

**6 WORLD**

● UN Security Council members blast Israel's West Bank plans

● Trump gathers members of Board of Peace for first meeting

**8 NATION**

● PM Modi unveils MANAV vision for AI, pitches for human control of technology

● Anti-CAA pleas: SC to start hearing petitions on May 5

*'When our next government comes after the elections, the education department will immediately start working to give 55,000 jobs in the next three years'*

## Assamese people will become a minority in the 2027 Census, predicts Himanta

GUWAHATI, Feb 19: Claiming that the Assamese community will become "almost" a minority in the 2027 Census, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday charged the Congress with allowing encroachments on almost 10 lakh acres of forest land across the state during its rule.

Sarma also said the daily wages of tea garden workers in the state may be hiked from March 1, and the education department will hire 55,000 people over the next three years if the BJP returns to power after the assembly polls, due in a few months.

"During the 2027 Census, the Assamese community will become almost a minority," he said in the assembly without elaborating.

During the Motion of Thanks on the governor's address in the assembly, he also said that he is in politics amid a "very dark time".

The BJP-led Assam government is trying to keep the lamp alive, which is giving "courage to everyone", Sarma asserted.

"Today, people from Dhubri as



well as Majuli call me and say 'I am safe and secured'. We are marching towards (being a) minority, but just one lamp is giving light and courage," he said.

Sarma has earlier claimed on several occasions that the population of Muslims in Assam would be almost equal to that of the Hindus by 2041 if the current growth rate continues.

as per the 2011 Census from six in 2001, and the number has increased to at least 11 at present, although no census was conducted in its scheduled year of 2021.

Accusing the Congress of encouraging illegal occupation of public land, Sarma said: "The party left 30 lakh bighas of forest land for encroachment. We have carried out eviction in 1.5 lakh bighas."

Not a single house of any tribal family has been demolished during the eviction drive, he said, adding, they have been provided with land pattas. "We are fighting the Congress legacy. We are fighting their legacies on multiple fronts - MMR, IMR, child marriage, polygamy, corruption and many more - Today, Assam is the shining spot of the Indian economy," he said.

The CM said daily wages of tea garden workers in the state may be hiked from March 1 if the ongoing negotiations with stakeholders become fruitful. "Rupesh Gowala (Labour Welfare Minister) is working on it. If possible, we will give good (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Priyanka releases charge sheet against state govt

**BJP terms it as 'blatant lies'**

GUWAHATI, Feb 19: Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Thursday released a 20-point 'charge sheet' against the BJP-led Assam government here, which accused the state administration of indulging in corruption and using its machinery to instil fear among minorities.

A BJP spokesperson dismissed the charges as 'blatant lies and baseless'. In the Assembly poll-bound state, the opposition party also accused the saffron party of, among other issues, failing to keep its assurance of granting ST status to six indigenous communities and increasing the daily wage of tea garden workers to ₹ 351 in its decade-long regime.

The Congress further claimed that the BJP government engaged in "bulldozer justice and selective evictions of the minorities".

Vadra, chairperson of the party's screening committee for the state polls, is on a two-day visit and is being accompanied by Imran Masood and Saptagiri Sankar Ulaka, both Lok Sabha MPs, along with Sirivella Prasad, who are members of the panel. Several senior party leaders, including state president



Gaurav Gogoi, AICC general secretary in-charge of Assam Jitendra Singh, and Karnataka Deputy CM D K Shivakumar, former Chhattisgarh CM Bhupesh Baghel and former Jharkhand MLA Bandhu Tirkey, who are senior observers for the state elections, were also present on the occasion.

Gogoi, speaking before the release of the document, said, "This charge sheet is based on the issues the people raised before us, when our leaders and members approached them for preparing it."

He urged the block-level work-

ers of the party to "take each of these issues to each household", as the top leaders participated in a closed-door meeting with booth presidents and others immediately after the release of the 'charge sheet'. Lok Sabha MP Pradyut Bordoloi, who is heading the manifesto committee and was in charge of preparing the 'charge sheet', said it was compiled based on consultations with people over a period of three months.

"We are submitting it before the court of the people of Assam," he said. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## SC refuses to entertain plea for SIR of electoral rolls in poll-bound Assam

NEW DELHI, Feb 19: The Supreme Court on Thursday refused to entertain a PIL seeking directions to the Election Commission to conduct a special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in poll-bound Assam.

A bench comprising Chief Justice of India (CJI) Surya Kant and Justices Joymalaya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi took note of the submissions of the poll panel that the final electoral rolls have already been prepared in Assam and the petition has become infructuous.

The PIL, filed by Mrinal Kumar Choudhary, challenged the EC's decision to conduct a standard Special Revision in Assam instead of the more rigorous SIR conducted in other states.

During the proceedings, senior

advocate Vijay Hansaria, appearing for the petitioner, said the state required an intensive revision to ensure the integrity of the rolls.

However, senior advocate D S Naidu, representing the poll panel, informed the bench that the final electoral roll for Assam had already been published on February 10.

"Nothing survives now," the CJI said.

The bench emphasised the sensitivity of the matter, noting that under the current legislative and judicial framework, the EC is not empowered to arbitrarily declare individuals as foreigners, as statutory cut-off dates and specialised tribunals govern such determinations.

"You have to be very sensitive and careful," the CJI told Hansaria. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## People of Assam, not Bangladeshi infiltrators, have rights over state's resources: BJP president

GUWAHATI, Feb 19: BJP president Nitin Nabin on Thursday asserted that it is only the people of Assam who have rights over the state's resources, and not Bangladeshi infiltrators.

Nabin, while addressing booth workers at Manohari tea estate in Dibrugarh district, also said Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has taken the right steps against infiltrators to protect the rights of Assam's people.

"The CM's actions to send back the infiltrators indicates that he is committed to protect the rights of people," he said.

Nabin said that he definitely considers infiltration as a "big problem" as it snatches the rights of locals.

"It is not just the question of vote bank politics, but Bangladeshi infiltrators are taking away the resources that rightfully belong to people of the state," he said.

He also said that even in this era of global



economic crisis and instability, India is emerging as the fastest-growing economy, due to the policies initiated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"Many countries of the world have been

facing an economic crisis for many years and there is a political crisis, too, globally due to tension among different countries. Amid this scenario, India's growth rate has been steady (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Assam to pay salary bills fully from own tax revenue in FY27: CM

GUWAHATI, Feb 19: Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday said the state will, for the first time in its history, be able to pay salary and pension bills in the 2026-27 fiscal entirely from its own tax devolution.

During the Motion of Thanks on the Governor's Address in the Assam Assembly, Sarma also said the state will become a ₹ 10 lakh crore economy by the 2027-28 financial year, two years ahead of its own target.

"In earlier Finance Commission (FC) devolutions, Assam's share was shrinking, and it remained at around three per cent. The 16th FC decided the state's share on the basis of its contribution to the country's GDP. Accordingly, our devolution increased to 3.25 per cent," he said.

Sarma told the House that Assam will get nearly ₹ 50,000 crore as tax devolution in 2026-27. "We will be able to give our employees' salaries and pension completely through tax revenue. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## What's value of my humiliation when Rahul Gandhi says he too feels humiliated: Bhupen Borah

GUWAHATI, Feb 19: Former Assam Congress president Bhupen Borah, who is set to join the BJP, said on Thursday that when he raised the issue of his humiliation in the party with Rahul Gandhi, he was told by him that he too feels humiliated.

Borah, who resigned on Monday in a setback for the Congress ahead of the assembly polls, said he cannot tolerate such humiliation.

"I had told Rahul Gandhi that I am feeling humiliated in the party, and then he said that he was also feeling humiliated. Then what is the value of my humiliation? I cannot tolerate such humiliation as I do not have so much capacity," Borah told PTI-Video, recalling the conversation he had with the senior leader who had called him after he resigned.

Asked about state Congress president Gaurav Gogoi's allegation that he has taken ₹ 50 crore from Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma to join the BJP, Borah said that if offered the money, he would take it in front of the press.

"My father had a dream of building a stadium, and had reserved 12 bighas of land for the purpose. I, however, could not fulfil his wish even when I was the MLA for two terms. He died in 2019," he said.

"This wish of my father is in my heart, but to build a state-of-the-art stadium, ₹ 50 crore will not be enough. But I will accept it and start the work," he added.

On Sarma visiting his house a day after his resignation, Borah said that they had been in the Congress for 22 years and "I continued for another 10 years".

"Sarma is the most influential leader of the North-east after the late PA Sangma, and when he called me to say that he would come to my house, I welcomed him," he said.

"The CM said he had talked to his party's central leaders and then invited me to join the BJP. I am not anywhere now after my resignation, and so agreed to join," he added. Borah, who is set to join the BJP on February 22, reiterated (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

GUWAHATI, Feb 19: Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Thursday said that during elections, it is common for some leaders to switch parties, in an apparent reference to the resignation of the outfit's former state unit president Bhupen Borah who is set to join the BJP.

The Congress leader, however, did not elaborate on Borah's resignation.

Vadra, who is the Chairperson of the party's screening committee, arrived in Guwahati on Thursday on a two-day visit, during which she will hold a series of meetings for finalising the party's list of candidates for the Assam elections.

"We will contest unitedly and

strongly. We consider this election a battle. We have many warriors, and we will win", Vadra said on the sidelines of the programme to launch a 20-point document titled 'charge sheet' against the BJP government in the state.

She said that over the two days, "we will continue consultations to ensure proper ticket distribution and contest the elections in a strong and organised manner".

Vadra said that feedback and details of probable candidates are being collected and assessed to ensure that party tickets are distributed to right persons so that assembly elections are contested strongly in Assam.

"I am now meeting everybody,

taking their suggestions, feedback and for these two days I am going to do this".

She said that she is trying to meet all party functionaries individually and will make an effort to meet as many people as possible.

"The members of the screening committee are moving across the districts in the state. We will take the feedback, assess it thoroughly and our efforts will be to distribute tickets in the right manner so that we can fight the elections strongly," she said.

Asked about the Congress's alliance with other opposition parties, Vadra said, "Watch and see what happens". The elections to the state's (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Common for some leaders to switch parties before elections: Priyanka

## Naxalism drawing its last breaths: CRPF DG

GUWAHATI, Feb 19: Asserting that Naxalism is drawing its last breaths, CRPF Director General GP Singh on Thursday said the menace will be eradicated from the country by March as announced by Home Minister Amit Shah.

Addressing the DG's Parade of the force in Guwahati, he said decisive steps have been taken by the CRPF in joint operations with other security agencies against Naxalites in the last year.

"In the operations against Naxals, we have achieved unprecedented success. Decisive steps have been taken in the joint operations with other security agencies," he said. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## M'laya MP dies while playing futsal in Shillong

SHILLONG, Feb 19: Meghalaya Lok Sabha MP and VPP leader Ricky Andrew J Syngkon died at a hospital on Thursday evening, shortly after collapsing while playing futsal in Shillong, party officials said.

Doctors at the hospital here declared him dead around 8:45 pm, a senior Voice of the People Party (VPP) leader told PTI. Party colleagues and close associates said the parliamentarian was participating in a friendly futsal session when the incident occurred.

Syngkon, who represented the Shillong parliamentary constituency in Lok Sabha, was known for his active public engagements and grassroots outreach across the Khasi-Jaintia Hills. Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma expressed shock over Syngkon's death, describing him as a committed public representative who worked tirelessly for the welfare of people.

Leaders cutting across party lines also mourned his demise, recalling the MP's role in raising regional issues in Parliament. (PTI)

## Daily wages of tea garden workers may be hiked from Mar 1: Himanta

GUWAHATI, Feb 19: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday said the daily wages of tea garden workers in the state may be hiked from March 1 if the ongoing negotiations with stakeholders become fruitful.

During the Motion of Thanks in the governor's address in the assembly, Sarma said Labour Welfare Minister Rupesh Gowala is holding talks with various tea associations.

"Rupesh Gowala is working on it. If possible, we will give good news on hiking the daily wages by March 1," Sarma said.

The minimum daily wage of tea garden workers was last hiked by ₹18 in October 2023.

In the Brahmaputra valley, the daily wage was increased to Rs 250, while the workers in the Barak valley started getting Rs 228.

In her budget speech on Tuesday, Assam Finance Minister Ajanta Neog said the state government was in talks with tea associations to increase the minimum daily wage of garden workers from this year.

"The prosperity of our tea industry must flow directly to the hands of our tea garden workers. Therefore, I am pleased to share that we are finalising discussions with tea associations to announce enhanced wages for our tea garden workers within this year," she said while presenting the interim budget for 2026-27.

The Assam assembly elections for 126 constituencies are likely to take place in March-April this year.

Sarma also said that the government will soon start distributing land pattas to tea garden workers as legal hurdles in the matter have been removed. (PTI)

IMPHAL, Feb 19: Manipur Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh on Thursday interacted with people displaced by the ethnic violence and assured them that he would not let their tears go in vain.

Speaking at a programme of relief distribution among internally displaced persons in Imphal, he said the first step, after the formation of the new government following the President's Rule in the state, was to help IDPs return to their native places with peace and goodwill.

He appealed to the IDPs and civil society organisations in the hills and valley areas to cooperate with the state government in its efforts to overcome the trust deficit between the two warring groups - Meiteis and Kuki-Zo communities



in the state. The chief minister also said that people belonging to the Kuki-Zo community, who want to visit Imphal for medical treatment, would be provided with foolproof security.

Manipur has witnessed ethnic strife between the two groups since May 2023. So far, more than 260 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in the violence. The relief distribution

programmes were also organised in Churachandpur and Kangpokpi districts in the presence of legislators Paolienal Haokip, LM Khaute, Letzaming and Deputy CM Nemcha Kipgen.

Singh interacted with the displaced people belonging to the Meitei community at the programme in Imphal and talked to Kuki IDPs virtually.

These people narrated their plight and the hardships since the beginning of the ethnic violence in 2023.

A Kuki girl from Kangpokpi district urged the chief minister to consider her as his own daughter and said she was facing difficulties in pursuing her post-graduation, while a Meitei woman pleaded with him (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

# Leading AI firms, Indian innovators make 'New Delhi Frontier AI Impact Commitments': Vaishnav

**NEW DELHI, Feb 19:** Frontier AI companies, along with India's own innovators, have committed to advancing understanding of real-world AI usage to support policies on various issues, including jobs, with multilingual and contextual evaluations under the 'New Delhi Frontier AI Impact Commitments', IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnav said on Thursday.

Announcing the outcome of India AI Impact Summit here, he said under the 'New Delhi Frontier AI Impact Commitments', "leading frontier AI companies, along with India's own innovators such as Sarvam, Bharatjani, Yani and Soket, have come together to make a set of voluntary commitments that reflect a shared vision for inclusive and responsible AI". "This initiative positions India at the forefront of building a Global South-led perspective on AI governance, one that balances innovation with equity and real-world impact," the minister said.

Under the pledge, the companies have made "two significant commitments", he added.

First is "advancing understanding of real-world AI usage through anonymised and aggregated insights to support evidence-based policy making on jobs, skills and economic transformation," Vaishnav said.



"The second is strengthening multilingual and contextual evaluations of AI systems to ensure that AI works effectively across languages, cultures and real-world use cases, especially in the Global South," he added. Together, these efforts mark an important step towards shaping AI that is not only powerful, but also inclusive, development-oriented

and globally relevant, he added.

Under the first commitment, participating organisations recognise that building rich measures of where and how AI is diffusing across the global economy helps to shed light on the future of the work and human-AI collaboration; support the development of evidence-based policymaking in areas such as workforce development and education; enable meaningful comparison over time and help advance adoption and opportunity.

As an outcome of the first commitment, the participants will work to enhance analysis regarding global AI adoption for economic purposes.

Consistent with user privacy commitments, the organisations will publish - by the next AI Summit - statistical insights derived from anonymised, aggregated and taxonomized usage data, either directly or (where relevant) through contributions to international efforts. The second commitment is aimed at strengthening multilingual and use-case evaluations with participating firms, recognising that cross-lingual support is helpful for democratising AI and aspire to improve AI performance and high-quality experiences for users across the globe. (PTI)

# AGI among most momentous periods in human history: Google DeepMind CEO

**NEW DELHI, Feb 19:** Google DeepMind CEO Demis Hassabis on Thursday termed AI as an ultimate tool for accelerating scientific discovery, and a force multiplier for human ingenuity.

Speaking at the India AI Summit, he described artificial intelligence as one of the most transformative technologies in human history and emphasised that the world is approaching a decisive moment in its development. With the advent of Artificial General Intelligence or AGI now, the moment has to be navigated very carefully, and thoughtfully, Hassabis said adding "and if we do so, I'm very optimistic that we'll usher in a great new era".

He advocated that a scientific method be adopted to understand the AGI's full capabilities, build good guardrails and monitoring systems -- an approach he believes

will help unlock the full potential of technology for the benefit of humans. Hassabis also called for a "bold" approach to grasp new opportunities for advancing science and medicine, improve human health and the living condition that "society and the globe badly needs". Hassabis said he has always been of firm belief that AI would be one of the most important and beneficial technologies ever invented.

"And I always felt that AI would be the ultimate tool for accelerating scientific discovery and being a force multiplier for human ingenuity," he said. Hassabis recounted how from a very young age, he has been obsessed with the questions of science, the nature of reality, the nature of consciousness, and the deep mysteries of the universe. "And I think AI can help us find answers to these questions that we pondered

over for thousands of years," he said.

That journey, he said, has already started with systems like 'Alpha Fold' built to solve the 50 year grand challenge of protein folding.

"And we hope that this will just be the first example of amazing advances in science and medicine that have been enabled by AI, and we and others are working on many other branches of science now to bring AI tools to help advance material science, fusion physics and mathematics," he said. Almost every branch of science and medicine will be touched and transformed by AI.

In 2026, the world is at another threshold moment with AGI (Artificial General Intelligence) on the horizon, and approaching "maybe within the next five years".

Hassabis outlined the transformative outcomes that could accrue from this, but struck a note of caution. (PTI)

## Jawa 42 the neo-classic disruptor, now in Ivory

**HT Bureau**  
**GUWAHATI, Feb 19:** The motorcycle from JawaYezdi Motorcycles that pioneered the neo-classic segment, debuts the all-new Ivory, a fresh pastel shade reflecting the growing appetite around the world for softer, unhurried colours as respite from cultural noise, and echoed by the Colour of the Year 2026. The retro livery and decals of the number 42 further define the new Jawa 42 Ivory's understated cool. The Jawa 42, in itself a statement for the youth who value individuality, disrupted the monochrome classic segment in 2018 with its design-first silhouette and iconic pastel shades. The 42's playful colour palette and sporty stance redefined authentic retro-cool, backed by serious performance engineering under the tank. The original pastel range cut through the greys of mid-size classics, then ruled by predictable design and monotonous performance.

