Raja, a Commonwealth Championships silver medalist, lifted a combined 302kg (130kg snatch + 172kg clean and jerk) to finish comfortably ahead of the field.

Charu Pesi of the Services Sports Control Board (SSCB) secured the silver medal with a total of 296kg (129kg + 167kg).

Mizoram's Jeremy, the 2018 Youth Olympic champion, endured an off-colour outing, failing three attempts including two in the snatch, and finished with an overall effort of 295kg (133kg + 167kg) to settle for bronze.

Former Commonwealth Championships gold medalist Shubham Todkar had a disappointing campaign, finishing seventh with a total of 263kg (118kg + 145kg).

Meanwhile, Services lifter Arumugapandian Maharajan produced a remarkable "double-gold" performance, sweeping both the Youth and Junior categories. His total lift of 282kg earned him the top honours in both divisions, underlining his emergence as one of India's most promising young weightlifting talents. (PTI)

Kochhar fires course record to take lead in the Philippines

MANILA, Feb 7: India's Karandeep Kochhar roared back in the third round with a course record to take the third-round lead in the Philippine Golf Championship here on Saturday.

Kochhar, who recently won in Egypt and his own country at the IGPL Tour, celebrated his return to the Asian Tour with a bogey free 65 that had seven birdies. With rounds of 74-69-65 he is now 8-under and leader by two.

Breaking par on the East Course – respected for being one of the most challenging courses in the region – is an outstanding achievement.

"The way this course has been playing for the past two days and today, with a little bit of rain, which was there for maybe seven, eight holes, I would say I think it was probably one of my finest performances," Kochhar said.

"Because it's not easy out there to score, the greens are tiny, they can get quick if you're on the wrong side of the hole. I just played really well tee to green, that's been the mantra this week, just try to hit as many greens as possible," he added.

Four players, South African Ian Snyman (70), Travis Smyth (71) from Australia, Thailand's Sarut Vongchaisit (71) and Korea's Wooyoung Cho (71), share second place and are two strokes behind.

The next best Indian after Kochhar was rookie Shubham Jaglan (77-70-69) with five birdies against two bogeys was T-17.

Ajeetesh Sandhu (72-75-74) had a rare quintuple bogey of five-over on a single hole but still made the cut at 5-over total and was T-61.

Shaurya Bhattacharya shot 77 but made the cut at 6-over

and was T-63rd.

Kochhar made six birdies – four in the first six, back-to-back ones on 11 and 12 and the final one, that allowed him to break the previous course record by one, on the legendary par-three 17th.

About the penultimate hole, he explained: "I was adjusting between clubs today, between an eight and seven, because I think because of the weather, the way it was, it was a little bit humid, the ball wasn't flying as far. So, my caddie and I just decided on the seven iron, like a chippy seven iron there."

"My iron play has been very good this week, and then I hit a good putt. I hit a good shot to whatever, like six, eight, feet or whatever, and then just trusted the line, trusted the pace. Which is what I did pretty much the whole day, tried not to get ahead of myself." (PTI)

Heart rates go up and down, but knew we could take down whatever runs in one over: Faheem



COLOMBO, Feb 7: All-rounder Faheem Ashraf admitted his heart rate was fluctuating during the fog end of Pakistan's nervy yet successful run chase against the Netherlands in the T20 World Cup opener here on Saturday, but said he was confident he "could take down whatever runs in one over".

Ashraf emerged as Pakistan's hero, hammering an unbeaten 29 off just 11 balls, including two fours and three sixes, in a stunning late assault that sealed a dramatic three-wicket victory over the Netherlands.

"We have been playing this brand of cricket for the past year. Heart rates go up and down, it's happened so many times before, we're used to it," the 32-year-old bowling all-rounder said at the post-match presentation.

"Shaheen (Afriidi) and I were talking about saving wickets, knew we could take down whatever in one over."

Ashraf and Shaheen Afriidi remained unseparated in a 34-run stand for the eighth wicket.

Chasing 148 for a win, Pakistan were 90 for 2 at the halfway stage but lost wickets in a heap as they were 114 for 7 in 16.1 overs, needing 34 more runs.

It looked all but over for Pakistan at that stage but walking in at No. 8, Ashraf, who was dropped on 7, had other plans.

