

6 WORLD
8 NATION



- BNP heading towards major victory
- New round of US-brokered talks between Russia, Ukraine set for Geneva next week
- Congress targets Maharashtra govt over Bishnoi gang threats to Bollywood stars
- Rahul's conduct remained anarchic, undemocratic in the first leg of Budget session: BJP

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Government of India
Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology
Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs
Government of Assam



Ensuring Holistic Development in Assam

Virtual launch of landmark initiatives



Chief Guest

Shri Narendra Modi
Prime Minister

August Presence

Shri Lakshman Prasad Acharya
Governor, Assam

Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma
Chief Minister, Assam

Shri Sarbananda Sonowal
Union Minister, Ports, Shipping & Waterways

14 February 2026 1 PM Lachit Ghat, Guwahati



National Data Centre for North-East Region (NDC-NER)

Amingaon, Kamrup

Designed to ensure faster adoption of e-Governance projects in NE region

KEY FUNCTIONS

- Act as a key enabler in digital service delivery across NE
- Serve as a Disaster Recovery Hub for other NDCs
- Support large-scale transactional and AI workloads
- Infrastructure can scale beyond 70 PB of data storage

Project Cost
₹348 crore+

Total area
7 bigha



Academic Session of IIM Guwahati

Transit Campus, Tech City, Bongora, Kamrup

Mentor Institute
IIM Ahmedabad

Transit Campus

- ▶ Academic block
- ▶ Hostel block
- ▶ Digital classrooms
- ▶ Seminar hall
- ▶ Canteen block

Project Cost
₹555 crore

225 Electric Buses for 4 Citites

under PM-eBus Sewa

Guwahati 100

Nagpur 50 | Bhavnagar 50 | Chandigarh 25



DIPR/D/HLT/297/14-Feb-26

Sensex crashes over 1k points on selling in metal, IT stocks; Nifty sinks 336 pts

MUMBAI, Feb 13: Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty tumbled more than 1 per cent on Friday due to a broad-based selloff, especially in metal, IT and commodity stocks, tracking sluggish global markets.

A weaker-than-expected earnings season and emerging pressure on technology stocks amid concerns about AI-led disruption also dampened sentiment, traders said.

In a volatile session, the 30-share BSE Sensex tumbled 1,048.16 points, or 1.25 per cent, to close at 82,626.76. During the day, the benchmark tanked 1,140.37 points, or 1.36 per cent, to hit an intraday low of 82,534.55.

A total of 2,960 stocks declined, while 1,253 advanced and 151 remained unchanged on the BSE.

The 50-share NSE Nifty plunged 336.10 points, or 1.30 per cent, to settle at 25,471.10. In the intraday trade, it slumped 362.9 points, or 1.4 per cent, to hit a low of 25,444.30.

The benchmarks nosedived following weaker-than-expected results, along with continued pressure in technology stocks amid concerns around AI-led disruption, Siddhartha Khemka, Head of Research, Wealth Management, Motilal Oswal Financial Services Ltd, said.

"The Nifty IT index touched a 10-month low during the session before closing 1.4 per cent lower, even as selective buying helped it recover from intraday lows. The sector continues to face headwinds amid rising concerns that rapid AI advancements could disrupt traditional service models and weigh on future revenue visibility," he noted.

On a weekly basis, the 30-share BSE Sensex slumped 953.64 points, or 1.14 per cent, while NSE Nifty dropped 222.6 points, 0.86 per cent.

The market capitalisation of BSE-listed firms eroded by ₹



7,02,017.71 crore to ₹ 4,65,46,643.20 crore (USD 5.13 trillion).

Among the Sensex constituents, Hindustan Unilever, Eternal, Titan, Tata Steel, Adani Ports, Tata Consultancy Services, PowerGrid, Reliance Industries, Bharat Electronics Ltd, Asian Paints, Mahindra & Mahindra, HDFC Bank and HCL Technologies were the major laggards.

On the other hand, Bajaj Finance and State Bank of India were the only gainers.

"Domestic equities ended lower following a highly volatile session, weighed down by weak global cues ahead of the upcoming US inflation data."

"Sentiment gains from the US-India trade deal have faded as renewed AI-driven disruption fears weigh on risk appetite, with markets worrying that Indian IT firms dependent on the labour arbitrage model may face tougher competi-

tive pressure than their Nasdaq peers," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Limited, said.

This cautious tone extended across the broader market, pulling all major indices into negative territory, with most sectors closing in the red, he added.

"Metal stocks saw profit-booking amid a stronger dollar index, as reports of Russia's return to the US-dollar settlement system heightened expectations of potential sanctions relief and raised concerns over weaker realisations for metal companies," Nair said.

The BSE SmallCap Select Index fell 1.90 per cent, while the MidCap Select Index slipped 1.19 per cent.

Among sectoral indices, Metal declined the most by 3.21 per cent, followed by Realty and Commodities by 2.27 per cent each, Utilities by 2.26 per cent, Energy by 1.94 per cent, Oil & Gas by 1.86 per cent, Power by 1.85 per cent,

FMCG by 1.74 per cent, and Services by 1.72 per cent.

In the commodities space, gold and silver prices declined up to 10 per cent after the greenback strengthened on the back of stronger-than-expected US January jobs data, which reduced expectations of near-term interest rate cuts by the US Federal Reserve, Khemka said.

Precious metals prices declined more than 5 per cent in the national capital on Friday, with silver declining to ₹ 2.55 lakh per kilogram, while gold dropped to ₹ 1.58 lakh per 10 grams amid weak global trends.

The dollar gained further traction amid media reports that Russia may consider re-entering the dollar settlement system as part of a potential economic understanding with the US, adding additional pressure on precious metals.

The rupee consolidated in a narrow range and settled for the day 3 paise lower at 90.64 (provisional) against the US dollar on Friday.

In Asian markets, Hong Kong's Hang Seng benchmark, Shanghai's SSE Composite index, Japan's Nikkei 225 index and South Korea's Kospi ended in the negative territory.

European markets are trading on a mixed note in mid-session deals. The US equities market ended up to 2 per cent lower on Thursday.

Meanwhile, Foreign institutional investors bought equities worth ₹ 108.42 crore on Thursday, while domestic institutional investors were also net buyers of stocks worth ₹ 276.85 crore, according to exchange data.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, rose 0.32 per cent to USD 67.81 per barrel.

On Thursday, the 30-share BSE Sensex declined 558.72 points to settle at 83,674.92. The 50-share NSE Nifty declined 146.65 points to end at 25,807.20. (PTI)

Silver declines 5 pc to ₹ 2.55 lakh/kg, gold drop to ₹ 1.58 lakh/10g

NEW DELHI, Feb 13: Precious metals prices declined more than 5 per cent in the national capital on Friday, with silver declining to ₹ 2.55 lakh per kilogram, while gold dropped to ₹ 1.58 lakh per 10 grams amid subdued demand in the local market.

According to the All India Sarafa Association, the white metal slumped ₹ 13,500, or 5.03 per cent, to ₹ 2,55,000 per kilogram (inclusive of all taxes). It ended flat at ₹ 2,68,500 per kg on Thursday.

Gold of 99.9 per cent purity also dived ₹ 2,400, or 1.5 per cent, to ₹ 1,58,500 per 10 grams (inclusive of all taxes) from the previous close of ₹ 1,60,900 per 10 grams.

"Gold and silver fell sharply on Friday amid a broader market sell-off and remained under pressure on Friday, as investors adopted a cautious stance ahead of the highly anticipated US consumer inflation data," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst, Commodities at HDFC Securities, said.

In the international market, spot silver gained USD 2.01, or 3 per cent, to USD 77.30 per ounce, while

gold was trading nearly 1 per cent higher at USD 4,968.40 per ounce.

"Silver has rebounded to trade near USD 79 per ounce, while gold has also recovered to USD 4,990 per ounce as markets turn their focus to upcoming US Consumer Price Index (CPI) data," Kaynat Chainwala, AVP Commodity Research, Kotak Securities, said.

She added that softer inflation readings could revive expectations of policy easing and provide much-needed stability to bullion prices while persistent inflation and a resilient labour market could keep the Federal Reserve on a "higher-for-longer" trajectory, keeping prices under pressure.

Meanwhile, easing geopolitical tensions, particularly around Russia-Ukraine and renewed US-Iran nuclear discussions, have dampened safe-haven demand.

"On Thursday, silver faced additional pressure from weak US existing home sales and concerns over softer Chinese industrial demand ahead of the Lunar New Year shutdown," Chainwala said. (PTI)

India's forex reserves drop USD 6.7 bln to USD 717.06 bln

MUMBAI, Feb 13: India's forex reserves dropped by USD 6.71 billion to USD 717.06 billion during the week ended February 6, the RBI said on Friday.

In the previous reporting week, the kitty had jumped by USD 14.361 billion to an all-time high of USD 723.774 billion.

During the week ended February 6, foreign currency assets, a major com-

ponent of the reserves, increased by USD 7.661 billion to USD 570.053 billion, the data released by the central bank showed.

Expressed in dollar terms, the foreign currency assets include the effects of appreciation or depreciation of non-US units, such as the euro, pound, and yen, held in the foreign exchange reserves.

Value of the gold reserves dropped

by USD 14.208 billion to USD 123.476 billion during the week, the RBI said. The Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) were down by USD 132 million to USD 18.821 billion, the apex bank said.

India's reserve position with the IMF was also down by USD 32 million to USD 4.715 billion in the reporting week, according to the apex bank's data. (PTI)

Govt approves Startup India Fund of Funds 2.0 with ₹ 10,000 cr corpus

NEW DELHI, Feb 13: The government on Friday approved the second tranche of Startup India Fund of Funds Scheme with a corpus of ₹ 10,000 crore. This will encourage startups in early stages and deep-tech research, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said in a social media post.

On his first day at Seva Teerth, the prime minister's new office, Modi signed files that are connected with the empowerment of the poor, downtrodden, farmers, Yuva Shakti and Nari Shakti. The key decisions include "approval for a Startup

India Fund of Funds 2.0 with a corpus of ₹ 10,000 crore," said the post.

The Prime Minister on Friday shifted to his new office Seva Teerth from the colonial-era South Block building near Rashtrapati Bhavan on Raisina Hill. The shift came on a day -- February 13 -- that marked 95 years since the formal inauguration of New Delhi as India's modern capital in 1931. The government in 2016 had constituted a Fund of Funds worth ₹ 10,000 crore to provide seed capital and enable startups take calculated risks. (PTI)

FABRICATION OF GLUED JOINT IN LUMDING DIVISION

Tender Notice No.: LMG/Engg/12 of 2026. Dated: 10-02-2026.

E-Tender are invited by the undersigned for the following work:

SN:1: Brief Description of Item

: Fabrication of Glued joint under jurisdiction of ADEN/Dimapur.

Tender Value: ₹ 2,77,215/-.

Earnest Money: ₹ 1,85,600/-.

Date & time of closing of tender at 15:00 hrs. on 09-03-2026 and opening at 15:00 hrs. on 10-03-2026. Complete information alongwith the tender document of above e-tender will be available up to 15:00 hrs. on 09-03-2026 in the website www.ireps.gov.in

DRM(W)/Lumding
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
Serving Customers With A Smile

Contd. from Page 3...

Kumar Bhaskar Varma Setu

Indian history. The two rulers maintained warm diplomatic relations and treated one another with mutual respect and importance. Kumar Bhaskar Varma expanded the boundaries of Kamarupa westward into North Bengal after defeating Shashanka, the ruler of Gaur who had earlier assassinated Harshavardhana's brother Rajyavardhana. According to the travel accounts of Huen Tsang, southeastern Bengal, Sylhet and Tripura also formed part of Kamarupa during Kumar Bhaskar Varma's reign. He further wrote that the sea routes to China were under the supervision of the King of Kamarupa. During Kumar Bhaskar Varma's rule, Assam's prestige spread across India, making this era widely regarded as the golden age of Assamese history. The Assamese calendar, known as Bhaskarabda, is traditionally calculated from his accession to the throne. Today we are officially using this calendar. He is also remembered as "Kumar Raja", as he remained unmarried throughout his life.

At the grand Dharma Sabha held at Kannauj in honour of Huen Tsang, Emperor Harshavardhana accorded exceptional respect to Kumar Bhaskar Varma by offering him the place of highest honour. The event was further marked by a magnificent religious procession, in which Harshavardhana, dressed as Lord Indra, and Kumar Bhaskar Varma, dressed as Lord Brahma, walked side by side at the forefront, while all others followed behind. This included eighteen subordinate kings under Harshavardhana, forty princes, nearly three thousand Buddhist scholars and an equal number of Brahmins who had gathered for the occasion. The honour accorded to Kumar Bhaskar Varma at this imperial gathering makes it clear that the King of Kamarupa occupied a uniquely distinguished position in the political and cultural landscape of the time, reflecting the immense influence and prestige he commanded across the subcontinent.

The copperplate inscriptions issued by Kumar Bhaskar Varma prove that ancient Kamarupa had a well-organised, robust and accountable system of governance. His kingdom maintained a formidable naval force, comprising nearly 30,000 boats, along with a powerful army supported by around 20,000 elephants. As a responsible ruler, he took the security of Kamarupa seriously and did not compromise on this.

The Glory of Kamarupa during the Reign of Kumar Bhaskar Varma

The economic condition of ancient Kamarupa reached a remarkable level of prosperity during the reign of Kumar Bhaskar Varma. There were various industries in Kamarupa for the production of bamboo and cane products, paat and muga textiles, perfumes from agar, jaggery prepared from sugarcane and the manufacture of metal utensils and exquisite gold ornaments. This prosperity is evident from the list of gifts sent by Kumar Bhaskar Varma to Emperor Harshavardhana through his envoy Hamsavega. Among the offerings were a remarkable ceremonial umbrella known as the Abhaga, bamboo and cane carpets, agarwood perfumes preserved in silk pouches, a variety of utensils, liquid jaggery stored in earthen pots and paat-muga textiles. The list of gifts also included sanchipaat manuscripts and paintings. This shows that Kamarupa was also a vibrant centre of literature, art and intellectual activity.

In the political history of Assam, the resistance of external aggression led by Kumar Bhaskar Varma will always be remembered with pride by the people of Assam. This seventh-century king, who displayed unparalleled knowledge, military strength and rare strategic skill in warfare and alliances, continues to inspire us today with his courage and spirit of resistance. Kumar Bhaskar Varma's irresistible struggle is a source of inspiration for us in waging a courageous resistance struggle at a time when the indigenous people of Assam are living day and night in fear of losing their language, culture and land due to continuous religious aggression by outsiders.

The state government has already established a state university in Nalbari in the name of this great King of Kamarupa. This year the state government has dedicated the newly constructed Guwahati-North Guwahati bridge over the Brahmaputra in the name of Kumar Bhaskar Varma. The bridge will be named Kumar Bhaskar Varma Setu.

Context of Bridge Construction

In 2016, for the first time in Assam, a BJP-led NDA government was formed, and I was entrusted with the responsibility of serving as the Minister of the Guwahati Development Department. I invited the Singapore-based government enterprise Surbana Jurong to Guwahati and assigned it the task of preparing architectural designs

for two proposed bridges over the Brahmaputra. These bridges were planned to connect Palashbari-Sualkuchi and Guwahati-North Guwahati. After Surbana Jurong confirmed the feasibility of the projects and prepared the designs, we began discussions and consultations on how to arrange the required funding. At that time, I was also holding the charge of Finance Minister of the Government of Assam. Through Ministry of Finance, we approached the New Development Bank (NDB), popularly known as the BRICS Development Bank, an international financial institution established by Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. The Bank agreed to provide funding for the Guwahati-North Guwahati bridge. This was first ever NDB assisted project in North East and Assam.

As per the agreed terms, the Bank financed 80 percent of the project cost, while the State Government contributed 20 percent. The loan component extended by the Bank to the State Government is to be repaid by the Government of India. In total, the bridge was constructed at a cost of approximately Rs. 3,000 crore, of which around Rs. 2,000 crore was borne by the Government of India and about Rs. 1,000 crore by the Government of Assam.

The bridge connects South and North Guwahati through the heart of the city, fulfilling a long-standing demand of residents on both banks of the river. It significantly reduces travel time and eases traffic congestion in Guwahati, especially as the Sarighat Bridge had long remained the only land route linking the two sides. This new bridge also opens up the possibility of developing twin metropolitan hubs on the lines of Hyderabad-Secunderabad and Ahmedabad-Gandhinagar. With Guwahati facing mounting pressure from rapid population growth and a steadily declining carrying capacity, urban expansion has become inevitable. The new bridge will also help meet that need.

Technical Specifications

There are several new aspects to this bridge. It is about 33 metres wide and has six lanes. Apart from vehicular traffic, the bridge also includes a dedicated sidewalk for pedestrians. Taken together, the old and new Sarighat Bridge have only five lanes, whereas this bridge alone has six - an important point to note. The bridge uses extradosed technology, enabling a 200-metre span that reduces the number of pillars in the middle of the Brahmaputra River. The cables attached to the structure further enhance its load-bearing capacity. The main bridge is 1.2 km long. Notably, this is the only extradosed bridge in the country to incorporate friction pendulum bearings for earthquake protection. Most importantly, the bridge has been constructed by the Public Works Department of Government of Assam, which is a matter of great pride for us. Earlier, some bridges over the Brahmaputra were built by the Indian Railways, while others were executed by the National Highways Authority of India. For the first time, Assamese engineers, officers, employees and workers have together delivered such a world-class bridge. The Public Works Department of Government of Assam is also constructing the 3.6 km four-lane extradosed bridge connecting Palashbari and Sualkuchi. Previously, this was unimaginable. This is the result of the confidence of a new and resurgent Assam.

Arrival of the Prime Minister

The foundation stone of the bridge was laid on 9 February 2019 by the country's illustrious Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi. He will formally inaugurate the bridge on 14 February 2026. Following its official opening, the bridge will remain accessible exclusively to pedestrians until 28 February. Visitors will be able to enjoy panoramic views of Kamakhya Temple and the Nilachal Hills, along with the scenic beauty of Guwahati and the majestic Brahmaputra River. Vehicular movement across the bridge will commence at a later date. On the same day as the inauguration, the Prime Minister will also lay the foundation stone of the Indian Institute of Management Guwahati, marking another significant milestone in the region's development.

Progressive Assam

This is undoubtedly a golden era for Assam. On behalf of the people of the state, I express my sincere thanks and gratitude to the Hon'ble Prime Minister, for his unwavering commitment to the rapid development of Assam and the North East. His genuine affection for the region and deep sense of responsibility towards its progress have ushered in a new phase of growth and transformation. I warmly welcome him to Assam. The new modern, world-class terminal at Lokpriya Gopinath Bardoloi International Airport in Guwahati, already inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, will become operational from 22 February. The Assam we see today is unlocking far greater potential, strengthened by the Prime Minister's sincere commitment and affection for the region. In a few days, there will be a Ring Road in Guwahati. Beyond this, four more bridges are planned over the Brahmaputra, including the Narengi-Kuruwa and

Palashbari-Sualkuchi bridges. Moving further ahead, there is the Semiconductor project in Jagiraoad and, then again, a bit further a 34-km elevated corridor in Kaziranga. Then there is the two-lane tunnel between Numaligarh and Gohpur under the Brahmaputra with provision for both rail and vehicular traffic. Added to this are the expansion of the Numaligarh Oil Refinery and the revival of the Namrup Fertilizer Plant with its fourth unit, each representing milestones in Assam's modern development journey. Together, these initiatives define the identity of a new Assam - steadfast (Atal), unwavering (Avichal) and forward-looking (Aragami). We must sustain this unstoppable momentum that we have built collectively and continue to carry Assam forward with the same global vision once demonstrated by great leaders like Kumar Bhaskar Varma.

PM to launch Moran

the inauguration of IIM-Guwahati and will become one of the select states to have an IIT, IIM, AIIMS and all other pioneer institutions to cater to the next generation, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said.

The National Data Centre in Guwahati is set to become the backbone of IT infrastructure in the region and by adopting a 'Cloud First' approach, it will enhance the capacity of e-governance initiatives and ensure secure digital services.

The prime minister will also flag off 100 electric vehicles (EVs) for Guwahati from the same venue.

Modi will conclude his visit to the state by addressing a public meeting of BJP booth-level workers here before flying back to Delhi. Assam Chief Secretary Ravi Kota and Director General of Police Harmeet Singh held a joint review meeting to assess the preparedness for the forthcoming visit of the prime minister. "Reviewed arrangements for key programme components scheduled during the visit, including inauguration of the 1.2-km Kumar Bhaskar Varma Bridge over the Brahmaputra connecting Guwahati and North Guwahati; inauguration of IIM-Guwahati at Bongora and the National Data Centre at Amingaon; flagging-off of e-buses in Guwahati and other cities under the PM e-Bus Sewa Scheme; and inauguration of the Northeast's first highway-based emergency landing strip at Chabua on the Dibrugarh-Moran stretch," Kota posted on X.

Security, logistical and inter-agency coordination measures were comprehensively assessed, with focus on crowd management, traffic regulation, emergency response preparedness and seamless coordination among civil administration, police and allied departments, he said.

"Directed all agencies concerned to adhere strictly to established protocols and timelines to ensure the programme is conducted smoothly, safely and successfully," he added. (PTI)

Assam govt pursuing

encroachments had posed a serious threat to Assam's environmental security, law and order, and overall development. "For long, illegal encroachers operated with immunity, turning forests into a den for illegal activities. But our government has a zero tolerance policy towards encroachers," Sarma said in his post, underlining that the present administration is determined to reverse years of neglect and inaction.

The chief minister emphasised that the eviction drives being carried out across several districts are part of a larger strategy to ensure a "Surakshit Assam" (Safe Assam).

According to him, reclaiming encroached land is also crucial for protecting forests, preserving biodiversity, and restoring ecological balance in the state.

He further stated that the government is not limiting its actions to eviction alone.

"Not only are we evicting them, we are finishing off avenues of crime," Sarma said, adding that illegal settlements had often been linked to organised crime, smuggling, and other unlawful activities that undermined public safety.

Over the past few months, the Assam government has intensified eviction operations in forest reserves and government land, reclaiming hundreds of hectares.

The drives, though politically contentious, have been defended by the state government as necessary for enforcing the rule of law and ensuring equitable use of public resources.

Officials have reiterated that all actions are being carried out in accordance with legal procedures, with prior notices issued to encroachers.

The government has also maintained that genuine indigenous landless families will be rehabilitated through lawful means.

The chief minister concluded by reaffirming his government's commitment to strong governance, environmental protection, and public safety, asserting that Assam is moving decisively towards a future marked by lawfulness, security, and sustainable development.

Meghalaya DGP

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

The NGT had in 2014 issued a blanket ban on transportation and rat-hole mining of coal in Meghalaya due to its severe environmental impact and grave risks it poses to miners, citing lack of safety measures, ventilation and structural support.

The state government has assured the Meghalaya High Court that strict action will be taken against those involved in running the illegal mine and that four persons have been arrested and several thousand metric tonnes of illegal coal dumps seized as district authorities stepped up raids and inspections in coal-bearing areas to dismantle labour camps. (PTI)

CM launches projects

he said. The CM also distributed ₹ 10,000 each to 26,988 women in Tangla Assembly constituency under the beneficiary scheme for women entrepreneurs.

"Tangla is the 114th legislative Assembly constituency to be covered under the initiative, further strengthening the journey dignity and self-reliance of women power", Sarma added.

Earlier in Kokrajhar, Sarma attended the 11th annual Sonkosh Kherai Festival and the 12th annual session of the Dularai Gudi Bathou Afad.

He also laid the foundation stone for the historic Sonkosh Kherai complex infrastructure development project, to be constructed at an estimated cost of around ₹ 50 crore.

"This is another reaffirmation of Assam government's commitment to preserving cultural heritage while promoting regional development", he added. (PTI)

Digboi tense following

Medical College and Hospital for post-mortem examination, demanding strict legal action and firm assurances from the administration. They relented following assurances from the authorities, police said.

Five people have so far been arrested in this connection. Tinsukia Senior Superintendent of Police Mayank Kumar said.

They are Bhatt Khan, Ranjan Khan, Bikram Sahani, Ajim Ali and Sonu Shattacharjee. (PTI)

₹ 3,000-cr new bridge

under varying river conditions, he added.