Anupam Thareja, co-founder, JawaYezdi Motorcycles, said, "The Jawa 42rewrote the classic playbook back in 2018."

## Assamese people will

news on hiking the daily wages by March 1," he said.

The minimum daily wage of tea garden workers was last hiked by ₹18 in October 2023. In the Brahmaputra valley, the daily wage was increased to ₹250, while the workers in Barak valley got ₹228.

Sarma also said the government will soon start distributing land pattas to tea garden workers, as legal hurdles have been removed.

On jobs, he said: "When our next government comes after the elections, the education department will immediately start working to give 55,000 jobs in the next three years. We are presently doing the assessment for other departments, too."

Sarma said a committee has been formed to prepare a five-year roadmap for providing the maximum possible government jobs to the state's youths. He said his government has already hired 1.59 lakh people in the last five years against its "promise of one lakh jobs".

"I believe another 5,000 will get appointments in the education department before the polls. So, there will be around 1.65 lakh jobs in my tenure," he said.

The BJP had promised to provide one lakh government jobs every year in Assam during campaigning for the 2021 assembly polls, but later clarified that the figure was for the entire five-year tenure. He claimed that despite so many people getting government jobs, not a single case has been filed, challenging the hiring process or alleging corruption.

On the state's economy, Sarma said his government will, for the first time, be able to pay salary and pension bills in the 2026-27 fiscal entirely from its own tax devolution. "In earlier Finance Commission (FC) devolutions, Assam's share was shrinking, and it remained at around three per cent. The 16th FC decided the state's share based on its contribution to the country's GDP. Accordingly, our devolution increased to 3.25 per cent," he said. Sarma told the House that Assam will get nearly Rs 50,000 crore as tax devolution in 2026-27.

"We will be able to give our employees' salaries and pension completely through tax revenue. This is happening for the first time in 77 years," he asserted.

Assam will require around ₹48,000 crore in the next fiscal for paying salaries and pensions to its working and retired employees, the CM said. Sarma also said the state will become a ₹10 lakh crore economy by the 2027-28 financial year, two years ahead of its target. (PTI)

## Priyanka releases charge

The Congress has 'charged' the BJP-led government of indulging in "rampant corruption and accumulation of illegal wealth by (chief minister) Himanta Biswa Sarma, his close ministers and their family members". It also accused the government of irresponsible financial management, institutionalisation of a 'Syndicate Raj' and generating a parallel economy. It accused the saffron party of "hoodwinking Constitutional governance by instilling fear through draconian measures of police encounters and 'cowboy' justice".

Maintaining that land of the indigenous people was being given to corporate houses, the opposition party charged the BJP government of "sabotaging" the Assam Accord, "stalling the NRC project, and continuous blackmailing of communities by promoting fear psychosis through official channels". It also claimed government complicity in the operation of illegal rat-hole mining, besides failing to accord the perennial floods and river bank erosion of the state as a national disaster.

The state Congress also accused the BJP government of "crushing freedom of speech and subversion of the fourth pillar of democracy".

The 'charge sheet' also alleged that the government could not create new jobs and turned Assam into a "labour supply state", throttling the public education system, failing to provide basic healthcare and protecting women and children from violence, proliferation of drugs, and lack of urban planning.

Meanwhile, state BJP senior spokesperson Rupam Goswami claimed that the 'charge sheet' contains "blatant lies and is completely baseless". "It is basically targeting a single person and not the party, if we go by the heading of the document," Goswami told PTI.

The 12-page 'charge sheet' is captioned "People of Assam vs BJP Govt of Himanta Biswa Sarma (2021-2026)".

Goswami accused the Congress of running 'syndicates' during its terms, which had led it to lose power in the first place.

He further said the BJP-led government has ensured peace across the state, checked rhino poaching, controlled flood and erosion problems, and ensured transparent recruitment in government jobs. He also maintained that it was the Congress who had tried to "rein in" the media during Emergency and Assam Agitation, whereas the press has been given free hand by the current regime.

"These are baseless allegations. People know the truth," the senior spokesperson added. (PTI)

## SC refuses to entertain

The PIL sought a direction to quash the poll panel's memo dated November 17, 2025, which ordered a Special Revision instead of an SIR in Assam. It also sought a direction for the SIR on the same parameters as the one conducted in Bihar in June 2025, ahead of the 2026 Assam assembly elections.

The plea had also sought the exclusion of Aadhaar as a relevant document for inclusion in the electoral rolls.

Following the conclusion of the Special Revision, data from the chief electoral officer revealed that the total voter count in Assam has dropped by 2.43 lakh. (PTI)

and impressive," Nabin said. Inflation has also been kept under control and this has been possible due to the "far-sighted vision of the PM", he said. The BJP president said Modi gives priority to the northeast and "personally monitors each project" in the region.

"Previous central governments also allocated funds for the region, but those were not utilised properly," he claimed.

Nabin, who is on a two-day visit to poll-bound Assam since Wednesday, urged party workers to visit each and every home under their booths, and explain to people the changes that have taken place during the last 10 years of BJP rule in the state.

He said that he was confident all 26 assembly constituencies in Dibrugarh and Tinsukia districts will be won by the BJP.

The party workers must ensure that all seats in Upper Assam areas are won by the BJP, Nabin said.

He also said that the Congress should be completely wiped out, and

their "part-time politicians, who come only during elections, should not be a matter of concern". "It is the BJP that works 24x7, as was evident during the time of Covid when everyone went away, and it was only our party workers, who served the people," he claimed.

The BJP chief said it was the PM who enhanced the respect of tea garden workers by ensuring they have bank accounts and other facilities.

"Now, it is our turn to give him more than double the respect he has given us by winning the forthcoming polls in Assam".

The Assam government has also worked hard to ensure the tea garden workers get their dues, particularly by giving land rights to people who came around 200 years ago from different parts of the country and settled here, Nabin said.

"The state government has given respect and honoured your labour and commitment... and you should work with renewed energy for development of the state... you may be from anywhere, but this is your 'karmabhoomi' (workplace)," he said.

The PM said the country has to become 'Viksit Bharat' by 2047, and the people of Assam will have to ensure the state also becomes developed by then, Nabin asserted. The party workers must make all-out efforts to strengthen the booths, spreading the ideals, policies and work of the government, along with the role of the leadership in the all-round development of Assam, he said.

If they are "prepared to work anywhere from the booths to the mandal, there is no power that can defeat the BJP in the polls", Nabin said.

Nabin, earlier in the day, visited a tea garden in Assam's Dibrugarh district and lauded labourers for their tireless work and dedication in ensuring the global recognition of the beverage. He was accompanied to the tea estate by Union minister Sarbananda Sonowal, BJP's Assam unit president Dilip Saikia and Culture Minister Bimal Borah.

"The tea gardens of Assam have earned global acclaim for their boundless natural beauty, and Assam tea has gained international recognition for its exquisite flavour and superior quality," Nabin posted on X. He said it was the result of the "tireless labour and dedication of tea workers", and their focus and commitment have always brought pride to Assam. In the morning, the BJP president had breakfast at the Dibrugarh residence of Sonowal along with other state party leaders. Nabin subsequently visited the Barekuri 'Naamghar' (prayer hall) in Tinsukia district.

"Visited the sacred 'Namghar' at Barekuri in Tinsukia district, a spiritual centre that reflects the deep faith and cultural unity of the Moran community," he posted on the social media platform. Nabin said that he prayed for peace, prosperity and continued progress of the people of India.

"As mentioned by Hon'ble PM Shri @narendramodi Ji in one of his #MannkiBaat programmes, in this small village, devotion and nature co-exist beautifully, as the rare Hoolock Gibbons, lovingly called 'Holo Bandar', have made Barekuri their home alongside the people," he said.

The BJP chief also visited the 'Moidam' (resting place) of Matak ruler Sarbananda Singha and paid floral tributes to him. (PTI)

## Assam to pay salary bills

This is happening for the first time in 77 years that salary bills will be paid by our own tax revenue," he added.

Assam will require around Rs 48,000 crore in the next fiscal for paying salaries and pensions to its working and retired employees, the CM said. "In addition to the tax devolution, our own tax collection will be around Rs 30,000 crore in the next financial year," he added. For FY 2026-27, the Union Budget has allocated Rs 49,725 crore towards tax devolution to Assam.

Sarma further said that Assam had set a target to become a Rs 10 lakh crore economy by 2030.

"Next year, we will be a Rs 8.71 lakh crore economy. I am happy to announce that Assam will enter the big leap of a Rs 10 lakh crore economy in 2027-28, two years prior to our target," he added.

The CM said that according to the RBI, the Indian economy grew by 29 per cent during 2021-2025, while Assam grew by 45 per cent in the same period. "Today, Assam is officially recognised as the fastest-growing economy in the country. Earlier, we were considered as the fastest growing in the Northeast only. This is a matter of pride for me," he added. Sarma said that the per capita income of the state also rose to Rs 1,85,429 in 2025-26 from Rs 86,947 in 2020-21.

"The gap with West Bengal in per capita income is narrowing. I believe that in the next one year, we will be able to cross West Bengal in per capita income," he added. (PTI)

## What's value of my

that he did not discuss any political issues with the CM during that day's meeting. He alleged that Gogoi had broken the opposition alliance, which he had stitched together a few years back, as he feared that if the "opposition came to power in the state by chance, then he may not become the chief minister".

"When I was given the responsibility to take the alliance forward once again on February 9, then what was the point of including Dhruvi MP Rakibul Hussain in the talks?" he asked. "Gogoi perhaps felt that if the alliance takes place, then Bhupen Borah will do everything amicably and put it forth before Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, threatening his existence," he claimed.

Borah said the alliance will, however, take place with around 12 seats each going to the Rajiv Dal and Assam Jatiya Parishad (AJP), one each to CPI(M), CPI and the All Party Left Leaders Conference (APLLC), with the Congress contesting the rest.

The 126-member assembly is expected to go to the polls in March-April. Vadra, the chairperson of the Congress screening committee for the upcoming assembly elections, arrived here earlier in the day on a two-day visit, during which she would hold a series of meetings to finalise the party's list of candidates. Borah alleged that Nagaon MP Pradyut Bordoloi and the Leader of Opposition in the assembly, Debabrata Saikia, were also humiliated in the party, but now Gogoi will "try to heal their wounds".

"Now that Bhupen Borah is out and a pillar of the opposition is gone, Gogoi will try to keep the other pillars intact," he said.

Borah said that when he took over as the state Congress president in 2021, the situation was very grim, with the party losing two consecutive assembly elections. "It was then that I took the initiative to build an alliance of 16 opposition parties, both big and small," he said. (PTI)

## Common for some leaders

126-member assembly are expected to be held in March-April. She was received at the airport by state Congress president Gaurav Gogoi and other senior leaders of the party earlier in the day. From the airport, she

went to the revered Kamakhya Temple atop the Nilachal Hills to offer her prayers. "I have come to seek blessings from Goddess Kamakhya for the Assam elections so that the culture and civilisation of the state is protected," she said.

People have immense faith in the Goddess and "I have come here to offer my prayers", she added. Asked about the opposition alliance in the state, Vadra said that the "temple is a religious institution and I do not want to talk about politics here. I will talk about it with the media tomorrow or at any other convenient time". The Wayanad MP is holding discussions with members of the party's Political Affairs Committee, and one-on-one meetings with MLAs, district presidents, and MPs, leader of the Congress Legislature Party (CLP), the working presidents and other office bearers, according to state Congress leaders.

She also unveiled a document which the Congress termed as a 'charge sheet' against the state's BJP government in the afternoon.

The Congress leader also addressed party workers at a closed door meeting after releasing the document. (PTI)

## Naxalism drawing its last

highlighting the role of the General Duty battalion and CoBRA Commandos of the CRPF in it. "Naxalism is drawing its last breaths. Through our joint operations, Naxalism is mostly over. It is on its way to be eradicated by March 2026, as announced by our Union Home minister," Singh said.

Mentioning the force's role in Jammu and Kashmir, the DG said it is involved in joint operations against militants and commended the personnel for putting up camps in heavy snowfall areas and ensuring security of those parts.

Singh also lauded the personnel deployed in the North East, especially in Manipur, with the force engaged in maintaining law and order in the region. "Our force has been able to win the trust of the people in the region as a neutral agency," he said.

The DG recalled the personnel martyred in the line of duty and affirmed the support of the CRPF for the families of the deceased.

He also dwelt on the measures being pursued by the force for the physical and mental well-being of the personnel and welfare of the families, including addressing healthcare needs. Singh presented 61 medals, eight trophies and one citation on the occasion.

The best Forward Operating Base among those established in Naxal-affected areas over the past year also received a citation from the Director General. The parade was commanded by Deepak Daundiyal, a commandant-level officer. The contingent commanders of the sectors were officers of the rank of assistant commandant.

The DG's Parade was held ahead of the Force's 87th Anniversary Parade, which will be attended by Shah on Saturday, with both events being conducted in the North East for the first time.

Ceremonial marching contingents from various CRPF formations, demonstrations on traditional martial arts of the country and a showcase of modern operational equipment and capabilities, reflecting the Force's preparedness to meet emerging security challenges, were performed during the DG's Parade.

A similar display will be put up during the Anniversary Parade also, CRPF officials said.

During the Anniversary Day Parade, 26 awards, including six Distinguished Service Medals and five trophies, will be presented by the Union Home Minister. Shah will also honour the best battalions of the three theatres with trophies where the CRPF is deployed. (PTI)

## Will not let your tears go

to allow her to return to their home in Moreh border town, according to an official statement.

When the Meitei person of Moreh border town told the chief minister that she was in the relief camp for almost three years and expressed her desire to see her home once, Singh said his government was trying hard to bridge the relationship between the two warring sides so that "the fear of venturing into each other's area is fully removed".

"I will not let your tears go in vain," said the CM.

Another Kuki-Zo woman from a relief camp in Churachandpur explained to Singh the difficulties they face in getting medical treatment.

"There were tears, choked voices and teary eyes when IDPs of both communities interact with the new chief minister as they see a ray of hope that they may soon return to their homes and lead a normal life. In fact, it was tears of love and revival of 'insaniyat' (humanity) in the chief minister's outreach programme," the release said.

To an inmate of a relief camp in Churachandpur, Singh said that he understands the hardships faced by the people of the district in getting medical treatment, as the majority of doctors in the state are from the Meitei community and advanced medical facilities are located in Imphal.

"There will be absolutely no problem for you all to get medical treatment in the hospitals of Imphal. A few new ambulances have also arrived; we will make some arrangements," he told the Kuki-Zo inmates of the relief camps in Churachandpur and Kangpokpi.

"When BJP MLA Vungzagin Valte was admitted to Churachandpur district hospital recently in serious condition, I sent two Meitei 'pangal' (Manipuri Muslims) doctors as they did not face problems in visiting Kuki-Zo areas. I will never forget the services rendered by the two doctors, including a woman," he said.

Khemchand said that there were around 8,000 Kuki-Zo students whose studies had been affected by the ethnic conflict, and only 2,000 of them could pursue their studies in other states.

"We need a special plan for such students (6,000 remaining students)," he said. Khemchand also highlighted financial assistance measures, including Rs 1 lakh per family whose houses were fully burnt during the ethnic violence.

He said Rs 25,000 has already been released to 9,314 households as the first instalment, and the Rs 25,000 each will be disbursed to another 434 households and Rs 20,000 additional assistance will be extended to all 9,748 eligible households.

"There are certain places where IDPs cannot enter immediately. We are witnessing a gradual return of peace to the state. However, due to the conflict between the two communities, there exists a trust deficit. I appeal to all the CSOs, IDPs and the people of the communities to overcome this trust deficit." He said the state government is making efforts to ensure that all IDPs return to their native places.

Singh said, "I also appeal to bring love among the IDPs and the people of the hills and the Imphal valley. The government remains open 24 hours to address the grievances of IDPs. We are also working to ensure all of them return to their native homes."

Manipur has 36 communities which have all defended the state since historical times, he said. (PTI)

### AFFIDAVIT

I, FIRDOUS ALAM, S/O Samsul Alam R/O- Kharupetia ward No 3 ( Nimtoili ), PO & PS - Kharupetia ,Dist- Darrang (Assam) do hereby declare that my actual and correct name is Firdous Alam. That My name has been recorded in my passport vide Passport vide No. P0648673, File No. GU1069956971416 as Firdous Alam in place of Firdous Alam. That Firdous Alam and Firdous Alom are the same and one person who is myself. I signed this Affidavit on 19/02/2026 before the Notary Public, Darrang, Mangaldoi.

Sd/-  
FIRDOUS ALAM

### ENGINEERING WORKS AT LUMDING DIVISION

**E-Tender Notice No. LMG/Engg/15 of 2026; Dated: 16-02-2026** E-tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following work: **SN. 1. Brief Description of Item:** Maintenance of operation of different valves provided at water intake points (Barlonger & Nullah), water works complex, filtration plant, reserve tank, distribution of water to service building, colonies, Lumding Railway Station other establishment through existing network, operation of sewage treatment plants (STP) along with other ancillary work and supplying of potable water through pump mounted vehicle (tanker) during emergency in greater Lumding area for a period 2 years under the jurisdiction of ADEN/III/Lumding. **Tender Value:** ₹5,59,05,803.72; **Bid Security:** ₹4,29,500.00; E-tenders will be closed at 15:00 hrs. on 16-03-2026 and opened at 10:00 hrs. on 17-03-2026. The complete information with tender documents of above e-tender will be available upto 15:00 hrs. of 16-03-2026 in website <http://www.irops.gov.in>

DRM/Works, Lumding  
**NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY**  
"Serving Customers with a smile"

### ELECTRICAL WORK IN UPPER & UNDER GEAR IN ICF SG AC AND LHB AC COACHES

**Tender Notice No.:** EL/1/DB/W/1/AC COACH/2025-26/93. **Date:** 16-02-2026. E-Tender are invited by the undersigned for the following work; **Tender No.:** EL/1/DB/W/1/AC COACH/2025-26/93. **Name of Work:** At Dibrugarh Workshop - Electrical work in upper and under gear in ICF SG AC and LHB AC coaches for a period of two year. **Tender Value:** ₹69,69,248.50/-; **Bid Security:** ₹1,39,400/-; **Date & time of closing of tender at 15:00 hrs. on 10-03-2026.** For complete information with the tender document of above e-tender will be available up to 15:00 hrs. on 10-03-2026 in the website <http://www.irops.gov.in>

Dy. CEE, Mech. Workshop, Dibrugarh  
**NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY**  
"Serving Customers With A Smile"

BJP claims wave of resignations from Congress leadership in Assam

## 'Congress flee at the mere sight of Congress', says Dilip Saikia

HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, Feb 19:** In the prevailing political scenario, leaders of the Congress themselves have become a formidable challenge for the party. The moment news emerges that any of its top leaders are arriving from Delhi to Guwahati, a wave of resignations sweeps through the provincial Congress leadership.