Needing 29 runs from the last two overs, Ashraf hit three sixes and one four off Logan van Beek and finished off the match with a four in the final over as Pakistan reached 148 for 7 in 19.3 overs.

Max O'Dowd dropped Ashraf when he was on seven in the second ball of the 19th over and that perhaps cost the Dutch the match.

"When the ball is in the air, you just want the ball to land. Our effort is to finish the games as early as possible. But you have to hold your nerve in these situations," said Ashraf, who was named Player of the Match.

Pakistan captain Salman Agha conceded that his team won the match the hard way.

"We have to do it the hard way. Credit to Faheem. We tried well, knew they'd come hard. Held things really well," said Salman.

"(Total) 147 we'd take on this pitch. Spinners have done well in the last six months. First 10 overs we batted well, then two wickets fell and pressure came in. We need to absorb better."

He said the conditions were tough early on but eased once he got set.

"Once a batter gets set, they need to finish the game, didn't do that today. Want to change that."

Netherlands captain Scott Edwards admitted his side was not at its best but lauded the players for the fight.

"Small moments can come on to hurt you. We kept losing wickets at important times. We felt 160 was going to give us a fair chance. We had to bowl well to give us a chance. A couple of good performances from the bowlers kept us in the game."

"It's a good wicket, Pakistan got it down to run a ball, then we got a maiden and the boys jumped on the momentum." (PTI)

Sumit Nagal to spearhead Indian Challenge at Delhi Open Challenger Meet

NEW DELHI, Feb 7: India's top ranked singles player Sumit Nagal will headline the country's challenge while Great Britain's Jay Clarke is the biggest overseas name at the Delhi Open ATP Challenger tournament scheduled from February 16 to 22 at the DLTA Complex here.

Nagal, the lone Indian to gain direct entry into the singles main draw, will be a key attraction for home fans.

A regular on the Challenger circuit, Nagal has consistently competed at the highest level and will be keen to take advantage of familiar conditions in New Delhi.

Talented Indian players Manas Dhame and Karan Singh will feature in the singles qualifiers on February 15, adding further domestic interest to the tournament.

Talented Japanese teenager Rei Sakamoto, his compatriot Rio Noguchi and Kazakhstan's Beibit

Zhukayev are also part of the field, underlining a strong Asian presence.

Speaking ahead of the tournament, Rohit Rajpal, President of the DLTA, underlined the event's importance for Indian tennis.

"The Delhi Open has firmly established itself as one of the most competitive and professionally run Challenger events in the region. Over the years, the tournament has played a critical role in bridging Indian talent with top international competition; giving our players the invaluable advantage of competing at home while offering fans the opportunity to experience world-class tennis at close quarters," Rajpal said.

"Equally important is the inspiration it provides to young players training at DLTA and across the country, showing them that the pathway to the international stage is both real and achievable." (PTI)

4th Inter-MAC Cup enters quarter-final stage after round of 16 matches

HT Bureau

DIPHU, Feb 7: After intense competition in the group stages, the 4th Inter-MAC Cup 2025-26, organised by the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), has reached its quarter-final stage with the completion of the round of 16 matches.

The knockout fixtures were played on Friday at eight different venues across Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong.

The Inter-MAC Cup was introduced in 2022 by the chief executive member of KAAC and president of the Karbi Anglong Sports Association, Tuliram Ronghang, with the objective of cultivating a strong sports culture and promoting local talent in the region.

The tournament features one team each from the 26 MAC constituencies and is organised by the Sports and Youth Welfare Department with support from KAAC.

The group stage followed a league format, with teams playing home and away matches, while the round of 16 marked the beginning of the knockout phase.



The fourth season of the tournament kicked off on August 26, 2025, and after nearly six months of group-stage action, the competition has now entered its decisive

phase.

At the KASA Stadium, Lumbajong MAC produced a dominant performance to defeat Surupathar MAC by a convincing 8-3 margin.

Lumbajong took early control of the match, with T Zamno scoring in the second minute and Sarlong Teron adding another in the 14th minute.

Malongkiri Tisso made it 3-0 in the 31st minute. Surupathar reduced the deficit through Namri Kro, but Lumbajong led 3-

1 at half-time.