The new bridge connects key transport corridors and supports the broader goals of regional development under Assam's infrastructure roadmap, the official said.

Construction of this bridge has been closely monitored by relevant authorities to ensure compliance with safety, quality, and environmental standards throughout the building cycle.

Singla pointed out that the company will continue to collaborate with stakeholders to highlight the long-term value this infrastructure delivers for residents, businesses, and the broader Northeast region.

A senior official of the state government pointed out that the key benefits of the bridge are "easy access to several national institutions and cultural landmarks located in North Guwahati, to develop North Guwahati as a twin city and overall development of the state capital region" (PTI)

9th Assam State Film

fraternity, along with government dignitaries. Assam State Film Finance and Development Corporation Ltd chairman Simanta Shekhar Simanta also attended the press meet.

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THE HILLS TIMES 3

Zubeen death case hearing held • Lawyers of 2 accused • No sign of remorse in accused's face: Garima

Demand for fast-track court gets louder

GUWAHATI, Feb 13: The court hearing the case of singer Zubeen Garg's death on Friday examined documents submitted by two accused, Shyamkanu Mahanta and Siddhartha Sharma, while the singer's wife and sister demanded that the fast-track court promised by the state government be set up at the earliest for daily hearings.

The Kamrup Metropolitan District and Sessions Court admitted Mahanta's petition seeking the release of his frozen bank accounts and also heard three petitions of Sharma, including one seeking the handing over of the report of the Singapore Coroner's Court regarding Garg's death.

The lawyers of both the accused also submitted various documents related to the case to the court for examination. The prosecution opposed all the petitions with the court fixing February 16 as the next date of hearing.

Garg's wife Garima told reporters outside the court that the government should immediately set up the fast-track court for daily hearing of the case, otherwise it would drag on for years and justice would not be meted out to both the



family and the people of Assam.

"We have been saying from the very beginning that the fast-track court should be set up so that continuous hearing can take place and the guilty are punished", she said. "There is no sign of any remorse in the face of the accused and even their lawyers appeared to be confused or trying to confuse the court," she said.

Garg's sister Palme Borthakur also demanded that the trial be sped up, saying, "Even now the ac-

cused are only submitting the documents and if it continues in this way, it will take more than 20 years for the verdict to be executed."

The prosecution lawyer also urged that the fast-track court should be set up immediately and said they will soon apply for it in the Gauhati High Court.

Among the seven accused arrested in the case, three -- Garg's band member Amritprava Mahanta and his two personal security officers (PSOs) Paresh Baishya and

Nandeswar Bora -- had earlier filed for bail, which was rejected during the last hearing on January 30.

North East India Festival Director Shyamkanu Mahanta, the singer's secretary Siddhartha Sharma, his band members Shekhar Jyoti Goswami and Amritprava were accused of murder in the chargesheet by the Special Investigating Team constituted by the Assam government to probe into the singer's death.

The singer's cousin and suspended Assam Police officer Sandipan Garg has been charged with culpable homicide not amounting to murder while the singer's two PSOs have been charged with criminal conspiracy and criminal breach of trust by misappropriating funds or property entrusted to them.

The SIT had submitted the chargesheet on December 12 and the first hearing was held on December 16.

Garg had gone to attend the North East India Festival at Singapore, where he died under mysterious circumstances while swimming in the sea on September 19. (PTI)

No problem with Oppn unity move: Himanta

BJP to name candidates after declaration of poll date



STAFF REPORTER

GUWAHATI, Feb 13: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Friday said that the BJP will announce its list of candidates immediately after the Election Commission declares the dates for the upcoming polls.

Speaking to reporters in Udalguri, the Chief Minister asserted that the party is fully prepared for the elections and is moving ahead with a clear strategy.

Sarma said that political developments in the opposition camp will not delay or alter the ruling party's roadmap.

"Once the election dates are announced, we will declare our candidates without any delay," he said, adding that early clarity will help the party strengthen its grassroots outreach and organisational work.

Referring to attempts at opposition unity, the chief minister said the ruling party must always assume that the opposition will fight the elections in a united manner.

"We have to move forward believing that opposition unity will take shape," Sarma told reporters, un-

derlining that electoral preparedness should not be based on speculation or political uncertainty.

He stated that the government and the party are confident of their performance, citing development initiatives, infrastructure expansion and welfare schemes implemented over the past few years.

According to Sarma, these works have created a strong connect between the government and the people, particularly in rural and tribal areas.

The chief minister also emphasised that the party's focus remains on governance and public service rather than political calculations.

He said that the government will continue to prioritise development, law and order, and welfare of all sections of society in the run-up to the elections.

Sarma noted that organisational strengthening at the booth level has been completed in most constituencies and feedback from ground-level workers is being continuously reviewed.

He said candidate selection will be based on winnability, performance and acceptance among the people.

The chief minister dismissed suggestions that opposition strategies would pose a major challenge, stating that the ruling party is confident of securing a fresh mandate.

He added that the electorate will judge parties based on their work and credibility rather than political alliances.

Reiterating his confidence, Sarma said the party is ready to face the elections whenever they are announced, and expressed optimism that the people of Assam will once again repose faith in the present leadership and its vision for the state's future.

Digboi tense following protests over death of tea tribe man in mob assault

DIBRUGARH, Feb 13: Tea garden workers and various organisations held protests at Digboi in Assam's Tinsukia district on Friday, demanding justice for a youth who was killed by a mob, officials said.

Markets and shops were closed, while National Highway 38 was blocked by protesters for hours, affecting traffic movement, they said.

The deceased, 26-year-old Budheshwar Garh, was a sanitation worker and belonged to the Adivasi tea community. A group of fish traders allegedly assaulted him on Thursday, accusing him of stealing fish from Digboi Chariali Bazar on Thursday.

Garh, a resident of Line No 10 of Bogapani Tea Estate, succumbed to his injuries at the Digboi Civil Hospital the same day, following which tension gripped the entire oil town.

Garh's death sparked widespread outrage among the tea garden community and Adivasi groups.

Organisations like the Assam Tea Tribes Students' Association, All Assam Adivasi Students' Union and Assam Chah Mazdoor Sangha staged a massive protest in Digboi on Friday.

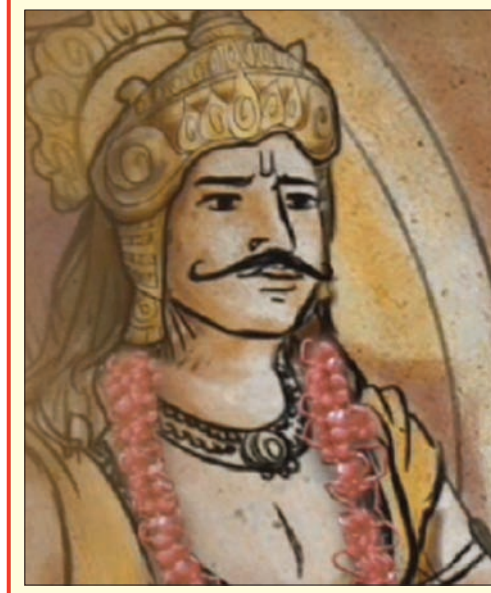
All markets, shops and business establishments were closed in Digboi since Thursday, and the protesters also blocked the National Highway-38.

His body remained at Digboi Community Health Centre (CHC) for several hours as the protesters staged a sit-in inside the premises.

The protesters initially obstructed efforts to shift the body to Tinsukia (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Kumar Bhaskar Varma Setu: A Symbol of Unwavering, Steadfast and Progressive Assam

Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma



Kumar Bhaskar Varma, the last king of the Varman dynasty, ruled Kamarupa from 594 CE (some say 600 CE) to 650 CE. He is regarded as the most illustrious and influential ruler of Kamarupa. Although he was the king of Kamarupa, Kumar Bhaskar Varma possessed a vision that extended beyond regional boundaries, reflecting an all-India as well as international outlook. During the reign of Kumar Bhaskar Varma, the famous Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang visited Assam—then known as ancient Kamarupa—between 640 and 643 CE, honouring the king's invitation. In his travel accounts, he recorded several important observations about Kamarupa. He wrote about the fertility of the land and its suitability for agriculture, noting that the people were deeply engaged in farming. He described the irrigation systems of ancient Kamarupa, including the practice of drawing canals from rivers or embankments to supply water around towns. He also mentioned the region's temperate cli-

mate, the simplicity of its people, their keen interest in learning and their strong memory and intellectual abilities. Hiuen Tsang further recorded the religious practices of the people and noted that scholars travelled from distant places to Kamarupa in pursuit of knowledge. Through his travel accounts, the wider world came to know many of these significant details about ancient Kamarupa. In this sense, King Kumar Bhaskar Varma may be regarded as the visionary leader who first introduced Assam to the wider world. The travel accounts of Hiuen Tsang describe him as a learned and enlightened ruler, deeply respected by his subjects. His observations remain among the earliest and most reliable written records of ancient Assam.

Kumar Bhaskar Varma's influence in North India

With his broad all-India and global outlook, Kumar Bhaskar Varma forged close diplomatic and military ties with the great northern Indian Emperor Harshavardhana, whose reign marks a significant chapter in (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

PM to launch Moran ELF, other projects today

GUWAHATI, Feb 13: Prime Minister Narendra Modi is scheduled to conduct a day-long visit to Assam on Saturday, when he will launch several projects, including an emergency landing facility (ELF) at Moran, and address BJP workers.

This would be his third visit in three months to Assam, where assembly elections are due in a couple of months.

The PM is expected to arrive at the Chabua airfield in Dibrugarh district at 9.50 am and then fly to the ELF in Moran aboard an Indian Air Force C-130 aircraft to inaugurate the ₹ 100 crore-worth, 4.2-km-long facility.

Modi will also witness a 20-minute aerial display of fighters, transport aircraft and helicopters.

He will then leave for Guwahati for the second leg of his tour aboard the C-130 from the ELF.

In Guwahati, the PM is scheduled to inaugurate the ₹ 3,000-crore Kumar Bhaskar Varma Setu, connecting Guwahati with North Guwahati.

The six-lane bridge will provide seamless connectivity between Guwahati and North Guwahati, boosting regional growth, enhancing seismic safety and accelerating development across the State Capital Region.

Modi will also virtually inaugurate the temporary campus of the IIM-Guwahati and an AI-enabled hyperscale data centre from the nearby Lachit Ghat.

Assam will take a big academic leap with (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

CM launches projects worth ₹ 300 crore in Bodoland Territorial Region

GUWAHATI, Feb 13: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Friday launched projects worth over ₹ 300 crore in districts under the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR).

The CM laid the foundation stone for the Rs 150-crore BTC mini-secretariat at Udalguri, which will be constructed in a piece of land measuring over 25 bighas.

The five-storey complex will house various departments of the council and a conference hall, along with a BTC legislative assembly building, he said.

The state-of-the-art facility will also include a guest house, residential quarters for officials and staff, roads and parking facilities, Sarma added.

He also laid the foundation stone for a ₹ 63.45-crore railway flyover at Golma Chowk—Mission Chariali Road in Udalguri.

The flyover will ease traffic congestion, reduce travel time and boost the district's socio-economic development, the CM said.

Sarma said a badminton facility was being planned to be set up beneath the structure to ensure effective use of public space.

Sarma virtually inaugurated the ₹ 36-crore Tangla Town Water Supply Project (Phases I & II).

The project will ensure safe and reliable drinking water for residents, marking another step towards improved urban infrastructure and public welfare in the state. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Meghalaya DGP constitutes SIT to probe mine explosion

SHILLONG, Feb 13: Meghalaya Director General of Police (DGP) Idashisha Nongrang has constituted a special investigation team (SIT) to probe the illegal coal mine explosion that claimed at least 31 lives, officials said on Friday.

An explosion at an illegal coal mine at Thangsku area of Mynsngat village in East Jaintia Hills district on February 5 has claimed at least 31 lives, with the latest fatality reported at a hospital in Guwahati, where an injured worker succumbed to his injuries, a senior Home Department official said.

"In view of the recent coal mine accident that occurred at Thangsku, East Jaintia Hills District, Khliehriat and in order to ensure a fair, impartial and expeditious investigation



into the circumstances leading to the incident, the DGP, Meghalaya is pleased to constitute a special investigation team (SIT) with immediate effect," Nongrang said in her order.

The nine-member SIT will be headed by Deputy Inspector General of Police (Eastern Range) Vivekanand S Rathore.

The SIT has been directed to ascertain the cause and circumstances

leading to the incident, to conduct a comprehensive investigation into the mining accident at Thangsku and to identify violations of court's order/NGT directions relating to illegal mining activities.

"The SIT will also ensure that the investigation is carried out in a time-bound manner so as to bring the case to its logical conclusion and ensure delivery of justice in accordance with law," the order stated.

On February 9, the state government had called off search and rescue operations at the blast site after assessment teams concluded that there was no further possibility of locating survivors trapped inside the mine. Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Assam govt pursuing zero tolerance policy against illegal encroachment: Himanta

STAFF REPORTER

GUWAHATI, Feb 13: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Friday asserted that the state government is pursuing a strict "zero tolerance" policy against illegal encroachment, stating that eviction drives are not only aimed at reclaiming government and forest land but also at dismantling networks of crime that had flourished under previous regimes.

In a post on X, the Chief Minister said that for a long period, illegal encroachers operated with complete immunity, converting protected forest areas into hubs of unlawful activities. He maintained that such (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Assam State Film Awards

9th Assam State Film Awards to honour 40 contributors to Assamese cinema

HT Correspondent

DIBRUGARH, Feb 13: Reaffirming the State Government's commitment to strengthening and promoting regional cinema, Cultural Affairs Minister Bimal Borah on Friday said the government will honour individuals who have contributed to Assamese cinema at the 9th Assam State Film Awards to be held on February 15.

Addressing a press conference in Tingkong, Borah said Assamese cinema is steadily reaching new heights and gaining wider recognition, and it is time to honour the filmmakers, artists, technicians and creative professionals who have played a vital role in this journey.

He reiterated the commitment of the Government of Assam, led by chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, to foster a vibrant cultural



ecosystem and provide continued support to the film industry.

The awards ceremony, which will recognise outstanding contributions to Assamese cinema for the years 2020 and 2021, will take place at the Sri Sri Damodardeva

International Auditorium at Srimanta Sankaradeva Kalakshetra, Panjabari.

Taking to X, Borah stated that Assamese cinema is going places and it is time to honour those who have taken it to new heights, reit-

erating the chief minister-led Government of Assam's commitment.

He also mentioned that along with Assam State Film Finance & Development Corporation Ltd chairman Simanta Shekhar, he addressed the media regarding the awards ceremony scheduled to be held in Guwahati on February 15, 2026.

A total of 40 award categories have been finalised to recognise outstanding contributions to Assamese cinema, Borah said, extending his best wishes to all concerned.

Officials stated that the awards aim to encourage quality filmmaking and inspire new talent in the Assamese film industry.

The ceremony is expected to witness the presence of prominent personalities from the cultural and film (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

₹ 3,000-cr new bridge over Brahmaputra river to boost urban mobility in Assam

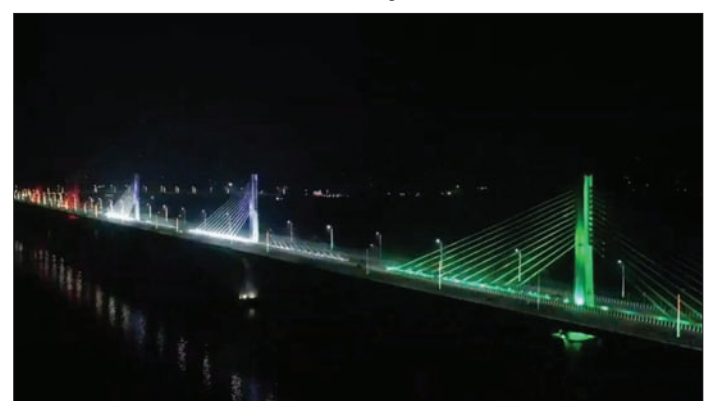
GUWAHATI, Feb 13: The ₹ 3,000 crore Kumar Bhaskar Varma bridge over the Brahmaputra river, which will be inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday, will improve regional connectivity and urban mobility in Assam, officials said.

The 1.24-km bridge, connecting Guwahati and North Guwahati, has been constructed over one of India's most challenging riverine terrains, they said.

"It represents a significant engineering achievement and a key contributor to Assam's long-term transportation network," project executing agency SPS Construction India director Rohit Singla told PTI.

The bridge is expected to reduce travel time, ease congestion, and facilitate smoother movement for commuters, freight, and long-distance travellers, he said.

"Our role, as the executing agency, was to translate that vision



into a durable, safe, and functional structure. We are grateful for the guidance and cooperation of the authorities throughout the project lifecycle, and we believe the bridge will serve the region's mobility needs for many years to come," Singla said on Friday.

Unlike traditional suspension bridges, this modern extradosed de-

sign offered optimal strength and durability while allowing faster construction over the Brahmaputra's wide span, he said.

The 6-lane structure is the first extradosed bridge in Northeast India.

The project involved extensive planning, coordination, and execution (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

QUOTE OF THE DAY

There is no instinct like that of the heart
—Lord Byron

US-B'desh trade deal

The United States-Bangladesh Agreement on Reciprocal Trade marks a quiet but consequential shift in the political economy of global textiles. Far from being a routine tariff adjustment, the deal functions as a carefully engineered intervention into Asian supply chains—one that grants Bangladesh a conditional competitive edge, subtly undermines India's labour-intensive textile hubs, and strengthens Washington's leverage over how and where garments for the U.S. market are produced. Signed on February 9, the agreement reduces the U.S. reciprocal tariff on Bangladeshi goods to 19%, down from the steep 37% imposed in April 2025. While this rollback is significant, the deal's true impact lies elsewhere: a zero-tariff window for select apparel and textile products made using U.S.-origin cotton or man-made fibres. Crucially, this exemption is capped and explicitly linked to U.S. textile exports to Bangladesh, embedding a managed "cotton-for-garments" mechanism into the trade relationship. This is not free trade in the classical sense. It is conditional access, designed to reward sourcing compliance and lock Bangladeshi producers into U.S.-centric input chains. For Bangladesh, where garments account for roughly 80% of exports and employ more than four million workers, the agreement arrives at a strategically sensitive moment. The U.S. apparel market—worth an estimated \$118 billion—absorbed about 6% of Bangladesh's garment exports in 2024, compared with India's 8.6%. In a sector defined by thin margins and buyer dominance, even modest tariff differentials can redirect sourcing decisions.

The comparison with India is therefore unavoidable. Earlier this month, New Delhi concluded its own trade understanding with Washington. Indian textile and apparel exports now face a flat 18% reciprocal tariff, with no product-specific exemptions. On the surface, India appears marginally better off: 18% versus Bangladesh's 19%. But headline rates obscure the real asymmetry. Bangladesh's zero-tariff clause allows qualifying garments to bypass the reciprocal duty entirely, leaving only the standard U.S. MFN tariff of around 12%. In these segments, Indian exporters face an effective disadvantage of up to 18 percentage points—a gap large enough to influence sourcing decisions in basic knitwear, T-shirts, and mass-market apparel. It is precisely in these categories that India's southern textile clusters—Tiruppur, Coimbatore, Erode—have built global competitiveness. Tiruppur alone anchors India's cotton knitwear exports, sustaining a dense ecosystem of spinning mills, garment units, dyeing houses, and ancillary services. Any sustained diversion of orders risks cascading effects across employment, credit, and regional industrial stability.

Industry bodies and opposition politicians have already flagged the risk. Beyond finished garments, the deal also threatens India's upstream position. As Bangladeshi manufacturers pivot toward U.S. cotton and fibres to qualify for tariff relief, Indian cotton yarn and fabric suppliers could lose market share, weakening India's role even where production does not relocate outright.

French President Macron's India visit: Strategic signals for collaboration

Indo-French relations will elevate to a higher level with the visit of French President Emmanuel Macron to India from February 17 to 19, 2026. The visit will underscore what both governments describe as a "maturing strategic partnership" that spans defense, technology, innovation and global diplomacy.

The visit comes against a backdrop of intensifying geopolitical competition — from China's assertiveness in Asia to shifting Western alignments — and at a moment when New Delhi is fast emerging as a pivotal player in global commerce and security.

President Macron's itinerary combines high-level bilateral talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, participation in the India-AI Impact Summit in New Delhi on February 19, and a joint launch of the India-France Year of Innovation 2026 in Mumbai.

The summit — the first global AI forum hosted in the Global South — builds on the two leaders' co-chairmanship of an AI Action Summit in Paris last year and signals a mutual ambition to shape global norms on artificial intelligence and emerging tech.

The Horizon 2047 Roadmap, a long-term strategic framework adopted by India and France to chart bilateral cooperation through India's centenary of independence, will form the conceptual anchor of their discussions. Topics will span defense, technology, trade, Indo-Pacific cooperation and multilateral coordination.

At the heart of the visit's strategic subtext is defense cooperation, especially a move toward a make-in-India production base for French military aircraft. In the run-up to Macron's arrival, India's Defense Acquisition Council (DAC) is expected to consider approval for a massive procurement of 114 new Rafale fighter jets from France — a deal valued at roughly ₹3.25 lakh crore — with around 80 percent of the aircraft to be manufactured domestically under India's defense industrialization drive.

This planned acquisition, which would follow earlier purchases of 36 Rafale jets for the Indian Air Force and 26 naval Rafale M aircraft for the Indian Navy, could be among the most consequential defense deals between the two partners in decades. While details remain under negotiation and institutional clearance, the proposal exemplifies the convergence between India's strategic autonomy and France's interest in deepening defense industrial ties with New Delhi.

The decision to build most of these jets in India reflects New Delhi's intent to strengthen sovereign aerospace capabilities, create high-tech employment, and position itself as a regional hub for advanced military manufacturing. It also aligns with France's broader push to diversify supply chains in defense production and to establish overseas



manufacturing bases in friendly but non-aligned capitals.

India and France share one of New Delhi's oldest and most resilient bilateral partnerships. Diplomatic relations were established soon after India's independence in 1947, and strategic cooperation was elevated formally in 1998 — the first such Western partnership for India. France was an early Western partner willing to engage India across defense, nuclear energy and space technology when Cold War fault lines made other Western capitals cautious.

Over the decades, the bilateral agenda has broadened from defense and civil nuclear cooperation to encompass naval exercises (Varuna), air exercises (Garuda), space collaborations and joint research initiatives. Summit diplomacy has been robust: President Macron was chief guest at India's Republic Day in 2024, and Modi has made several state visits to France. High-level meetings continue on the sidelines of the G20 and other multilateral forums.

In 2023, the two nations marked 25 years of their strategic partnership with adoption of the Horizon 2047 roadmap, envisioning cooperation through India's centenary of independence. Core pillars of this vision cover not just security and defense but also digital transformation, climate action, space, energy and people-to-people exchanges.

Beyond defense, the India-France agenda increasingly embraces technology and innovation. The AI Impact Summit — a marquee feature of Macron's visit — highlights cooperation in artificial intelligence as part of wider efforts to shape global governance standards and build shared capacity in critical technologies.

French firms and research institutions are also eyeing increased collaboration in areas such as rare earths, clean energy and digital infrastructure.

Trade between India and France has grown steadily, although France remains a relatively smaller investor compared with other European partners. Still, bilateral commerce and investment have been growing in sectors like aerospace, renewables, pharmaceuticals and financial services.

Updating tax treaties and investment frameworks has been part of a broader push to provide legal and economic certainty for French companies operating in India.

The India-France Year of Innovation 2026 — inaugurated in Mumbai — aims to elevate people-to-people links, cultural exchange, student mobility and business partnerships. It represents a more holistic view of bilateral ties beyond government-to-government diplomacy.

The deepening Indo-French partnership resonates beyond bilateral corridors into wider geopolitical dynamics.

First, for EU-India relations, France's leadership in European diplomacy makes New Delhi-Paris ties an anchor for India's engagement with the European Union. The EU and India have pursued a Strategic Agenda that includes trade liberalization, technology cooperation and maritime security.