This sarcasm comes from the State president of the Bharatiya Janata Party and Member of Parliament from Darrang-Udalguri, Dilip Saikia. No sooner had Jitendra Singh and several other senior Congress leaders arrived in Guwahati than former president of the Assam Pradesh Congress, Bhupen Borah, submitted his resignation to the National president of the Congress, Mallikarjun Kharge.

On the very day of Bhupen Borah's resignation, news spread of Priyanka Gandhi's impending arrival in Guwahati. Upon hearing this, Bhupen Borah immediately declared his allegiance to the Bharatiya Janata Party.



Meanwhile, a number of senior leaders—including General Secretary Rajesh Joshi, Spokesperson Kangkan Das, Chairman of the M.O.B.C. Department Bhava Bora, vice-president of Kamrup District Shibu Roy, General Secretary Dipjyoti Nath and Hiteswar Das have already tendered their resignations.

These departures have created pandemonium within the Congress, leaving the organisation de-

bilitated and bereft of vitality. State BJP president Dilip Saikia asserted that this wave of desertions within the Congress would continue unabated.

The statement was issued from the State BJP Headquarters, Atal Bihari Vajpayee Bhavan and conveyed to the press by Party Spokesperson Ranjib Kumar Sarmah.

In contrast, the Bharatiya Janata Party is witnessing enthusiastic

support on the ground. Thousands of citizens eagerly await the arrival of the party's senior leaders in Assam. Public participation at BJP programmes demonstrates this widespread enthusiasm.

On 18 February, the National president of the Party, Nitin Nabin, visited Dibrugarh on a two-day itinerary. News of his visit sparked hope among the residents of Dibrugarh and Tinsukia districts.

The moment news of Nitin Nabin's arrival reached the public, more than 1,000 influential leaders and workers from the Khuwang Legislative Assembly Constituency and over 800 from the Dulijan Legislative Assembly Constituency including members from Congress, National People's Party and other organisations declared their allegiance to the Bharatiya Janata Party.

The State president stated that this influx of leaders and workers from diverse political formations into the BJP is expected to continue in an unbroken stream.

## Historic Pahugarh cries for biparental care

Neglect, broken sluice gate and illegal activities threaten 17<sup>th</sup> century waterbody

HT Correspondent

**SIVASAGAR, Feb 19:** The historic Pahugarh, the 17th century aqua park excavated by Ahom King Rudra Singha as part of the Rangpur Capital complex, which invites thousands of migratory aquatic birds in the winter season is desperately crying for biparental care now from the government and nature lovers as the present scenario inside the important waterbody depicts.

The broken sluice gate, this correspondent saw on a recent visit to the spot, to control the flow of water from the inside tanks to the outer stream in the middle of the western bank, shows the apathy of the Forest Department and its lack of concern for the rare species of migratory fowls that gather in incredible numbers in the pools for rest and regaining vital energy they lose on the way from distant shores. The sluice gate might have been destroyed by unscrupulous fishermen to drain out the water so that fishing can be easier in the pools inside. The water level in all the pools inside is receding fast as the water is flowing out and the huge bird population will be left with no choice but to migrate to another waterbody with the necessary fish quantity. It is an urgent necessity to increase the water-bearing



capacity of the Pahugarh ponds to increase the small fish population that the migratory birds feed upon. The nature conservation societies here are busy with planting trees on Environment Day alone, it appears. They need to seriously consider conserving the ecological heritage of Sivasagar if the place is to earn a place among the top tourist destinations of the country. Today's tourists do not tour around architectural monuments alone, but seek a more serene atmosphere around lakes, trees, forests, ponds, birds and animals in the wilderness.

The regular winged visitors to this important water body are the graylag geese, bar-headed geese, glossy ibis, pelicans, pochards,

moorhens, various types of egrets, jacanas, adjutant storks, etc.

Though the Sivasagar district administration, through an order under Section 144 CrP of 1973, prohibits illegal fishing, hunting, littering of garbage and playing loud music inside Pahugarh, it all goes on clandestinely as there is no security arrangement around.

The rampant denudation of the green topsoil of the nearby Jerenga Pathar by earth-cutting excavators and dumpers of unscrupulous contractors has already made the surroundings of Pahugarh less attractive for the aquatic birds which feed on the green shoots, herbs, molluscs and grass in the nearby fields.

## KA administration enforces strict norms to protect CBSE exams

HT Bureau

**DIPHU, Feb 19:** In a proactive move to safeguard the integrity of the ongoing CBSE Board Examinations, the Karbi Anglong District Administration has clamped down on unauthorised activities near examination centres.

The District Magistrate, Aranyak Saikia, has issued a formal prohibitory order under Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS). The measure aims to prevent external interference, maintain public tranquility and eliminate the possibility of unfair practices as thousands of students sit for their Class X and XII finals.

Key restrictions under the order include:

**Restricted Zones:** Gathering of unauthorised persons, including parents and guardians is strictly prohibited within a 100-meter radius of any examination centre. **Electronic Ban:** Examinees are strictly forbidden from carrying mobile phones, smart-watches or any electronic communication devices into examination halls.

**Zero Tolerance for Malpractice:** Any individual found aiding, abetting or participating in unfair means will be liable for prosecution under Section 189 of the BNSS.

The CBSE examinations, which began on February 17, will continue until April 11, 2026. The District Magistrate's order is in immediate effect and will remain active throughout the examination period.

## GU scientist secures ISRO-funded project on space-based plant health monitoring

HT Correspondent

**JORHAT, Feb 19:** Over the years, many distinguished scientists from Assam have gained recognition at national and international levels. Continuing this tradition, Dr Arabinda Baruah, Assistant Professor in the Department of Chemistry at Gauhati University and a native of Bahona Dhuwapukhuri, Jorhat has secured a research project funded by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO).

The project, approved under the Human Space Flight Centre (HSFC) programme, has received Rs 28.7 lakh in funding for a duration of two years. Its objective is to develop a nano-enabled biosensing platform capable of monitoring plant health within space station-compatible plant growth environments.

The research will focus on detecting plant hormones such as indole-3-acetic acid and ethylene, along with other volatile organic compounds and photosynthesis-related stress indicators. This technology is expected to help astronauts monitor crop growth and stress in controlled environments, a crucial advancement for future human space missions and space agriculture.

Dr Baruah will serve as Principal Investigator, with Professor Hemen Sharma, Head of the Department of Botany at Bodoland University, as Co-Principal Investigator. The team aims to develop a prototype sensing system capable of identifying multiple biomarkers for real-time crop health assessment.

The project is expected to contribute to India's human space mission programme and support advancements in agricultural monitoring technologies on Earth, such as smart greenhouses and precision farming systems.

## Miss KYF 2026 crowned; Karbi Youth Festival 52<sup>nd</sup> edition concludes

HT Bureau

**DIPHU, Feb 19:** The 52nd Karbi Youth Festival organised on Wednesday continued till early Thursday morning with a competitive mini marathon attracting athletes from across the region.

The 13th edition of the Miss KYF pageant, organised by the Jakve Asong NGO in collaboration with the Karbi Cultural Society (KCS), featured 20 contestants competing in a three-stage elimination process. Maline Teronpi impressed judges with her grace, confidence and eloquent responses during the final traditional attire round, winning the crown, a cheque for ₹ 50,000 presented by Athik Tisso and the "Best Photogenic" subtitle.

The podium finishers included First Runner-up Mirlin Baglary (₹ 30,000), Second Runner-up Rengmirso Hansepi (₹ 20,000) and Subtitle Winners Binuka Teronpi (Best Personality) and Mirso Hansepi (Best Ramp Walk). The panel of judges featured former Miss Nagaland Akumnaro Imsong and models Amisha Chaliha and Mirmily Hansepi. The show was



headlined by chief sponsor Dr Tuliram Ronghang and choreographed by Julie Beypi.

Following the pageant, the Karbi Anglong Sports Association (KASA), in partnership with KCS, organised a mini marathon that began at the Taralango Clock Tower, looping through the ARTC & S gate to the Catholic Hospital on Diphu-Manja Road. Top finishers for the girls' category were 1st Sengmir Teronpi (₹ 20,000), 2nd Fulmoni Urang (₹ 15,000),

and 3rd Serlibon Teronpi (₹ 10,000); for the boys' category, 1st Kamal Kumar (₹ 20,000), 2nd Tikheswar Kurmi (₹ 15,000), and 3rd Brojen Tai (₹ 10,000).

The prize distribution ceremony at Taralango was attended by KCS president Humsing Bey, general secretary Sunil Tokbi and KASA officials. All participants received certificates of participation for their contributions to the historic 52nd edition of the festival.

## Tai Phakey village cries for development

HT Correspondent

**MARGHERITA, Feb 19:** India has completed 79 years of independence, but the Tai Phakey community has still not seen the face of development.

Situated 13 kilometers from Margherita headquarters, the village is home to 35 Tai Phakey families, along with residents from Adivasi and Gorkha communities. Despite decades of independence, the village remains without basic infrastructure such as roads, drainage systems, erosion control measures and benefits from central schemes including the Prime Minister Awas Yojana (PMAY) and Jal Jeevan Mission.

Even though the Jal Jeevan Mission's ambitious scheme "Har Ghar Jal, Har Ghar Nai" was declared complete two years ago, the village continues to struggle for access to clean drinking water. Villagers report that during the monsoon season, severe flooding submerges their homes and there is no government presence to provide assistance or check on the situation.

With elections approaching, Margherita MLA Bhaskar Sharma, local administration and gaon panchayat representatives have recently begun laying stones and gravel under the guise of road construction.

## Five candidates from Kokrajhar clear APSC

HT Correspondent

**KOKRAJHAR, Feb 19:** In the recently declared results of the Assam Public Service Commission (APSC) combined competitive examination, five candidates from Kokrajhar district of the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) have brought laurels with their success.

The successful candidates are Srishti Kashyap (ACS) from Subhshally in Kokrajhar town, Victor Talukdar (Inspector of Taxes) from Thanapara, Musukha Brahma (BDO) from Bongshigaon, Dotma, Rozina Parvin (BDO) from Singimari, Fakiragram and Harshajit Basumatary (BDO) from Alupara, Parbatjhora subdivision.



Srishti Kashyap secured the 30th rank in the Assam Civil Service (ACS), bringing pride to Kokrajhar. She is the only daughter of advocate Lakhman Barman and Dulmoni Barman. She completed postgraduate degree in Zoology from Bodoland University in 2024.

Victor Talukdar from Thana Para secured the 24th rank in the Inspector of Taxes examination, bringing recognition to the district. The eldest son of Amal Talukdar, he achieved success after receiving coaching under the Bodofa Super Fifty Mission run by the BTC government.

Rozina Parvin, daughter of Ajibur Rahman and Aslima Khatun from Singimari, Fakiragram, secured the 1st position in the BDO category, bringing pride to the region. Similarly, Musukha Brahma from Bongshigaon, Dotma, son of Mankeshwar Brahma and Reimoti Brahma, also earned honours through his success in the APSC examination.

From the remote village of Alupara under Parbatjhora subdivision, Harshajit Basumatary excelled in the examination to become a BDO, bringing joy to his parents Ananta Basumatary and Anjana Basumatary, as well as the entire village.

## Guwahati airport's new terminal powered by invisible technologies

Smart systems work quietly to ensure smoother passenger experience

HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, Feb 19:** At the new terminal of Lokapriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport (LGBIA), technology has been deployed with a simple objective: to work quietly in the background. The focus is not on flashy screens or futuristic gimmicks, but on systems that quietly do the thinking for passengers so they do not have to. From the moment a traveller walks in, software systems begin tracking how people move through the terminal, much like traffic apps monitor vehicles on roads. If one security area starts filling up faster than another, airport teams are alerted and can redirect passengers before queues build up. To travellers, it simply feels like things are moving smoothly.

Security checks are another place where technology stays deliberately unobtrusive. Instead of changing how passengers behave, systems monitor queue length, processing speed and lane availability in real time. When needed, more lanes are opened or staffing is adjusted. The experience remains familiar, but faster and less uncertain.

Baggage handling is where invisible technology makes perhaps the biggest differ-



ence. Once a bag is checked in, scanners and sensors track its movement through a network of automated belts. If something slows down or moves off its intended path, the system flags it immediately. This early detection helps prevent delays before they become visible problems at the baggage carousel.

At boarding gates, backend systems qui-

etly synchronise multiple moving parts. Flight schedules, aircraft readiness, boarding progress and ground crew activity are continuously updated on shared platforms. If a flight arrives late or weather affects schedules, teams can adjust plans quickly. For passengers, this often means fewer sudden gate changes and clearer announcements.

This understated use of technology re-

flects the operating philosophy of Adani Airport Holdings Limited (AAHL), which manages LGBIA through its subsidiary Guwahati International Airport Limited (GIAL). Across its airport network, AAHL has focused on systems that improve reliability without adding complexity to the passenger experience. Rather than deploying visible tech for novelty, the emphasis is on integration. Digital platforms connect airline operations, ground handling, security agencies and airport teams so information flows automatically instead of being passed manually. Fewer handoffs mean fewer chances for error and delay.

Energy and sustainability systems also work quietly behind the scenes. Lighting and air conditioning adjust automatically based on how many people are in different parts of the terminal and what time of day it is. These systems save energy while keeping temperatures comfortable, without passengers ever noticing a change.

What sets this approach apart is restraint. In an age where airports often showcase technology as an attraction, Guwahati's new terminal treats it as infrastructure. The aim is not to impress travellers, but to make their journey feel predictable and calm.

## Bodo Sahitya Sabha holds education awareness camps



HT Correspondent

**HOWRAGHAT, Feb 19:** In a significant push toward academic empowerment, the Karbi Anglong District Bodo Sahitya Sabha (KADBS) organised two simultaneous educational awareness meetings on Thursday at Garjaga and Chunpura villages.

The Garjaga session was conducted in collaboration with the Howraghat Tiniali Primary Bodo Sahitya Sabha and moderated by Sumeswar Basumatary, Secretary of KADBS. Key attendees included Mogege Narja Boro, Milaram Boro (Treasurer, KADBS), Hari Narzary (president, Kachari

Samaj), Biren Swargiary (president, Garjaga Primary School Management Committee) and representatives from ABSU, the Gaon Burha Association and the All Bodo Women's Welfare Federation (ABWWF). Speakers emphasised community involvement to improve literacy rates and student retention.

Simultaneously, a second awareness camp was held at Chunpura Primary School, moderated by Dinesh Daimary, Assistant Secretary of KADBS. The event was graced by Rituraj Basumatary (president, KADBS), Langouna Brahma (Assistant Secretary, KADBS), Pramila Fakhari (president, ABWWF), Gurucharan Goyary (secretary, Harimu Afad) and local

leaders including Kamal Basumatary and Khagen Basumatary. Discussions highlighted the importance of quality education in Bodo-medium schools and the socio-economic benefits of higher learning.

The dual-location initiative aimed to bridge gaps between school administrations and parents, promote Bodo language and literature within formal education and encourage primary school enrollment across the district.

"Education is the backbone of our society. By reaching out to the grassroots in villages like Garjaga and Chunpura, we aim to ensure that no child is left behind due to a lack of awareness," summarised the speakers.

## Workshop on water utility conducted in Kokrajhar

HT Correspondent

**KOKRAJHAR, Feb 19:** A one-day district level workshop on "Making Utility Items from Water Hyacinth" held successfully at PM Shri Kokrajhar Girls HS School in Kokrajhar on Wednesday, under the scheme Environment Education Programme (EEP), an initiative of Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change, Govt of India implemented by Assam Science Technology and Environment Council, Guwahati.

The workshop was inaugurated by the District Programme Officer, SSA Biju Basumatary. Dr Sanjib Brahma, Vice Principal, Science College, Kokrajhar was invited as resource person to conduct the theoretical session. Chakramani Brahma, District Coordinator, EEP, Kokrajhar explained the aims and objectives of the programme.

The practical sessions were conducted by experienced 4 resource persons—Monendra Koch, Demonstrator, Tipkai HS School; Kabita Nath Basumatary, A/T, Kokrajhar Girls HS School; Ganapati Brahma, A/T, PM Shri Dotma HS School & Jwngsar Jhwla Basumatary, Block Coordinator, ASC, Gossaigaon. During the workshop, participants were trained to prepare useful items from water hyacinths, encouraging eco-friendly practices and sustainable utilisation of natural resources. The hands-on training helped the participants gain practical knowledge and creative skills. During valedictory session, EEP handbooks for school eco club and certificates for participation were distributed among the participants.

In the event 80 teachers from 40 schools participated, the programme concluded successfully with appreciation from the attendees, highlighting the importance of such skill-based and environmentally conscious initiatives.

## QUOTE OF THE DAY

*Optimism is a happiness magnet. If you stay positive good things and good people will be drawn to you.*  
- Mary Lou Retton

## Now all eyes on March 5 Nepal polls

Just twenty days after the February 12 national elections in Bangladesh, another South Asian country Nepal is going to the polls on March 5 just six months after the Gen Z movement in the country ousted the K P S Oli government in September 2025. The official poll campaign under the interim government began on February 16 and it will end on March 3-48 hours before the polling day. The elections are taking place under the interim government led by the Prime Minister Sushila Karki. There are some similarities as well as dissimilarities in the way the snap elections have been organized in both countries. In Bangladesh, the students led by anti-discriminatory body launched the movement initially for the removal of discrimination on quota in February 2024 after the new Awami League government was installed in January 2024 after the national elections which were boycotted by most of the opposition parties. This movement took a militant shape in July after many killings and clashes between the supporters of students movement and the security forces as also ruling Awami League supporters. The students movement then turned into a national movement of opposition against the Awami League rule. This led to the ouster of the Awami League government and the fleeing of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on August 5, 2024 to India.