In the second half, Surupathar scored again through Tokjir Ingti in the 59th minute, but Lumbajong responded strongly with five more goals.

Malongkiri Tisso struck twice more in the 63rd and 82nd minutes. Sumit Marak scored in the 74th minute, and Sarlong Teron completed his hat-trick with goals in the 85th and 87th minutes to seal the emphatic win.

At Jengkha High School playground, host Kopili MAC defeated Phuloni MAC 4-2.

At Samelangso Mini Stadium, Korkhanti MAC advanced to the quarter finals after beating Singhason MAC 4-2.

At Hornbill Playground in Bhoksong, Amreng MAC defeated host Duar Amla MAC 3-0 to qualify. Nomat MAC edged past host Duarbagori MAC 1-0 at Deithor Mini Stadium. At Koilamati Mini Stadium, Amri MAC progressed after defeating Nilip MAC 5-4 in a tie-breaker.

The match ended 1-1 after regulation time and extra time, with Amri converting all five penalty kicks while Nilip missed one.

In another round of 16 encounter at Howraghat Mini Stadium, Bithung MAC defeated host Howraghat MAC 3-1 to book their place in the last eight.

The eight teams qualified for the quarter-finals are Lumbajong MAC, Kopili MAC, Borjan MAC, Korkhanti MAC, Bithung MAC, Amreng MAC, Nomat MAC and Amri MAC.

The quarter-final matches are scheduled to be played on February 10, with venues yet to be announced by the organisers.

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Faheem Ashraf's sensational knock takes Pakistan to 3-wicket win over Netherlands

COLOMBO, Feb 7: All-rounder Faheem Ashraf emerged as the hero for Pakistan, hammering 29 off 11 balls in a stunning late assault to snatch a dramatic three-wicket win over the Netherlands in the T20 World Cup opener here on Saturday.

Chasing 148 for a win, Pakistan were 90 for 2 at the halfway stage but lost wickets in a heap as they were 114 for 7 in 16.1 overs, needing 34 more runs.

It looked all but over for Pakistan at that stage but walking in at number 8, Ashraf, who was dropped on 7, had other plans.

Needing 29 runs from the last two overs, Ashraf hit three sixes and one four off Logan Van Beek and finished off the match with a four in the final over as Pakistan reached 148 for 7 in 19.3 overs. Max O'Dowd dropped Ashraf when he was on seven in the second ball of the 19th over and perhaps that cost the match for the Dutch.

Pakistan's build-up was dominated by off-the-field matters after their Board decided to boycott the February 15 marquee match against India here, though they had beaten a depleted Australia 3-0 in the home T20I series.

At the Sinhalese Sports Club Ground which is hosting a T20I for the first time after 2010, Pakistan, the champions of the 2009 edition, huffed and puffed to win the match with three balls to spare.

Sahibzada Farhan top-scored with 47 off 31 balls while his opening partner Saim Ayub contributed 24 off 13 balls, but senior batter Babar Azam struggled with a 18-ball 15 with just one boundary. Captain Salman Agha made 12 off eight balls.

Pakistan were 90 for 2 at the halfway stage



and looked like they would wrap up the match quickly. But Paul van Meekeren's two-wicket burst in the 12th over -- removing Farhan and Usman Khan (0) -- and dismissal of Azam in the 13th over put them on the backfoot.

From 98 for 2 at the end of the 11th over, Pakistan were 100 for 5 in 12.4 overs, losing three wickets in the space of 10 balls for

addition of just two runs. They had just one substantial partnership of 45 runs between Farhan and Azam for the third wicket.

All hell broke loose after the 15th over when they needed 37 runs from the last five overs. The Dutch tightened the screw with the experienced Kyle Klein removing Mohammad Nawaz for 6 in the 16th over.

Pressure piled on Pakistan who needed 34

from the last four overs and immediately Shadab Khan was dismissed with the third umpire ruling against a review from the batter.

Earlier, sent in to bat, Netherlands lost way in the later part of their innings after a strong start as they were bowled out for 147 in 19.5 overs.

The Dutch milked 14 runs from the sixth over with the help of three boundaries to be 50 for 2 at the end of powerplay. But in the end, they ended at 147 with Salman Mirza (3/24) returning best figures among Pakistani bowlers.