A strengthened Franco-Indian axis could inject momentum into stalled EU trade negotiations and the EU-India Trade and Technology Council. India recently wrapped up a majorly EU India FTA, considered both historic and far reaching, benefits of which start flowing from Jan 2027 with reduction and evolution abolition of import duties both

ways on a variety of commodities.

As Washington's global trade posture becomes more volatile, Brussels sees India as a strategic partner that shares a commitment to democratic norms and a rules-based order — a narrative amplified in recent EU strategic reviews.

Macron's visit underscores that European capitals view New Delhi as more than a market, but as a partner in security frameworks and supply-chain resilience.

Second, in the context of India-US relations, closer ties with France do not diminish New Delhi's strategic partnership with

Washington, but rather reflects India's insistence on strategic autonomy. India continues defense and technology cooperation with the United States, participates in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), and engages in joint exercises like Malabar.

The France partnership adds strategic depth and diversification — an approach India has long maintained rather than aligning with any single power bloc.

Third, India-UK ties, revitalized through a landmark 2025 free-trade agreement removing tariffs and boosting economic integration, complement India's broader Western partnerships. While the UK focuses on trade, services and people-to-people ties, France brings strength in defense production and technology cooperation. Together, these relationships contribute to India's multipolar diplomacy.

At the leadership level, the personal chemistry between Modi and Macron has been a feature of recent diplomacy. Their engagements at global summits and co-chairing of AI summits signal a level of mutual trust rare in bilateral ties. This bonhomie, coupled with substantive policy alignment, has helped sustain momentum even when broader geopolitical tensions — such as France's engagements with other partners or India's defense relations with Russia — complicate the landscape.

President Macron's visit in February 2026 is more than ceremonial — it is a reaffirmation of a relationship that straddles defense, technology, trade and global governance. As India moves toward becoming the world's most populous major economy, Paris offers a blend of strategic depth and European connectivity that New Delhi values.

The unfolding Rafale manufacturing agreement, the AI summit and the long-term vision under Horizon 2047 suggest that India-France cooperation is maturing into a more substantive and diversified partnership.

In a world of shifting alliances, France's embrace of India reflects shared interests in sovereignty, technological leadership and a multipolar global order — one that New Delhi seeks to shape on its own terms. (IPA Service)

Vande Mataram: Cultural nationalism no substitute for development metrics



By K Raveendran

Order mandating the recital of Vande Mataram before the national anthem at official events has reignited debate over the role of symbolism in governance under Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Supporters describe the move as an affirmation of national pride and civilisational continuity. Critics see it as another instance in which performative gestures eclipse pressing structural challenges. The controversy reflects a broader pattern in which the government's political communication strategy relies heavily on symbols, slogans and high-visibility gestures that resonate emotionally but invite scrutiny over tangible outcomes.

Symbolism occupies an undeniable place in India's public life. From the freedom struggle to the framing of the Constitution, symbolic acts have mobilised collective action and forged shared identity. Yet the question confronting policymakers is whether symbolism can substitute for administrative depth or whether it merely complements it. The mandatory recitation directive is viewed by some as an attempt to anchor governance in cultural nationalism, reinforcing a narrative of continuity between state authority and patriotic expression. Detractors argue that such measures risk narrowing the inclusive ethos embedded in constitutional practice.

The present directive follows a series of initiatives that have relied on spectacle. During the height of the Covid-19 crisis, citizens were urged to clang utensils in solidarity with frontline workers. The gesture generated visible unity and momentary morale, yet it did not alter the trajectory of infection or compensate for shortcomings in public health infrastructure. It was an emblematic moment of collective mobilisation that demonstrated the administration's ability to command national attention, but it also raised questions about whether symbolic unity was being conflated with policy preparedness.

Similarly, the renaming of long-standing schemes has become a recurring feature of the administration's political vocabulary. The Ma-

hatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, one of the country's most significant social protection programmes, has periodically been rebranded or reframed in official communication. Proposals such as the introduction of the GRAM G legislation were presented with assertive rhetoric. The tone adopted by Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan while presenting the bill underscored the emotive appeal being sought. The emphasis was on identity, pride and transformative vision rather than on detailed fiscal architecture or delivery metrics.

This approach aligns with a broader penchant for slogans that define the Modi era: phrases such as "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas" and "Atmanirbhar Bharat" have become fixtures of political discourse. These slogans serve a strategic function. They simplify complex policy ambitions into memorable formulations that can travel across linguistic and regional divides. Political branding of this kind is not unique to India; leaders worldwide use catchphrases to anchor policy narratives. However, when slogans are not matched by measurable improvements in employment, healthcare, education or rural incomes, scepticism grows about their substantive value.

Defenders of the government argue that symbolism and substance are not mutually exclusive. They point to flagship initiatives such as the expansion of sanitation coverage under Swachh Bharat, the rollout of direct benefit transfers and the scaling up of digital infrastructure as evidence that headline messaging has been accompanied by administrative execution. From this perspective, the use of powerful symbols creates political capital that enables reforms. National pride, in this reading, is a mobilising force that encourages compliance, participation and behavioural change.

Critics counter that the intensity of symbolic politics risks crowding out deliberative policy design. Mandating the recitation of Vande Mataram may foster a sense of patriotic ritual, yet it does not address structural unemployment, agrarian distress or widening inequality. Rural employment schemes, for example, de-

rive legitimacy from guaranteed wage payments and timely fund flows, not from rhetorical reframing. When allocations fall short of demand or payments are delayed, the symbolic appeal of a renamed programme offers little comfort to beneficiaries.

There is also concern about the implications for institutional balance. Governance built heavily around emotive mobilisation can centralise authority and personalise policy ownership. The projection of decisive leadership, reinforced by symbolic gestures, strengthens political narratives of resolve. Yet robust democracies depend equally on procedural transparency, parliamentary scrutiny and evidence-based planning. When symbolic announcements dominate headlines, the granular details of implementation can receive less public attention.

The use of symbolism has electoral utility. It sharpens contrasts, consolidates core constituencies and frames political debate around identity rather than performance metrics. In a diverse polity, appeals to shared heritage can unify disparate groups under a common banner. The recitation order, therefore, can be seen as part of a broader strategy to embed cultural markers within state functions. Whether this strengthens social cohesion or deepens polarisation depends largely on perception. For many, patriotic songs evoke collective memory and pride. For others, compulsion dilutes voluntariness and raises constitutional sensitivities.

Economic governance illustrates the tension between spectacle and structure. Announcements framed as transformative breakthroughs often create expectations of rapid change. When delivery is uneven, public trust can erode. The gap between declared ambition and administrative capacity becomes more visible in areas affecting vulnerable populations. Social welfare programmes require meticulous targeting, transparent procurement and sustained funding. Symbolic reframing may attract media attention, but it does not resolve bureaucratic bottlenecks.

The debate over mandatory recitation reflects deeper questions about the nature of leadership and the metrics by which governance should be judged. Charismatic politics thrives on imagery, decisive gestures and rhetorical flourish. Administrative effectiveness demands patient institution-building and incremental reform. The two can coexist, but their balance determines whether symbolism becomes a catalyst for development or a substitute for it.

India's electorate has repeatedly demonstrated sophistication in evaluating governments. Electoral verdicts have turned on economic performance, welfare delivery and perceptions of integrity as much as on identity appeals. Symbolic measures may galvanise sentiment, yet sustained political legitimacy ultimately depends on lived experience. Access to employment, healthcare and education shapes public judgment more profoundly than ceremonial protocols. (IPA Service)

When lies acquire a face: Democracy on trial in the age of deepfakes

By: Lalit Garg

In the digital age, the speed at which information travels have increased dramatically—but so too have the possibilities of confusion, deception, and misinformation. Artificial intelligence and deepfake technology have made this challenge even more complex. Falsehood is no longer conveyed merely through words; it can now be presented as truth through fabricated faces, cloned voices, and manipulated expressions. This is precisely why the central government has decided to tighten IT regulations governing deepfakes and AI-generated content. Under the new provisions coming into effect on February 20, it will be mandatory to clearly label AI-generated material, and any unlawful or misleading content must be removed or blocked within three hours. Previously, the time limit was 36 hours. This shift is not merely a technical amendment—it is a serious intervention aimed at strengthening digital ethics and democratic accountability.

In recent years, the misuse of deepfake technology has emerged in alarming ways. Fake videos of political leaders, morphed obscene images of actresses, audio clips designed to incite communal tension, and artificial messages created for financial fraud—all testify that technology is never neutral; it can be used constructively or destructively. When truth is distorted and lies are wrapped in the polished veneer of technological authenticity, an atmosphere of distrust inevitably spreads across society. In such circumstances, government intervention appears necessary, for this is not merely a question of free expression, but one of social harmony, national security, and the dignity of citizens.

Under the new rules, the responsibility of social media platforms has been significantly expanded. They must now ensure that users are informed whether the content being shared has been generated by AI. This establishes a minimum standard of transparency. The three-hour compliance window further signals that the government recognizes the gravity of digital offenses. Once a deepfake video goes viral, subsequent clarifications often prove ineffective; only swift action can limit the damage. However, it is equally true that verifying the authenticity of content within such a short timeframe is technically and administratively complex. Platforms will have to substantially strengthen their monitoring mechanisms, posing operational and financial challenges.

An equally critical question concerns who defines "objectionable" or "misleading" content—and on what basis. In a democracy, freedom of expression is a fundamental right. If the regulatory process lacks transparency and fairness, it risks misuse. In the past, attempts to regulate social media have been portrayed by some as governmental overreach. Therefore, striking a balance between regulation and liberty is essential. The government must ensure that these rules are not used to suppress dissent but are applied strictly to curb misinformation and criminal misuse. Independent oversight mechanisms, judicial review, and transparent grievance redressal systems could serve as essential safeguards in this regard.

The global landscape reflects similar concerns. Countries such as Australia and France have intro-

duced measures including minimum age requirements for social media use by children. In the United States, historic lawsuits are underway to examine the mental health impacts of platforms like Instagram and YouTube. Major technology companies have faced allegations of designing systems that foster addiction among young users. Experts note that some adolescents experience not only psychological but even physical discomfort when separated from their phones. This crisis is not confined to developed nations; in India and other developing countries, the unchecked expansion of social media is also contributing to social and psychological distress.

The AI industry itself is navigating a moral dilemma. In an intensely competitive market, companies are racing to achieve technological superiority, often leaving safety and ethical concerns behind. Recently, the resignation of a security researcher from a major company—citing the unchecked acceleration of controversial projects—highlighted these tensions. As technological progress accelerates, regulatory frameworks risk becoming obsolete unless they are continually updated. Regulation must therefore be not only punitive but also forward-looking and participatory.

In the Indian context, the issue is particularly sensitive. The country's digital revolution has witnessed unprecedented growth, with millions of new users coming online each year. If the distinction between authentic and fabricated content becomes blurred, democratic discourse itself may be undermined. Electoral processes, social harmony, financial transactions, and personal reputations could all be threatened by deepfakes. Thus, mandatory labeling of AI-generated content is not a mere procedural formality but a significant step toward strengthening information literacy. However, labeling will only be effective if citizens themselves are digitally literate; otherwise, content may continue to be shared uncritically.

In light of upcoming e-summits and India's "India AI Mission," it becomes even more pertinent that technological advancement be aligned with the values of transparency, integrity, and authenticity. If India aspires to global leadership in AI, it must also lead in establishing ethical standards. Merely increasing the number of startups and innovations is insufficient; it is equally important to ensure that AI respects human dignity, privacy, and democratic institutions. The objective of regulation is not to stifle technological progress, but to make it accountable.

Ultimately, the deepfake and AI challenge is not only technological—it is moral and social. Law is necessary, but it is not sufficient. A lasting solution will require coordinated responsibility from digital companies, transparency from governments, vigilance from the judiciary, and awareness among citizens. Balanced and impartial regulation will not suppress freedom of expression; rather, it will safeguard it—because freedom is meaningful only when anchored in truth and responsibility. As technology's ability to transform lies into convincing realities grows stronger, so too must our collective resolve to defend truth. This is the greatest ethical test of the digital age—and the next defining benchmark for democratic societies. (The author is a journalist and columnist)

The eternal form of love

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

The deepest and most influential emotion in human consciousness is love or affection, which is not merely confined to physical attraction or social necessity but exists as an inseparable and eternal truth of the soul within human thought. When we speak of love, we are actually referring to an invisible force that binds the entire universe together, and without which no meaning or depth can be found in human life. The concept of love is so vast and comprehensive that it cannot be confined within any specific definition, for it takes on new forms in every moment, and although its experience differs for each individual, its essential essence remains the same. This feeling, hidden in the most secluded corner of the human mind, not only inspires us to live but also helps us discover the true purpose of living. When one heart seeks to merge with another beyond the roles of society, religious beliefs, and worldly customs, that is when the true nature of love is revealed. This nature does not end with the union of two individuals; it is a spiritual journey in which a spontaneous eagerness arises to surrender one's existence for the well-being of another. In the mechanical noise and selfishness of the modern world, the word "love" has often become synonymous with mere entertainment or fleeting emotion, yet its inner power and sanctity never diminish. Love is a form of devotion through which a person transcends narrow self-interest and seeks a greater truth, and that truth is the supreme bliss attained through sacrifice and surrender.

To comprehend the eternal form of love, we must first understand that it is completely free from the limitations of time and space, and its flow never stagnates. It is generally observed that everything in the material world ages or perishes with time, but love is an entity that becomes even brighter and deeper with the passage of time. When a genuine connection is established between two minds, that connection carries no expectation or desire for gain; rather, it holds only the joy of giving and the willingness to dissolve oneself in the happiness of the other. This mindset elevates a person to the level of divinity, for it involves no calculation of profit or loss. In contemporary society, most relationships formed in the name of love arise either under the sway of passion or for the fulfillment of some particular interest, but they cannot be placed in the category of true love. Genuine affection is a silent promise that never breaks and remains undisturbed in any circumstance. It is a continuous process in which patience and tolerance are tested at every moment. Only those who pass this test truly taste the essence of love. When someone loves another, they do not merely forgive the other's faults and flaws but accept them and help shape that person into a better human being. In this way, love brings completeness to a person and fills the incompleteness of life with beauty. This feeling does not depend on external beauty or wealth; it relies entirely on the purity of the mind and faith.

The necessity and depth of love in human life are so great that without it, the existence of human civilization could face crisis. For a society to function harmoniously, mutual understand-

ing and affection among people are indispensable. This affection or love keeps people away from jealousy, enmity, and hatred. When a person learns to love another selflessly, narrow-mindedness vanishes from their mind, and they become compassionate toward all beings in the universe. This universal form of love is the eternal truth. It cannot be confined within the boundaries of any religion or caste. The language of love is the same for everyone, and it resonates equally in every heart. Often we see people mistakenly regard love as merely the passion of youth, but in reality it remains equally necessary and influential at every stage of life. The sense of security felt in a mother's embrace during childhood, the fulfillment experienced in the company of a companion during youth, and the peace found in the care of loved ones in old age—all these are different forms of love. Each of these forms contains a profound assurance that gives us courage to live. In times of sorrow, de-

stacles arise, the greater love's power becomes. It is through this struggle and sacrifice that love assumes its eternal form. Love that is easily obtained and free from struggle has a short lifespan. But the love that stands firm against storms and adversity is truly timeless and everlasting.

From a philosophical perspective, love is complete freedom from ego or the sense of "I." As long as ego remains in a person's mind, they cannot enter the depths of true love. Love means finding oneself in another's existence and prioritizing the other's happiness over one's own. In this state, it is wrong to think that a person loses their individual identity; rather, they become part of a vast identity. In this identity, there is no division—only a sense of oneness. This oneness is the foundation of spirituality. That is why many compare love to God or describe it as worship. Just as a devotee surrenders completely to God, so too does a lover surrender unconditionally to the beloved. There is no weakness in

sage of peace, cooperation, and unity in place of war, terrorism, and division is the true work of love. When people can empathize with others' sorrow and rejoice in others' happiness, then it will be understood that love has triumphed in the world. This victory is not achieved through weapons but through the transformation of hearts. A glance through the pages of history reveals that behind every great deed or positive change lies someone's profound love and sacrifice. Therefore, love should not be regarded merely as a personal emotion but accepted as a universal force.

Love is not always soft like a rose; it comes with thorns. That is, love does not consist solely of happiness; it also carries responsibility, conflict, and problems. True affection is ready to accept all these challenges. Nowadays, many people think of ending a relationship at the slightest problem, which proves that their emotion was not deep. Eternal love does not flee from problems but seeks solutions and makes the relationship even stronger. This requires profound mutual trust and respect. Without respect, love cannot survive. Where there is no honor, affection cannot exist. In modern lifestyles, busyness has increased, resulting in people being unable to give time to one another. This distance creates mental gaps. But those who possess genuine love never allow physical distance to turn into mental distance. They know that even if bodies are apart, minds remain together. This faith is the true foundation of love. The stronger this foundation, the more secure the house of the relationship becomes. In love, there is no room for force or the exercise of rights. It is like a free bird that can be bound only by the thread of trust. Freedom and love are not contradictory but complementary. One person can

love another while still respecting their personal freedom and opinions. When this balance is maintained, that relationship attains an eternal form and becomes a source of inspiration for others.

In conclusion, the concept of love is so subtle and profound that it enables humans to understand the mysteries of life and death. Even after death, if anything remains, it is the memory of a person's love and good deeds. The body is perishable, but love is imperishable. This imperishable entity connects the human soul with the Supreme Soul. Therefore, no matter how much wealth or power a person acquires in life, at the end of the day they seek only a little affection and peace. This peace is the grace of love. Whoever has attained this grace has lived a blessed life. Our duty is to realize this eternal truth, apply it in our own lives, and spread its light in society. When every individual abandons violence and chooses the path of love, this world will become even more beautiful than heaven. In this infinite journey of love, there is no end—only the joy of moving forward. This joy gives meaning to our existence as human beings. Civilizations have undergone and will continue to undergo many changes with the flow of time, but the eternal form of love will remain unchanged—ever new and ever radiant. It is not an outdated idea; rather, like the morning sun, it is fresh and vibrant each day. This realization should be the fundamental mantra of our philosophy of life. (The author is the recipient of the 'Yuba Lekhak Sanman - 2025' from the Government of Assam)



spair, and calamity, when a person sees darkness from all sides, only a small ray of love can once again illuminate life. That is why it is said that love is life's greatest medicine and supreme power. No one has the capacity to deny this power, and whoever attempts to deny it is in fact denying their own existence.

Another important aspect of love is its silence and depth, which renders words unnecessary. In true affection, there is never a need to speak excessively or to display oneself. When deep understanding exists between two hearts, everything is exchanged through the language of the eyes or silent presence. This silence sometimes proves more powerful than a thousand words. When a person feels something from the core of their heart for another, language is not required to express it; rather, actions and conduct prove it. In today's publicity-driven world, people have also taken to exhibitionism in the name of love, which destroys its sanctity. But the love that is eternal always maintains its existence even away from public gaze. It is like an underground stream that flows ceaselessly within the heart, though invisible from the outside. This stream keeps the human mind alive and prevents it from drying up. That is why people can endure the pain of injury or separation in love, for even within it lies a sweetness and the joy of attainment. Despite the fear of loss or the pain of not receiving, people do not cease to love, because loving is a natural human instinct. Suppressing this instinct is impossible. On the contrary, the more ob-

vious this surrender; rather, it contains an indomitable strength. For not everyone has the courage to give oneself away. Only those who can offer themselves truly gain everything. Realizing this supreme truth is the greatest knowledge of life. The prevailing systems of marriage and family in our society are also based on this sacrifice and faith. When two people decide to spend their entire life together, they resolve not only to unite physically but also mentally and spiritually. This resolve holds them together even amid life's storms and rains. Therefore, love is not merely an emotional luxury; it is a powerful pillar in the formation of society.

The eternal nature of love is not limited to human society alone; it pervades every element of nature. An invisible bond of affection exists among trees and vines, animals, and the entire environment, which maintains nature's balance. When humans understand this loving aspect of nature, they become reverent toward it. Yet modern consumerist civilization has distanced people from this feeling. Humans have begun to oppress nature solely for their own pleasure, which is actually a sign of lovelessness. Had true affection existed in the human heart, destruction would never have been possible. Love always creates, protects, and nurtures; it never destroys. Therefore, for the world to remain beautiful and habitable, the reawakening of love in human hearts is urgently needed. This awakening must occur not only at the personal level but also at the social and universal levels. Spreading the mes-

Valentine's Day: A celebration of love beyond romance

By: Lalit Nath

Valentine's Day, observed each year on February 14, has grown into a global cultural moment dedicated to expressing affection, gratitude and emotional connection. Though popularly perceived as a celebration of romantic love, its meaning is far richer and more layered. Across societies, the day has evolved into a symbolic reminder that human relationships — romantic, familial and social — require acknowledgment and care. In an era defined by speed, digital communication and emotional distance, Valentine's Day offers a pause to reflect on the enduring human need for connection.

The historical roots of the observance are traditionally linked to Saint Valentine, a Christian priest believed to have lived during the reign of Roman emperor Claudius II. According to widely circulated accounts, the emperor discouraged marriage among young men, arguing that unmarried soldiers fought more effectively. Valentine is said to have defied this decree by secretly performing marriages, placing moral conviction above authority. His eventual arrest and execution transformed him into a symbolic figure associated with devotion, sacrifice and loyalty. Over time, Christian communities commemorated his martyrdom, gradually linking February 14 with ideals of love and fidelity.

While the historical accuracy of these stories remains debated among scholars, their cultural influence is undeniable. The narrative of a figure willing to risk his life for the sanctity of love resonated deeply within medieval European consciousness. This symbolic association laid the foundation for the transformation of a religious remembrance into a broader celebration of human affection.

The romantic identity of Valentine's Day gained literary prominence in the Middle Ages, particularly through the poetry of Geoffrey Chaucer. His work *The Parliament of Fowls* imaginatively portrayed February 14 as the day when birds select their mates. This poetic linkage between nature's rhythms and human emotion shaped emerging ideals of courtly love — emphasizing emotional sincerity, admiration and spiritual companionship. Chaucer's vision did not merely romanticize affection, it elevated love into a cultural and philosophical theme that influenced centuries of European thought.

From these literary beginnings, the celebration gradually entered everyday social practice. By the 17th and 18th centuries, exchanging handwritten notes and small tokens of affection became customary among friends and lovers. The industrial age introduced printed greeting cards, expanding the reach of the tradition and embedding it within popular culture. Commercialization later amplified the visibility of Valentine's Day, sometimes inviting criticism that emotional expression had been reduced to consumer ritual. Yet beneath the commercial layer, the deeper purpose remains intact, affirming bonds that give meaning to human life.

Crucially, Valentine's Day is not confined to romantic partnerships. Its broader cultural significance lies in recognizing love as a multifaceted human experience. Expressions of appreciation toward family members, friendships strengthened by loyalty and gestures of gratitude toward mentors or caregivers all reflect the day's inclusive spirit. Seen in this light, Valentine's Day becomes less a romantic festival and more a celebration of emotional literacy — the capacity to articulate care, empathy, and respect.

Philosophical reflections further illuminate this expansive understanding of love. The ancient Greek thinker Aristotle described love as a profound unity of souls rather than a purely physical attraction. Such perspectives remind us that affection is not merely an emotion but a guiding principle that shapes ethical behavior, mutual understanding and social cohesion. Love, in its truest sense, fosters patience, forgiveness and compassion — qualities essential for sustaining both personal relationships and broader communities.

Literature across civilizations has long portrayed love as transformative, capable of elevating ordinary experience into something spiritually meaningful. Classical narratives such as the devotion between Shakuntala and Dushyanta, the enduring bond of Nala and Damayanti and the mystical love symbolized by Radha and Krishna reveal how affection can transcend circumstance, embodying faith, sacrifice, and spiritual longing. These narratives continue to resonate because they speak to universal emotions — longing, trust, devotion — that define the human condition.

In the contemporary world, where digital communication often substitutes for face-to-face interaction, relationships may suffer from misunderstanding, haste, or emotional fatigue. Valentine's Day can serve as a gentle corrective — an opportunity to reaffirm sincerity and attentiveness. Rather than focusing solely on grand gestures, the day invites reflection on everyday kindness, listening patiently, expressing gratitude, or offering reassurance. Such acts, though simple, reinforce trust and emotional resilience.