As against this, in Nepal, the movement was started by the Gen Z including the school students in protest against the government order to ban social media platforms. The movement then turned into a total opposition to the ruling K P S Oli government and all the established political parties. There were clashes between security forces and demonstrators but Nepalese army took a cautionary stand. After the situation went out of control, the Nepalese army chief told PM Oli to step down. He and his government resigned. The Army chief in consultations with Gen Z leaders and civil society leaders helped in the formation of an interim government led by the former Chief Justice Sushila Karki.

Like Bangladesh, Nepalese youth also have failed to take proper follow up actions on the hopes of a new society raised by them during the movement. The Nepalese Gen Z who are very active in social media and many of them earn good money through these platforms failed to put forward a new charter which will excite the people in the country who are fed up with the rule of the same political leaders through shifting alliances for two decades. The March 5 polls again go back to that same set of people against whom the September revolt was held.

# Intelligence reimagined

## India and the new architecture of work

India's AI Impact Summit stands as more than a diplomatic milestone; it signals a strategic recognition that artificial intelligence represents a structural transformation in how societies organise production, distribute opportunity, and prepare citizens for the future of work. At a time when global discourse often frames AI as an existential threat to employment, India's positioning reflects a more nuanced understanding. Artificial intelligence is not extinguishing the concept of work itself; rather, it is rendering certain skills, functions, and career pathways obsolete while simultaneously expanding the boundaries of what human labour can achieve. The essential distinction lies in recognising that while specific job roles may diminish, transform, or disappear, the broader ecosystem of work is diversifying, becoming more fluid, and increasingly accessible to those prepared to evolve alongside technological progress.

Historically, particularly within emerging economies such as India, employment followed a relatively linear trajectory. Education culminated in degrees, degrees led to entry-level employment, and steady progression within a defined hierarchy promised long-term stability. This model provided predictability but also fostered rigidity, as repetition and specialisation became the primary mechanisms of professional growth. Artificial intelligence disrupts this structure by assuming responsibility for structured, repeatable tasks that have traditionally underpinned entry-level roles. Coding standard modules, processing documentation, generating reports, managing routine customer queries, and analysing extensive datasets are now performed with increasing efficiency by intelligent systems. Sectors such as IT services, finance, legal support, and media, long dependent on large teams executing predictable functions, are witnessing a decline in the economic value of such repetitive tasks. The transformation does not signify the disappearance of work, but it does mark the erosion of roles built primarily on routine execution.

Technological upheaval is not unprecedented. The Industrial Revolution displaced artisanal labour but generated new professions in engineering, logistics, and industrial management. The computer revolution of the 1990s automated clerical functions while simultaneously creating vast opportunities in software engineering, digital marketing, and information systems management. Each technological epoch has dismantled certain tasks while giving rise to entirely new employment categories. Artificial intelligence repre-

sents the next chapter in this historical continuum, distinguished less by its nature than by the speed and scale at which it operates. Unlike previous transitions that unfolded across decades, AI-driven disruption is occurring within compressed timeframes, demanding swift adaptation from individuals, institutions, and governments.

The most consequential impact of artificial intelligence lies not in wholesale replacement but in augmentation. AI systems can generate content, identify patterns, automate workflows, and process information at speeds unattainable for human workers. Yet they remain dependent on human judgement to define objectives, interpret outputs, ensure ethical application, and integrate insights into meaningful action. Economic value is therefore shifting away from routine task execution toward higher-order skills such as complex problem-solving, creativity, strategic thinking, and contextual interpretation. A junior software engineer today may deploy AI tools to generate functional code rapidly, but the architecture of complex systems, the assurance of reliability, the translation of user needs into scalable solutions, and the alignment of technology with business objectives remain human responsibilities. Similarly, while AI-assisted diagnostics can support medical practitioners, empathy, clinical discernment, and the cultivation of trust cannot be automated.

This transformation redefines work as the orchestration of intelligence rather than the mechanical completion of tasks. Individuals who learn to collaborate effectively with AI systems amplify their productivity and economic value. Rather than replacing workers outright, AI enables individuals to accomplish outcomes that previously required entire teams. Consequently, the central challenge confronting societies is not job scarcity but skill readiness. The conventional model of front-loaded education, in which individuals complete formal studies early in life and rely on that knowledge for decades, is increasingly untenable. Reskilling must evolve into a continuous, lifelong process embedded within professional culture.

Continuous re-skilling extends beyond technical proficiency. Digital literacy, familiarity with AI interfaces, and data interpretation are essential, yet equally critical are human-centric competencies such as adaptability, interdisciplinary reasoning, creativity, and ethical judgement. The emerging economy rewards those ca-

pable of integrating knowledge across domains rather than operating within narrow specialisations. This shift also carries a democratising potential. Historically, access to advanced tools and analytical capabilities was confined to specialists with formal training. Today, AI-driven platforms enable individuals with limited institutional credentials to design products, analyse markets, produce creative content, and establish enterprises. The barriers to entry are lowering, provided individuals possess the willingness and capacity to learn continuously.

For India, artificial intelligence presents a complex but potentially transformative opportunity. The country's growth over recent decades has been significantly supported by IT-enabled services and back-office operations built upon routine digital processes. These sectors now face disruption as AI systems assume many of their foundational functions. Yet India's demographic scale, expanding digital infrastructure, and entrepreneurial dynamism uniquely position it to capitalise on AI-driven growth. The country's digital public infrastructure, including biometric identity systems, interoperable payment platforms, and large-scale digital service delivery frameworks, demonstrates an ability to deploy technology at national scale. Artificial intelligence layered upon

this infrastructure can enhance healthcare diagnostics in remote regions, optimise agricultural supply chains, personalise educational content, and improve governance efficiency.

The Global South AI Impact Summit reflects India's strategic assertion that artificial intelligence must not remain concentrated within a handful of technologically dominant nations or corporations. Instead, it should function as an instrument for expanding opportunity across developing economies. The summit underscores a broader geopolitical argument: equitable access to AI capabilities is essential to prevent new forms of digital dependency and inequality. For India, leadership in this domain aligns both with developmental priorities and with its aspiration to represent the interests of emerging economies in global technology governance.

At the societal level, the shift underway can be described as a transition from job security to skill security. In the industrial era, stability was derived from long-term employment within a single organisation. In the AI era, resilience will derive from adaptable capabilities. Workers who consistently update their competencies will

maintain relevance despite technological change. Those who rely on static expertise risk obsolescence as automation accelerates. This reality demands a cultural shift in how careers are conceived. The future workforce is likely to consist increasingly of portfolio professionals who integrate multiple roles and skill sets. An individual may simultaneously function as a data analyst, content creator, consultant, and entrepreneur, leveraging AI tools to enhance productivity across domains. Responsibility for employability is progressively shifting from institutions to individuals, requiring proactive career design rather than passive reliance on traditional pathways.

Paradoxically, the rapid advancement of artificial intelligence elevates the importance of human intelligence. While AI can process immense quantities of data, it cannot experience meaning or define moral purpose. It can optimise efficiency but cannot determine ethical direction. It can generate responses but cannot assume responsibility for their consequences. Judgement, empathy, imagination, and accountability remain distinctly human capacities that will shape the trajectory of the future workforce. Education systems must therefore evolve beyond memorisation and standardised assessment toward cultivating analytical depth, ethical reasoning, collaborative skills, and creative resilience. The objective is no longer to train workers to compete against machines, but to prepare individuals to collaborate effectively with them.

Viewed through this lens, artificial intelligence should not be regarded as a threat to employment but as an invitation to reinvention. The fundamental challenge confronting India and the broader global community is not the absence of work, but the preparedness of workers. If India invests decisively in re-skilling initiatives, digital inclusion, and educational reform, it can transform its vast population into the world's largest reservoir of AI-enabled talent. Failure to do so risks widening inequality between those equipped to adapt and those left behind. The AI Impact Summit signals recognition that technological transformation must be guided toward inclusion rather than exclusion. The future of work will ultimately be defined not by whether artificial intelligence replaces humans, but by the degree to which societies enable individuals to evolve alongside it, harnessing its capabilities while preserving the uniquely human qualities that confer purpose and direction upon progress.

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DEGREE OF THOUGHT  
By: Dipak Kurmi

## Strategic chemistry between Delhi and Paris

By: Satyabrata Borah

The relationship between India and France often escapes the loud drama that accompanies many global partnerships. It does not thrive on constant public spectacles or exaggerated rhetoric. Instead, it grows quietly, shaped by habit, trust, and a deep understanding of each other's strategic instincts. This is what gives the Delhi-Paris relationship its unusual chemistry. It is less about short-term alignment and more about long-term convergence, built patiently across decades. In a world where alliances are increasingly transactional and volatile, the India-France friendship stands out for its maturity and restraint.

At the heart of this relationship lies a shared respect for strategic autonomy. Both India and France are countries that value their freedom of decision-making above rigid bloc politics. India has long insisted on non-alignment in spirit, even as global politics have shifted from the Cold War to a multipolar contest. France, for its part, has cultivated an independent foreign policy tradition ever since Charles de Gaulle challenged American dominance within NATO. This common instinct has created an unspoken understanding between New Delhi and Paris. Neither side expects blind loyalty. Neither side demands ideological conformity. Instead, both recognise that cooperation works best when sovereignty is respected.

This mutual respect has been particularly visible in France's approach to India's ties with Russia. After Russia's invasion of Ukraine, France's relations with Moscow deteriorated sharply, aligning Paris more closely with the broader European consensus against Russian aggression. Yet France did not attempt to publicly pressure India to cut its historical ties with Russia or to fall in line with Western sanctions. French policymakers understood India's compulsions, its defence dependencies, and its geopolitical calculations. This was not indifference to the Ukraine crisis, but realism. France chose dialogue over moral lecturing, thereby reinforcing trust rather than weakening it.

Trust, once established, spills naturally into other domains, especially defence cooperation. France has emerged as one of India's most reliable defence partners, not merely as an arms supplier but as a strategic collaborator. The Rafale fighter jet deal is often cited as a symbol of this partnership, but the deeper story lies beyond the aircraft itself. France has shown a consistent willingness to transfer technology, respect India's security sensitivities, and avoid intrusive political conditions. This stands in contrast to some other defence relationships where sales are accompanied by pressure, restrictions, or strategic strings attached.

For India, France represents a rare combination of advanced military capability and political reliability. French defence equipment has proven effective, adaptable, and relatively free from supply disruptions. More importantly, France has supported India's aspiration to build indigenous defence capabilities rather than locking it into perpetual dependence. Joint ventures, co-development initiatives, and shared re-

search have gradually transformed the relationship from buyer-seller to partners in capability-building. This evolution mirrors India's broader goal of strategic self-reliance without isolation.

The Indo-Pacific has become another major arena where Delhi and Paris find their strategic interests converging. France is not an external observer in the region; it is a resident power with territories, military assets, and citizens spread across the Indian and Pacific Oceans. This gives France a direct stake in regional stability, freedom of navigation, and the balance of power. India, located at the heart of the Indian Ocean, shares similar concerns about maritime security, rule-based order, and the unchecked expansion of influence by any single power. Their cooperation in the Indo-Pacific is therefore practical rather than ideological. Joint naval exercises, coordinated patrols, and information-sharing arrangements reflect a shared understanding of maritime challenges, from piracy and illegal fishing to strategic competition. France's comfort with India's leadership role in the Indian Ocean, and India's acceptance of France as a legitimate Indo-Pacific actor, has helped avoid the suspicions that often plague external interventions in the region. The relationship here is less about containment and more about balance. Economics forms the third pillar of this growing partnership, though it often receives less attention than defence or geopolitics. Trade between India and France has expanded steadily, but the real significance lies in investment, technology, and long-term industrial cooperation. French companies have made substantial investments in India across sectors such as energy, infrastructure, transportation, defence manufacturing, and urban development. These investments are not driven purely by short-term profits but by a belief in India's long-term growth story.

France's engagement with India's energy transition is particularly noteworthy. As India seeks to balance economic growth with environmental responsibility, French expertise in nuclear energy, renewable technologies, and sustainable urban planning has found a receptive audience. Civil nuclear cooperation, once politically sensitive, has evolved into a pragmatic partnership focused on clean energy and technological collaboration. This reflects a broader shift in global economics, where strategic partnerships are increasingly shaped by climate goals and sustainability concerns.

The economic relationship also benefits from a shared belief in state capacity. Unlike countries that insist on minimal government involvement, both India and France accept that the state has a role in guiding development, regulating markets, and protecting strategic sectors. This philosophical compatibility makes negotiations smoother and expectations clearer. French firms understand India's regulatory complexity, while Indian policymakers appreciate France's emphasis on industrial policy and social protection. The result is not friction-free, but it is grounded in realism rather than ideological conflict. People-to-people ties, though quieter, add a human layer to this partnership. Educational exchanges, scientific cooperation, and cultural

engagement have grown steadily. Indian students in France and French professionals in India act as informal bridges, carrying ideas, habits, and perspectives across borders. Unlike some relationships that rely heavily on diaspora politics, the India-France connection remains understated, focused more on professional and intellectual exchange than on emotional symbolism. This understated quality is, in many ways, the relationship's greatest strength. There is no pressure to constantly prove loyalty or to dramatise cooperation. Disagreements, when they arise, are handled discreetly. Expectations remain realistic. Both sides understand that partnership does not mean uniformity. India and France do not always see the world in identical terms, but they respect each other's reasoning. This maturity is rare in international relations, where partnerships often oscillate between over-enthusiasm and disappointment.

The strategic convergence between Delhi and Paris also reflects a shared anxiety about an increasingly unstable world order. Both countries are wary of binary choices being imposed by great power rivalry. They prefer a multipolar system where middle powers have space to manoeuvre and shape outcomes. France's support for India's permanent membership of the United Nations Security Council is rooted in this vision. It is not merely symbolic endorsement but recognition that global governance must reflect contemporary realities rather than post-war hierarchies.

India sees France as a gateway to Europe that is not burdened by excessive moralism or bureaucratic inertia. Paris has often acted as a bridge between India and the broader European Union, advocating engagement rather than distance. While Europe as a whole may struggle to articulate a coherent Asia policy, France has been relatively consistent in viewing India as a strategic partner rather than just an emerging market or a values-based ally of convenience.

The handling of differences over Russia underscores this pragmatic approach. France does not presume to influence India's choices, even when Paris itself has taken a strong stance against Moscow. This restraint is not weakness but confidence. France understands that pressuring India would neither change Indian policy nor serve French interests. Instead, it chooses to preserve long-term trust, recognising that today's disagreements do not erase decades of cooperation or shared strategic outlook.

The India-France partnership offers a different model. It is slow, layered, and resilient. It accommodates disagreement without turning it into rupture. It blends chemistry with calculation, economics with strategy, and autonomy with cooperation. The tango between Delhi and Paris is not a flashy performance meant for instant applause. It is a disciplined dance, rehearsed over time, guided by mutual respect and a shared sense of direction.

India and France, by choosing patience over pressure and understanding over alignment, have built a partnership that can adapt to change without losing its core. This is not just diplomacy. It is strategic maturity, quietly shaping the contours of a multipolar world.

## The holy month of Ramadan & the significance of fasting scientifically

By: Diganta Barooah

In the month of Ramadan, the Muslim soul is burnt away from violence, greed, delusion, desires, etc., and is purified and brought closer to Allah, the Most Merciful, the Most Merciful. These six enemies are desire, anger, greed, delusion, drunkenness and envy. The purpose of fasting is to suppress these enemies and make them obey the Almighty Lord alone. It is noteworthy that fasting is the abstinence from all food and drink from just before sunrise to sunset according to the Shariah (Islamic policy/constitution). In addition, from a bird's eye view, the month of Ramadan is a time of spiritual reflection, spiritual advancement and intense devotion. It also teaches Muslims to practise a quality life full of virtue and to help the poor and downtrodden people in their society. During the month of Ramadan the Muslim people who are rich and well to do help the poor people in cash or kind which is called 'Zakat' or a compulsory charity. This practice encourages sacrifice and compassion as well as generosity. In addition, in this month Muslims, those who are eligible to give alms, pay alms to the poor and downtrodden people. Each person pays 1633 grams of wheat or its equivalent as 'Fitr'. The Almighty Lord which the Muslims address as 'Allah' declares in the Holy Qur'an about the burden: O you who believe fasting in the month of Ramadan is obligatory upon you as a duty as fasting was enjoined upon your fathers. You can become righteous. In other words, this declaration from the Qur'an shows that fasting was not only enjoined on the followers of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), but also on his followers as well as his predecessors. Furthermore, the Almighty Lord 'Allah' says that every good deed of man is for himself, but fasting is only for Me, so we will reward it ourselves. They fasted because they ate all day. The basic principles of fasting in Ramadan are to maintain good relations with others. It is called 'Seheri' to eat before the sunrise. This means that they eat before the fast begins. Similarly, without eating any food or even water after 'Seheri', they break their fast in the evening at the sunset with water and dates, other fruits or sweets, which is called 'Ifaar'. Like other months, Muslims always pray five times during the month of Ramadan. In addition to these five prayers, they conclude the 'Tarawih' prayer with the 'Isha' prayer at night. 'Tarawih' means resting. 'Tarawih' prayer is a prayer that is recited slowly and steadily. Tarawih is performed for a whole month (the whole month of Ramadan) from the moonrise of Ramadan to the moonrise of 'Chawal'. Among the many events in the history during the month of Ramadan is the lighting of 'Shab-e-Qadr' or 'Laylat al-Qadr' (in Arabic 'Laylat al-Qadr' means night and the word 'Qadr' means honor, dignity). It also has other meanings: to determine fortune, quantity, etc. On this night, which is usually considered the 27th day of the month of Ramadan, Muslims worship all night long. In this light the holy book of Islam, 'The Koran Sharif' was revealed to Hazrat Mohammad as a divine message from the Almighty Lord. Indeed, this night is called the night of dignity or the night of luck. It is said that worshipping on this night is better than worshipping in a thousand

months. Muslims celebrate Eid-ul-Fitr on the day after the moon appears, that is, on the 29th or 30th day of the month of Ramadan.