Netherlands were at a comfortable 79 for 3 in the halfway stage, hitting 12 fours and one six till then.

The 40-run partnership for the fourth wicket between captain Scott Edwards (37 off 29 balls) and one-down Bas de Leede (30 off 25 balls) gave the Dutch hope of at least crossing the 150-run mark.

The minnows reached 100-run mark in 12.1 overs with seven wickets in hand.

But from there, the Dutch lost way with the Pakistanis taking the pace off their bowling. From 105 for 3 in 12.3 overs, they were reduced to 129 for seven in 16.4 overs.

The dismissal of de Leede off the bowling of Mohammad Nawaz in the 13th over pulled Netherlands back as they pressed the accelerator.

Abrar Ahmed then dealt a blow on Netherlands, removing Edwards in the 16th over.

Right-arm off-spinner Saim Ayub removed both Logan van Beek (0) and Zach Lion-Cachet (9) in the space of three balls in the 17th over to leave the Dutch in disarray at 130 for 7. (PTI)

Hetmyer's 22-ball fifty powers West Indies to 182/5 after slow start



KOLKATA, Feb 7: Shimron Hetmyer unleashed a brutal mid-innings assault with a 22-ball half-century as West Indies overcame a sedate start to post a competitive 182 for 5 against Scotland in their T20 World Cup opener at Eden Gardens here on Saturday. The left-hander turned the game on its head with clean, calculated power-hitting, smashing six sixes and two fours in a 36-ball 64 to transform the tempo after the two-time champions had crawled early on.

West Indies were an uncharacteristic 33 for no loss in the power play, managing just four boundaries while eating up 17 dot balls, which is nearly three overs without scoring.

Even at the halfway mark they were only 66/2 as the Scotland spinners, led by seasoned Mark Watt (0/38), bowled brilliantly.

But after the 10-over mark, Hetmyer slog-swept the spinners, pulled anything short with dis-

dain and even launched an audacious inside-out six over covers as the momentum swung dramatically.

West Indies plundered 72 runs between overs 11 and 15 to surge to 138 for 2, with Hetmyer doing most of the damage.

The Guyanese southpaw found an able ally in Rovman Powell (24 off 14) as the duo added a brisk 81 off just 37 balls to seize complete control of the middle overs. Hetmyer's charge, however, ended spectacularly when Brandon McMullen pulled off a stunning one-handed running catch at the boundary, diving full stretch to his left.

Earlier, Scotland who confirmed their participation only two weeks ago following Bangladesh's withdrawal justified their decision to bowl with a disciplined start.

Brandon King looked scratchy during his 35 off 30 balls, surviving a testing opening spell from Safyaan Sharif, while skipper Shai Hope (19) was cleaned up by Michael Leask's (1/42) quicker delivery. Debutant left-arm spinner Oliver Davidson (1/23 in three overs) then struck with his second ball to keep the Windies in check.

For the Scot, Brad Currie was most successful bowler picking 2/23. (PTI)

Bumrah doubtful for India's T20 World Cup opener against USA

MUMBAI, Feb 7: India's pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah is doubtful for the team's opening T20 World Cup match against the United States on Saturday after feeling slightly under the weather and skipping the training session the previous evening.

With the opening fixture expected to be a one-sided affair, the Indian team management is in no mood to take any risk with its most important fast bowler at the very start of a long campaign, it is learnt.

Bumrah, central to India's white-ball plans, did not bowl at the nets on Friday, prompting speculation that he could be rested purely as a precautionary measure. He was running a bit of temperature.

In case the 32-year-old fails to recover in time, Mohammed Siraj, who joined the squad on Friday evening, is expected to slot into the playing XI.

However, with Hardik Pandya likely to share the new ball, Siraj might have to operate as the first-change bowler. (PTI)

Having international cricket in Afghanistan is bigger than playing WC: Rashid Khan

CHENNAI, Feb 7: Rashid Khan and his Afghanistan teammates have travelled across the globe to play cricket and have achieved several honours, but one dream of them is still unfulfilled -- playing an international match at their home.

The war-ravaged nation has never hosted a global fixture at Kabul, and the devastation has been so soul-shattering that they were forced to adopt cities abroad as home venues.