Critics sometimes argue that dedicating a single day to love risks trivializing a value that should be practiced year-round. Yet cultural rituals often function as reminders — symbolic anchors that renew awareness. Just as festivals celebrate gratitude, remembrance, or renewal, Valentine's Day underscores the importance of nurturing emotional bonds consistently. Its true worth lies not in spectacle but in intention.

Ultimately, Valentine's Day endures because it captures a timeless truth, human beings thrive on connection. Love — whether romantic, familial, or communal — is not merely a private sentiment but a social force that shapes empathy and cooperation. When approached thoughtfully, the day becomes an affirmation of shared humanity. It encourages individuals to look beyond routine and recognize the emotional threads that bind people together.

Seen through this broader lens, Valentine's Day is less about indulgence and more about awareness — a cultural invitation to celebrate affection in all its forms. By honoring sincerity over display and connection over commerce, the occasion can inspire a deeper appreciation of love as a sustaining principle of life itself. In remembering this, society preserves not just a tradition, but a timeless reflection on what it means to be human.

Does Valentine's Day matter to our society?

By: Satyabrata Borah

Valentine's Day has quietly but firmly found a place in public conversation across Indian society, including Assam. Every year on the fourteenth of February, the day arrives with red roses, heart-shaped balloons, social media posts, advertisements, celebrations, criticism, excitement, and resistance all mixed together. For some, it is a day of joy and emotional expression. For others, it feels unnecessary, artificial, or even threatening to social values. This mixed response itself makes Valentine's Day an interesting subject to reflect upon. The real question is not whether the day should be accepted or rejected outright, but whether it carries any meaningful significance within our social and cultural context.

Valentine's Day is associated with love. Love is not a foreign emotion. It is one of the most fundamental human feelings, deeply rooted in every culture, religion, and civilization. Long before Valentine's Day entered Indian consciousness, love existed here in many forms. Ancient literature, folklore, devotional poetry, and oral traditions are full of stories of love, longing, sacrifice, and emotional bonding. From Radha and Krishna to Heer and Ranjha, from Usha and Aniruddha to local folk tales passed down through generations, love has always been present. What differs is not the emotion itself, but the way it is expressed and socially understood.

Indian society, including Assamese society, has traditionally viewed love as something deeply connected to responsibility, family, and long-term commitment. Love was rarely seen as a loud public performance. It was often quiet, restrained, and woven into everyday life. A shared struggle, mutual respect, emotional endurance, and social responsibility were considered stronger proofs of love than words or symbols. In such a context, the arrival of Valentine's Day, with its emphasis on public display, individual romance, and commercial celebration, naturally feels unfamiliar to many.

Globalisation has played a major role in bring-

ing Valentine's Day into Indian society. Through films, television, the internet, and social media, cultural practices travel faster than ever before. Young people today grow up watching global content where Valentine's Day is portrayed as a normal and joyful celebration of love. For them, participating in it feels natural. It becomes a way of expressing emotions that they may otherwise find difficult to articulate in a conservative social environment. Seen from this perspective, Valentine's Day becomes less about copying the West and more about finding emotional language in a changing world.

At the same time, the commercialisation of Valentine's Day cannot be ignored. Markets play a powerful role in shaping how the day is perceived. Love is packaged into products, offers, discounts, and social expectations. The idea that love must be proven through gifts, expensive outings, or social media visibility creates pressure, especially among young people. Those who cannot or do not want to participate may feel excluded or inadequate. In such cases, the emotional essence of love is overshadowed by performance and consumption.

Criticism of Valentine's Day often comes from the fear that it promotes superficial relationships or moral decline. Some worry that it encourages impulsive behaviour without emotional maturity. Others see it as a challenge to traditional family structures and cultural values. While these concerns are not entirely baseless, they also risk oversimplifying the issue. A single day cannot be blamed for deeper social changes that are already underway. Relationships, values, and social norms are evolving due to education, urbanisation, economic independence, and digital communication. Valentine's Day is more a reflection of these changes than their cause.

It is also important to recognise that love does not exist only in romantic relationships. One of the limitations of how Valentine's Day is popularly celebrated is that it often narrows love down to couples. This can unintentionally marginalise other forms of love that are equally important.

Love between parents and children, between friends, between teachers and students, and even compassion for society at large are often left out of the picture. If Valentine's Day is understood only as a celebration for romantic couples, its relevance becomes limited. If it is seen as a reminder to value human connection in all its forms, its meaning expands.

Assamese society has always valued emotional bonds, even if they were not loudly expressed. Care for elders, loyalty to friends,



community solidarity during crises, and respect for relationships are all expressions of love. These values do not disappear just because a new cultural practice enters society. The challenge lies in integration. Instead of rejecting Valentine's Day as alien, society can reinterpret it through its own cultural lens. Love does not have to be loud to be real, and celebration does not have to contradict dignity.

For young people, Valentine's Day can serve as a starting point for conversations about emotional responsibility. Love without respect, consent, and understanding is incomplete. If families, educa-

tors, and society engage with young people instead of silencing them, Valentine's Day can become an opportunity for guidance rather than conflict. Suppression often leads to secrecy and misunderstanding, whereas dialogue builds awareness and maturity.

There is also a quiet irony in how Valentine's Day is sometimes opposed. Many who criticise it in the name of culture still enjoy love songs, romantic films, poetry, and stories that celebrate similar emotions. This shows that the discomfort

is not with love itself, but with changing forms of expression. Cultures are not static. They evolve, absorb, and adapt. What matters is not preserving tradition in rigid form, but preserving its core values while allowing space for new expressions. Valentine's Day also highlights an important social reality. Emotional expression is still difficult for many people. Men are often discouraged from expressing vulnerability. Women's emotions are frequently judged. In such a context, even a single day that normalises emotional openness can feel liberating. This does not mean the day is perfect or necessary, but it does explain why it resonates

with many.

The resistance to Valentine's Day often reflects a deeper anxiety about losing control over social norms. Change always brings discomfort. When young people choose their partners, express affection publicly, or prioritise emotional compatibility, it challenges older models of authority and structure. Instead of framing this as a moral threat, it may be more useful to see it as a shift that requires mutual understanding across generations.

Valentine's Day, in itself, is neutral. It does not carry values automatically. Values are shaped by how people engage with it. If it becomes a day of shallow imitation, it will remain shallow. If it becomes a day to reflect on kindness, commitment, and emotional honesty, it can hold genuine meaning. Society has the power to shape this interpretation.

In the Assamese context, where community bonds and cultural sensitivity remain strong, Valentine's Day does not have to replace anything. It does not need to compete with traditional values. It can simply exist as one more moment in the calendar that reminds people of the importance of human connection. Love does not weaken culture. When rooted in respect and responsibility, it strengthens it.

The significance of Valentine's Day in our society depends less on its origin and more on our intention. A date borrowed from elsewhere does not automatically erase local identity. What defines us is how we live our values every day. Love expressed with sincerity, whether on Valentine's Day or any other day, remains meaningful.

Valentine's Day should neither be blindly celebrated nor aggressively rejected. It should be understood. When society moves beyond fear and imitation, it gains the freedom to choose wisely. Love is not a threat. Indifference is. If Valentine's Day encourages even a small pause to reflect on relationships, empathy, and emotional responsibility, then it carries significance. Not because it is Western, modern, or fashionable, but because it touches something deeply human that has always existed among us.

Tarique Rahman set to return to power after two decades BNP heading towards major victory

DHAKA, Feb 13: The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) on Friday was cruising towards a sweeping victory with more than two-thirds majority in the landmark parliamentary polls and is all set to return to power after a gap of two decades.

The elections assumed significance as they were held after a period of tumultuous political vacuum, instability and fragile security situation, including widespread attacks on minorities after the student-led protests brought down the 15-year rule of Sheikh Hasina in August 2024.

It is becoming increasingly clear that BNP's top leader Tarique Rahman is set to become the prime minister to replace the interim government headed by Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus, under whose tenure Dhaka's relations with New Delhi witnessed a significant downturn.

According to media reports, the BNP has bagged more than 200 seats out of 300 while Jamaat-e-Islami, a hardline party known to be close to Islamabad, was heading or winning in around 75 seats. The Awami League party of Hasina has been barred from contesting the polls.

The Election Commission (EC) is yet to make a formal announcement.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke to Rahman and congratulated him on BNP's spectacular victory.

"Delighted to speak with Mr. Tarique Rahman. I congratulated him on the remarkable victory in the Bangladesh elections," Modi said on social media.

"I conveyed my best wishes and support in his endeavour to fulfil the aspirations of the people of Bangladesh. As two close neighbours with deep-rooted historical and cultural ties, I reaffirmed India's continued commitment to the peace, progress, and prosperity of both our



peoples," he said.

In an earlier social media post, Modi said India will continue to stand in support of a democratic, progressive and inclusive Bangladesh.

"I look forward to working with you to strengthen our multifaceted relations and advance our common development goals," he said.

On its part, the BNP thanked Modi for recognising the verdict of the elections and hoped that the relations between the two countries would be strengthened under the new government.

"We thank Prime Minister Narendra Modi for congratulating our leader, Tarique Rahman. It is great that a democratic country is supposed to recognise the verdict of the people, and Mr Narendra Modi has done this. We thank him," senior leader Nazrul Islam Khan said.

India-Bangladesh relations witnessed a severe strain after the collapse of the Hasina-led government.

The US Embassy in Dhaka has congratulated the people of Bangladesh in advance on what it described as a successful national election, extending special recognition to BNP and Rah-

man for their "historic victory."

"Congratulations to the people of Bangladesh on a successful election and to the Bangladesh Nationalist Party and Tarique Rahman on your historic victory. The United States looks forward to working with you to realise shared goals of prosperity and security for both our countries," its social media post read.

The election was seen as a direct contest between the BNP and its former ally Jamaat-e-Islami.

BNP was in power earlier between 2001 and 2006 when Jamaat was its crucial partner, with two of its leaders serving as ministers.

The voting for the 13th parliamentary elections was held on Thursday along with a referendum on the implementation of a complex 84-point reform package, known as the July National Charter.

Meanwhile, Jamaat has raised allegations of "abnormal delays" and "result tampering," warning that it would launch a tough movement if the public mandate were "snatched away".

Speaking to reporters at the Election Commission building early morning, Jamaat's assistant secretary general

Ahsanul Mahboob Zubair alleged that returning officers were intentionally delaying results to favour a "particular party."

"In the seats contested by our top leaders, results should have been declared by 8 pm or 9 pm according to the signed sheets given to polling agents," Zubair said.

Jamaat's major ally in an 11-party right-wing alliance, the National Citizen Party (NCP), floated with interim government chief Yunus last year, also brought allegations of "result tampering and planned fraud" in multiple Dhaka seats in particular.

The Election Commission announced on Friday that the voter turnout for the polls was 59.44 per cent. It also dismissed allegations of manipulation regarding voters' appearances in polling centres.

Election Commissioner Brig Gen (ret) Abul Fazal Md Sanaulah on Friday said the spontaneous and massive participation of people in the election proved that 'we are ultimately victorious as a nation.'

"We had only one commitment to the nation: to conduct a neutral election. We have tried our best to ensure that. We are deeply grateful to the people of the country as they participated spontaneously in this massive arrangement. This has proved that we are ultimately victorious as a nation."

More than 2,000 candidates, including a number of independents, were in the fray for 299 of the 300 parliamentary constituencies that went to the polls.

Polling for one seat was postponed due to the death of a candidate.

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

New round of US-brokered talks between Russia, Ukraine set for Geneva next week

GENEVA, Feb 13: Another round of US-brokered talks between envoys from Russia and Ukraine will take place next week in Geneva, days ahead of the fourth anniversary of the all-out Russian invasion of its neighbour, officials in Moscow and Kyiv said on Friday.

The meeting will be held on Tuesday and Wednesday, Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said in a statement carried by Russian news agencies.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's communications adviser, Dmytro Lytvyn, confirmed the new round of negotiations.

The talks take place against a backdrop of continued fighting along the roughly 1,250-kilometre front line, relentless Russian bombardment of civilian areas of Ukraine and the country's power grid, and Kyiv's almost daily long-range drone attacks on war-related assets on Russian soil.

Previous US-led efforts to find consensus on ending the war, most recently two rounds of talks in Abu Dhabi, the capital of the United Arab Emirates, have failed to resolve difficult issues, such as the future of Ukraine's Donbas industrial heartland that is largely occupied by Russian forces.

Zelenskyy said last week that the United States has given Ukraine and Russia a June deadline to reach a deal. Previous deadlines given by US President Donald Trump have passed largely without consequence.

Zelenskyy was in Munich, Germany, on Friday and visited the first joint Ukrainian-German company for the production of drones. Germany has been a major backer of Ukraine in the war.

He was also due to hold bilateral and multilateral meetings at the Munich Security Conference, an annual gathering of top international security figures.

The negotiators heading to Geneva have the tough task of finding compromises that are palatable to both Moscow and Kyiv.

Russian President Vladimir Putin's adviser Vladimir Medinsky, who headed Moscow's team of negotiators in the first direct peace talks with Ukraine in Istanbul in March 2022,



is returning to lead Moscow's delegation.

The previous two rounds of trilateral talks in Abu Dhabi reportedly focused on military issues, such as a possible buffer zone and ceasefire monitoring. The return of Medinsky, who has pushed Russian President Vladimir Putin's maximalist conditions for peace, could mark a shift toward political issues in the next round of talks.

Ukraine's delegation will again be led by Rustem Umerov, Ukraine's National Security and Defense Council chief.

The grim war of attrition is continuing while the two sides negotiate.

Overnight from Thursday to Friday, a Russian strike killed three brothers between 8 and 19 years of age in eastern Ukraine, authorities said. Their mother and grandmother survived but sustained multiple injuries, the Donetsk regional prosecutor's office said.

In Odesa, one person was killed and six more injured in a Russian strike at the city's port and energy infrastructure, officials said.

The Russian Defense Ministry said on Friday its air defenses shot down 58 Ukrainian drones over several Russian regions and annexed Crimea during the night.

Of those, 43 were brought down in the Volgograd region of southwestern Russia, where three people, including a 12-year-old boy, were injured by drone debris, according to the local governor. Ukraine has recently targeted the Volgograd oil refinery. (AP)

Thailand's ruling conservative party moves closer to forming new coalition government

BANGKOK, Feb 13: Thailand's ruling conservative Bhumjaithai Party on Friday moved closer to forming a new government after the Pheu Thai Party, the third place finisher in the country's general election, agreed to join it in a proposed ruling coalition.

Bhumjaithai won 193 seats in the 500-member House of Representatives in Sunday's election, according to unofficial results from the Election Commission, positioning it to return incumbent Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul to office with a Cabinet of his choosing.

The populist Pheu Thai Party, backed by former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra, finished third with 74 seats. Together, the two parties would command 267 seats, surpassing the 251 seats required for a majority. Several smaller parties also pledged their support.

Anutin sees a bright future for their partnership

"Bhumjaithai and Pheu Thai will look into the future. We agreed that both our parties have people with abilities great enough to lead Thailand into a stable and sustainable future," Anutin said in a news conference.

He was joined by Pheu Thai leaders, including Yodchanan Wongsawat, a nephew of Thaksin who had been the party's candidate for prime minister.

The two parties had previously partnered after the 2023 election, when Pheu Thai — then the second-largest party — led negotiations as the senior partner in their government-to-be.

That alliance collapsed last year following controversy surrounding then-Prime Minister Paetongtarn

Shinawatra, Thaksin's daughter, over border tensions with Cambodia. Anutin then secured enough parliamentary support in September to become prime minister.

Addressing their past disputes on Friday, Anutin said that "We must erase everything and move forward."

Bhumjaithai has announced that six smaller parties with a combined eight seats have also pledged to join its coalition.

The progressive People's Party, which finished second with 118 seats, has ruled out joining a Bhumjaithai government.

Pheu Thai falls from dominant position

Pheu Thai's result was considered its worst performance in decades. Electoral politics since 2001 had been dominated by populist parties loyal to Thaksin, who served as prime minister until he was ousted by an army coup in 2006, setting off a tussle for power against Thailand's conservative royalist-military establishment. The party alienated some pro-democracy supporters in 2023 by breaking its campaign promise not to align with pro-military parties and instead formed a government including them.

Last year it angered conservatives when Paetongtarn was found to be too chummy with Cambodia's leader Hun Sen in a leaked phone call. She was kicked out of office for an ethics violation, giving Anutin his chance to take her place.

"For the first time in its history, (Pheu Thai) will be a mid-sized party that can at most play the role of a junior coalition partner," said Ken Lohatepanont, a University of Michigan doctoral candidate in an

online commentary on Thai politics. Especially galling was losing all the seats it had held in the northern city of Chiang Mai, Thaksin's hometown.

He and other election observers suggest that for Bhumjaithai to establish a more stable government, it will invite another major partner — either the fourth-place Kla Tham Party, with 58 seats, or the Democrat Party, Thailand's oldest, with 22.

Thailand's business community hailed Bhumjaithai's decisive victory, with the hope that it would bring stability as the country struggles with a lagging economy.

Concerns over election irregularities

Negotiations on forming a new government unfolded amid mounting allegations of electoral irregularities, prompting frustrated voters to stage protests in several parts of the country. Demonstrators called for recounts and, in some constituencies, fresh by-elections.

The Asian Network for Free Elections, one of the observer groups in the polls, said the vote was conducted in a generally peaceful and orderly manner. But it flagged "procedural irregularities in several polling stations," including inadequate public information and inconsistent access for election observers.

The legal monitoring group iLaw, which also observed the election, reported receiving more than 4,000 complaints. These included cases where the number of ballots exceeded the number of eligible voters, officials denying observers access to vote counting, disputes over recount requests, and inaccuracies in the recording of final tallies. (AP)

Trump administration reaches trade deal to lower Taiwan's tariff barriers

WASHINGTON, Feb 13: The Trump administration has reached a trade deal with Taiwan, with Taiwan agreeing to remove or reduce 99 per cent of its tariff barriers, the office of the US Trade Representative said.

The agreement comes as the US remains reliant on Taiwan for its production of computer chips, the exporting of which contributed to a trade imbalance of nearly USD 127 billion during the first 11 months of 2025, according to the Census Bureau.

Taiwan's exports to the US will be taxed at a 15 per cent rate or the US government's "Most Favoured Nation" rate, the USTR's office said on Thursday. The 15 per cent rate is the same as that levied on other US trading partners in the Asia-Pacific region, such as Japan and South Korea.

Trade Representative Jamieson Greer attended the signing of the reciprocal agreement, which occurred under the auspices of the American Institute in Taiwan and the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office in the United States. Taiwan's Vice Premier Li-chiun Cheng and its government minister Jen-ni Yang also attended the signing.

The deal comes ahead of President Donald Trump's planned visit to China in April and suggests a deepening economic relationship between the US and Taiwan.

Taiwan is a self-ruled democracy that China claims as its own territory, to be annexed by force if necessary. Beijing prohibits all countries it has diplomatic relations with — including the US — from having formal ties with Taipei.

Under the deal, Taiwan will make investments of USD 250 billion in the US industries such as computer chips, artificial intelligence applications and energy. The Taiwanese government says it will provide up to an additional USD 250 billion in credit guarantees to help smaller businesses invest in the US.

The agreement would make it easier for the US to sell autos, pharmaceutical drugs and food products in Taiwan. But the critical component might be that Taiwanese companies would invest in the production of computer chips in the US, possibly helping to ease the trade imbalance.

The investments helped enable the US to reduce its planned tariffs from as much as 32 per cent initially to 15 per cent. (AP)

2 Mexican Navy ships laden with humanitarian aid dock in Cuba

HAVANA, Feb 13: Two Mexican Navy ships laden with humanitarian aid docked in Cuba as a US blockade deepens the island's energy crisis.

The ships arrived on Thursday, two weeks after US President Donald Trump threatened tariffs on any country selling or providing oil to Cuba, prompting the island to ration energy in recent days.

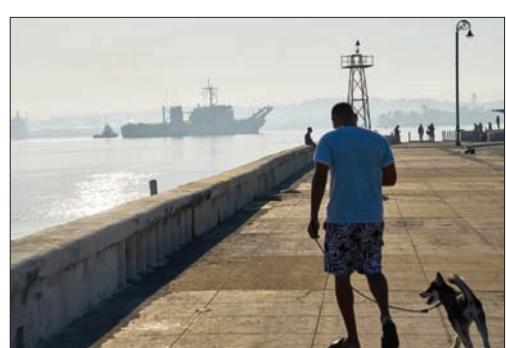
The Mexican government said that one ship carried some 536 tonnes of food including milk, rice, beans, sardines, meat products, cookies, canned tuna, and vegetable oil, as well as personal hygiene items. The second ship carried just over 277 tonnes of powdered milk.

Yohandri Espinosa, a 34-year-old engineer, observed the ships arrive with his daughter and took pictures.

"This is incredibly important aid for the Cuban people at this moment," he said. "We are living through difficult times of great need and uncertainty, and we don't know how long we will be like this."

Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel has called Trump's threats an "energy blockade" and said it affects transportation, hospitals, schools, tourism and the production of food.

Cuban aviation officials warned airlines earlier this week that there isn't enough fuel for airplanes to refuel on the island. On Monday, Air Canada announced it was suspending flights to Cuba, while other airlines announced delays and layovers in the Dominican Republic before flights continued to Ha-



vana. The cuts in fuel are expected to be another blow to Cuba's once thriving tourism economy.

"Sometimes you think that things are going to improve, but it's not like that," said Javier Gonzalez, a Cuban who sat on Havana's famed seawall watching the Mexican ships arrive. "We can't stay how we are because it's too hard. We'll have to wait and see."

Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum said Thursday that as soon as the ships return, "we will send more support of different kinds". Her administration noted that it still plans to send 1,500 tonnes of beans and powdered milk.

Sheinbaum has previously said the humanitarian aid would be sent while diplomatic maneuvering to resume oil supplies is underway. She says Mexico has told the United States it seeks to promote peace-

ful dialogue and ensure Cuba "can receive oil and its derivatives for its daily operations".

Before Trump's announcement, the state-owned oil company Petróleos Mexicanos, Pemex, had already suspended crude oil shipments to Cuba in January, although it has not clarified the reasons behind that decision.

Meanwhile, speaking with journalists on Thursday, the Russian presidential spokesman declined to comment on whether Russia might send oil supplies to Cuba.

"It's impossible to discuss these issues publicly right now for obvious reasons," presidential spokesman Dmitry Peskov said. He also stressed that Moscow did not want an escalation with the United States over the situation: "Probably, we are still counting on constructive dialogue."

Cuba relied heavily on oil shipments from Venezuela that were halted when the US attacked the South American country in early January and arrested its leader.

Cuba has also reduced bank hours and suspended cultural events, while fuel distribution companies have said that sales only will be made in dollars and limited to 20 litres (5.28 gallons) per user.

In addition to severe blackouts, Cuban officials say that US sanctions, which increased under Trump's second term, cost the country more than USD 7.5 billion between March 2024 and February 2025. (AP)

No. SLPRB/REC/SI (UB)- SI (C)-AJ/699/2024/182

NOTICE/CORRIGENDUM

1. Reference Advertisements issued vide Nos. SLPRB/REC/SI (UB) & EQUIVALENT/699/2024/171 dated:12-12-2025 & SLPRB/REC/SI & CONST (AB)/CDO BN/733/2025/65 dated: 12-12-2025 for Recruitment of 48 posts of Sub Inspector (UB) in Assam Police & 47 posts of Sub (AB) in Assam Commando Battalions respectively.

Govt. of Assam has enhanced one (01) year in the upper age limit i.e. from 26 (twenty six) years to 27 (twenty seven) years for Recruitment to the post of Sub Inspector (UB) in Assam Police and from 24 (twenty four) years to 25 (twenty five) years for Recruitment to the post of Sub Inspector (AB) in Assam Commando Battalions under the Unreserved Category in the current Recruitment Cycle. Hence, Unreserved Category Applicants who are born within the period as mentioned below shall also be eligible to apply against the present Advertisements for Recruitment of 48 posts of Sub Inspector (UB) in Assam Police & 47 posts of Sub Inspector (AB) in Assam Commando Battalions.