Scientifically significance of the month of Ramadan: Fasting for one month every year is compulsory according to the Holy Qur'an provided the person is free from any obligatory duties of the modern world. What does science say about fasting? Autophagy is a Greek word. It means eating yourself. In 2016, autophagy was introduced to medical science. We know that Dr Yoshinori Ohsune of Japan won the Nobel Prize for his discovery of Autophagy. The discovery of autophagy explained the greatness of Ramadan which scientifically proved how beneficial fasting is for the human body and mind. When we are fasting, our stomach is empty for a long time and our body cells are working. They eat their own waste products and clean up the waste products of the cells themselves. In medicine, this process is called Autophagy. This autophagy method will prevent many of our diseases that affects our body and a disease free mind and body can be obtained through fasting. In modern day also any person can fast for atleast a day in a week (no matter which day it is) and can obtain a sound body and mind no matter which religion he/she adheres to or no matter whether the person believes a particular faith or an atheist. The method of fasting increases the activity of the cells of our body and provides a different source of energy. Autophagy is the process of cleaning body cells through fasting. Autophagy can be practiced any day of a week by modern human beings in the hustle bustle of the complexity of modern lifestyle to prolong the life of the cells of their bodies. Basically, the month of Ramadan is spent by the believers of Islam (Muslims) all over the world fasting wholeheartedly, for the sake of the pleasure of Allah Almighty (the Creator). Actually fasting is not limited to only the Muslim community. It can be done by any person. The process of fasting is a unique, moral and spiritual duty for the believers of Islam. Right knowledge should be imparted to the illiterate masses regarding fasting rather than forcing something without the knowledge about its scientific validity. So the purpose of fasting is to teach people patience, discipline, humility and spirituality. Fasting itself makes a person tolerant, spiritual and humble. Since the common people in the olden times were not scientifically aware of the benefits of fasting so a religious compulsion was imposed upon them as if the Almighty Lord would be offended if they didn't fast. So with knowledge and wisdom the benefits of fasting should be imparted to the common masses.

### Conclusion:

Let us be determined and continue our efforts for the development of our beloved Motherland India in all its forms with a positive attitude while maintaining peace and harmony among all sections of the people in our society. With this thought of positivity in my mind, I wish everyone a happy holy month of Ramadan. May the Almighty Lord bless each and every person in this beautiful world of ours no matter which religion the person belongs to. (The author is the Assistant Development Officer, Transformation and Development Department, Government of Assam. He can be reached at 9678785439 or digantabarooah1971@gmail.com)

# The struggle for dominance in global politics

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

The intense competition for dominance in the current global political landscape is not confined to any specific geographical boundary. Today, the concept of power has assumed a new and complex form, where economic capability and diplomatic strategy have gained equal or greater importance alongside military strength. This undeclared war among the world's powerful nations poses a major challenge to global stability. Every powerful country now seeks to have the world's important policies and directions shaped according to its own will. Every step in this struggle for dominance conceals a deep political intent. As a result, an atmosphere of distrust and uncertainty has emerged in international relations. Powerful states form various alliances to preserve their influence and continually adopt new strategies to weaken their opponents. In this chess game of politics, every move is merely an attempt to prove superiority over the other. In such a situation, world politics is no longer limited to safeguarding the borders of a single country; rather, establishing control over the entire world's resources and power has become its primary objective. Most of the conflicts and disputes in the world today arise precisely from this extreme greed for dominance, pushing the future of all humanity toward an uncertain direction.

Economic dominance now stands as the most powerful weapon in contemporary international politics. In today's world, the stronger a country's economy, the more extensive its political influence becomes. A fierce competition is underway among powerful nations to bring the global market under their control. In this struggle, tactics such as trade barriers, increases in import-export tariffs, and currency valuation are frequently employed. When a country manages to establish control over a large share of the world's resources and trade routes, it can compel other nations to accept its terms. Debt politics is also an inseparable part of this contest for dominance. By lending massive amounts to developing and weaker countries, major powers

establish authority over their land and resources, ushering in a new form of economic colonialism. Becoming economically dependent causes many countries to lose their ability to make independent decisions and forces them to bow before greater powers. This economic dominance has created immense inequality across the world, where wealthy nations grow even stronger while poorer ones become increasingly exploited. The flow of global capital and the use of technology have made this gap even more evident. Therefore, it would be more accurate to describe the current struggle for dominance not merely as a political war, but as a profound economic conflict.

Military strength no longer depends solely on the number of soldiers; it now relies heavily on advanced technology and lethal weapons. Every influential country is increasing its military budget and investing in the development of ever more destructive armaments. Possessing nuclear capability has become a symbol of national pride and dominance. Moreover, there is a frenzy to establish military bases in outer space and the depths of the oceans to control the world. Whoever dominates maritime routes holds the keys to global trade and security.

This military competition has created an atmosphere of terror worldwide, where even a small miscalculation at any moment could trigger a catastrophic war. Powerful nations intervene in the internal disputes of other countries to serve their interests, providing military aid to expand their influence. Indirect warfare—strengthening enemies and strengthening allies—has now become the prevailing military strategy. In such circumstances, the very notion of world peace and security has become meaningless, as this insatiable quest for dominance has blinded every nation. The relentless display of military power is destroying human values and transforming the planet into a powder keg.

In today's era, whoever controls information holds power. An invisible war is raging among the world's leading countries to dominate artificial intelligence and the cyber realm. Stealing critical data from another nation,



paralyzing its power or communication systems through cyber attacks, and spreading disinformation to mislead public opinion have become integral parts of this struggle for dominance. By using social media platforms, powerful states now possess the ability to alter the political environment of any country. This influence of digital technology has posed a new challenge to national sovereignty. By making the entire world dependent on software or technology developed in their own countries, a form of technological servitude has been created. This technological dominance affects everything from individual lives to national security. In this secret war over information, those who emerge victorious will control the world in the days to come. Countries that lag behind technologically have become increasingly dependent on advanced nations, and powerful states exploit this dependence to fulfill their political objectives. This technological dominance has created a massive division among humanity, where the use of knowledge and information has completely altered the balance of power.

The struggle to establish control over natural resources—especially energy sources such as mineral oil, gas, and more recently rare minerals like lithium and cobalt—is intensifying across the globe. Regions rich in these resources have turned into battlegrounds for powerful countries. To meet their growing en-

ergy demands and control global energy markets, powerful nations are increasing their military and political presence in these resource-rich areas. Often, this fight over resources is disguised under the cover of terms like religion or democracy, but beneath it lies only the calculus of profit. Many conflicts between countries have arisen precisely from the sharing and distribution of these resources, resulting in the loss of countless innocent lives. The disputes among neighboring states over fundamental resources like water signal a potential catastrophic crisis in the future. In this era of climate change, the value of natural resources has risen sharply, and with it, the attempts to dominate them have become more aggressive. The country that secures future energy sources in its hands will be able to maintain its primacy in world politics. In this way, the contest over natural resources continues to reshape the political map of the world.

The concentration of power in universal platforms like the United Nations is truly concerning. Because a handful of powerful countries hold special privileges, most important global decisions appear one-sided. These countries can block any proposal that goes against their political interests, casting doubt on the very concept of international justice. Through institutions like the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund, powerful nations impose their policies on weaker coun-

tries. The conditions attached to aid and development often strip away a nation's economic independence. Furthermore, the recent rise of various regional groups and military alliances has once again divided the world into opposing poles. The primary aim of these groups is to extend their collective dominance and weaken rival blocs. The selective use—or outright disregard—of international laws when it suits their convenience proves that in world politics, might makes right. Demands for reform of these institutions are suppressed by powerful countries fearing the loss of their dominance. In this manner, the global governance system itself has become an instrument for extending dominance.

Cultural dominance is one of the key strategies in modern world politics. Without engaging in military conflict, powerful nations seek to alter the thoughts, practices, and lifestyles of people in other countries to establish their supremacy. Through films, music, language, and food, they spread their culture to every corner of the world. When people begin to regard the lifestyle of a particular country as superior, it becomes easier for that country to have its political and economic authority accepted. This cultural invasion has placed many local languages and traditions on the path to extinction. Under the name of globalization, a specific Western worldview is being imposed worldwide, destroying cultural diversity. Pow-

erful nations spend vast sums to establish their ideals and concepts as the best in the world. As a result, people in developing countries develop a form of mental servitude, becoming preoccupied with imitating others while forgetting their own identity. This mental dominance is even more dangerous than military dominance, as it weakens people from within. Thus, in world politics, there is an unceasing struggle not only for territory but also for control over human minds and intellect.

In this global struggle for dominance, small and developing nations suffer the most. These countries become mere pawns in the conflicts between greater powers. Powerful nations use them to serve their political interests and then abandon them to an uncertain future once their purpose is served. Often, artificial border disputes or religious conflicts are created among these small nations to keep them perpetually embroiled in war, ensuring they can never become self-reliant. Their natural resources are plundered by large corporations, while their people receive only poverty and political instability in return. In the race for dominance among powerful countries, the independence and sovereignty of small nations hold no value. Even the choice of which side to ally with is frequently beyond their control. If a small country attempts to oppose a major power, economic sanctions or political conspiracies are used to destroy it. In this way, an atmosphere of fear has been created throughout the world, forcing weaker nations to remain perpetually subservient to the strong. This extreme greed for dominance has given license to inhumanity and injustice in today's world.

Environment and climate change have now become a new tool for extending dominance in world politics. Although developed countries speak of climate protection, their own economic interests lie behind it. By establishing control over green technology and renewable energy, they seek to keep the future global economy under their command. The very countries responsible for environmental pollution now lecture others on the environment and impose various

conditions to hinder the industrial development of developing nations. Setting limits on carbon emissions has created a new form of political pressure. On the other hand, under the pretext of environmental protection, restrictions are placed on resource use in certain countries to assert dominance. The anticipated future wars over water scarcity are also part of this struggle for dominance. Providing aid during natural disasters and thereby entering the internal politics of a country has become a common tactic. In this way, powerful nations are using even the fight to preserve the planet's existence as a means to increase their power. This politics of the environment makes it clear that, for the sake of dominance, humanity can exploit even the most serious problems for its own interests.

In conclusion, this relentless struggle for dominance is leading human society toward catastrophe. The greed for power has obstructed world peace and progress. As long as powerful countries do not abandon their mentality of expanding dominance, true equality and brotherhood cannot emerge in the world. What is needed today is a multipolar world where every country enjoys equal dignity and rights. Instead of power being concentrated in the hands of a few specific nations, there is a need for a democratic and transparent global governance system. International relations should be built not merely on self-interest, but on the foundation of human values and cooperation. If the vast sums spent on military strength were instead used for education, health, and poverty eradication, the picture of the world today would be very different. In this struggle for dominance, no side ultimately wins, because the destruction it causes will cripple all of human civilization. Therefore, while there is still time, the leaders of the world must realize that only through mutual trust and friendship—rather than the pursuit of dominance—can a beautiful world be built. Otherwise, this contest for power will lead us into such a dark abyss from which there will be no return. (The author is the recipient of the 'Yuba Lekhak Sanman - 2025' from the Government of Assam)

## Demography of faith: Understanding the Global religious realignment

By: MR Lahu

The global religious landscape has been changing repeatedly over time. There has been a consistent demographic shift affecting all religions across continents. However, the most striking fact, much to my amusement, is the steady rise in the number of religiously unaffiliated people. Across the world, this segment of the population has increased remarkably, while other major religions have experienced growth or decline in varying degrees.

The significant upward momentum of the religiously unaffiliated population sends a stark reminder to major global religions. A Pew Research Survey conducted by the Pew Research Centre highlights these changes, showing how the decade between 2010 and 2020 witnessed a drastic shift in religious demography. Islam has emerged as the fastest-growing religion, while Christianity and other major religions have also experienced upward movement.

During this period, Muslims increased by 347 million. Christians also grew by 122 million believers worldwide, but their growth did not match the rapid pace of the Muslims. Christians remain the largest religious group, accounting for 28.8 percent of the global population, while Muslims represent 25.6 percent. The survey reports that Buddhists have experienced a notable decline, dropping to 4.1 percent of the global population, a decrease of 0.8 percent from a decade earlier. The religiously unaffiliated have become the third-largest group, holding 24.2 percent of the global population. Hindus have maintained relative stability, recording a modest increase and contributing 14.9 percent of the global population. Largely concentrated in India, Hindus have remained resilient despite social and global challenges.

Among the most populous countries, China has the largest share of religiously unaffiliated people, with around 90 percent identifying as such. India, with approximately 79 percent of its population identifying as Hindu, remains the largest center of Hindu population in the world, while the remaining Hindu population is widely dispersed across other continents.

The survey also points to significant regional changes in Christianity. Although it remains the world's largest religion, it is facing a noticeable decline in the Americas and Europe, where its long-standing dominance is gradually eroding. Christians, according to the survey, are shrinking in number largely because believers either switch out of the religion or move toward other, more convenient religions with which they can draw ideologi-

cal and spiritual parallels. This trend is the result of a deep-seated discontent within the framework of Christianity. Christianity, along with its established institutions known as churches, is critically viewed to have widely failed to satisfy the spiritual needs of its followers. Its single religious text, which it claims holds full authority in defining spirituality from multiple perspectives, critics say, has failed to answer the complex questions posed by the faithful. Consequently, religious disaffiliation has become increasingly common within Christian communities, contributing to the growing number of religiously unaffiliated individuals.

Religious switching reveals the level of inconsistency between spiritual values and their practical implementation. Surveys that focus on the trend of leaving the religion into which one is born further illuminate the anomalies that believers experience. Deeply rooted in the spiritual attributes and practices of a particular religion, many followers eventually



come to realize that something within them remains unsatisfied. Spiritual evolution in an individual is often the result of a consistent effort to remain in communion with the divine. For those who aspire to cherish a spiritual glimpse of eternity, religions that fail to grant this vision of unity with eternal truth may become barren spaces of ritualistic practices that mechanically bring people together. Institutions through which such practices are sustained can then turn into empty structures, and people gradually lose interest in their once-celebrated sanctity.

This may be one aspect of why Christianity and Buddhism have experienced a serious decline in participation. While 8 percent of the total Christian population chose to leave Christianity, the survey observes that Muslims have largely maintained consistency, though 1.2 percent of followers left Islam. The Muslim population faces internal disengagement similar to that seen among Christians, with a growing number of freethinkers and members of the Ex-Muslim movement

emerging within the community. Although the number of Ex-Muslims appears to be increasing, the overall global Muslim population remains largely unaffected. At the same time, the survey finds that nearly an equal number of new entrants are converting to Islam from other religions, thereby maintaining its demographic strength. Muslims across the globe, the survey observes, are understood to maintain higher fertility rates than followers of many other religions.

For Hindus, a similar pattern applies, as the total Hindu population has remained almost stable during this period. This stability is not necessarily the result of a consistent fertility rate; rather, it is observed that many Hindus tend to remain within their religious framework, seeking spiritual fulfillment internally rather than turning elsewhere. The survey also highlights other factors contributing to religious demographic shifts. Mortality rates in certain regions may play a role, and migration, while not directly affecting the global total, can significantly influence religious populations within specific areas. For example, Europe's Muslim population has grown largely due to migration from predominantly Islamic regions. Migration on such a scale can substantially impact the socio-cultural landscape of host countries. Europe witnessed a significant influx of refugees from Islamic countries, with its Muslim population increasing by approximately 6.2 million during the decade.

This global shift in religious demographics has made the world more religiously diverse than before. Major countries are no longer dominated by a single religious concentration. The Religious Diversity Index published by the Pew Research Centre provides another data illustrating how diversity has increased due to mass migration, religious switching, and various local factors. Among the world's most populous countries, India ranks fourth in religious diversity, while the United States ranks first. Indonesia, Bangladesh, and Pakistan; countries founded largely on Islamic principles, rank near the bottom, as they have limited religious diversity due to their overwhelmingly Muslim populations. Many of the least diverse nations have nearly homogeneous religious compositions. Such demographic concentration can limit visible pluralism and constrain minority expression. Against this backdrop, India stands out as a constitutional democracy that upholds religious freedom and promotes inclusive development through the principle of "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas." (Together with all, development for all). (The author is a freelance journalist and social worker. He can be reached at [mrlahu30@gmail.com](mailto:mrlahu30@gmail.com))

## Winds of change blow in Dhaka, a new test for India

By: Dr Priyanka Saurabh

The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), led by Tarique Rahman, won a historic victory with a landslide majority in the recent general elections in Bangladesh. Returning to politics after a seven-year exile, Tarique Rahman carried forward the political legacy of his mother and former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, securing the party over two-thirds of the seats. This victory is not only an electoral success but also signals a major realignment of the balance of power in Bangladeshi politics and the beginning of a new political era. For India, this outcome brings opportunities as well as several strategic uncertainties, the management of which will determine the direction of bilateral relations in the years to come.

For over a decade and a half, Bangladesh's politics were dominated by the Awami League and Sheikh Hasina. This period saw stability, economic growth, and regional cooperation, but also persistent accusations of centralization of power, suppression of opposition, and weakening of democratic institutions. The prolonged dominance of a single political party led to administrative fatigue and a desire for change among voters. The BNP's victory can be seen as a result of this widespread public discontent and the search for political alternatives.

Tarique Rahman has long been an influential but controversial figure in Bangladeshi politics. During his exile, he faced allegations of corruption, abuse of power, and links with radical elements, tarnishing his image. However, after returning home from London in December 2015, he signaled a shift in his political outlook. He restructured the party organization, promoted young leadership, and revived the grassroots mass movement. He converted his exile experiences into political capital and reestablished the BNP electorally. In this context, this victory is seen not only as an extension of the family legacy, but also as a testament to strategic realignment, organizational discipline, and an ability to understand changing political realities.

The BNP presented economic reforms, corruption eradication, and minority protection as its key election issues in the 13th general election. Issues such as unemployment, inflation, and lack of transparency in governance deeply resonated with voters. The party attempted to distance itself from its traditional hardline image and assured security to all minorities, including the Hindu community. This mandate underscored that voters prioritized change after years of political dominance and administrative fatigue. The transition of power through a democratic process also signaled that Bangladeshi society expects stability as well as accountable governance.

From India's perspective, the BNP's victory sends mixed signals. Historically, India's relations with the Awami League government have been more comfortable and stable. The Sheikh Hasina government maintained close coordination with India on border management, counter-terrorism cooperation, and connectivity projects. In contrast, New Delhi has always been suspicious of the BNP, particularly due to the experiences of its 2001-06 tenure. However, in recent years, Tarique Rahman has indicated a relatively bal-

anced and pragmatic approach towards India. India's informal "green signal" to the BNP before the elections reflects this changing approach. It indicates that India is now willing to adopt a policy of multi-faceted dialogue rather than relying on any single party in Bangladesh's internal politics.