In line with that, Greater Noida, Dehradun, Lucknow in India, while Sharjah and Abu Dhabi in the UAE became their home bases at various times.

But Rashid is not ready to abandon his dream.

"Yes, that's bigger than the World Cup to be honest, for me and for the team and every individual. We play an international game in Afghanistan and then all these people will see how people back home in

Afghanistan are, how they are welcoming players and how they are enjoying cricket and that's something which is more than a dream to be playing international cricket in your own country," a solemn-looking Rashid told on the eve of the T20 World Cup match against New Zealand here.

Rashid said the group was accorded love wherever they travel, particularly during the IPL, but he knew that playing in front of a home crowd would be an entirely different proposition.

"When we play IPL here (in India), when we play an international game, we see how much their international stars are supported by the local fans and how much they give them love, like we get so much love, I am not saying we don't get love here.

"Whenever we play here, we get lots of love and support, especially playing in IPL and also the World Cup we played (2023), we

haven't felt like being away from Afghanistan. But when you play in your own country, it's a kind of different feeling and the world will see the country Afghanistan as well, how beautiful it is. But hopefully, one day we make that possible for an international team to come and they play cricket there," he said.

Along with lack of international cricket, Afghanistan also does not have any notable domestic system, and Rashid said picking up a national team would be much tougher.

"We don't have much cricket in Afghanistan, especially the shorter format. We have four-day cricket, but not much of the white ball cricket and then some time for you as a captain, it becomes very hard to pick the team because you don't have many options like in India where lots of tournaments are happening every day and you see lots of talents," he said. (PTI)

It's always good to have more teams in the World Cup: Rashid Khan

CHENNAI, Feb 7: Afghanistan skipper Rashid Khan on Saturday welcomed the expansion of the T20 World Cup into 20 teams from the ongoing edition, saying it has opened the doors to players from more countries to showcase their talent on the global stage.

The 2026 iteration of the ICC showpiece is the biggest ever in its history in terms of the number of participating teams. "It's always good to have more teams in the World Cup, that's why lots of nations come in and you see lots of new talent, which you haven't seen and different teams come in, they give tough time to the oppositions and I think that's how the World Cup becomes bigger and bigger," Rashid said on the eve of the match against New Zealand.

"It doesn't matter if you are losing or winning the game, but you show to the world that you are capable of beating any side, any time as long as you have that belief," he added.

Afghanistan are in Group D along with contenders New Zealand and South Africa, and Rashid said the team was looking forward to taking the rough road.

"In World Cup, you don't get things easily, it's always very tough and that's the beauty of T20 cricket. You have to pass through the tough lines to achieve something bigger and I feel like that's something which is a challenge for us. If you want to achieve bigger things, you have to go through tough routes and we have tough oppositions."

"But still you have to keep that belief in yourself



and keep pushing yourself in the ground, as we have done in the '24 World Cup, where we have beaten big teams. I think the confidence is there, but it's just about making sure we do the right things at the right time," he added.

The leg-spinner said the Afghan players' experience in playing in the IPL will stand them in good stead in the tournament.

"We do have good spinners, but still you have to bowl well. And the wicket looks good, I think it looks good to bat on, but still the experience you have of playing a lot in IPL in here, I think you have to use that experience here and you can bowl the best to the batter, so it's going to be a good game," he said.

Rashid is four shy of completing the 700-wicket mark in all T20 competitions, and he was proud of his performance. (PTI)

Not just my lips every part of my body prayed for dropped catch: Faheem Ashraf

COLOMBO, Feb 7: Faheem Ashraf admitted that there was a prayer not just on his lips but every inch of his body when Max O'Dowd put down his catch, a moment that proved decisive as he powered Pakistan to a last-over victory over the Netherlands with a blistering 29 off 11 balls in the T20 World Cup.

Pakistan needed 29 off 12 balls with three wickets in hand. The all-rounder, who bats left-handed started with a six off seamer Logan van Beek but he mis-timed the second delivery as the aerial shot turned into a regulation catch at long off which O'Dowd dropped.

Ashraf made full use of the reprieve to smash 24 off that over including three sixes and a four to turn the game on its head and earn Pakistan much-needed full points.