Posts Name	Category	Period (both dates included)
Sub Inspector (UB) in Assam Police	Unreserved	01-01-1999 and 31-12-1999
Sub Inspector (AB) in Assam Commando Battalions	Unreserved	01-01-2001 and 31-12-2001

Similarly, upper age limit for all the remaining Reserved Categories Applicants shall also be enhanced, following the criteria mentioned at Para 5.5.D of the Advertisement issued for Sub Inspector (UB) in Assam Police and Para 5.5.C of the Advertisement issued for Sub Inspector (AB) in Assam Commando Battalions.

2. Further, the Online Application Portal for all the below mentioned nine (09) Advertisements shall be reopened w.e.f. 15-02-2026 to 28-02-2026 to receive the Online Applications from the eligible Applicants.

- 1052 posts of Constable (UB) & 663 posts of Constables (AB) in the Assam Police
- 48 posts of Sub Inspector (UB) in the Assam Police, 4 Posts of Sub Inspector of Police (Communication) in APRO, 6 posts of Station Officer & 5 posts of Squad Commander in F & ES and 39 posts of Assistant Jailor in Prison Department.
- 47 posts of Sub Inspector (AB) & 3 posts of Constable (AB) for Assam Commando Battalions.
- 127 posts of Driver Constable in Assam Police, 14 posts of Constable (Dispatch Rider), 20 posts of Constable (Messenger) & 3 posts of Constable (Handyman) in APRO and 90 posts of Driver & 4 posts of Driver Operator under Fire & Emergency Services, Assam and 7 posts of Driver Constable & 106 posts of Driver under Forest Department and
- 96 posts of Safai Karmachari in Assam Police, 3 posts of Safai Karmachari in Assam Commando Battalions, 5 posts of Safai Karmachari in F & ES and 8 posts of Safai Karmachari under DGCD & CGHG.
- 211 posts of Forester Grade-I, 504 posts of Forest Guard, 74 posts of Game Watcher, 405 posts of AFPF Constable in Forest Department, 642 posts of Constable (WO/WT) & 1 post of Constable (UB) in APRO, 1 post of Sub-Officer, 337 posts of Fireman & 41 posts of Emergency Rescuer in F & ES, 733 posts of Constable (Grade-III), 11 posts of Bandman (Constable) & 2 posts of Bugler under DGCD & CGHG and 10 posts of Boatman in Assam Police.
- 138 posts of Jail Warder in Prison Department.
- 181 posts of Grade IV staff in Assam Police, 6 posts of Grade IV staff in Assam Commando Battalions and 69 posts of Grade IV staff under DGCD & CGHG and
- 2 posts of Tailor & 2 posts of Dresser under DGCD & CGHG, 2 posts of Nurse, 1 post of Craft Instructor, 1 post of Craft Helper, 1 post of Yoga Instructor, 1 post of Yoga Instructor & 8 posts of Pharmacist in Prison Department.

Accordingly, the eligible Applicants may submit their Online Applications by logging in to the SLPRB website (www.slpbassam.in) w.e.f. 15-02-2026 to 28-02-2026 against all above mentioned 9 (nine) Advertisements.

DIPR /D/HLT/296/14-Feb-26

Sd/
Nodal Officer, SLPRB
Assam, Rehbari, Guwahati

Foundation stones laid for Sankosh Kherai Complex and railway flyover in Udalguri

Assam CM attends Bathou Kherai Puja at Sankosh Kherai



HT Correspondent KOKRAJHAR, Feb 13: Chief Minister Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma, accompanied by BTC chief executive member Hagrama Mohilary and minister Jayanta Mallabarua on Friday attended the

sacred Bathou Kherai Puja at Sankosh Kherai in Gossaigaon of Kokrajhar district. During his visit, the Chief Minister offered prayers and sought blessings for peace, harmony and prosperity of the people of Assam.

The traditional rituals of the Bathou faith were performed with deep devotion in the presence of local devotees and community leaders. Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma also laid the foundation

stone for the infrastructure development of the historic Sankosh Kherai Complex at Dainimari (Ballamjehara).

Bathou is regarded as the foundational religious faith of the Bodo community and its spiritual beliefs are vividly expressed through the sacred Kherai rituals. CM Sarma also laid the foundation stone of a railway flyover at the railway gate on Mission Chariyal Road from Golma Chowk in Udalguri.

The flyover will be constructed at an estimated cost of ₹ 63.45 crore. Once completed, it is expected to significantly ease traffic congestion, reduce travel time and boost the socio-economic development of the district. A badminton facility is also planned beneath the structure to ensure effective utilisation of public space.

The programme was attended by Hagrama Mohilary, Deputy Chief Rihon Daimary and Ministers Charan Boro and Jayanta Mallabarua, along with other dignitaries and local residents.

Rajdhani Express gets stoppage at Sivasagar

Long-standing demand fulfilled after CM takes up matter with Railway Ministry



HT Correspondent SIVASAGAR, Feb 13: Responding to a request from the Sivasagar media for a stoppage of the Rajdhani Express at Sivasagar Town station, Chief Minister Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma moved the Railway Ministry to grant the demand. The express train to the national capital stopped at Sivasagar station for the first time on Thursday evening at 9:20 PM.

The Dibrugarh–New Delhi Rajdhani Express will reportedly pass through the historic Sivasagar town five days a week.

Welcoming the decision of the Railway Ministry, Sivasagar district BJP chief Bitopan Rapidongia said it was a long-standing demand of the people of Sivasagar town. He thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Chief Minister Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma and the Railway Ministry for the gesture.

Assam Science Society celebrates foundation day in Demow

HT Correspondent DEMOW, Feb 13: The foundation day of the Assam Science Society was organized by the Demow branch of the society at its office on Friday.

On the occasion, the flag was hoisted by Jyoti Changmai, president of the Assam Science Society, Demow Branch. Ghana Kanta Gogoi, retired principal of Demow Higher Secondary School, delivered a speech on the main theme of the foundation day.

During the programme, the Assam Science Society, Demow Branch, felicitated three lifelong members of the society—Swarna Prabha Gohain, Hiteswar Borgohain and Durlav Borgohain. Certificates were also presented to two newly inducted lifelong members, Dr Sudhir Kumar Das and Juri Kotoky.

The event was attended by Arup Kumar Dutta, Joint Secretary of the Central Committee, Hamida Begum, retired professor of the Sociology Department at Demow College, Dr Pranjal Bezboruah and a host of other dignitaries.

AAU explores collaboration with Southern Cross University

A high-level delegation from AAU visited Southern Cross University to explore research collaborations. Both universities expressed optimism about strengthening ties and fostering joint projects in agriculture and science

HT Correspondent JORHAT, Feb 13: A high-level delegation from Assam Agricultural University (AAU), Assam, visited Southern Cross University, Lismore, NSW, Australia on February 11 and 12 to discuss collaborative research and academic exchange programmes. From Southern Cross University, the delegation included Vice-Chancellor Professor Tyrone Carlin, Professor Renaud Joannes Boyau, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research), Professor Thomas Roche, Pro Vice-Chancellor, Professor John Hill, Dean, Faculty of Science and Technology, Christine Martin, Director of Global Exchange and Professor Tobias Kretzschmar of Plant Sci-

ences. AAU was represented by Professor Bidyut Kumar Sarma, Director, DBT–North East Center for Agricultural Biotechnology (DBT-NECAB) and Tapan Kumar Gohain, Registrar.

During the discussions, Professor Sarma highlighted in his presentation the ongoing research initiatives, innovative projects and areas of mutual interest that could strengthen cooperation between the two institutions. The sessions also saw the participation of AAU alumni Dr Priyashee Borpatra Gohain and Dr Rekhamoni Das, currently working at Southern Cross University, who contributed to deliberations on potential collaborations.

In addition to the meetings, the

AAU delegates visited the university's crop research fields, gaining firsthand insights into ongoing agricultural research and experimental projects.

The two-day interactions featured presentations, roundtable discussions and brainstorming sessions aimed at identifying collaborative research opportunities, postgraduate student exchanges and other joint academic programmes.

The visit concluded with both sides expressing optimism and commitment to enhancing and accelerating academic and research collaborations between the two universities in the coming years through mutual understanding.

KVK Karbi Anglong concludes training on meat processing and value addition

HT Bureau DIPHU, Feb 13: A two-day intensive training programme on Meat Processing and Value Addition concluded on Friday at the Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Karbi Anglong. Organised by the AICRP on Post-Harvest Engineering and Technology (PHET) in collaboration with KVK Karbi Anglong, the initiative aimed to empower 30 local beneficiaries with skills to transform raw meat into high-value commercial products.

The inaugural session featured experts who highlighted the untapped economic potential of the region. Dr Monuj Kumar Doley, Senior Scientist & Head of KVK Karbi Anglong, welcomed participants and emphasised the opportunities for meat value addition within the district.

Dr Ankur Das, Co-PI of AICRP on PHET, outlined the session's objectives: shifting from traditional livestock rearing to a market-oriented approach. He stressed that processing could increase shelf-life and profitability for local entrepreneurs.

The core of the programme focused on practical demonstrations. Led by Dr Das and Dr Santosh Upadhyaya, with assistance from Dr Kushal Thakuria and Er Anil Sharma, partici-



pants learned recipes and techniques for meat sausages, meat balls, meat cakes and meat pickles.

The event was a joint effort between the Department of LPT, College of Veterinary Science (under Assam Veterinary and Fishery University, Khanapara) and KVK Karbi Anglong.

Other notable attendees included Chandan Kalita, Seed Certification Officer from the Assam Seed and Organic Certification Agency.

The programme concluded with the distribution of certificates to participants, marking their readiness to explore new avenues in the meat processing industry.

Sivasagar Jila Sahitya Sabha holds 'Preetir Sannidhya' programme

HT Correspondent SIVASAGAR, Feb 13: The Sivasagar Jila Sahitya Sabha observed the 'Preetir Sannidhya' programme on Thursday, with Jogesh Kishore Phukan, president of the district unit, presiding over the event. The programme was attended by office bearers of the Sivasagar District Sahitya Sabha and members of various sub-committees. Dr Pankajyoti Hazarika, principal of Bir Lachit Borphukan College, delivered the keynote address, giving a comprehensive speech on how machines have complicated human life and increased suffering from their first invention to the era of artificial intelligence. Manoj Gogoi, secretary of Jila Sahitya Sabha, spoke on the objectives of the event. Aruna Chetia Khataniar and Beena Goswami read out stories, while Devayani Mohanta, Runupama Handique Gogoi, Baby Mohanta, Ashrumani Dutta Ghosh and Hareja Begum recited poems.

Musical performances included songs by Dipali Rajkumari, Mousumi Handique Gogoi and Debajani Saikia. Several participants, including Dr Prasanta Chutia, Pabitra Pran Bhattacharya, Dilip Saikia, Khairuddin Ahmed, Kamal Chiring, Ramen Barua, Dr Simanta Baruah and Prasanta Gogoi, shared brief reflections on their thoughts and feelings during the programme.

Teacher Jilimai Saikia accorded farewell on superannuation

HT Correspondent MORIGAON, Feb 13: In a solemn reception meeting, the Prathomik Sikhyak Sammiloni, Solmari unit, bid farewell to Jilimai Saikia, teacher of Solmari Mikirgaon LP School on her superannuation on Friday. The meeting was presided over by the president of the organisation, Nur Alim Khan, while the secretary, Anup Kr Das, explained the objective of the meeting. The teachers' organisation honoured the retired teacher with a traditional gamusa, a sarai, a book and a citation. After receiving the honours, Jilimai Saikia thanked the teachers and expressed her gratitude for the recognition. She also appealed to the teachers to continue their endeavours as dedicated guides for students, as they have been maintaining till date.

Attending as chief guest, vice president of the organisation Imran Sah said that the teachers' body had done a commendable job by felicitating retired teachers. The organisation also discussed arranging a special teaching programme for students who will take part in the Pragya talent hunt examination to be held shortly.

Children's litterateur Dilip Kumar Baruah's 70th birthday observed with exhibition of his 70 books



HT Correspondent TEZPUR, Feb 13: Noted children's writer of Tezpur Dilip Kumar Baruah marked his 70th birthday on Friday by organising a solo exhibition of 70 selected titles authored by him and by releasing, in both print and digital formats, a comprehensive edited volume on his literary life and contributions.

The programme, held at the auditorium of Lokapriya Gopinath Bordoloi Girls College here was presided over by the college principal Dr Tapan Kumar Kalita and began with a recitation of a poem

of Nilmani Phukan by Dharitri Shrivastava, who also anchored the entire event. The book exhibition was formally inaugurated by novelist and former president of the Sonitpur Zila Sahitya Sabha Dr Bhupen Saikia. Dr Saikia highly commended the initiative of organising such a solo exhibition of an author's own books on his birthday.

The edited volume, compiled by Dr Jintumoni Bora, Associate Professor of English at Dispur Law College, was jointly unveiled by 12 dignitaries which include Santanu Baruah, Nabin

Chandra Lahkar, Karuna Saikia, Pankaj Baruah, Kumud Saikia, Binanda Bora, Rajen Hazarika, Arun Kumar Saha, Birendra Nath Goswami, Suren Bora, Bhuvan Luitel and Gopal Kashyap. The digital edition of the book was launched by Dr Manoj Kumar Hazarika, Principal of Tezpur College, by clicking a button on a laptop. Writer Nabin Chandra Lahkar highlighted the impact of Baruah's children's writings while Santanu Barua, Pankaj Barua and several other dignitaries also delivered brief speeches on the literary journey of Dilip Kumar Barua and its enduring impact on the Assamese literary world.

Theatre personality Karuna Saikia added a creative touch by performing a dramatic dialogue during the programme. Welcoming the digital release, Dr Manoj Kumar Hazarika observed that the new generation increasingly reads books in digital formats alongside print, underlining the relevance of such dual-format publications in contemporary times. Receiving felicitations, Dilip Kumar Baruah said that books would continue to shape young minds even in a rapidly changing digital age.

Banks' performance, credit plans reviewed at Sonitpur DCC/DLRC meeting

HT Correspondent TEZPUR, Feb 13: The District Consultative Committee/District Level Review Committee (DCC/DLRC) meeting for the quarter ended December 2025 in Sonitpur district was held on Friday at Conference Hall-I of the Office of the District Commissioner, Sonitpur. The meeting was presided over by Additional District Commissioner Kuldip Hazarika, in the presence of Chief Executive Officer, Sonitpur Zilla Parishad, Jayanta Kumar Borah; LDO, RBI (Assam), Bedabrata Saikia; DDM, NABARD, Suman Chatterjee; Director, RSETI, Sonitpur, Jitendra Kumar Sarmah; Chief Manager, SBI Tezpur; branch managers of district coordinating bank branches under Sonitpur district and officials from various concerned departments of the district administration. The meeting reviewed the performance of banks in terms of deposits, advances, Credit-Deposit (CD) ratio and the disbursement status of various government schemes being implemented by different departments.

Convened by the Lead District Manager, Sonitpur, Achajya Sonowal, the meeting also assessed the progress of banks operating in the district with regard to various flagship and social security schemes of the government. During the meeting, the Potential Linked Credit Plan (PLP) for 2026–27 was launched for Sonitpur district. The DDM, NABARD, made a brief presentation highlighting the key features of PLP 2026–27 and pegged the Priority Sector credit potential at ₹ 4,928.56 crore, which will form the basis for the Annual Credit Plan (ACP) to be prepared by the LDM for 2026–27.

Unopened health centre, water woes raise concerns in Margherita

HT Correspondent MARGHERITA, Feb 13: Serious questions are being raised over the implementation of key public welfare schemes in the 83rd Margherita Legislative Assembly constituency, as the Bargolai Telkhad Basti Sub-Health Centre continues to remain unopened nearly nine years after its completion. At the same time, residents allege that the BJP-led Union Government's flagship Jal Jeevan Mission has failed to deliver safe drinking water across large parts of the region.

The sub-health centre building at Bargolai Telkhad Basti was completed in 2016. However, despite the passage of several years, the facility has not been made operational, leaving local residents without access to basic primary healthcare services.

The abandoned structure, now overgrown with weeds and vegetation, stands as a stark reminder of what locals describe as administrative apathy. Residents have demanded the immediate opening of the health centre, stating that the absence of nearby medical facilities has forced people to travel long distances even for basic treatment. The situation has reignited criticism of the government's claims of transformative reforms in the health sector, with locals alleging that several areas continue to suffer from an acute shortage of doctors and healthcare workers, while in other places newly constructed health facilities remain locked and unused.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ambitious 'Har Ghar Nal, Har Ghar Jal' initiative under the Jal Jeevan Mission has come under sharp criticism in the Margherita constituency.

Residents of Bargolai, Ledo, Lekhapani, Jagun, Ketetong, Inthem, Margherita town and adjoining tea garden areas allege that they are yet to receive a regular supply of clean drinking water, despite the scheme being implemented with public funds.

According to locals, the Jal Jeevan Mission has failed to deliver tangible benefits in the 83rd Margherita Assembly constituency for reasons that remain unclear, as they claim that even years after the scheme's launch, many households are still waiting for potable tap water.

BJP vp Vaijayanta Panda highlights Assam's growth under Modi

Economic, infrastructural and employment initiatives underscored in Nagaon press meet

HT Correspondent NAGAON, Feb 13: The Indian economy has surpassed the UK economy, making the country the third-largest economy in the world during the tenure of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, BJP National vice president and Assam election in-charge Vaijayanta Panda said at a press conference in Nagaon on Friday.

Addressing the media at the BJP office in Nagaon town, Panda said that over 250 million people have risen above the poverty line in India and the country has become the third-largest power in manufacturing globally.

He highlighted that during the 10-year tenure of the UPA government, Assam received only ₹ 64,000 crore from central revenue. Under the current BJP-led NDA



government, the amount has risen to ₹ 3, 12,000 crore. Panda further stated that the

UPA government had allocated only ₹ 63,000 crore to Assam in 10 years, while the present government released ₹ 2,05,000 crore, despite the Prime Minister of the UPA government being a Rajya Sabha MP from Assam, alleging that the previous regime paid little attention to the state.

Referring to the visits of prime ministers, Panda noted that Dr Manmohan Singh visited Assam only a few times during the UPA tenure, while PM Modi has visited the state 76 times so far.

On infrastructural development in the medical sector, Panda said that Assam had only six medical colleges until 2016, which has now increased to 14, with plans to reach 21 by next year. He also mentioned the establishment of high-quality industries in

Assam, including a ₹ 27,000 crore semiconductor project in Jagiroad, central Assam, facilitated by PM Modi.

Panda highlighted initiatives for women and employment, citing that female fraternity has become self-reliant through the Lakhpati scheme and over two million jobs are targeted in gaming, animation and graphics. Content creator labs will be established in 15,000 schools and 500 colleges across India.

He added that capital investment in India increased by 430 per cent in 2025–26 compared to 2013–14.

The press meet was attended by MLAs Rupak Sarma, Diptu Ranjan Sarma, BJP's state spokesman Ranjib Sarma and other party leaders.

Congress targets Maharashtra govt over Bishnoi gang threats to Bollywood stars

'Dhurandhar star Ranveer Singh received a threat through WhatsApp from unidentified persons'

NAGPUR, Feb 13: The Opposition Congress on Friday launched a scathing attack on the Maharashtra government, claiming that law and order has deteriorated in the state, including Mumbai, with threats to Bollywood celebs Salman Khan, Ranveer Singh and Rohit Shetty from the Lawrence Bishnoi gang.

Maharashtra Congress spokesperson Atul Londhe alleged that the state government is short of ideas and not in a position to take strict action, engaging only in Hindu-Muslim debates instead of addressing the mainstream issues of unemployment, inflation and women's safety.

Speaking to a news channel, Londhe said, "We have a so-called powerful chief minister, who is also serving as the home minister. And it is his responsibility. Law and order situation is deteriorating not only in Mumbai but also in his hometown Nagpur."

Earlier this week, Dhurandhar star Ranveer Singh received a threat through WhatsApp from



unidentified persons, while an unidentified shooter fired five rounds at filmmaker Rohit Shetty's residence in Juhu. A member of the Lawrence Bishnoi gang took responsibility for the shooting.

"Failure of law and order could be seen even during election time. There have been threats to filmmaker Salman Khan and Ranveer Singh, and filmmaker Rohit Shetty,

Shots were fired at Salman Khan's house, and these things are happening frequently, but the government does not have an answer to these issues," the Congress leader said.

He said that when the Congress was in power, it had taken strict action against extortion rackets and put an end to the underworld gangs in Mumbai.

He criticised Chief Minister De-

vendra Fadnavis, who also heads the home department, for "failing" to rein in criminal elements in the state.

Londhe further said that while security agencies, police, and ministers are discussing Bishnoi's role in these threats, it is unclear how the gangster has remained out of the law's grasp despite being behind bars.

"He (Bishnoi) is in prison, and you are in power and controlling the prison, but still, he is able to do all these things. So whose failure is this? It is completely the failure of Devendra Fadnavis and the Maharashtra government," he said.

The Congress leader alleged that Bishnoi can operate from prison because he has the support of someone from the administration and political establishment.

"It is very clear that this government is short of ideas and not in a position to take strict actions. They are only after Hindu-Muslim debates instead of addressing unemployment, inflation and women's safety," he said. (PTI)

Rahul's conduct remained anarchic, undemocratic in the first leg of Budget session: BJP

Gandhi has not become the Leader of Opposition (LoP) in the Lok Sabha with his ability or talent, alleges spokesperson



NEW DELHI, Feb 13: The BJP launched a sharp attack on Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi, alleging that his conduct remained "anarchic, undemocratic and politically uncivilised" throughout the first leg of the Budget session of Parliament which concluded on Friday.

Addressing a press conference at the BJP headquarters here, senior party leader Ravi Shankar Prasad alleged that the way Congress members behaved during the session at the behest of Gandhi made it clear that he does not believe in any "democratic process, democratic probity, constitutional decorum and rules" of the House.

"He (Rahul Gandhi) will do what he likes... It is a matter of concern that Rahul Gandhi's entire conduct is now becoming anarchic," the BJP MP said.

Prasad alleged that the "entire political conduct" of Gandhi is now becoming an "embodiment of anarchy" with the Congress leader showing no respect

for "norms, parliamentary procedures, constitutional propriety and democratic traditions" during the session.

"The BJP strongly condemns this rampant anarchic, undemocratic and politically uncivilised behaviour of Rahul Gandhi," the former Union minister said.

"Gandhi has not become the Leader of Opposition (LoP) in the Lok Sabha with his ability or talent. Since he has become the LoP, he should learn a bit," he added.

The tumultuous first leg of the Budget session, which saw heated exchanges over the India-US interim trade deal and unpublished memoir of former army chief M M Naravane, concluded Friday and the House will now reconvene on March 9.

The first part of the session began on January 28 with the address of President Droupadi Murmu to a joint sitting of the two Houses.

Lok Sabha witnessed dramatic scenes and repeated adjournments from February 2 afternoon after the Chair disallowed Gandhi to quote from the excerpts of the memoir of Naravane relating to the India-China conflict of 2020.

The House witnessed noisy protests and dramatic scenes in the coming days leading to the suspension of seven Congress MPs and one CPI-M member from the House for the remainder part of the Budget session for unruly behaviour.

The Opposition also submitted a notice to move a resolution to remove Om Birla as Lok Sabha Speaker. (PTI)

Vijay has no intention to help people, he 'simply wants to become CM': DMK

CHENNAI, Feb 13: The ruling DMK on Friday lashed out at TVK founder Vijay for his strident criticism of the party, saying the actor-politician "simply wants to become CM".

Responding to Vijay's assertion that the TVK would emerge victorious in the 2026 Assembly elections, DMK leader T K S Elangovan remarked that several actors in the past have launched political parties and drawn massive crowds but failed to sustain their presence.

"Vijay has not taken part in any agitation for the sake of the people. His intention is not the people; he simply wants to become the chief minister," he said.

Assuring a social justice driven regime if voted to power, Vijay at a rally in Salem, hit out at the DMK on various issues, including power-sharing and buying votes through money.

Dismissing criticisms by Vijay as standard opposition rhetoric, Elangovan asserted that its welfare

schemes, including the monthly dose for women, are legitimate commitments being fulfilled despite alleged attempts by the BJP to stall them through legal hurdles.

Elangovan also denied allegations of false promises, stating that the funds have reached the accounts of the beneficiaries.