Economically, the BNP government could open new opportunities for India. Bangladesh is a major trading partner and a key pillar of India's "Neighborhood First" policy in South Asia. Bilateral trade is expected to reach \$20 billion under the new government. Cooperation could gain new momentum in areas such as connectivity projects, hydropower cooperation, border trade, digital connectivity, and industrial investment. Bangladesh's rapidly growing economy presents attractive opportunities for Indian investment. The BNP's public commitment to protecting minority interests somewhat alleviates India's social and political concerns.

Nevertheless, uncertainties remain. The BNP has been accused of being soft on radical elements, and caution is necessary regarding the role of organizations like Jamaat-e-Islami. Past corruption allegations against Tariq Rahman, alleged links with Pakistan, and recent incidents of communal violence raise India's security concerns. The risks associated with infiltration, smuggling, human trafficking, and terrorism along the India-Bangladesh border have not been completely eliminated. Without concrete and transparent action on these issues, bilateral trust could be affected.

The impact of the change of power in Bangladesh is not limited to India-Bangladesh relations, but will also impact broader South Asian geopolitics. China and Pakistan are constantly seeking to expand their influence in the region. Therefore, it will be essential for India to maintain a strong economic and strategic partnership with Bangladesh to ensure that the regional power balance does not shift in India's favor. Dialogue and cooperation can be strengthened through multilateral forums and sub-regional cooperation initiatives.

In such a scenario, it will be imperative for India to adopt a balanced and proactive diplomacy. Maintaining long-standing ties with the Awami League while engaging with the BNP government is in India's long-term interest. Institutionalized and multi-party engagement, rather than unilateral orientation, will provide India with greater strategic flexibility.

India should neither ignore nor over-intervene on issues of human rights, minority protection, and democratic values. Only a prudent balance can maintain India's effectiveness.

The victory of the BNP under Tarique Rahman is neither entirely risky nor entirely opportune for India. This is a transitional period in which, through vigilance, dialogue, and pragmatic diplomacy, India can not only safeguard its interests but also steer India-Bangladesh relations towards a new and more mature direction. If uncertainties are effectively managed and areas of cooperation are strengthened, this political transition can strengthen not only bilateral relations but also the prospects for stability and cooperation across South Asia. (The author is a PhD (Political Science), is a poet and social thinker)

# 'Israel's recent illegal decisions to expand its control over the West Bank are gravely disturbing'

## UN Security Council members blast Israel's West Bank plans

UNITED NATIONS, Feb 19: Members of the United Nations Security Council called Wednesday for the Gaza ceasefire deal to become permanent and blasted Israeli efforts to expand control in the West Bank as a threat to prospects of a two-state solution, coming on the eve of President Donald Trump's first Board of Peace gathering to discuss the future of the Palestinian territories.

The high-level UN session in New York was originally scheduled for Thursday but was moved up after Trump announced the board's meeting for the same day and it became clear that it would complicate travel plans for diplomats planning to attend both. It is a sign of the potential for overlapping and conflicting agendas between the United Nations' most powerful body and Trump's new initiative, whose broader ambitions to broker global conflicts have raised concerns in some countries that it may attempt to rival the UN Security Council.

Pakistan, the only country on the 15-member council that also accepted an invitation to join the Board of Peace, denounced Israel's contentious West Bank settlement project during the meeting as "null and void" and said it constitutes a "clear violation of international law." "Israel's recent illegal decisions to expand its control over the West Bank are gravely disturbing," Pakistani Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar said.

The foreign ministers of the United Kingdom, Israel, Jordan, Egypt and Indonesia also attended the Security Council's monthly Mideast meeting after many Arab and Islamic countries requested last week that it discuss Gaza and the West Bank before some of them head to Washington.

"Annexation is a breach of the UN Charter and of the most fundamental rules of international law,"



Palestinian UN Ambassador Riyad Mansour said. "It is a breach of President Trump's plan, and constitutes an existential threat to ongoing peace efforts."

Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Saar said that attention was not on the U.N. session and that the focus of the international world would be on the Board of Peace meeting.

Saar also accused the council of being "infected with an anti-Israeli obsession" and insisted that no nation has a stronger right than its "historical and documented right to the land of the Bible."

### Bigger ambitions for the Board of Peace

The board to be chaired by Trump was originally envisioned as a small group of world leaders overseeing his 20-point plan for Gaza's future. But the Republican president's new vision for the board to be a mediator of worldwide conflicts has led to skepticism from major allies.

While more than 20 countries have so far accepted an invitation to join the board, close US partners, including France, Germany and others, have opted not to join yet and renewed support for the UN, which also is in the throes of major reforms and funding cuts.

British Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper said there is an opportunity for the UN's most powerful body

to help build "a better future" for Israelis and Palestinians despite the "cycle of violence and suffering" over the more than two-year war between Israel and Hamas.

"Gaza must not get stuck in a no man's land between peace and war," Cooper said as she opened the meeting.

Mike Waltz, the US ambassador to the UN, appeared to criticize countries that had not yet signed on to the Board of Peace, saying that unlike the Security Council, the board is "not talking, it is doing."

"We are hearing the chattering class criticizing the structure of the board, that it's unconventional, that it's unprecedented," Waltz said Wednesday. "Again, the old ways were not working."

The Security Council is meeting a day after nearly all of its 15 members — minus the United States — and dozens of other diplomats joined Palestinian ambassador Mansour as he read a statement on behalf of 80 countries and several organizations condemning Israel's latest actions in the West Bank, demanding an immediate reversal and underlining "strong opposition to any form of annexation."

In the last several weeks, Israel has launched a contentious land regulation process that will deepen its control in the occupied West

Bank. Israeli Energy Minister Eli Cohen said it amounts to "de facto sovereignty" that will block the establishment of a Palestinian state.

Outraged Palestinians, Arab countries and human rights groups have called the moves an illegal annexation of the territory, home to roughly 3.4 million Palestinians who seek it for a future state.

### A pivotal moment in the Middle East

The UN meeting also delved into the US-brokered ceasefire deal that took effect Oct. 10. UN political chief Rosemary DiCarlo and Israeli and Palestinian civil society representatives gave briefings for the first time since the Hamas-led Oct. 7, 2023, attacks that launched the war. Hiba Qasas, a Palestinian who is founding executive director of Geneva-based Principles for Peace Foundation, and Nadav Tamir, a former Israeli diplomat who is executive director of J Street Israel, both said they represent a strong coalition of Israelis and Palestinians who believe the only way to end the conflict is through a two-state solution.

"Israel cannot remain the democratic homeland of the Jewish people if Palestinians are denied a homeland of their own. Our futures are interdependent," Tamir said.

DiCarlo of the UN said this is "a pivotal moment in the Middle East" that opens the possibility for the region to move in a new direction. "But that opening is neither assured nor indefinite," she said, and whether it will be sustained depends on decisions in the coming weeks. "The Board of Peace meeting in Washington, DC, tomorrow is an important step," she said.

Aspects of the ceasefire deal have moved forward, including Hamas releasing all the hostages it was holding and increased amounts of humanitarian aid getting into Gaza, though the UN says the level is insufficient. (AP)

# Trump gathers members of Board of Peace for first meeting

## US allies wary of new body

WASHINGTON, Feb 19: President Donald Trump will gather Thursday with representatives from more than two dozen countries that have joined his Board of Peace — and several that have opted not to — for an inaugural meeting that will focus on reconstruction and building an international stabilization force for a war-battered Gaza, where a shaky ceasefire deal persists.

Trump announced ahead of the meeting that board members have pledged \$5 billion for reconstruction, a fraction of the estimated \$70 billion needed to rebuild the Palestinian territory decimated after two years of war. Members are expected to unveil commitments of thousands of personnel to international stabilization and police forces for the territory.

"We have the greatest leaders in the world joining the Board of Peace," Trump told reporters earlier this week. "I think it has the chance to be the most consequential board ever assembled of any kind."

The board was initiated as part of Trump's 20-point peace plan to end the conflict in Gaza. But since the October ceasefire, Trump's vision for the board has morphed and he wants it to have an even more ambitious remit — one that will not only complete the Herculean task of bringing lasting peace between Israel and Hamas but will also help resolve conflicts around the globe.

But ahead of the board's first gathering, the Gaza ceasefire deal remains fragile and Trump's expanded vision for it has triggered fears the US president is looking to create a rival to the United Nations. Trump earlier this week said he hoped the board would push the UN to "get on the ball."

"The United Nations has great potential," he said. "They haven't lived up to the potential."

### Some US allies remain skeptical

More than 40 countries and the European Union have confirmed they will send officials to Thursday's meeting, according to a senior administration official who was not authorized to comment publicly.

Germany, Italy, Norway and Switzerland are among more than a dozen countries that have not joined the board but are expected to attend as observers, the official said. The UN Security Council held a high-level meeting Wednesday on the ceasefire deal and Israel's efforts to expand control in the West Bank. The UN session in New York was originally scheduled for Thursday but was moved up after Trump announced the board's meeting for the same date and it became clear that it would complicate travel plans for diplo-



rats planning to attend both.

Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Parolin told reporters earlier this week that "at the international level it should above all be the UN that manages these crisis situations." The Trump administration on Wednesday pushed back on the Vatican's concerns.

"This president has a very bold and ambitious plan and vision to rebuild and reconstruct Gaza, which is well underway because of the Board of Peace," White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said. "This is a legitimate organization where there are tens of member countries from around the world."

Mike Waltz, the US ambassador to the UN, also pushed back on skeptical allies, saying the board is "not talking, it is doing."

"We are hearing the chattering class criticizing the structure of the board, that it's unconventional, that it's unprecedented," Waltz said. "Again, the old ways were not working."

### Questions about disarming Hamas

Central to Thursday's discussions will be creating an armed international stabilization force to keep security and ensure the disarming of the militant Hamas group, a key demand of Israel and a cornerstone of the ceasefire deal.

But thus far, only Indonesia has offered a firm commitment to Trump for the proposed force. And Hamas has provided little confidence that it is willing to move forward on disarmament. The administration is "under no illusions on the challenges regarding demilitarisation" but has been encouraged by what mediators have reported back, according to a US official who was not authorized to comment publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity. (AP)

# Toxic gas leak at mine in Nigeria kills 37 people

ABUJA, Feb 19: A toxic gas leak at a mine in north-central Nigeria killed 37 people and led to the hospitalisation of 26 others, according to police.

The incident occurred in the early hours of Tuesday in Kampani Zurak community, located in the Wase area of Plateau state, police spokesman Alfred Alabo said in a statement.

"Preliminary investigation revealed that the miners were affected due to a sudden discharge of lead oxide and other associated gases like sulphur and carbon monoxide which are toxic and poisonous to humans, particularly in a confined or poorly ventilated environment," he said.

"The corpses of the deceased victims have been released to their families for burial according to their religious practices."

The Nigerian government has closed the mining site and an investigation into the leak is underway.

The miners were unaware of the toxic nature of the emissions and continued their operations. Nigeria's Minister of Solid Minerals Development Dele Alake said in a statement.

It's not clear what was being mined at the site and whether the mine was operating legally. Nigeria is trying to rein in illegal gold mining operations across the country that have killed hundreds of people over the years. (AP)

# At least 16 killed in explosion due to suspected gas leakage

KARACHI, Feb 19: At least 16 people, including many children, were killed and 14 others injured when a suspected gas leakage led to an explosion in a residential building in Pakistan's Karachi on Thursday morning.

"The explosion took place around 4:30 am on the first floor of the building located in the Old Soldier Bazar area when everyone was awake for Sehri time," police official Jamshed Asher said.

The police official said that the reason for the explosion apparently was a gas leakage.

Due to gas shortage in Pakistan's biggest city, many families especially in lower income residential areas use liquid petroleum gas cylinders at their homes. Police surgeon Dr Samaiya Syed confirmed that they have received 14 bodies so far from the blast site while 14 injured are under treatment. The explosion caused a part of the building structure to collapse due to its dilapidated condition. (PTI)

# Former South Korean Prez Yoon receives life sentence for imposing martial law

SEOUL, Feb 19: Former South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol was sentenced to life in prison for his brief imposition of martial law in a dramatic culmination to the country's biggest political crisis in decades.

Yoon was ousted from office after a baffling attempt to overcome an opposition-controlled legislature by declaring martial law and sending troops to surround the National Assembly on December 3, 2024.

Judge Jee Kui-youn of the Seoul Central District Court said he found Yoon guilty of rebellion for mobilizing military and police forces in an illegal attempt to seize the liberal-led Assembly, arrest politicians and establish unchecked power for a "considerable" time.

### Martial law crisis recalled dictatorship past

Yoon's martial law imposition, the first of its kind in more than four decades, harkened back to South Korea's past military-backed governments when authorities occasionally proclaimed emergency decrees that allowed them to station soldiers, tanks and armoured vehicles on streets or at public places such as schools to prevent anti-government demonstrations.

As lawmakers rushed to the National Assembly, Yoon's martial law command issued a proclamation declaring sweeping powers, including suspending political activities, controlling the media and publications, and allowing arrests without warrants.

The decree lasted about six hours before being lifted after a quorum of law-

makers managed to break through a military blockade and unanimously voted to lift the measure.

Yoon was suspended from office on December 14, 2024, after being impeached by lawmakers and was formally removed by the Constitutional Court in April 2025. He has been under arrest since last July while facing multiple criminal trials, with the rebellion charge carrying the most severe punishment.

### Yoon's lawyers reject conviction

Yoon Kap-keun, one of the former president's lawyers, accused Jee of issuing a "predetermined verdict" based solely on prosecutors' arguments and said the "rule of law" had collapsed. He said he would discuss whether to appeal with his client and the rest of the legal team. Yoon Suk Yeol told the court the martial law decree was only meant to raise public awareness of how the liberals were paralyzing state affairs, and that he was prepared to respect lawmakers if they voted against the measure.

Prosecutors said it was clear Yoon was attempting to disable the legislature and prevent lawmakers from lifting the measure through voting, actions that exceeded his constitutional authority even under martial law.

In announcing Yoon and Kim's verdicts, Jee said the decision to send troops to the National Assembly was key to his determination that the imposition of martial law amounted to rebellion.

"This court finds that the purpose of (Yoon's) actions was to send troops to the National Assembly, block the Assembly building and arrest key figures, including

the National Assembly speaker and the leaders of both the ruling and opposition parties, in order to prevent lawmakers from gathering to deliberate or vote," Jee said. "It's sufficiently established that he intended to obstruct or paralyse the Assembly's activities so that it would be unable to properly perform its functions for a considerable period of time."

### Protesters rally outside court

As Yoon arrived in court, hundreds of police officers watched closely as Yoon supporters rallied outside a judicial complex, their cries rising as the prison bus transporting him drove past. Yoon's critics gathered nearby, demanding the death penalty. There were no immediate reports of major clashes following the verdict.

A special prosecutor had demanded the death penalty for Yoon Suk Yeol, saying his actions posed a threat to the country's democracy and deserved the most serious punishment available, but most analysts expected a life sentence since the poorly-planned power grab did not result in casualties.

### Other officials sentenced for enforcing martial law

The court also convicted and sentenced several former military and police officials involved in enforcing Yoon's martial law decree, including ex-Defense Minister Kim Yong Hyun, who received a 30-year jail term for his central role in planning the measure and mobilizing the military. (AP)

# King Charles III's brother Andrew arrested by UK police in misconduct probe

LONDON, Feb 19: The UK police on Thursday arrested Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor, the younger brother of King Charles III, on suspicion of misconduct in public office following damaging allegations over his association with convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein.

Thames Valley Police said they are carrying out searches at addresses associated with the former prince in Berkshire and Norfolk, while he remains in police custody.

While the force said they will not be naming the arrested man, it is being widely reported that the arrest involves Andrew, who turned 66 on Thursday.

"Following a thorough assessment, we have now opened an investigation into this allegation of misconduct in public office," said Oliver Wright, Assistant Chief Constable of Thames Valley Police. "It is important that we protect the integrity and objectivity of our investigation as we work with our partners to investigate this alleged offence."

"We understand the significant public interest in this case, and we will provide updates at the appropriate time," he said.

In UK law, an arrest requires police to have reasonable grounds to suspect an offence has taken place and reasonable grounds for believing that it is necessary to arrest the person in question.

Earlier, when asked about the allegations against Andrew during his time as a former trade envoy in the then government's Department of Business over a decade ago, British Prime Minister Keir Starmer told the BBC that no individual is above the law.

"Anybody who has any information should testify. So, whether it's Andrew or anybody else, anybody who has got relevant

information should come forward to whatever the relevant body is, in this particular case, we're talking about Epstein, but there are plenty of other cases," said Starmer.

"Anybody who has got information relating to any aspect of violence against women and girls has, in my view, a duty to come forward, whoever they are."

"One of the core principles in our system is that everybody is equal under the law, and nobody is above the law, and it is really important that is applied across the board."

"That is the principle. It's a long-standing principle, it's a very important principle of our country, our society, and it applies, and it has to apply in this case, in the same way as it would apply in any other case," he said.

The arrest follows a series of shocking allegations over the past few weeks as the Epstein files were released by the US Congress, with Buckingham Palace issuing an unprecedented statement earlier this month to say that it "stands ready" to support a police investigation into the conduct of Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor.

"The King has made clear, in words and through unprecedented actions, his profound concern at allegations which continue to come to light in respect of Mr Mountbatten-Windsor's conduct," the Palace said at the time. "While the specific claims in question are for Mr Mountbatten-Windsor to address, if we are approached by Thames Valley Police we stand ready to support them as you would expect."

"As was previously stated, Their Majesties' [Charles and Camilla] thoughts and sympathies have been, and remain with, the victims of any and all forms of abuse," it stated. (PTI)

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# Eight backcountry skiers found dead, 1 still missing after California avalanche

NEVADA CITY, Feb 19: Eight backcountry skiers have been found dead and one remains missing after an avalanche near Lake Tahoe in California, officials said Wednesday, making it the deadliest avalanche in the US in more than four decades.

Nevada County Sheriff Shannan Moon said during a news conference that authorities have told the families the mission has moved from rescue to recovery. It is the deadliest avalanche in the US since 1981, when 11 climbers were killed on Mount Rainier, Washington. Crews have faced treacherous conditions in their search for the missing skiers since the avalanche struck Tuesday morning. Search and rescue crews were dispatched to the Castle Peak area of the Sierra Nevada after a 911 call reporting the avalanche had buried 15 skiers. Six of them have been found alive. The group was on a three-day trek in Northern California's Sierra Nevada as a monster winter storm pummeled the West Coast.