"That feeling, at that time, it wasn't only my lips that were praying, but every part of my body was praying for that catch to be dropped," Ashraf said at the post-match press conference.

Ashraf said that he never felt pressure even when the dot ball count increased as he knew that one good over was all that was required to turn the game in Pakistan's favour.

"There were dot balls but we didn't take much pressure. We thought we just needed one good over and the match would turn in our favour. Because of that, we kept our nerves in check and believed that even if we played till the last ball, we would win," Ashraf replied that thoughts of losing the game wasn't even entertained.

For Ashraf, more than happiness, winning a match for Pakistan gives him peace.

"You feel that the team was in such a bad situation, but you still won. The most peaceful feeling is that you have won the first match of the World Cup and you scored the winning runs. There is nothing more satisfying than that." (PTI)

Chidambaram Stadium ready to welcome T20WC with new outfield, drainage system

CHENNAI, Feb 7: The loud whirrs of JCBs, lifters and loaders reverberated inside the fabled MA Chidambaram Stadium for eight months instead of the sweet sound of a ball meeting the meat of a cricket bat.

But the whole exercise resulted in a wonderful outfield and drainage system just in time for the ICC T20 World Cup.

So, why did the Tamil Nadu Cricket Association (TNCA) decide to undertake such a time-consuming venture with the World Cup approaching?

"See, the last time we did this outfield was I think in 2011, so it has been quite some time. So, this whole exercise has taken us some 8 months starting from June (2025)," TNCA secretary U Bhagwandas Rao told PTI.

"We excavated all the soil, removed all the old pipes. So, it is filled with gravel, river sand, and then the actual grass that you see," he added.

Along with relaying the outfield and carrying out the regular maintenance works, Rao said, the upgrade of the draining system held an important place.

"In between all that, we have changed and completely upgraded the entire drainage system for the stadium, including the motors, the sprinkler systems, the drainage flow out of the stadium...all that has been changed."

"So, that has taken us around seven months and then we finished it off with the synthetic running track. So, that is more or less completed, but the wickets have not changed, all old 9 pitches apart from the routine yearly maintenance," he detailed.



Rao said the rains late last year also helped in gaining some momentum to the repair work.

"The drainage is exceptional. We did not expect it to be so good. The November rains also helped us a lot. You know, nothing like natural testing of all these facilities. It actually kind of accelerated the growth of the grass after planting. I think that helped a lot -- the two weeks of heavy rains that we had," he noted.

Rao said the International Cricket Council (ICC) too inspected the outfield and drainage system thoroughly before giving a thumbs up.

"See, the ICC, when they came, they said it was exceptional. They did not have a prob-

lem. All of them liked the stadium and the facilities."

"The infrastructure like pavilion, gates, the exits, other common areas...yeah...all that has been completely redeveloped in the last 4-5 years. Of course, Hari (Harihara, the TNCA spokesperson), has been efficient in his coordination, making our job that much easier," he said.

Rao also said works at Chepauk helped TNCA to give more attention to district grounds, where the association now regularly hosts the Tamil Nadu Premier League (TNPL) matches.

"This work actually started three years back when the previous administration took

over. I think one of the primary goals or the vision was to develop infrastructure in districts. They should not keep coming back to Chennai because the bulk of the talent is originating from the districts.

"So, the plan was to have these satellite centers which have practice facilities, nets and full residential quarters. So, we have one in Tirupur, in Salem, in Coimbatore and in Theni. We have chambers in Natham (Dindigul)."

"They all have come out exceptionally well. So, all our state teams whenever they play board games, we stay at our own facilities. It has also helped the women's cricketers. You know this residential thing is much better for them, as it's safer for them. Now, many parents too have told us that they feel mentally very comfortable," he added.

Rao said the TNCA is open to extending these facilities to cricketers from around the country or even outside of it.

"So much care has been given to all these facilities, the outside state associations now have come and seen these facilities, including MCA. Mumbai wants to use the facility whenever they have the monsoons for two months there."

"I am told that some of the foreign boards also want to come and play here. So, the idea is that these are not only for ours, but we want to provide these facilities for as many talents as possible. But the (TNCA) Center of Excellence will be very much in Chennai and all report into the TNCA Academy," he detailed. (PTI)