"The money had gone into every account. We have given it. And we had stated that this money is for the next three months. It is not a change in our policy. Rs 1,000 per month is what we have been giving for the last three years," he added.

Elangovan further said that the chief minister directed to advance these funds to protect the scheme from the BJP, which, he claimed, is planning to approach the courts to halt the payments.

"Our leader had clearly said in his statement that I am giving the fund only to protect the scheme from the BJP's hands. They don't care for the suffering of women and want to put the DMK in a difficult position," he said. (PTI)

Abhishek meets slain migrant's family, seeks justice

BJP rejects 'linguistic hate' narrative

KOLKATA, Feb 13: Senior TMC Leader Abhishek Banerjee on Friday met the family members of a migrant worker from West Bengal, who was killed in Maharashtra's Pune district, and demanded that the police in the western state ensure justice for the deceased.

The BJP accused the ruling Trinamool Congress of spreading misinformation over the incident.

The TMC national general secretary visited the residence of Sukhen Mahato in Purulia, and said strict punishment must be ensured for all those involved in the killing, even as he warned that the party would extend legal and political support to the family if the investigation faltered. "The Maharashtra Police should ensure that the family receives justice. If those involved get bail, the police should oppose it," Banerjee told reporters outside the family's residence.

Escalating the attack, he said, "If they cannot do it, transfer the case to us; we will solve the case within 50 days."

Banerjee said the state administration, on the directions of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, had already initiated contact with authorities in Maharashtra and the Koregaon Bhima police administration to ensure coordination and strict action.

"We came to know about this painful incident the day before yesterday. The CM expressed grief and condolence, and instructed the administration to coordinate with Maharashtra so that strict punishment is awarded," said the MP who is considered number two in the TMC hierarchy. Referring to a purported video circulating online, Banerjee described the assault as "barbaric" and said the victim's family was devastated. The TMC leader recounted how Mahato's brothers, who also worked in an auto-parts unit in Koregaon Bhima, lost contact with him before being informed of his death.

He said the family was assured of legal aid and that the party would pursue the matter in courts if re-

quired. "It is not enough to arrest someone for a few days. If bail is granted, bail cancellation appeals should be filed. We will help the family fight this legal battle," he said. Banerjee, however, said the exact cause of death remained a matter of investigation and insisted he did not want to politicise the tragedy. At the same time, he alleged that incidents involving Bengali migrants had occurred in several BJP-ruled states in recent months and called for vigilance.

He urged the BJP MP from Purulia, Jyotirmay Singh Mahato, to intervene and speak to Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis and Union Home Minister Amit Shah to ensure speedy justice.

"I would expect the MP to rise above party lines and act. Where is the urgency when people are being killed?" he said, adding that if all the accused were not arrested and the trial did not begin in time, the TMC would send a delegation of MLAs to Maharashtra along with the family members. (PTI)

PM congratulates Bangladesh leader Tarique Rahman on BNP's poll victory

NEW DELHI, Feb 13: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday spoke to Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) leader Tarique Rahman on his party's victory in the neighbouring country's parliamentary elections and extended India's continued commitment to the peace, progress and prosperity of the people of both countries.

The BNP on Friday is cruising towards a sweeping victory in the landmark parliamentary polls in the country and is all set to return to power after a gap of two decades.

"Delighted to speak with Mr. Tarique Rahman. I congratulated him on the remarkable victory in the Bangladesh elections.

"I conveyed my best wishes and support in his endeavour to fulfil the aspirations of the people of Bangladesh. As two close neighbours with deep-rooted historical and cultural ties, I reaffirmed India's continued commitment to the peace, progress, and prosperity of both our peoples," Modi wrote on X.

Earlier, Prime Minister Modi warmly greeted Rahman on his "decisive victory" in another post on X and said he looked forward to working with him to advance common development goals.

"I convey my warm congratulations to Mr. Tarique Rahman on leading BNP to a decisive victory in the Parliamentary elections in Bangladesh," Modi said.

Modi said Rahman's victory showed the trust of the people of Bangladesh in his leadership.

"India will continue to stand in support of a democratic, progressive and inclusive Bangladesh. I look forward to working with you to strengthen our multifaceted relations and advance our common development goals," he said.

The elections assumed significance as they were held after a period of tumultuous political vacuum, instability and fragile security situation including widespread attacks on minorities after the student-led protests brought down the 15-year rule of Sheikh Hasina in August 2024. (PTI)

Man faints, dies at TVK rally in TN's Salem

SALEM (TAMIL NADU), Feb 13: A 37-year-old man fainted at a TVK rally here on Friday addressed by party chief Vijay and died on the way to hospital, police said.

The man, identified as Suraj, a native of Maharashtra and residing here, collapsed after complaining of chest pain, and was immediately rushed to a local hospital. "He was declared brought dead at the medical facility," a police official said. He also claimed that Suraj had undergone angioplasty sometime ago.

The police have registered a case and are investigating.

According to the police, the man had gone to see Vijay. He complained of uneasiness while waiting at the rally venue and fainted. Those near him initially attempted to revive Suraj, but later rushed him in an ambulance to a private hospital. However, the doctors who examined him said he was brought dead.

Police claimed that the incident happened even before Vijay arrived for the district functionaries' meeting.

Preliminary enquiry by a team from the Annadhapatti police who arrived at the hospital revealed that Suraj was a heart patient and underwent a procedure. This is the first casualty at the TVK rally since the tragic September 27, 2025, stampede in Karur that claimed 41 lives.

Describing the demise as "heartbreaking", TVK joint general secretary C T R Nirmal, said Suraj had come to witness the TVK rally and fainted due to ill health. He was immediately given first aid by the party

members and was rushed to a hospital without losing time.

"However, he died due to a heart attack. It is heart-breaking. We express our deepest condolences for the untimely death of Suraj," Kumar said in a post on 'X'.

BJP senior and former Governor Tamilisai Soundararajan flayed the TVK for the "poor arrangements" at the event and said the party should have provided water to its members.

"It's very unfortunate that a person dies at a political rally. And the state government should also take concrete measures to provide protection, drinking water and adequate medical help to the people attending such events," she said.

Speaking to reporters in Chennai, she said such tragic deaths should never happen.

Flying the TVK for the incident, BJP youth wing leader Vinoy P Selvam said it only proved the concern that the party leader had for the safety of his cadres. "It would not have mattered if it happened inadvertently for the first time. But the mistake is recurring," he said in a post on the social media platform 'X'.

DMK spokesperson A Saravanan on 'X' wondered how many more lives would be lost before the Assembly elections are held.

He claimed that no arrangements were made by the TVK to provide shelter or drinking water at the rally.

A source in the Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam said the party had already appealed to its cadres and also members of the public who are sick to refrain from attending the meeting. (PTI)

Opposition brings heat on CM Stalin over ₹ 5,000 payout

CHENNAI, Feb 13: The opposition parties in Tamil Nadu on Friday launched a scathing attack on Chief Minister M K Stalin following his early morning announcement of a ₹ 5,000 consolidated payout to women beneficiaries, terming it a "sign of election fatigue and fear of imminent defeat" in the upcoming 2026 Assembly polls.

Leading the charge, Leader of Opposition and AIADMK General Secretary Edappadi K Palaniswami questioned the timing of the summer special allowance and the advance release of the 'Magalir Urimai Thogai'.

"Have you seen what the fear of electoral defeat is making this puppet Chief Minister do? After stalling the ₹ 1,000 payout for 28 months, the Stalin government is now suddenly providing a summer special fund along with three months of advance payment. Did we not have summers in 2024 and 2025, Mr Stalin?" he asked, taking to X. Palaniswami alleged that the DMK government had ruined the state's law and order, making it unsafe for women ranging from young girls to the elderly.

He claimed the announcement was a patchwork job to counter the AIADMK's growing campaign titled 'Vidai Atchi Veetu Bill-ay Satchi' (No dawn rule, the house bill is the witness), which highlights the financial losses suffered by families under the current regime.

The AIADMK leader further asserted that

Stalin's move was a direct reaction to his own poll promise of providing ₹ 2,000 per month to all female heads of households under the 'Kulavilakku Thittam' if voted to power.

"It is amusing to see the CM claim that others are trying to stall the scheme when no one has done so. You have betrayed one crore women by denying them the rights initially promised to all cardholders," he added.

Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK) president and actor Vijay also slammed the government, attributing the sudden announcement to the rising popularity of his party.

"How was this special summer allowance of 2,000 rupees announced so abruptly? Does summer only occur this year? The reason for this, including the early credit of funds on the 13th instead of the 15th, is the sound of the whistle heard in every street and home," he said, referring to his party's symbol.

In a lengthy post on X, Vijay claimed the CM's move confirms that the DMK views TVK as its primary competitor and the only force capable of defeating them.

He urged women to accept the money as a result of his political entry, but promised a more permanent and genuine welfare state under his leadership. The BJP also joined the chorus of criticism, with its state chief spokesperson, Narayanan Thirupathy, highlighting the government's alleged failure in governance.

"Mr Stalin, you may try to lure people by giving even ₹ 50,000, but the state will not forgive or forget your misuse of five years, particularly on the deteriorating law and order and crimes against women and girl children in schools," the spokesperson said.

The BJP leader added that the Dravidian model might think people are fools, but the Tamil people are clever enough to throw out governments that fail to protect them.

In a statement issued to media, PMK founder Dr S Ramadoss termed the ₹ 5,000 credit an "open manifestation of the fear of failure".

He dismissed the CM's claim that opposition parties were plotting to move the court to stop the scheme as a "fairy tale".

"Even a commoner knows that existing schemes are not barred by the model code of conduct. This is a desperate attempt to reduce public anger by handing out cash," Dr Ramadoss said.

He pointed out that while the government cited fiscal deficit to avoid waiving student loans or reducing electricity bills, it had borrowed an additional ₹ 6,550 crore to fund this payout, adding to the state's debt.

Amma Makkah Munnetra Kazhagam (AMMK) General Secretary T T V Dhinakaran echoed similar sentiments, stating that no matter how many weapons the DMK used out of fear, they would not work. (PTI)

Rahul meets leaders of farm unions

Launching of movement against India-US trade deal discussed

NEW DELHI, Feb 13: Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi on Friday met leaders of farm unions from across the country in Parliament House complex during which the need for a nationwide movement to oppose the India-US interim trade deal as well as safeguarding the livelihoods of farmers and farm labourers was discussed.

During the meeting, the farm union leaders expressed their opposition to the India-US trade deal, and conveyed their deep concern for the livelihoods of farmers of corn, soyabean, cotton, fruits and nuts, the Congress said.

Gandhi said the trade deal has opened the door for agricultural imports and that many other crops would soon follow, according to the party.

The farm leaders and Rahul Gandhi discussed the need for a large-scale national movement to oppose the deal, and safeguard the



livelihoods of farmers and farm labourers, it said.

The farm leaders who met Gandhi here included All India Kisan Congress chief Sukhpal S Khaira, Ashok Balhara of the Bharatiya Kisan Mazdoor Union, Haryana, Baldev S Zira of the BKU Krantikari, R. Nandkumar of the Progressive Farmers Front, Amarjit S Mohri of the BKU Shaheed Bhagat Singh, Guramneet S Mangat of the Kisan Mazdoor Morcha -- India, and Hameed Malik of the J-K Zamidara Forum, among others.

The meeting comes a day after Gandhi asserted that the government can file cases or a privilege motion against him but he will stand strongly with farmers. He had also accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of being "anti-farmer" and "selling" the country through the India-US interim trade deal.

The Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha had shared a video statement on X in which he made a scathing attack on the government over the India-US interim trade deal.

In a post in Hindi on X along with the video, Gandhi had said, "FIR is filed, a case is registered, or a privilege motion is brought -- I will fight for the farmers."

"Any trade deal that takes away the farmers' livelihood or weakens the country's food security is anti-farmer. We will not let the anti-farmer Modi government compromise on the interests of the food producers," he had said. (PTI)

Chennithala's criticism of early book distribution 'challenge' to future of poor kids: Sivankutty

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, Feb 13: Kerala General Education Minister V Sivankutty on Friday termed senior Congress leader Ramesh Chennithala's criticism of the early distribution of books and uniforms to school students as a "challenge" to the future of poor children.

Chennithala, while speaking to reporters here, questioned the need to distribute the books even before the academic year was over when it was not clear how many students may or may not be promoted to the next year.

"Does Sivankutty decide which students have been promoted to the next class? Without deciding or knowing that, how can books be distributed to them? What kind of 'Tuglaq reforms' are these? He is trying to show people that books have been printed in advance. Is it the first time books are being distributed in Kerala," he asked.



Responding to the remarks, Sivankutty in a Facebook post, said that Chennithala's words were a challenge to the future of poor children and not just a political statement.

He questioned how upgrading government schools to world standards and providing textbooks in ad-

vance can be called a "Tuglaq reform".

"It is administrative excellence to deliver books and uniforms to children even before the school opens, unlike making students wait for the same even after Onam like in the time of the UDF government," the

minister said.

He also questioned whether it was a "Tuglaq reform" to set up 7,000 robotic labs in 2,000 schools and teach modern technology to the children of the poor.

"Do you (Chennithala) feel uncomfortable when you see these facilities that were only available to the elite being made available to the common man," Sivankutty asked in his post.

The minister contended that printing books before the exam results are out is not a lack of planning, but shows determination of the government.

"The education department in Kerala does not have Chennithala's political mindset, which is doubtful whether it will win or lose," Sivankutty added in his post and demanded that the Congress leader apologise to the students of Kerala. (PTI)

Arunachal CM attends inauguration of new block at Sera Jey Monastery in Tawang

Khandu calls monasteries living centres of culture and compassion

ITANAGAR, Feb 13: Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu on Friday described monasteries as living centres of culture, learning and compassion, while stressing on collective responsibility to support them.

He made the remark while attending the consecration and inauguration of the new administrative block of Sera Jey Jamyang Choekhorling Monastery at the border district of Tawang.

"Deeply humbled to be part of the consecration and inauguration of the new administrative block of Sera Jey Jamyang Choekhorling Monastery, in the august presence of Venerable Geshe Lobsang Norbu la, chief administrator of Sera Jey Monastery, Karnataka, His Eminence Dolhe Rinpoche Tenzin Kunkhyen la, Abbot of Sera Jey Jamyang Choekhorling Monastery and other dignitaries," Khandu said in a post on X.

Highlighting the importance of the newly developed infrastructure, the chief minister observed that it would significantly improve facilities and the academic environment for monks and students.

"The newly inaugurated infra-



structure will greatly enhance administrative efficiency, residential facilities and the learning environment for monks and students," he said.

Khandu also appreciated the contribution made by the Tawang branch of State Bank of India, for supporting education and mobility.

"The generous donation of a school bus by SBI is a commendable initiative that will directly benefit our children," he said.

Emphasising the spiritual and cultural significance of monasteries in

society, the chief minister said, "Our monasteries are living centres of culture, discipline, learning and compassion. Supporting them is a responsibility we all share."

Earlier in the day, Khandu also visited the historic Tawang Monastery and sought blessings from its spiritual leadership.

"Visited Tawang Monastery this morning and had the profound privilege of receiving blessings from the Abbot, Venerable Phara Damey Tulku Rinpoche," he said in another post. (PTI)

Rural empowerment, transparency key to grassroots development: DyCM

ITANAGAR, Feb 13: Arunachal Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Chowna Mein on Friday said the government remains committed to strengthening rural infrastructure and empowering farming communities, stressing that transparency, proper documentation and effective monitoring at the panchayat level are crucial for the implementation of welfare schemes.

He said the VB G RAM G initiative reflects the collective resolve to ensure that the benefits of good governance reach the last mile under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Mein was speaking at a 'Chaupaal Beithak' (community outreach meeting) on VB G RAM G and also flagged off a tractor rally organised by the BJP in Namsai district, an official statement said.

The Viksit Bharat - Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) (VB-G RAM G) Act, 2025 replaces MGNREGA to provide 125 days of guaranteed annual wage employment per rural household.

The community outreach meeting witnessed enthusiastic participation from farmers, party workers and community members, carrying a strong message of rural empowerment and grassroots development, the statement said.

Highlighting the role of self-help groups in transforming rural livelihoods, Mein observed that start-ups and innovation in Arunachal Pradesh are opening new avenues of growth for the youth.

He stressed that coordinated efforts, responsible financial management and the use of technology are essential to ensure efficient utilisation of development funds and timely delivery of benefits to rightful beneficiaries.

Later, the deputy chief minister inaugurated the Botanical Garden at Noi Chenam Tengapani in Namsai in the presence of local MLA Zingnu Namchoom, deputy commissioner C R Khampa and other officials.

Describing the garden as a symbol of the government's dedication to biodiversity conservation and ecological awareness, Mein said Arunachal Pradesh is blessed with immense natural wealth and such initiatives ensure its responsible preservation for future generations. (PTI)

Tripura Cabinet approves ayurveda, homeopathy colleges

Two new medical colleges to start from 2026-27 academic session

AGARTALA, Feb 13: The Tripura Cabinet has approved the setting up of an ayurveda and a homeopathy medical college and hospital, a senior minister said on Friday.

The northeastern state currently has three medical colleges, including the Agartala Govt Medical College, which offers PG courses in different disciplines.

"The Council of Ministers on Thursday cleared proposals for setting up two new medical colleges -- an ayurvedic medical college and hospital and a homeopathy medical college and hospital. They will start functioning from the coming academic session (2026-27)", Tourism Minister Sushanta Chowdhury said at a press conference on Friday.

He said the proposed ayurvedic medical college will initially function from Chandrapur in Gomati district until a full-fledged campus is ready at Tepania in the same district.

"The homeopathy medical college will be established at Netaji Subhas homeopathic hospital in West Tripura district. Both the medical colleges will have 60 seats each", he said.

Chowdhury said the cabinet also approved a proposal for the appointment of 330 posts in the IT department and 110 veterinary officers in animal resources development department.

"Out of the 330 posts in the IT department, 220 Assistant Technical Officer (ATO) posts will be filled



through the Tripura Public Service Commission (TPSC). This is for the first time the IT department is going to recruit such a large number of professionals," he said.

Chowdhury added that the cabinet also approved enhancement of stipend for boarders in tribal hostels from ₹ 80 to ₹ 100 per day.

As many as 37,773 tribal students staying in hostels will benefit from the move. (PTI)

Mizoram to introduce experience-based curriculum in schools to replace rote learning

AIZAWL, Feb 13: The Mizoram government will introduce experience-based curriculum in schools to replace rote learning in a major transition in the state's pedagogical approach, an official said on Friday.

The government is also planning to introduce standardised annual exams for classes 5 and 8 in which students from various schools will be required to answer uniform questions, the official said.

The move is a departure from the traditional rote memorisation or learning by heart method and is designed to reform and modernise the state's education system in line with the National Curriculum Framework, 2023 and the National Education Policy (NEP), 2020, she said.

State Council of Educational Research and Training Director Caroline Zoramthangi said new textbooks will be rolled out from the 2026-27 academic session for classes 1, 2, 3 and 6.

The new textbooks have been fi-

nished and are being printed by the state's Printing and Stationery Department to be implemented in the upcoming academic session, she said.

She said that new textbooks for classes 4, 5, 7 and 8 will be rolled out from the 2027-28 academic year.

Caroline said the new model will prioritise illustration, drama and field trips, among others, over rote memorisation to educate students on critical thinking as well as direct experiential learning rather than abstract theory.

"In line with NEP 2020 and NCF 2023, education must be holistic. Instead of merely measuring a child's knowledge level, the focus will shift to physical, emotional, moral and spiritual development. Learning will be child-centric and enjoyable for students, who will engage in project works," she told PTI.

She said subjects like Mathematics and Science will be taught in a way that relates directly to

their daily lives.

The shift also aims to make the classroom environment more interactive and less burdensome for young learners, she added.

Apart from this curriculum shift, Caroline said the government will also implement competency-based uniform question papers for students of classes 5 and 8 across 770 state-run and aided schools for standardised assessment.

Results from these exams will be centralised and analysed by the SCERT to monitor educational standards across the state, she said.

"The education minister aims to achieve quality education through assessment reform and has taken proactive steps in this direction. Questions will now be competency-based, developed entirely in accordance with the NCF 2023," she said.

She said the shift is expected to improve the state's performance in national-level competitive examinations. (PTI)

Two Sikkim residents killed, two injured as car falls into Teesta river in Bengal

GANGTOK, Feb 13: Two persons were killed and two others critically injured after the car in which they were travelling fell into the Teesta river along National Highway-10 in West Bengal's Kalimpong district in the early hours of Friday, police said, adding that both the deceased were residents of Sikkim.

The accident took place between 4 AM and 5 PM at 29th Mile on the Bengal side of NH-10 when the driver reportedly lost control and the vehicle plunged

into the river below.

The deceased have been identified as Aniket Prasad (25) and Aman Gupta (23), both residents of Gangtok.

The two injured passengers, Kunal Gupta and Pawan Kumar Prasad, were taken to a hospital in Siliguri, where they are currently undergoing treatment. Police said the Sikkim registered private vehicle was travelling from the Dooars in West Bengal to the hill state. (PTI)

Four houses destroyed in fire in West Sikkim, police personnel injured

GANGTOK, Feb 13: Four houses were gutted in a fire that broke out at Upper Ribdi in Soreng district of West Sikkim on Friday afternoon, officials said. According to police, the homeowners and their family members were not present at the time of the incident.

The fire spread rapidly, causing extensive damage before it was brought under control.

Personnel from the Sashastra Seema Bal, Sikkim Police and officials of the BDO office of Daramdin constituency rushed to the spot after receiving information. Local residents also joined efforts to douse the flames.

The situation worsened after an LPG cylinder exploded, intensifying the fire and hampering fire-fighting operations.

During rescue efforts, one police personnel sustained injuries.

Authorities are currently assessing the extent of the damage and an investigation into the cause of the fire is underway. (PTI)

Sikkim MP meets Union forest minister, seeks intervention over rising man-animal conflicts

GANGTOK, Feb 13: Sikkim MP Indra Hang Subba met Union Forest Minister Bhopender Yadav on Friday, seeking his intervention on issues being faced by people living in villages on the periphery of forests, including the growing incidents of man-animal conflicts.

Subba met Yadav at his Parliamentary office and submitted a memorandum, highlighting the increasing incidents of crop depredation and threats to human safety, which have severely impacted rural livelihoods and led to a decline in active farming in several areas, according to a statement issued by the MP's office here.

He urged the minister to formulate a special programme for Sikkim focusing on scientific mitigation measures, strengthened compensation mechanisms, preventive infrastructure and community-based conservation initiatives to safeguard both farmers' interests and wildlife, it said.

Subba also noted that more than 40 per cent of Sikkim's total geographical area is under protected forest cover, it added.

He also proposed the development of regulated trekking and hiking trails, eco-friendly camping sites, interpretation centres and community-led tourism initiatives to generate livelihood opportunities.

Yadav gave a patient hearing to the concerns raised by the MP and assured him that the matter would be examined positively, the statement said. (PTI)

No. SCDB/6th ASFC-57/2022-23/81 Date 03-02-2025

PRESS NOTICE
Tender No. BTC/SCDB/05/2025-26

The BDO, Sidli-Chirang Dev. Block invites bids from registered contractors with PWD Building or Registered contractor with BTC in the category of class II and above for 2 (two) nos. of works for an estimated amount of Rs. 65.00 Lakhs (Rupees sixty five lakhs) only under BDO, Sidli-Chirang Dev. Block under 6th ASFC for the year 2021-22 during 2025-26. The details may be seen at the website <http://assamtenders.gov.in> and also in the office of the undersigned during office hours.

N.B.: The bill of the contractor will be paid only after receiving the fund from BTC.

Sd/-
Block Development Officer,
Sidli-Chirang Dev. Block, Sidli

IPR(BTC)/C/2025-26/4008

GOVT. OF ASSAM
OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY CONTROLLER OF LEGAL METROLOGY(ZONAL):: DIPHU::

Memo No: DCLM/DPU/E-2/2025-26/285 Dated 13/02/2026

::NOTIFICATION::

It is hereby informed to all candidates who have been selected in the Written Examination held on 8th February 2026 at D.A.V. Higher Secondary School, Diphu for recruitment to the post of Publicity Organiser (Grade-III), published vide Advertisement No. DCLM/DPU/E-2/2025-26/240-46 dated 09/01/2026, that the Viva-Voce (oral Interview) and Computer Test are scheduled to be held on 21st February 2026 at the Office of the Deputy Controller of Legal Metrology (Zonal), Diphu from 11:00 A.M. onwards.