Two of those rescued after several hours of searching were taken to a hospital for treatment, said

Ashley Quadros, a spokesperson for the Nevada County Sheriff's Office. Heavy snow and the threat of additional avalanches slowed the rescue effort in the mountains near Castle Peak, northwest of Lake Tahoe.

The area near Donner Summit is one of the snowiest places in the Western Hemisphere and until just a few years ago was closed to the public. It sees an average of nearly 35 feet of snow a year, according to the Truckee Donner Land Trust, which owns a cluster of huts where the group was staying near Frog Lake.

The Sierra Avalanche Center warned Wednesday that the risk of avalanche remains high and advised against travel in the area. Multiple feet of snowfall and gale force winds in recent days left the snowpack unstable and unpredictable, and more snow was predicted to fall, the centre said.

Nevada County Sheriff Capt. Russell Greene said authorities were notified about the avalanche by Blackbird Mountain Guides, which was leading the expedition, and the skiers' emergency beacons. (AP)

# Youth discontent could trigger another rebellion, warns Nepal PM Karki

KATHMANDU, Feb 19: Nepal's interim Prime Minister Sushila Karki on Thursday warned that failing to address youth discontent could trigger another rebellion.

Speaking on the 76th Democracy Day celebrations at the Nepali Army Pavilion in Kathmandu, she said democracy must deliver results, protect citizens' rights and ensure accountability.

Referring to the Gen Z-led protests in September last year that led to the ouster of K P Sharma Oli-led coalition government, Karki said, "That movement sought an end to corruption, nepotism and discrimination. It sought good governance and equitable justice." "The state must respond to this not only with generosity, but also with humility and a deep sense of duty," she added.

She warned that failing to address youth discontent could trigger another rebellion.

"No nation can progress by undermining the youth," Karki, who became interim prime minister on September 12 last year, said.

"The youth have energy, aspiration for change and moral anger,"



she said, adding democracy is "not only a process, but a result-oriented system".

"We embraced democracy in principle, yet in practice, we continued to foster discrimination. We wrote equality in the Constitution; yet within our structures, we went on protecting inequality," she said.

Monopoly over power and resources has eroded public trust, fuelling rebellion, Karki added.

Separately, Nepal President Ramchandra Paudel expressed his wish that Democracy Day may help

also always reminds us of the immortal story of the martyrs," the president said.

Meanwhile, former King Gyanendra has said that "if we go for election without addressing the national crisis, it could invite more conflict". He did not elaborate specifically what he meant by national crisis.

"The entire country has plunged into an unnatural crisis and the people are experiencing threat to the sovereignty of the country," claimed the former monarch in a video message broadcast on the National Democracy Day.

Gyanendra was indirectly hinting towards restoration of monarchy ahead of the March 5 general election which is evident from the voices raised by different pro-monarchist groups.

"We have to evaluate what we have gained from past movements and changes," Gyanendra said.

Nepal is set to hold the House of Representatives elections on March 5, the first since last year's deadly Gen-Z protests that toppled the K P Sharma Oli-led coalition government. (PTI)

Relief distribution programmes held in hills and valley districts

# Manipur CM urges IDPs, CSOs to help bridge trust deficit



IMPHAL, Feb 19: Manipur Chief Minister Y Khechhand Singh on Thursday appealed to the internally displaced people and civil society organisations in the

hills and valley areas to cooperate with the state government in its efforts to overcome the trust deficit between Meiteis and Kuki-Zo communities in the state.

He said the trust deficit stemmed from the ethnic violence exists in some places.

Speaking at a programme of relief distribution among internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Imphal, Singh said, "There are certain places where IDPs cannot enter immediately. We are witnessing a gradual return of peace to the state. However, due to the conflict between the two communities, there exists a trust deficit. I appeal to all the CSOs, IDPs and the people of the communities to overcome this trust deficit."

He said the state government is making efforts to ensure that all IDPs return to their native places.

Singh said, "I also appeal to bring love among the IDPs and the people of the hills and the Imphal valley. The government remains open 24 hours to address the

grievances of IDPs. We are also working to ensure all of them return to their native homes."

The relief distribution programmes have also been organised in Churachandpur and Kangpokpi districts in the presence of legislators Paolien Haokip, LM Khaute, Letzamang and Deputy CM Nemcha Kipgen.

"Manipur has 36 communities which have all defended the state since historical times. The state is one and with this thought, the programme is being held in both hills and the valley. MLAs are also working to assist the government," Singh said.

Manipur has witnessed ethnic strife between Meiteis and Kuki-Zo groups since May 2023.

So far, more than 260 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in the violence. (PTI)

# Fed-Up Nagas urge Centre to honour Naga agreements

DIMAPUR, Feb 19: The Fed-Up Nagas, "a collective movement of concerned Naga youths committed to a peaceful and democratic process", has urged the Government of India to implement the "agreements already signed with the Nagas". The Fed-Up Nagas said in a statement that the movement arises from a shared conviction that the only sustainable way to address and end the prevailing social evils within society is to bring a just and honourable conclusion to the long-standing Naga political issue, which stands concluded in principle.

The Fed-Up Nagas also held a press conference recently in Dimapur, Nagaland.

The Fed-Up Nagas "firmly" appealed to the Government of India to act with sincerity and responsibility and to refrain from divisive approaches that foster misunderstanding and discord among the Nagas. "Continued delay only weakens our collective strength and accelerates our disintegration as a family, as a people and as a nation," it added.

The Fed-Up Nagas claimed that it "functions as a collective movement guided by a core group of



like-minded youths without hierarchy, titles, or official positions". Any concerned Naga youth may be part of this core and contribute meaningfully to the movement, it said. It described itself as a youth-driven initiative representing Naga youths as a whole, without tribal, organisational, or political affiliation. Participants stand solely as individuals united by shared concern and responsibility, it added.

In view of the ongoing HSLC and HSSLC examinations, the Fed-Up Nagas stated that the movement will continue with awareness and mobilisation campaigns in a responsible and considerate manner until the examinations conclude. "Immediately thereafter, a mass youth rally will be organised and memorandums and representations will be submitted to the relevant authori-

ties as peaceful and democratic demands of the youth for a timely and honourable resolution."

The Fed-Up Nagas "humbly requests prayer support from all the churches and the general Naga public for the success of this youth movement, seeking divine guidance, wisdom and unity in the pursuit of permanent peace and a just resolution to the long-pending Naga issue". It added that it believes collective spiritual support and moral strength are essential in guiding efforts toward reconciliation and lasting harmony.

The Fed-Up Nagas reiterated its commitment to non-violence, unity and constructive engagement. "The movement seeks solidarity from all sections of society who believe in truth, justice and the collective future of the Naga people," it added. (NNN)

Tripura tea auction centre likely to be operational by April: official



AGARTALA, Feb 19: The proposed tea auction centre in Tripura is likely to be made operational by April, an official said on Thursday.

Chief Minister Manik Saha had laid the foundation stone for the state's first tea auction centre at Gurkhabasti in West Tripura district in March, 2024. At present, the country has seven tea auction centres.

"We have set a target to operationalise the first tea auction centre at Gurkhabasti by April," Tripura Tea Development Corporation (TTDC) chairman Samir Ranjan Ghosh told PTI.

He said buyers have been seeking a transport subsidy to make the auction centre viable and paying heed to the demand, the TTDC has decided to provide ₹ 4 per kg as a subsidy from its own pocket.

Ghosh said that at present, tea planters of the state send their produce to auction centres in Guwahati and Kolkata, which is time-consuming, besides incurring a hefty transportation cost.

"If we can establish a tea auction centre here, tea traders will not be required to send their products outside the state. The tea buyers and sellers will also get better price realisation at the proposed auction centre because the state's tea doesn't get priority at those auction centres," he said.

"Tripura is still considered a tea-producing state and is losing crores of State GST. If the auction centre is established, the state will turn into a tea-consuming state and thus be eligible to get State GST," he said.

The northeastern state, which has 54 operational tea estates, produces 90 lakh kg of finished tea per year. Over 30,000 people are directly involved in the sector. (PTI)

# Shots fired targeting editor of Manipur newspaper

IMPHAL, Feb 19: Gunshots were allegedly fired targeting the editor of a local newspaper in Manipur's Imphal East district, police said on Thursday.

Armed men intercepted Khoirom Loyalakpa's car near Hatta Cemetery around 10 PM on Wednesday, they said.

Two rounds were fired at his vehicle, which shattered the rear glass. Following this, the attackers physically assaulted him, they added.

Loyalakpa was taken to a hospital with a bloody nose and discharged after primary treatment, police said.

A case has been registered and an investigation is underway to ascertain the exact cause of the attack, they said.

No arrests have been made so far, police said. (PTI)



# Tribal body urges posting of Tribal Affairs Minister in Imphal

IMPHAL, Feb 19: The Tribal Youth Council Manipur (TYCM), Council Headquarters, submitted a memorandum to the Chief Minister of Manipur, Yumnam Khechhand Singh on Wednesday, urging the appointment of a Minister-in-Charge of Tribal Affairs & Hills from among tribal MLAs who can be stationed in Imphal.

As mandated by Article 164 of the Constitution of India, it is stated that the Chief Minister shall be appointed by the Governor and the other ministers shall be appointed by the Governor on the advice of the Chief Minister and the ministers shall hold office during the pleasure of the Governor, the tribal body said.

The TYCM said, "It may be recalled that, for more than the past two years, the tribal people of the state have had no opportunity to meet or interact with the Minister of Tribal Affairs & Hills, as the minister has not been stationed in Imphal since the outbreak of eth-

nic clashes in Manipur on May 3, 2023." In this regard, the Tribal Youth Council Manipur (TYCM) has repeatedly appealed to the previous government. "However, these appeals have not been addressed."

The Tribal Affairs & Hills Department serves as the backbone for ensuring the welfare and development of tribal areas in Manipur, the TYCM said. However, since the outbreak of ethnic clashes in Manipur, this vital department has remained in a state of paralysis due to the prolonged absence of the Minister of Tribal Affairs & Hills, it added.

As a result, the release of funds and the implementation of various schemes and work programmes have been stalled for over a year, causing significant hardship and injustice to communities not involved in the ethnic conflict, the TYCM said. It added that this state of limbo has severely impeded the development process in the tribal

and hill areas, exacerbating existing disparities and backwardness.

"If the post of Minister-in-Charge of Tribal Affairs & Hills is once again assigned to an MLA who is unable to be stationed in Imphal, development activities in the tribal areas of Manipur will not progress and the losses and gaps of previous years will remain unaddressed," the tribal body added.

The TYCM said it is "an urgent necessity" to intensify extra efforts towards the development of the tribal areas of Manipur in order to fill the losses and gaps of previous years without delay and to restore effective governance in the state.

The Tribal Youth Council Manipur (TYCM) expressed hope that the Chief Minister will "kindly take affirmative and appropriate action on the matter stated hereinabove under your committed, dynamic and capable leadership." (NNN)

# Manipur Central Jail warder arrested for helping inmates with mobile phones

IMPHAL, Feb 19: A warder of the Manipur Central Jail was arrested for allegedly helping prisoners get access to mobile phones, police said on Thursday.

The arrested warder was identified as Sahid Shah (35) of Kairang Mayai Leikai, they said.

He was allegedly illegally helping inmates, including those facing stringent UAPA cases, to make and receive phone calls, they added.

A case has been registered in this regard at the Heingang police station in Imphal East district, police said.

Multiple mobile phones and SIM cards were seized from Shah, who was arrested on Wednesday, they said.

It has been established that he has received money from inmates through UPI, they claimed.

An investigation is underway to identify other persons involved, police said. (PTI)

# Centre allocates ₹ 491 cr for Tripura-Mizoram gas pipeline project

AIZAWL, Feb 19: Mizoram Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs Minister B Lalchanzova informed the state assembly on Thursday that the Centre has allocated ₹ 491 crore for the implementation of the Tripura-Mizoram natural gas pipeline project.

Replying to a query from opposition BJP member Dr K Beichhua, the minister noted that the Centre has earmarked a total of ₹ 9,265 crore for the broader North East Natural Gas Pipeline Grid.

Of this total fund, ₹ 491 crore is specifically designated for the 119.5-km stretch connecting Panisagar in Tripura to Aizawl, he said.

Officials confirmed that the project, executed by Indradhanush Gas Grid Limited (IGGL), has reached a significant milestone with 45 per cent of the physical work now complete.

Providing a technical breakdown, officials stated that welding work stands at 52 per cent, while pipe lowering has reached 40 per cent.

The entire 119.5-km project is expected to be completed by December 2027, they said.

The pipeline originates from the Panisagar

receiving terminal in Tripura and passes through several Mizoram villages, including Kanhmun, Zawlnuam, Kawrthah, Tuidam and Darlak, before reaching the Mamit area. From there, it will proceed toward Lengte and terminate at the proposed Sihhmui receiving terminal, located approximately 21 km from Aizawl.

Once the pipeline installation to Sihhmui is finalised, the Tripura Natural Gas Company Limited (TNGCL) will spearhead the local distribution network for Aizawl residents, according to officials.

Lalchanzova said laying of pipes for internal distribution within the capital has not yet commenced, as the TNGCL must first secure all necessary land and site clearances.

The minister earlier announced that Mizoram is on track to transition to Piped Natural Gas (PNG) by early 2028.

Following IGGL's completion of the primary pipeline, TNGCL will begin providing PNG connections to Aizawl and Mamit, bringing the service to the Mizo people by early 2028, he had said. (PTI)



# CRS authorises train operations in Murkongselek-Sille section

110 kmph speed approved under Murkongselek-Pasighat New Rail Project



ITANAGAR, Feb 19: The Commissioner of Railway Safety (CRS), North-east Frontier Circle, Sumeet Singhal has authorised operation of trains in the Murkongselek-Sille (15.70 km) newly laid BG line section on 12th and 13th February, 2026. After successful inspection and speed trials, the CRS approved train operations on the route at a maximum permissible speed of 110 kmph, paving the way for enhanced connectivity in the region.

This section is part of the ongoing 26.15-km-long new rail line project between Murkongselek and Pasighat, a key infrastructure initiative aimed at further strengthening rail connectivity to Arunachal Pradesh. The 26.15-km Murkongselek-Pasighat new railway line runs from Murkongselek in Assam to Pasighat in Arunachal Pradesh. The newly laid line will help carry more freight and passenger traffic through this route in the near future. The project features three newly developed stations—Sille, Labo and Pasighat—along with 27 major bridges.

The capital of Arunachal Pradesh was connected to the national broad-gauge railway network with the commissioning of a new line from Harmuti to Naharlagun railway station on 29th March, 2014. This milestone brought the capital city, Itanagar, onto India's broad-gauge map for the first time. Passenger services on the Harmuti-

Naharlagun route commenced on 7th April, 2014, marking a major boost in regional connectivity. Further strengthening this link, the Naharlagun-New Delhi AC Express was introduced on 22nd February, 2015, providing Arunachal Pradesh with its first direct rail connection to the national capital, New Delhi.

The Murkongselek-Pasighat New Railway Line Project will significantly enhance connectivity between Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and the rest of the country. Once completed, the new line will extend long-distance rail connectivity up to Pasighat through the Rangiya-Murkongselek route and via the Bogibeel Bridge, linking the region more efficiently with major destinations. The improved rail network will help reduce travel time and transportation costs for both passengers and goods, while ensuring a more reliable and uninterrupted supply of essential commodities. It will also enhance mobility and overall convenience for residents by providing long-distance rail access directly to local hubs such as Rangiya and Murkongselek. Moreover, better connectivity is expected to encourage the growth of small-scale industries, promote regional trade and boost economic development by supporting tourism and helping position Arunachal Pradesh as an emerging tourism hub.

# Nagaland farmers urged to benefit from government schemes: Ram Nath Thakur

Union Minister stresses focused attention on agriculture and scheme implementation

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, Feb 19: Union Minister of State for Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Ram Nath Thakur, on Thursday said Nagaland continues to witness progress through various initiatives of the Central Government. He emphasised that the Prime Minister is particularly concerned about farmers' welfare and is keen to ensure that they fully benefit from government schemes.

Thakur was addressing an official programme at Longleng with all heads of departments and civil society organisations.

He urged the agriculture and allied departments to



collect detailed information regarding the total area under cultivation in the state, including the number of hectares being farmed and the number of farmers involved. The minister also inquired about the functioning of the Soil Testing Laboratory

in Nagaland and whether it is effectively benefiting the farming community.

Highlighting that the Central Government stands ready to assist, Thakur urged farmers to avail all government schemes. He also called upon the State Government to give

focused attention to agricultural development and the challenges faced by farmers. He stressed the importance of proper implementation of government schemes and urged officials to ensure that benefits reach the grassroots level. He further emphasised the need to review how effectively Central Government schemes are being implemented in Nagaland.

Speaking on the occasion, Longleng Deputy Commissioner W Manpai Phom expressed gratitude to the minister and provided a brief overview of the district's comprehensive report through a PowerPoint presentation.

No.A/BKD/Tender/Gaja-Mitra/2025-26/1902-05 Date 19/02/2026

**SHORT NOTICE INVITING E-TENDER**

Sealed tenders affixing a non-refundable Court fee Stamp of Rs. 8.25 (Rupees eight and paise twenty five) only with validity period of 180 days, which will subsequently be converted and drawn up in the printed F-2 form are invited from the registered contractors of A.P.W.D. Class-I (A), (B), (C) & Class-II & Class-III category according to their eligibility for submitting tenders for the work stated below.

Sl. No.	Name of work	Estimate Amount	Earnest Money (in Rs)	Cost of Tender Paper
1	Installation of Solar Fencing under Baksa Forest Division under SOPD "Gaja Mitra" for the financial year 2025-26.	Rs. 32,00,000.00	2% for GEN, 1% for OBC/ST/SC of the estimated cost	500/-

The tenders will be received by the undersigned up to 2 PM on 12.03.2026 and will be opened on the same date and place at 3.30 PM in the office of the Divisional Forest Officer, Baksa Forest Division, Mushalpur. In the event of any unusual occurrence due to strike, bandh, holiday etc. the same will be received and opened on the next working day at same place and same time.