The selected Roll Nos. are as follows:

P.O-3	P.O-4	P.O-6	P.O-10	P.O-11	P.O-12
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Sd/-
Deputy Controller of Legal Metrology (Zonal, Diphu)

Memo No: DCLM/DPU/E-2/2025-26/286-90 Dated 13/02/2026

Chief Minister reviews Sikkim INSPIRES progress

GANGTOK, Feb 13: Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang on Friday chaired a review meeting of the Sikkim Integrated Service Provision and Innovation for Reviving Economies (INSPIRES) programme to assess its progress over the last two years.

The initiative, supported by the World Bank, is aimed at creating better economic opportunities for women and youth across the state.

Commending the programme's strides in empowering women and young people through diverse training and capacity-building initiatives, the CM expressed optimism that Sikkim INSPIRES would ensure effective utilisation of the state's trained manpower.

"Our true success will lie not merely in conducting innovative trainings, but in enabling our people to become self-reliant and entrepreneurial, rather than limiting their aspirations solely to white-collar employment," Tamang said in a Facebook post.

He emphasised the need to transform the mindset of the younger generation and foster a positive work culture, noting that these remain pressing challenges globally.

"By ensuring that available resources and funds are utilised judiciously and responsibly, we can nurture a confident, resilient and self-reliant generation for the future," he added.

The meeting, held at Samman Bhawan in Gangtok, was attended by state ministers and senior government officials. (PTI)

KARBI ANGLONG AUTONOMOUS COUNCIL
OFFICE OF THE DIVISIONAL FOREST OFFICER ::
KARBI ANGLONG EAST DIVISION
D I P H U

No. B/KAE/Tender Notice/Sand Mahal/2025-26/9394-(A) Dated 30/01/2026

NOTICE INVITING EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST

Under the provision of Rules 32(I) & (2) of Assam Mines and Minerals sealed tender are hereby invited for grant of Mining Permit / Contract for collection of Sand / Stone as per Annexure 'A' the prescribed form is to be obtained from the undersigned and will be received up to **3:00 PM (IST)** on or before **20/02/2026**.

ANNEXURE-'A'

STATEMENT SHOWING THE LIST OF MAHAL OUTSIDE RESERVE FOREST UNDER KARBI ANGLONG EAST DIVISION, DIPHU

Sl. No.	Name of Mahal	Quantity	Period	GPS Coordinate	Earnest Money	Govt. Value
1.	Upper Laichan, Nagalango Sand Mahal	4,000	2 Years	1. 26°09.089' N 93°41.674' E 2. 26°09.091' N 93°41.689' E 3. 26°09.784' N 93°42.150' E 4. 26°09.777' N 93°42.181' E	10 % 56,000/-	5,60,000/-

Sd/-
Divisional Forest Officer,
Karbi Anglong East Division, Diphu.

Memo No. B/KAE/Tender Notice/Sand Mahal/2025-26 Dated __/__/2026

'THE FAMILY MAN', 'PANCHAYAT', 'PAATAL LOK' AMONG PRIME VIDEO'S TOP 10 NON-ENGLISH TITLES GLOBALLY



Prime Video's Indian shows "The Family Man", "Panchayat" and "Paatal Lok" have emerged among the streamer's most-watched non-English titles worldwide, the OTT platform revealed at its inaugural "Prime Video Presents: International Originals" showcase in London.

The event highlighted Prime Video's international slate through 2026 and showcased how non-English language films and series are increasingly drawing audiences across borders.

According to the platform, three Indian series -- "The Family Man" season three, "Panchayat" season four and "Paatal Lok" season two -- featured in its list of the top 10 most-watched non-English International Originals of the past year based on global performance.

Season three of "The Family Man", headlined by Manoj Bajpayee, is ranked fifth on the global list, while "Panchayat" season

four is placed seventh and Jaideep Ahlawat's "Paatal Lok" season two secured the tenth spot based on worldwide performance.

The top of the chart was led by Spanish film "Culpa Nuestra", followed by Germany's "Maxton Hall - The World Between Us" season two at second place and "The Tank" at third. The list also included titles from Spain, Germany, Brazil and Mexico, highlighting the increasing international appetite for non-English language content.

Gaurav Gandhi, Vice President of

Prime Video APAC, said there is a "tremendous appetite" for content from the region beyond its home markets.

"Whether it's Japanese anime, Korean dramas, or Indian films and series, these are now amongst the most watched shows and movies outside their countries of origin on Prime Video. The opportunity is immense, and as a global service, we're uniquely positioned to champion Asian content on the world stage," Gandhi said during the presentation.

The showcase also previewed a slate of upcoming international titles, including India's "Don't Be Shy", produced by Alia Bhatt under her banner Eternal Sunshine Productions, which is expected to launch in 2026.

Kelly Day, Vice President of Prime Video and Amazon MGM Studios International, said global audiences are increasingly embracing stories from different countries, aided by technology that improves personalisation, subtitles and dubbing across more than 30 languages.

"Prime Video is where international storytelling is thriving. What we're seeing now is that audiences all over the world are finding content from lots of other countries that they really enjoy watching. This is happening more frequently, and Prime Video is where that's happening," she said.

Nicole Clemens, Vice President of

International Originals at Amazon MGM Studios, said the success of international programming shows there is "so much opportunity to bring local stories, characters, and outstanding talent to global audiences".

Prime Video also announced that Spanish-language franchise "Culpables" has crossed 100 million viewers worldwide.

The showcase also previewed a slate of International Originals slated to launch in 2026.

The titles include Chile's "The House of the Spirits", starring Nicole Wallace and Dolores Fonzi; the French-Italian series "Masterplan" featuring Hollywood star Stanley Tucci; Korea's "Siren's Kiss", starring Park Min-Young and Wi Hajun; the UK's "Your Fault: London"; and Spain's "Drawn Together", adapted from Mercedes Ron's best-selling books.

Other projects unveiled at the event include Italy's "Love Me, Love Me", based on a hit Wattpad novel; Japan's animated reimagining "Fist of the North Star: Hokuto No Ken"; Colombia's "Betty La Fea: The Story Continues" season three; France's "Toi + Moi - Seuls contre tous", adapted from a best-selling trilogy; Spain's "Perfect Liars", based on a Wattpad phenomenon with over 140 million reads; and "Apocalypse Z: Part II", the sequel to the popular post-apocalyptic series. (PTI)

FARHAN AKHTAR TO PORTRAY RAVI SHANKAR IN SAM MENDES' 'THE BEATLES'



Actor-filmmaker Farhan Akhtar is all set to play the role of sitar icon Ravi Shankar in filmmaker Sam Mendes' upcoming four-part movie saga on The Beatles, slated to release in theatres in April 2028.

Sony Pictures shared the news of Akhtar's casting with a post on its official X handle on Friday.

"New casting announced for 'The Beatles - A Four-Film Cinematic Event', directed by Sam Mendes. Farhan Akhtar will star as Ravi Shankar, Lucy Boynton will star as Jane Asher. Morfydd Clark will star as Cynthia (Powell) Lennon. Harry Lawtey will star as Stuart Sutcliffe. In cinemas April 2028. #TheBeatlesMovies," the studio posted.

Mendes, the director of critical hits like "American Beauty", "Road to Perdition", "Revolutionary Road", James Bond movies "Skyfall" and "Spectre", and "1917", has taken on the ambitious duty of directing the four-film series chronicling the legendary British band, with each movie told from the perspective of one of the Beatles members.

The band was formed by John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George Harrison and Ringo Starr in 1960 and is known for tracks such as "Hey Jude", "I Want to Hold Your Hand", and "Yesterday", and "Penny Lane", among others. The band broke up in 1970.

In the film, Paul Mescal will feature as Paul McCartney, Harrison Dickinson as John Lennon, Barry Keoghan as Ringo Starr and Joseph Quinn as George Harrison.

Ravi Shankar's music had influenced the Beatles, particularly Harrison, who learned Sitar from the Indian maestro. The band introduced Indian instruments in several of their songs including "Norwegian Wood", "Within You Without You" and "Love To You".

Shankar and Harrison remained friends till the very end and even collaborated together in a concert in the newly-independent Bangladesh on August 1, 1971.

Paul McCartney, Ringo Starr, and the families of the late John Lennon and George Harrison have given the filmmaker the full life story and music rights for the upcoming films.

Boynton will play Jane Asher, McCartney's ex-girlfriend, Clark will star as Cynthia Powell, who was married to Lennon for four years. (PTI)

SHAAN BRINGS ELECTRIFYING ENERGY TO IIT GUWAHATI AT MYNTRAGLAMFEST TOUR

The vibrant campus of IIT Guwahati came alive on February 1 as the MynttraGlamfest Tour arrived in collaboration with Alcheringa, the institute's annual cultural festival. Amidst high-energy fashion showcases and immersive campus experiences, the evening reached its peak with a power-packed performance by celebrated playback singer Shaan.

Performing for thousands of students, Shaan described the Gen Z audience in one word: "Energy." He emphasised the tremendous positive energy that young crowds bring, adding that such audiences elevate the live performance experience to another level. The enthusiasm and engagement of the students turned the concert into a memorable, collective celebration of music.

When asked about a song he never tires of performing, Shaan instantly named Tanha Dil. Calling it a song that comes from a deeply personal space, he shared that its emotional connection keeps it fresh for him every single time he sings it on stage.

Speaking about the rapidly evolving music landscape, Shaan expressed excitement about the digitisation of the industry and the transformation of platforms. He noted that the future of Indian music looks promising and dynamic. With the next generation including his own children—actively exploring music, he shared that he is closely observing how the industry is shaping up over the next five to ten years. According to him, whatever direction it takes, the future is gearing up to be exciting and full of possibilities.

The Guwahati edition of the MynttraGlamfest Tour not only showcased fashion and youth culture but also highlighted the enduring power of music in bringing generations together, with Shaan's performance serving as a fitting crescendo to an unforgettable evening.

Wedding is on cards but when right person walks into my life: Mrunal Thakur

Actor Mrunal Thakur says she will not shy away from announcing her marriage to the world but she is still waiting for the right person to walk into her life.

There were reports last month claiming that Thakur has been secretly dating South star Dhanush and will tie the knot with him on February 14, which marks Valentine's Day. The two, however, have not officially spoken about it.

Asked about the speculation around personal life, Thakur said she has plans to get married some day.

"Yes, wedding is on the cards and whenever the right day, the right time and the right person walks into my life, I will be the first one to announce it on my social networking sites," Thakur, who currently stars in romance drama "Do Deewane Seher Mein", told PTI in an interview.

The actor said she resonates with her character of Roshni, who believes one shouldn't get married for

the sake of it.

"Roshni said, 'Karne ke liye nahi karni hai' (Marriage shouldn't be done just for the sake of doing it). Someone had to say it and I'm glad she said it," she said. Thakur added that today's generation prioritises genuine connection over societal status or external pressure.

"...Like, earlier, people might have had certain reasons to get married but today, people marry because they want to, and they want to do it with the right person," she said.

In "Do Deewane Seher Mein", Thakur features opposite Siddhant Chaturvedi.

The film, directed by Ravi Udyawar, is billed as an imperfectly perfect love story of Chaturvedi's Shashank and Thakur's Roshni.

The romantic-drama, produced by Sanjay Leela Bhansali and Zee Studios, is set to hit theatres on February 20. (PTI)



BORLUIT PRODUCTIONS UNVEILS POSTER OF 'DIPHOLU'; FILM TO RELEASE ON AUGUST 21

Tezpur-based production house Borluit Productions has unveiled the official poster of its debut Assamese feature film Dipholu, announcing that the much-anticipated film will hit theatres on August 21, 2026.

The newly released poster offers a glimpse into the film's visual universe, presenting a rich ensemble cast set against a rural Assamese backdrop that reflects the production house's rooted storytelling approach.

Directed by Nekib and produced by Jekiv, Dipholu brings together an accomplished team of artistes and technicians. The cast features Amrita Gogoi, Subrat Deori, Arun Nath, Arun Hazarika, Purnada Hazarika, Rajib Dowari, Jyotishman Borah, Kanika Nath, Anirban Kalita, Ankur Baidya, Dr Hitesh Baruah, Simashree Bora, Priyanshi Kashyap and Dibya Jyoti Borah, with veteran actress Mridula Barua making a guest appearance.

The film's creative team includes Nekib as writer, director and editor, while the screenplay and dialogues are penned by Debojit Bora. Cinematography is handled by Uttam Kalita, and the music and background score are composed by Jekiv, who also serves as producer. Playback singers include

Zubeen Garg, Rakesh Reeyan, Rupali Kashyap, Gayatri Hazarika and Montumoni Saikia.

Notably, the film features two special duet songs sung by Zubeen Garg — one alongside Rupali Kashyap and the other with Gayatri Hazarika. Both tracks are among the last few recorded and unreleased works of Zubeen Garg, who passed away on September 19, 2025. Widely regarded as the voice of modern Assam, his music shaped generations and continues to resonate deeply with audiences. The duet with Gayatri Hazarika also holds emotional significance, as it is among her final recorded works before her demise on May 16, 2025. A recipient of multiple state and national honours, she was revered for her melodious voice and lifelong contribution to Assamese music and culture.

Reflecting on the loss of the legendary singer, director Nekib said Zubeen Garg was not just a singer but the heartbeat of Assam, adding that having one of his last songs in the film was an emotional experience for the entire team and an honour they would always cherish.

Deepak Dey and Uday Shankar lead the choreography, while Pankaj Soram directs the action sequences. Costumes are designed by Juri Kalita, with Pijumoni Sharma as



head of makeup. Lyrics are written by Nekib and Gargee Bhattacharya. Jitul Rajbongshi and Anupam Baishya serve as chief assistant directors, supported by Debasish Deka, Afiron Nessa and Pranjal Haloi. Production is managed by Utpal Kalita and Hirok Jyoti Saloi. Dhanjit Das is the DI colourist, while Zeetumoni Hazarika handles community stills and BTS. Guwahati-based PR and reputation management consultancy Life's Purple is overseeing the film's media outreach.

Commenting on the announcement, producer Jekiv described Dipholu as a heartfelt journey into the soul of Assam, saying every

frame carries a piece of identity, humour and hope, with the poster offering only a glimpse of a world built with authenticity and purpose.

Following the success of its award-winning short films Rong - The Colour and Akaax Bisari - Into the Sky, Borluit Productions' entry into feature-length cinema with Dipholu marks a significant step, promising a production rich in local flavour, artistic sincerity and cinematic charm.

Dipholu will be released in cinemas across Assam and select cities in India on August 21, 2026.

Scotland renew rivalry with 'Auld Enemy' England with Super Eight spot at stake

KOLKATA, Feb 13: A floundering England will square off against traditional sporting rivals Scotland here on Saturday in a must-win T20 World Cup match that could well determine which of the two teams progresses to the Super Eight stage from Group C.

West Indies sit atop with back-to-back wins, while Scotland, Italy and England -- all with one win each -- are separated only by net run rate. Scotland hold the second spot thanks to their massive win in Italy.

So, Saturday's clash could give either side a decisive edge in the race for second place as both are expected to win their final group games, with Scotland facing Nepal and England taking on Italy.

Their rivalry, born with football's first official International in 1872, has long been fuelled by history and identity.

On the cricket field, it's still new but has steadily acquired its own narrative.

Scotland had stunned England by six runs after posting a massive 371/5 in a one-off ODI in Edinburgh in 2018, and

in the 2024 T20 World Cup, their group match was washed out after Scotland raced to 90 without loss in 10 overs, a result that had derailed England's campaign.

For the Scots on the cricket pitch, there is some unfinished business.

Openers George Munsey and Michael Jones had put on an unbroken 90-run stand in that abandoned 2024 encounter and will look to finish what they started against the 'Auld Enemy' at Eden Gardens.

The duo had smashed England ace spinner Adil Rashid for 26 runs in two overs and their match-up will once again be a highlight.

The 2022 champions England find themselves under mounting pressure especially after a 30-run defeat to the West Indies which has complicated the scenario for the Harry Brook-led side after it scraped through by four runs in the tournament-opener against Nepal.

The loss on a turning Wankhede wicket also exposed England's recurring vulnerability against spin.



Chasing 197, they were well placed at 74/1 before West Indies spin twins Gudakesh Motie and Roston Chase shared five wickets between them. England lost six wickets in succession to spin during the middle overs and were eventually bowled out for 166 in 19 overs. History is also heavily against the

World Cup after Bangladesh's refusal to play in India, Scotland appear to be growing in the tournament.

They began with a loss to the West Indies where they looked short of preparation and rusty. But they responded emphatically against Italy who had beaten them in the European qualifiers.

Scotland piled up this edition's first 200-plus total before bowling Italy out for 134 in 16.4 overs in their last outing at Eden Gardens.

Michael Leask was their X-factor. He claimed a career-best 4/17 against Italy and then showcased his destructive batting at No.6, smashing Thomas Draca for two fours and two sixes in the last five balls he faced to propel Scotland past the 200-mark.

Also having stayed at the venue for over a week since their opener on February 7, Scotland have developed a clear understanding of the conditions at Eden and could feel closer to 'home' against their struggling neighbours.

There is an added context to the match.

Later in the day back in the Scottish capital, the two nations will also clash in the Six Nations rugby championship in Edinburgh.

"We're certainly looking forward to it. We've also got the Scotland rugby team taking on England the same day. So, it would make quite a nice headline if Scotland has two wins on Saturday," skipper Richie Berrington has summed up the mood.

Teams :

England: Harry Brook (captain), Rehan Ahmed, Jofra Archer, Tom Banton, Jacob Bethell, Jos Buttler, Sam Curran, Liam Dawson, Ben Duckett, Will Jacks, Jamie Overton, Adil Rashid, Phil Salt, Josh Tongue and Luke Wood.

Scotland: Richie Berrington (captain), Tom Bruce, Matthew Cross, Bradley Currie, Oliver Davidson, Chris Greaves, Zainullah Insan, Michael Jones, Michael Leask, Finlay McCreath, Brandon McMullen, George Munsey, Safyaan Sharif, Mark Watt and Brad Wheel.

Match starts: 3pm (PTT)

Ireland rocked by Stirling injury ahead of must-win Oman clash

COLOMBO, Feb 13: Reeling from two defeats and now without captain Paul Stirling due to a knee injury, Ireland will look to keep their fading Super Eight hopes alive when they take on fellow strugglers Oman in a Group B clash of the T20 World Cup here on Saturday.

Both the teams have suffered two losses respectively and will be desperate to register their first victory in the tournament.

While Ireland lost to co-hosts Sri Lanka and Australia by 20 and 67 runs respectively, Oman were trounced by Zimbabwe by eight wickets and Sri Lanka by 105 runs.

As if the two defeats were not enough, Ireland were banking on Stirling to inspire but he was ruled out of the remainder of the T20 World Cup after sustaining ligament damage to his right knee, ahead of the Oman match.

Stirling hurt his right knee when completing a catch during Ireland's 67-run loss to Australia here on Wednesday. The experienced captain aggravated the injury later in the same match when he attempted a quick single after returning to the crease to bat.

Despite the setback, Ireland will have an edge over Oman, a team which mostly consists of India and Pakistan-origin players.

Ireland know very well that they



will have to win big to keep their slim chance of remaining in the tournament afloat, while Oman will be looking to prove a point after two heavy losses.

With Stirling not there, the onus would be on the likes of Ross Adair, Harry Tector, Lorcan Tucker and Curtis Campher to convert their starts into big scores to bolster Ireland's batting department, which was found wanting in the two losses.

Uncapped youngster Sam Topping, who has been named as Stirling's replacement, too will have big shoes to fill.

In bowling department, left-arm spinner George Dockrell has been Ireland's best bowler in the tournament so far in terms of economy

and wickets, but he would look for support from the likes of fast bowlers Mark Adair and Barry McCarthy, and spinners Matthew Humphreys and Gareth Delany.

Oman, on the other hand, have nothing to lose and would be hoping for an all-round show to upset Ireland and register their maiden win in the tournament.

On head-to-head record, Ireland are way ahead. In their last five meetings, the Irish won four times while Oman registered one victory that came in October 2019.

Oman too have struggled with the bat, having posted just 103 and 120 for 9 against Zimbabwe and Sri Lanka respectively.

Making their fourth appearance in the T20 showpiece, Oman strug-

Henry braces for 'fierce contest' as NZ renew rivalry with South Africa

AHMEDABAD, Feb 13: Calling contests against South Africa "fierce", New Zealand pacer Matt Henry on Friday said the long-standing rivalry between the two sides adds an extra dimension to their crucial T20 World Cup clash, which could potentially decide the group winner.

Both New Zealand and South Africa approach the Saturday's game unbeaten in Group D.

Matches between the Black Caps and the Proteas have often been tight, high-stakes affairs, and Henry acknowledged that history and sporting culture have played their part in shaping the rivalry.

"You always want to play the best sides. Growing up, whether it was rugby or cricket, New Zealand versus South Africa were always the games you wanted to be part of. There's that natural competitive edge between the two countries and nothing changes in a World Cup," Henry said at the pre-match press conference.

"It's a fierce competition and something we absolutely love being involved in."

The Saturday's encounter could determine the group topper but Henry insisted that beyond the stakes, it's the quality of opposition that excites the New Zealand camp.

"South Africa are strong in all areas. They've got power with the bat, variety with the ball and a lot of experience. When you come up against a side like that, you know you've got to be sharp in every



arrive from Chennai.

"Being familiar with the ground is always nice, but it's a new surface. In T20 cricket, conditions can outweigh pre-set plans. It's about assessing quickly and adapting better than the opposition," he explained.

Henry also underlined the importance of composure in high-pressure contests between evenly matched teams.

"We've seen throughout this tournament how tight games have been. Even that double Super Over thriller the other day. That shows the margins are so small. In games like New Zealand versus South Africa, it often comes down to key moments and who handles them better," Henry said.

With dew and toss potentially playing a role, Henry maintained that adaptability remains the side's biggest strength.

"As Kiwis, we pride ourselves on problem-solving. Whether we bat or bowl first, whether we win the toss or not, the focus is on executing our skills and putting the opposition under pressure," he said.

Talking about the double Super Over game South Africa played against Afghanistan, Henry said, "It was our travel day and we had a bit of a delayed leave because yeah we couldn't keep our eyes off it was an incredible game and everything in it as well."

"That's probably shown throughout this tournament that the game's been so tight it's just been great to watch." (PTT)

facet of the game," he said.

"In World Cups, every game carries weight. Each win builds confidence and momentum. For us, it's about doing our best tomorrow and not looking too far ahead," he said.

Henry also pointed out that familiarity between players due to franchise cricket has added a new dimension to the rivalry.

"With franchise cricket around the world now, you get to know a lot of the players personally. There are cultural similarities between the two countries as well and we've always got on well off the field," he said.

"But once you cross that line, it's a different story. It's a fierce contest and that's what makes it special."

The pacer said adapting quickly to conditions will be key, regardless of which team has had more time at the venue. It was in the context of South Africa having played both their matches in Ahmedabad while the Black Caps

A tribute helmet, a disqualification and a ticking clock as CAS weighs Heraskevych's appeal



CORTINA D'AMPEZZO, Feb 13: The Court of Arbitration for Sport was hearing the appeal surrounding the disqualification of Ukrainian skeleton athlete Vladyslav Heraskevych from the Milan Cortina Games on Friday, though it still isn't clear how he could compete in these Olympics even if he wins his case.

Meanwhile, his disqualification was justified because he insisted on bringing his messaging -- a tribute helmet -- onto the field of play. International Olympic Committee President Kirsty Coventry reiterated Friday.

Heraskevych was in Milan for the hearing Friday, still believing that his plan to wear a helmet displaying the images of more than 20 Ukrainian athletes and coaches who have been killed since Russia invaded their country in 2022 was not in violation of the Olympic Charter.

"I feel the same as the last four days," Heraskevych said. "I believe I didn't fail at any rules, so therefore I shouldn't be suspended, and I should be today part of the Olympic Games, part of the competition, but not part of the hearing. So, we continue to fight for our truth."

Speaking in Milan, a day after she visited with Heraskevych in Cortina d'Ampezzo moments before he was told that he could not participate in his Olympic race, Coventry repeated what the IOC has been pointing to for several days about the need to control how messages from athletes can be shared with the world. (AP)

BWF Council proposes 3x15 scoring system, AGM vote slated for April

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 13: The Badminton World Federation Council will put to vote the 3x15 scoring system as the official format for the sport during its Annual General Meeting on April 25 in Horsens, Denmark. During its meeting on November 8 last year, the Council concluded that the 3x15 system, with setting to 21, offers a balance between match excitement, competitive fairness, player welfare and tournament presentation. The format has already been on trial in selected national and Grade 3 tournaments, besides being implemented at the BWF World Junior Championships in Guwahati last year.

"Our responsibility is to ensure badminton continues to grow, inspire, and thrive at every level. After extensive testing and consultation, we believe the 3x15 scoring system provides a strong foundation for the sport's future," BWF President Khunying Patama Leeswadtrakul said in a release on Thursday.

"It supports player welfare, keeps matches dynamic and engaging for global audiences, and helps badminton stand out in an increasingly fast-paced entertainment landscape.

"This approach reflects our commitment to long-term sustainability and innovation, and our continued support for players in their pursuit of excellence, enabling them to enjoy longer, more successful careers in the sport."

According to BWF research, the proposed system reduces game length, leading to more close-score situations. Players are expected to reach decisive endgame scenarios sooner, helping maintain pace and audience engagement.

The shorter format is also projected to result in more predictable match durations, aiding scheduling, tournament flow and broadcast planning, while supporting player recovery and reducing fatigue. The governing body said the system offers benefits across stakeholder groups,

including reduced physical load and injury risk for players, lower fatigue levels for technical officials, a more dynamic viewing experience for fans and broadcasters, and improved operational efficiency for tournament hosts.

"We look forward to presenting this proposal to our membership at the BWF AGM 2026. This proposal forms part of BWF's broader long-term strategy to modernise tournament formats and enhance how badminton is presented worldwide," Leeswadtrakul said.

Before 2002, badminton was played under a best-of-three game system, with games played to 15 points for men and 11 for women, and only the serving side able to score. It was replaced by the current 3x21 rally point system in 2006.

The BWF attempted to introduce a 5x11 system in 2014 and again in 2021, but the proposal failed to secure the required majority at the AGM. (PTT)

Bhatia fires 7-under in first round, lies seventh at Pebble Beach

PEBBLE BEACH (USA), Feb 13: Indian-American golfer Akshay Bhatia got off to a blazing start at the AT&T Pebble Beach Pro-Am, carding a 7-under 65 to sit tied for seventh after the opening round.

He fired three consecutive birdies, added two more on the sixth and seventh to reach 5-under through seven, and, without dropping a shot, closed the round with birdies on the 15th and 18th.

Another Indian-American Sahith Theegala had a rollercoaster round, finishing 1-under 71 and tied for 57th.

He started well with birdies on the second and fourth holes but dropped a shot on the fifth. A tough stretch from the ninth to 11th saw him card three consecutive bogeys, falling to 2-over. Showing resilience, Theegala birdied three of his final five holes to get back under par.

Aaron Rai had a rough round of 5-over 77.

Ryo Hisatsune, coming off two good weeks including a runner-up finish at the Farmers Insurance Open, had three straight birdies early in his round. He then made the only birdie on the par-4 ninth and finished with three straight for a 62.

He was one shot ahead of Keegan Bradley and Sam Burns. (PTT)

MP's Satendra Singh Lohiya becomes first Asian para-swimmer to cross Cook Strait

NEW DELHI, Feb 13: India's Satendra Singh Lohiya has become the first Asian para-swimmer to cross the Cook Strait in New Zealand. The 38-year-old Lohiya, who hails from the Bhand district of Madhya Pradesh, was honoured with the Padma Shri in 2024.

"Historic Achievement -- Cook Strait New Zealand Victory. One of the world's most challenging sea routes, Cook Strait, New Zealand, after successfully crossing it with my team, today I feel deeply emotional and immensely proud...for the first time in Asia, a differently-abled swimmer has crossed the Cook Strait," Lohiya posted on social media on Friday.

The para-swimmer, as per officials, reached New Zealand in the third week of January and began training in the extremely cold waters of the Strait to prepare for the attempt. Lohiya swam for 23.6km in nine hours and 22 minutes to accomplish the feat, officials said.

"Padma Shri and Tenzing Norgay National Adventure Awardee, Madhya Pradesh's international para-swimmer Shri @SatendraLohiya, has created history by successfully crossing New Zealand's Cook Strait, one of the toughest sea chan-

nels in the world," said Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav.

"With this remarkable achievement, he becomes the first para-swimmer from Asia to conquer the Cook Strait. I extend my heartfelt congratulations to him on this extraordinary feat.

"This proud moment for the nation and for Madhya Pradesh reflects his indomitable spirit and unwavering determination, which will continue to inspire generations to come," he added.

Both of Lohiya's legs were disabled in infancy due to lack of proper treatment for diarrhoea.

He started his journey of Open Water Sea Swimming in 2017. In 2018, he crossed the English Channel along with an Indian para-swimming team with a timing of 12 hours and 26 minutes covering a distance of 34km.

In the 2022 National Paralympic swimming championships at Guwahati, he won a gold medal in 100m backstroke. He has participated in 11 National Paralympic swimming championships in which he has won 23 medals including four Gold, 12 silver and seven bronze medals. (PTT)

Varun's 'game-breaking' spell

It's a skill we have never seen before: Gerhard Erasmus

NEW DELHI, Feb 13: Namibia captain Gerhard Erasmus had no qualms in accepting that his batters did not stand a chance against the mystery spin of Varun Chakravarthi, whose skill was something that they have never seen in associate cricket.

Chasing 210, Namibia kept themselves in the game till the powerplay.

However, Chakravarthi was brought in the seventh over and struck on the very first ball with a googly.

He ended up taking three wickets in 12 balls and for Erasmus, the game was done there.

"It's mystery bowling. Yes, there's leg spin googly every now and again that you face, and people have become accustomed to that. It's only in a few countries that they have guys like Varun, Mujeeb and these types of guys.

"I don't think there's anyone in the associate cricket that bowls it. Honestly, I have to say that that was the game-breaker right there. It was really just a new skill that we've never seen," Erasmus said after the 93-run loss to India on Thursday night.

Head of the game, Erasmus had spoken about the risk of his players being overawed by the occasion of playing hosts India in their own backyard.

The stadium was expectedly packed and the fans made a lot of noise, an environment Erasmus and Co. are not really familiar with.

However, they gave a good account of themselves in patches. First they bowled well in the death



over to limit India to 209 before taking the attack to the home bowlers in the powerplay.

Erasmus said the 93-run loss was not a fair reflection of how his team played.

"Through periods of that bowling performance (Chakravarthi's spell), guys stuck up, especially towards the back end of the game of their batting innings. So that's kind of something that you have to really get accustomed to is when you play in big stadiums in front of

crowds and against big teams.

"It's not to be overawed as a first step. Then you can express your skills better. I felt that some guys did it in patches, but unfortunately some of those big overs that leaked and also that period of batting when we went three or four wickets straight," he said.

To graduate to the next level, Erasmus feels the players must learn to perform on the biggest stage.

"If you want to be a high-class cricketer, then you have to have courage, but you also have to have calmness and the presence of mind to perform your skills under that pressure. For example, my shot was just a little bit way too far away from the ball. I have to get it closer to the ball.

"How can you, under the exposure that you have there with 40,000 fans and high-quality bowling, how can you access the same skills that you do when you play your peers, I guess, when you play in associate cricket and play in front of no crowds," said the straight-talking skipper. (PTT)

Expect Kuldeep to come in for game against Pakistan: Gavaskar

NEW DELHI, Feb 13: Former India captain Sunil Gavaskar expects leg-spinner Kuldeep Yadav to come in for pacer Arshdeep Singh in the national team's high-profile T20 World Cup game against arch-nemesis Pakistan on Sunday.

Arshdeep was at the receiving end of some punishment from Namibian batters here on Thursday even though the defending

champion home side prevailed by 93 run to maintain its winning streak. He did not complete his full quota of four overs either. "All our bowlers picked up wickets. Arshdeep did not complete his four overs, while Shivam Dube bowled two and Hardik completed his quota. This hints that Kuldeep Yadav could replace Arshdeep against Pakistan."

"Sri Lanka pitches help spinners and India have history of playing three spinners. Expect Kuldeep in the XI against Pakistan in Colombo," Gavaskar said on Star Sports' Amul Cricket Live.

Gavaskar said the Indian skipper Suryakumar Yadav juggled his bowling with the Pakistan game in mind. "Hardik bowling the first over suggests

Arshdeep may not play in the next match against Pakistan. Varun Chakravarthy bowled only two overs and would have taken five or six wickets if he bowled his full four overs. "The best part about Varun is that he gets wickets whenever he is asked to bowl. Axar Patel took two wickets in three overs, it's a good sign," he said. Gavaskar also explained how batter

Sanju Samson, who came in for an unwell Abhishek Sharma, is being hurt by his deep crease movement. Samson was dismissed after a eight-ball 22, which included three maximums.

"Sanju Samson has a technical problem. He goes too deep in the crease and plays that flick shot. You can only hope he times it in the gap or it goes for a six. He needs

to make improvements, especially when he opens against the new ball.

"Namibia were clever with their field placements. They set a field to get Samson out. But it was good that he hit some nice shots. That must have given him some confidence. If he plays the next match against Pakistan, he needs to spend more time at the crease," he said. (PTI)

All-round Zimbabwe script 23-run upset win over injury-hit Australia



COLOMBO, Feb 13: Zimbabwe rode on collective brilliance to pull off the first big upset of the ongoing T20 World Cup, stunning injury-ravaged former champions Australia by 23 runs here on Friday.

This was only the second time that the African nation defeated the traditional heavyweights in the format, having last beaten them back in the 2007 edition of the showpiece.

Riding on opener Brian Bennett's unbeaten 64 and useful contributions from other top-order batters, Zimbabwe posted a challenging 169 for 2 after Australia, who were without some of their front-line bowlers, invited them to bat.

The lower-ranked side then bowled Australia out for 146 in 19.3 overs on a sluggish pitch to register a famous win.

In the 2007 edition of the same tournament, Zimbabwe, then led by Prosper Utseya, had beaten Australia by five wickets with one ball

to spare in a low-scoring match in Cape Town. Pacer Blessing Muzarabani returned figures of 4/17, while Brad Evans (3/23), Wellington Masakadza (1/36) and Ryan Burl (1/9) also delivered with the ball for Zimbabwe.

It was a disaster for Australia in their pursuit of 170 as they suffered a top-order collapse and were reduced to 29 for 4 in 4.3 overs with Josh Inglis (8), Travis Head (17), Cameron Green (0) and Tim David (0) dismissed cheaply.

Matt Renshaw played a lone hand for Australia with a 44-ball 65 while Glenn Maxwell made 31.

From 38 for 4 at the end of Powerplay, Australia reached 67 for 4 at the halfway mark with 103 runs needed for a win. Maxwell and Renshaw then stitched a fifth-wicket stand of 77 runs off 9.5 overs to bring Australia back.

But Ryan Burl broke the partnership as Maxwell inside-edged one onto the stumps.

Australia needed 56 runs from the final five overs but Marcus Stoinis, who earlier left the field after being hit during the Zimbabwe innings, got out soon for 6.

Bennett took a stunning catch near the boundary to dismiss Ben Dwarshuis (7) for Brad Evan's third wicket of the day.

The target became 34 from 12 balls but Australia lost Renshaw and Adam Zampa (2) in the 19th over, and Matthew Kuhnmann (0) was run out in the final over.

Earlier, Zimbabwe's top-order batters fired collectively against a depleted Australia bowling attack to post a challenging 169 for 2.

Bennett struck seven fours from the 56 balls he faced and laid the perfect foundation for Zimbabwe for a big total, reaching 125 for one at the end of the 15th over. But Australia came back in the death overs, just conceding 44 runs in the final five overs.

Wicket-keeper Tadiwanashe

Marumani and Ryan Burl chipped in with 35 each while captain Sikandar Raza remained not out on 25 off 13 balls.

With wickets in hand, Zimbabwe could have pressed the accelerator much earlier and scored more. There was just one six in the innings. In the absence of the likes of Pat Cummins and Josh Hazlewood, the Australian pace-bowling attack seemed to be lacking sting initially and the Zimbabwe bowlers capitalised on that, only to fumble in the end.

Adam Zampa was handled very nicely by the Zimbabwean batters, as he remained wicket-less, returning figures of 0/31 from his four overs. The highlight of the Zimbabwe innings, after they were sent in to bat, was the 61-run stand for the opening wicket between Marumani and Bennett off 7.3 overs.

Marumani hit two fours off Ben Dwarshuis in the third over and three boundaries off Glenn Maxwell in the fourth over after a sedate start.

Bennett joined the party with two boundaries in the fifth over bowled by Matthew Kuhnmann, taking Zimbabwe to a decent 47 for no loss at the end of power play.

Zimbabwe were 61 for one and they moved to 79 for 1 at the halfway stage. They added 46 runs in the next five overs, reaching 125 for one at the 15th over mark.

Pacer Marcus Stoinis left the field in the 16th over, holding his hand in pain while trying a return catch of Burl. From a full toss, Burl hit straight back at Stoinis, who tried to get hold of the ball. Stoinis grimaced in pain and immediately called out the physio, before leaving the field.

Cameron Green completed the unfinished 16th over and it turned to be lucky, with Burl getting out in the last ball. (PTI)

Asian C'ship: Amanpreet shines as India complete clean sweep in 25m centre fire



NEW DELHI, Feb 13: India's pistol stalwart Amanpreet Singh clinched the biggest medal of his career, striking gold in the 25m centre fire event as the country completed a clean sweep of the podium on the concluding day of the Asian Championship here on Friday.

The 38-year-old Amanpreet fired a stellar 589 to claim gold, edging out fellow countryman and Olympian Gurpreet Singh, who scored 584 for silver, while Ankur Goel secured bronze with 570, completing India's sweep of the 25m centre fire podium.

The Indian trio dominated the team event as well, amassing a commanding 1743 points to clinch team gold, while Vietnam secured silver with a total of 1671 points.

India signed off in style, collecting seven medals on the final day to cap a dominant campaign. The team finished with an impressive overall tally of 33 medals in the senior rifle and pistol events - 13 gold, 11 silver and nine bronze.

Ace Indian shooter Sift Kaur Samra too delivered a stirring performance in the women's 50m rifle prone event, fighting till the very last shot to clinch a well-

earned silver medal.

Adding to the country's medal tally, seasoned campaigner Tejaswini Sawant displayed remarkable poise and precision to clinch the bronze, completing a memorable double podium finish for India, while Kazakhstan's Yelizaveta Bezrukova soared to the gold with a commanding performance.

Samra, 24, the ISSF World Cup and Asian Championship gold medalist in the 50m rifle 3-positions event last year, fired a superb 623.2 but missed out on gold by the narrowest of margins -- just 0.2 points -- as Kazakhstan's Yelizaveta Bezrukova edged ahead with 623.4 in a gripping showdown.

Olympian Sawant, 45, a former world champion in the event, claimed bronze with 621.0, marking her first podium finish since the 2021 World Cup in New Delhi, where she struck gold in the 50m Rifle 3-Positions Mixed Team event.

The Indian trio of Samra, Sawant and Jaipur shooter Manini Kaushik combined brilliantly to clinch team gold with an aggregate of 1862.9, edging past Kazakhstan by a mere 0.1 point in a nail-biting finish.

The Kazakh team settled for silver at 1862.8, underscoring just how fiercely contested the showdown was.

Dhavalika Devi bags junior prone bronze

India's Dhavalika Devi clinched the bronze in the women's 50m rifle junior prone event, with Kazakhstan's shooters dominating the top two spots. Dhavalika fired 614.1, while Tomiris Amanova captured gold with 620.1 and Darya Ponomarenko took silver at 615.4.

Another Indian shooter, Khwaisb Sharma, competing in the RPO (Ranking Points Only) category, fired an impressive 618.1 to finish third. However, despite her stellar performance, she was ineligible for a medal, as RPO competitors cannot contest for podium finishes.

Hailing from Fatehpur Shekhawati in Sikar district in Rajasthan, Khwaisb's accomplishment not only highlights her dedication, perseverance, and talent but also places her hometown on the map.

Khwaisb described the achievement as a dream beginning to her global journey.

Reflecting on her journey, she credited much of her progress to her coach, Monika Jakhar, who she said stood by her through both triumphs and setbacks.

Khwaisb also expressed heartfelt gratitude to her family for their unwavering belief and sacrifices, which she considers the backbone of her success.

The junior women's prone team, comprising Dhavalika, Prachi Gaikwad and Anushka Thokur totalled 1835.6 points to win gold, followed by Kazakhstan (1834.6). (PTI)

Honey Baisoya registers three-shot triumph

NEW DELHI, Feb 13: Honey Baisoya fired a sizzling five-under 65 on the final day to register a three-shot triumph at the Rs 1.5 crore DP World Players Championship, ending a five-year-long title-drought here on Friday.

Honey (63-65-64-65), the overnight leader by five shots, drove home the advantage making six birdies against a lone bogey in round four to total 23-under 257 for the week.

It was 29-year-old Honey's eighth professional win. He picked up the winning cheque worth Rs 22,50,000, to move up from third place to first position in the 2026 DP World PGTI Order of Merit.

Khsitij Naveed Kaul (62-71-65-62), who was overnight tied third and six shots off the lead, shot a 62 for the second time this week, the last day's lowest score, to rise one spot and end the tournament as runner-up at 20-under 260. (PTI)

Just move away when he pauses: Ashwin advice to India on tackling Usman Tariq

NEW DELHI, Feb 13: Spin great R Ashwin has a simple suggestion for Indian batters as they gear up to deal with the unique side-arm action of Pakistan off-spinner Usman Tariq come Sunday -- just move away when he pauses before delivering the ball.

The 30-year-old Tariq, whose stop and pause action has created quite a stir, has played four T20 Internationals and taken 11 wickets at an astonishing economy rate of less than six runs per over. He could play a decisive role in Sunday's T20 World Cup clash between the bitter foes on a slow Premadasa track.

"If he stops before delivering the ball, the batsman has the right to move away. He can say that 'I thought he is stopping'. That will be an interesting case and a huge headache for the umpire," Ashwin said on his Youtube channel "Ash



Ki Baat". "If I was there I would have done it. One should do everything to win a game within rules. I would simply say I don't know when he will release the ball and I would step away. If I move away, it is the umpire's responsibility. "Imagine the pressure on Usman

Tariq in the middle of the match. It would be an incredible joyride. He is the ace up their sleeves, imagine what he becomes if the batsman reacts like that," he added.

Tariq's unique action has divided the cricket world but Ashwin had earlier supported him.

Pakistan are using Tariq sparingly. He has become the talk of the cricketing universe with former England skipper Kevin Pietersen terming his stop and pause action illegal. Ashwin called for real time competition testing tool to check if his side-arm action falls within the permissible 15 degree limit as per ICC's rulebook. The rule allows 15 degree straightening of the elbow joint for all bowlers in international cricket.

"...there is a 15 degree rule under which a bowler needs to keep his elbow and straighten it and to judge if a bowler is bowling within that 15 degree mark by the on-field Umpire is impossible.

"The only solution to that is having a real time in competition testing tool. The above is a grey area and to accuse someone for utilising the grey area is wrong." (PTI)

Shouldn't complain about sub-continental tracks, we weren't good enough: Renshaw



COLOMBO, Feb 13: Australian batter Matt Renshaw refused to blame the slow R Premadasa Stadium surface for their 23-run defeat to Zimbabwe in the T20 World Cup, saying visiting teams from the sub-continent never complain about pace and bounce when they tour Down Under.

Renshaw's 44-ball-65 went in vain as Australia folded for 146, struggling to force the pace against the Zimbabwe attack.

"I think that's just the nature of cricket. You get a sub-continent team come to Australia and you don't get them complaining about the bounce or the pace," Renshaw said at post-match press conference.

"It's just the way that cricket is nowadays. You've got to be able to go through different surfaces."

Renshaw doesn't believe that adjusting to slower surfaces after playing on hard and bouncy Australian tracks during Big Bash League posed problems.

"Yes, the wickets in Australia during Big Bash are quite true - they get a lot of bounce. You go to India, and if in the other side of the tournament, there's different wickets, there's probably higher scores, shorter boundaries.

"The boundaries here (Premadasa) are quite big so it's just tricky. But yeah, it's probably just trying to adjust the conditions as

well as we can so that when we get to these conditions we know what the game plan is, we know how we get best suited." Renshaw said.

He further Zimbabwean bowlers for sticking to their gameplan and making a 170-run target look even more challenging.

"Yeah, probably makes it quite tough to chase 170 out there. They bowled really well at the start, took some early wickets, and felt like every time we built some momentum that partnership with Maxi (Glenn Maxwell) was obviously important but couldn't get enough momentum in there to chase that down and it was just too many to knock."

An enforcer like Marcus Stoinis was forced to come in at No. 7 due to a finger injury sustained during fielding but that can't be a reason for defeat, said Renshaw, who admitted that as a team they weren't good enough on the day.

"Probably Marcus Stoinis was going to bat higher, he got that hit on the finger, we don't know how bad it is, I'm sure the medical staff will treat that, but yeah that was the one today but yeah we just weren't good enough today.

"They played really well, they batted really well, got 170 on the board, had wickets in hand to launch at the end and took early wickets. So it's always tough in a T20 when that happens," Renshaw added. (PTI)

I am changed man now, don't joke around 24x7: Ishan Kishan

NEW DELHI, Feb 13: By his own admission, a personality change has played a part in Ishan Kishan becoming a more refined international cricketer.

Kishan has not looked back since his India comeback last month and, by sheer weight of performances, has cemented his place in the side as the first choice wicket-keeper batter ahead of Sanju Samson.

The southpaw played another special knock on Thursday night against Namibia, a 24-ball 61, to fire India to 86 for one in the powerplay. The blitzkrieg came in Abhishek Sharma's absence and led to India smashing their highest power-play score in the history of T20 World Cup.

Talking to reporters after the win, Kishan spoke about how he has changed as a person and cricketer. To start with, he doesn't joke around as much as he did couple of seasons ago when he lost his place in the team and also a central contract.

"No, I think I'm a changed man now, to be honest. I don't get into it too much, but I do enjoy jokes and everything. I do it, but earlier I used to do it 24x7, but now it's just 2-3 hours of it," said Kishan when asked if he was back in the mindset that he had before his career took a downturn.

Kishan had also given a pep talk to the team before the start of the game.

"I am just focusing more on batting and my wicket keeping which is going to help the team



and which is going to help me. Everything is secondary so I am not just always joking but especially under Gauti Bhai," he added on a lighter note. The left-hander seemed to have found more consistency in his execution of the big shots. On Thursday, he hammered JJ Smit for four sixes in an over.

On if anything has changed in his batting approach that is allowing him to bat more freely, Kishan reminded the room that he does take the odd singles as well.

"No, I do take singles as well and I do defend the good balls (smiles). But I don't know if I've done a very big amount of hard work or something. I just kept it simple rather than rushing into the overs or getting excited and playing those shots.

"I'm just trying to be calm on the pitch and trying to watch the ball and play those shots which I already had, but sometimes you get excited and play those shots when you're playing international cricket.

"So I'm just trying to cut those moments off in my life and just try to play my own shots which I am good at and which is on on that particular wicket. So I'm not doing so much or thinking so much about batting, or getting into extra training sessions, but yeah just trying to watch the ball and be calm in the wicket," he said. Kishan also stressed on the need of playing a few dot balls as per the game situation.

"Two-three dot balls also it should not make a difference because I think the batters in our team they all got strength, they all got that ability to hit at any point of time. So it's just a matter of two balls.

"And for us, it's important to understand that thing also. Like, two balls, if you get two sixes, it's all covered. So, we have to wait for a time rather than just throwing our wicket," said the explosive batter. (PTI)