Details N.I.T may be seen in all workings days in the office of the undersign. The Tender paper will be issued to the contractor or their authorized agent from 10.00 Hrs to 4.00 Hrs on all working days from 24/02/2026 to 12.03.2026 on payment of Rs.500/- (Rupees Five Hundred) only in the form of DD/Bankers Cheque in Favour of **Principal Secretary, BTC, Kokrajhar payable at SHI, Kokrajhar.**

Details of E-auction will be available [www.bteforest.in](http://www.bteforest.in) portal shortly.

Sd/-  
Divisional Forest Officer,  
Baksa Forest Division, Mushalpur

IPR(BTC)/C/2025-26/4096

## PM Modi unveils MANAV vision for AI, pitches for human control of technology

**NEW DELHI, Feb 19:** Making a pitch for democratising AI, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday unveiled the 'MANAV' vision for a human-centric approach and use of the fast emerging technology with a strong accent on sovereignty and inclusivity.

Inaugurating the AI Impact Summit here, he said India believes that artificial intelligence will truly serve the good of the world when it is shared and its codes are open, asserting that the country does not fear AI but sees a fortune in it and a blueprint of tomorrow.

Welfare and happiness of all is "our benchmark" for AI to ensure that humans don't become a data point or raw material, he stressed.

"I present the M.A.N.A.V. vision for AI where M stands for moral and ethical systems, A for accountable governance, N for national sovereignty, A for accessible and inclusive, V for valid and legitimate," Modi said.

Global leaders, including UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, French President Emmanuel Macron, Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, Swiss President Guy Parmelin, and CEOs from leading technology companies from around the world were among those present at the Summit.

Modi said India's MANAV vision will become a crucial link for humanity's welfare in the AI-driven world of the 21st century.

AI, he said, must be given an open sky, but command must re-



main in human hands.

Citing the example of GPS, the prime minister said the navigation tool gives suggestions on directions to take, but the final decision is that of the user.

"The direction in which humanity takes AI today will determine our future," Modi said.

Emphasising the importance of child safety, the prime minister said just as school syllabi are curated, the AI space must also be child-safe and family-guided.

"Today, there are two kinds of people - those who see fear in AI and those who see fortune. India sees fortune and future in AI, backed by talent, energy capacity, and policy clarity," Modi said.

The prime minister also noted that three Indian companies

launched their AI models and apps during the Summit which reflect the talent of the youth and showcase the depth and diversity of solutions that India contributes to the global AI landscape.

"AI will make our systems smarter, more efficient and more impactful. It will open more opportunities for people to take up creative roles. It is a major opportunity for innovation, entrepreneurship and the creation of new industries," he said at the event attended by world leaders and CEOs of leading companies.

"Some countries believe that AI should be developed in a confidential and closed manner. But India is different. We believe AI will truly serve the good of the world when it is shared and its codes are open.

Only then will millions of young minds be able to improve it further," he said.

He said the expo is taking place in India, which represents one sixth of humanity, and a country with the world's largest young population and a hub of the largest tech talent pool.

"Artificial intelligence marks a transformative chapter in human history. India is not just a part of the AI revolution, but is leading and shaping it," he said.

The prime minister said India not only builds technology but also adopts it at an unprecedented pace. "Some people have doubts about new technology. But the way the younger generation is embracing AI is unprecedented. There has also been tremendous enthusiasm here regarding the AI Summit exhibition," he said.

"In the course of human history, there have been certain turning points that shaped entire centuries. These turning points set the direction of civilisation and transform the pace of development. Artificial intelligence is one such transformation in history," he noted.

Modi said India builds new technology and also adapts it rapidly but the real question is not what AI can do in future, "it is what can we do with AI in the present".

He said AI is a transformative power; if it strays away from its goals, it will lead to destruction and if used well, it will give solutions. (PTI)

## 'Godse factory': Cong slams BJP-RSS after 'Karni Sena man' death threat to Rahul

**NEW DELHI, Feb 19:** The Congress on Thursday flagged a purported video of a man claiming to be from Karni Sena issuing death threats to Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi and "25 other MPs", and said the RSS-BJP ecosystem is a "Godse factory".

The opposition party also alleged that there is a deliberate campaign to demonise the opposition, and legitimise violence against political rivals, especially Gandhi.

The man, who purportedly issued the video threatening to shoot Gandhi and 25 other Congress MPs, has been detained by the Kota police.

Superintendent of Police, Kota, Tejaswani Gautam told PTI that the accused man has been detained in Borkheda police station and being questioned regarding the statement.

The man, who identified himself as Raj Singh, had issued the video statement, saying that all BJP and Karni Sena workers are deeply angered by the way 25 Congress MPs verbally abused Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla.

"If such an incident occurs again, we will enter the homes of those MPs and vandalize their homes. I believe this incident occurred on Rahul Gandhi's orders. Rahul Gandhi, listen carefully: if such an incident occurs again, we will wage into your home and shoot you," he said in the video.

"If those MPs are arrested within 24 hours, that is fine, otherwise we will shoot them all one by one," he said, while identifying



himself a spokesperson for the Karni Sena.

Congress' media and publicity department head Pawan Khera shared the video on X and slammed the RSS-BJP.

In his post, Khera said, "The RSS-BJP ecosystem is a 'Godse factory'. The threat issued by the so-called Karni Sena against Rahul Gandhi and the '25 Members of Parliament' is not an isolated outburst. It is the part of a calculated and devious plan."

First, Kiren Rijiju publicly "lied and misled" the nation that Congress MPs abused Om Birla -- a claim contradicted by available video footage, which shows no such abuse, Khera said, adding that the Speaker is seen smiling during the exchange.

"Then, BJP MPs across platforms began echoing a strikingly similar line: that Rahul Gandhi poses 'the biggest threat to India's national security.' This is a deliberate campaign to demonise the opposition, and legitimise violence against political rivals - especially Rahul Ji," Khera said.

"This is how radicalisation works: they manufacture a lie, amplify it through repetition, sanctify it with political authority, and circulate it until their followers are incited to hatred and violence. This is how Godse was created. This is how another Godse is being instigated today," the Congress leader said. Asked about the video at a press briefing, Congress spokesperson Supriya Shrinete lashed out at the BJP and said that despite the open threats against MPs no action has been taken against the man in the video.

"I want to ask Om Birla ji, the goon in this video calls himself your supporter from the Karni Sena -- Do you have no objection to this video? What is the Home Minister doing? There is pin drop silence even as a goon openly threatens to shoot MPs and the Leader of Opposition," Shrinete said.

She also asked why an FIR had not been registered in this matter and why is the government silent.

Congress general secretary K C Venugopal said "self-proclaimed Modi bhakts are brazenly issuing death threats against Rahul Gandhi in broad daylight - without any reprimand from the ruling regime".

"This is a direct result of the toxic culture of animosity and vengeance created by the BJP in national discourse - right from Parliament to political rallies. They treat political opponents as die-hard enemies to be eliminated, and their foot soldiers - blinded by hate - are unleashed to intimidate opposition leaders," he said on X. (PTI)

## Anti-CAA pleas: SC to start hearing petitions on May 5



**NEW DELHI, Feb 19:** The Supreme Court on Thursday said that it will commence the final hearing on May 5 over 200 pleas including the lead one of IJML challenging the constitutional validity of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 (CAA).

The CAA seeks to grant citizenship to migrants belonging to Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Christian, Jain and Parsi communities who came to the country from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan on or before December 31, 2014.

A bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justices Joy Malayal Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi issued procedural directions with regard to final hearings on the petitions which are pending since 2019-2020.

The bench said it will hear petitioners including the leader of the Indian Union of Muslim League (IJML) for one-and-a-half days and the Centre will be granted

a day for advancing its arguments.

The CJ said the bench would conclude the hearing on the petitions on May 12.

The bench asked the parties to file additional documents and submissions within four weeks.

The bench said it will hear the pleas related to pan-India application of the CAA first and then take note of the petitions pertaining to Assam and Tripura later.

It said Assam's problem is different from the rest of the country as the earlier cut-off date for citizenship was March 24, 1971, which under the CAA was extended to December 31, 2014.

These matters were last listed before a bench on March 19, 2024 when it asked the Centre to respond to interim applications seeking a stay on the implementation of the Citizenship (Amendment) Rules, 2024 till the apex court disposes of the pleas challenging the validity of the law.

The apex court, however, refused to stay the operation of the Rules that would give effect to the CAA as sought by a battery of senior advocates representing the petitioners.

The Centre on March 11, 2024 paved the way for the implementation of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019, with the notification of the relevant rules, four years after the contentious law was passed by Parliament to fast-track Indian citizenship for undocumented non-Muslim migrants from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan who came to India before December 31, 2014.

The president gave his assent to the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2019 on December 12 that year turning it into an Act. (PTI)

## DMDK aligns with DMK, party it once fought with zeal

### Captain's 'athma' won't forgive, says BJP

**CHENNAI, Feb 19:** Late actor Vijaykanth founded DMDK on Thursday joined the DMK-led Secular Progressive Alliance here for the upcoming Tamil Nadu assembly polls, ending weeks of political speculation.

DMDK's move came amidst reports that the opposition AIADMK was also actively wooing the party to its led NDA. Key NDA constituent BJP slammed DMDK, saying while it has boarded a "sinking ship," Vijaykanth's "athma (soul) will not forgive" the party for forging ties with the DMK.

Incidentally, this was the first time the two parties have forged an electoral alliance. DMDK joined hands with the J Jayalitha-led AIADMK for the 2011 polls where the opposition combine, which also included the Left parties, trounced the DMK, relegating it to the third position in the 234-member TN assembly. With 29 MLAs, Vijaykanth became the Leader of Opposition then.

On Thursday, DMDK top leaders sealed the alliance at the DMK headquarters Anna Arivalayam here in the presence of Chief Minister and party president M K Stalin.

DMDK general secretary Premalatha Vijaykanth, accompanied by senior party functionaries, including its treasurer and her brother L K Sudheesh, called on Stalin to formalise the partnership. During the brief interaction, the DMK chief presented a shawl to both the leaders of the DMDK.

Premalatha presented a flower bouquet to the CM and posed for a group photograph with DMK MP Kanimozhi and deputy CM Udhayanidhi Stalin to mark the formal entry into the alliance.

In a social media post, Stalin said, "It brings me immense joy that the DMDK, founded by Captain Vijaykanth and a man who had unwavering love for Kalaikann (late DMK patriarch M Karunanidhi), has joined the Sec-

ular Progressive Alliance." The DMDK founder is fondly addressed as 'Captain.'

"I warmly welcome sister Premalatha Vijaykanth, who is now skillfully leading the party founded by Captain, along with their party supporters. Let this bond of goodwill continue to contribute to the progress and prosperity of Tamil Nadu," he said, sharing images of the DMDK leaders joining the DMK-led alliance.

He emphasised the objective of ensuring the continuation of the "Dravidian model governance," of inclusive growth.

Later, addressing reporters, Premalatha said, "DMDK has forged an alliance with the DMK. We have joined the alliance after listening to our party supporters. We have formed an alliance at this time when Captain is not there with us."

"This alliance should have been formed in 2016. But, after a delay of 10 years we have joined the DMK alliance. With the blessings of both Captain and Kalaikann, we have forged a partnership with the DMK," she said. In 2016, DMDK led the multi-party "Makkal Nala Kootani" (People's Welfare Alliance) that had the Left parties, DMDK and VCK as its constituents.

To a query, Premalatha said, "a seat-sharing committee will be formed soon by both the parties. They will decide on the seats to contest and the constituencies will be formally announced by brother Stalin."

She added that the alliance was formed after consultation with the party functionaries. "All our party cadres supported this (alliance). This time, they felt that we must align with the DMK. That is their decision, and it is my decision as well. That is the primary reason we are joining hands with the DMK."

"You all know that the DMDK was founded in 2006 by actor Vijaykanth and he (Vijaykanth) alone earned a vote share of 8.33 per cent," she recalled.

In 2021 assembly polls, DMDK partnered with TTV Dhinakaran's Amma Makkal Munnetra Kazhagam and in 2024 Lok Sabha polls, the party was part of the AIADMK-led alliance.

Currently, the DMK-led alliance comprises the Congress, CPI (M), VCK, Vaiko-led MDMK, Manithaneya Makkal Katchi (MMK), Kongunadu Makkal Desiya Katchi (KMDK) and Tamilaga Vazhuvirimai Katchi.

Meanwhile, Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam leader Vaiko hailed the development as "sweet news".

"We happily welcome them. The Secular Progressive Alliance gets strengthened with this alliance. Victory for the DMK-led alliance has been confirmed with this," the DMDK founder told reporters in Madurai.

Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi (VCK) Leader Thol Thirumavalavan took to social media to welcome the new entrant and said DMDK's inclusion would pave the way for a "resounding victory" in the assembly elections.

The BJP Tamil Nadu unit reacted sharply and criticised the move as a "betrayal" of the DMDK founder's legacy.

The movement created by Captain joining the anti-people DMK, will "never be forgiven by the Captain's Soul," it said on its social media handle.

"Captain Vijaykanth has been fighting against the evil force DMK. The DMK has been humiliating Captain Vijaykanth..." the official social media account of BJP Tamil Nadu unit said.

Speaking to reporters in Vellore, BJP Leader Tamilisai Sounderrajan said, "As far as I am concerned, they (DMDK) have boarded a sinking ship. Invoking the legacy of Captain, they have forced their cadres to act as captains of a vessel that is already going down." (PTI)

## Senior Congress MLA K Babu steps down from electoral politics

**KOCHI, Feb 19:** Senior Congress leader and Tripunithura MLA K Babu on Thursday announced that he would not contest the upcoming Assembly elections, stepping down from electoral politics.

Addressing a press meet here, Babu said he was withdrawing from contesting elections for personal reasons. He said the party leadership had requested him to contest again, but he informed them of his decision not to enter the fray.

"I have told the party leadership that I would not contest the election," he said.

Babu said he had contested seven Assembly elections since 1991 and won six of them. (PTI)

## History would've been different without Shivaji Maharaj: Fadnavis

**PUNE, Feb 19:** Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Thursday praised the visionary leadership of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj in establishing "swarajya", saying history would have been different without him. The forts of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj are heritage sites, a fact now recognised by the world, Fadnavis said, addressing a gathering during the 396th birth anniversary celebration of the Marathi warrior king at the Shivneri Fort in Pune district.

Fadnavis, Deputy CMs Eknath Shinde and Sunetra Pawar paid tribute to Shivaji Maharaj in Shivneri, where he was born in 1630.

Several other leaders from the state and a large number of followers of Shivaji Maharaj gathered at the fort to celebrate Shiv Jayanti.

Fadnavis extended greetings on the occasion, expressing hope that Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj's blessings and inspiration will continue to guide the people of the state.

"If Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj had not been there, history would have been very different. Maharaj united Mavalas (foot soldiers) from 18 different castes and formed a force, resulting in the establishment of swarajya (self-rule)," he said. Shivaji Maharaj was the first ruler to understand where the enemy would come from. Anticipating threats via the sea route, he built sea forts to secure the state, the CM noted. (PTI)

## National Herald case: Delhi HC to hear on Mar 9 ED plea against Gandhis

**NEW DELHI, Feb 19:** The Delhi High Court on Thursday listed for hearing on March 9 a plea by the ED challenging the order of the trial court that refused to take cognisance of its chargesheet against Congress leaders Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi and others in the National Herald related money laundering case.

Justice Swarana Kanta Sharma granted time to the Gandhis and others to file their replies.

Solicitor General Tuskar Mehta, appearing for the Enforcement Directorate (ED), objected to the request made by the counsel for the respondent leaders for additional time to file responses, saying notice was served to them two months ago.

Termining it a "neat question of law", he said the case has to be argued on law and not facts, and the findings of the trial court were "coming in the way" of other cases. The reasons given by the trial

court to refuse taking cognisance in the case were "patently perverse", the solicitor general said.

On December 22, the high court had issued notice to the Gandhis and others on the main petition as well as on the ED's application seeking a stay on the December 16, 2025 trial court order, which held that cognisance of the agency's complaint in the case was "impermissible in law" as it was not founded on an FIR.

Besides Gandhis, the high court had also issued notices to Suman Dubey, Sam Pitroda, Young Indian, Dotex Merchandise Pvt Ltd and Sunil Bhandari on the ED's plea.

The ED has accused Sonia and Rahul Gandhi, as well as late Congress leaders Motilal Vora and Oscar Fernandes, along with Suman Dubey, Sam Pitroda, and a private company, Young Indian, of conspiracy and money laundering. It has been alleged that they acquired properties worth approxi-



mately Rs 2,000 crore belonging to Associated Journals Limited (AJL), which publishes the National Herald newspaper.

It further alleged that the Gandhis held the majority 76 per cent shares in Young Indian, which "fraudulently" usurped the assets of AJL in exchange for a Rs 90 crore loan.

In its order, the trial court has

said that an investigation and the consequent prosecution complaint (equivalent to a chargesheet) pertaining to the offence of money laundering is "not maintainable" in the absence of an FIR for the offence mentioned in the schedule to the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).

It said the agency's probe stemmed from a private complaint and not an FIR and despite receiving the complaint made by BJP leader Subramanian Swamy and the consequent summoning order in 2014, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) refrained from registering an FIR in relation to the alleged scheduled offence.

The ED, in its plea, has claimed that the trial court order has in effect given a hall pass to a category of money launderers only on the ground that the scheduled offence is reported by a private individual by way of a complaint to a magistrate.

It claimed there are such grave allegations levelled against Gandhis and others which cannot be brushed aside lightly by relying upon judicial precedents cited to conclude that the ingredients of the criminal offences alleged are lacking.

"The sole ground given for declining cognisance is that a prosecution complaint filed by an authorised officer under the PMLA

cannot be based on a scheduled offence emanating from a private complaint filed by a private individual and such scheduled offence must be registered only by a law enforcement agency, that is, either by way of an FIR by the police or a complaint by a person authorised to investigate the scheduled offence," the plea said.

The ED said the special judge has failed to appreciate that cognisance taken by a competent court on a private complaint stands on a much higher footing than a mere FIR registered by police wherein there is a possibility that cognisance may be declined after filing of a chargesheet by police.

"In the present matter, cognisance of the private complaint constituting the scheduled offence had already been taken by the competent court. Hence, the scheduled offence stood on a much higher pedestal than a mere FIR lodged by police," it added. (PTI)

## Naxal-affected districts in India reduce to 7 in latest review



**NEW DELHI, Feb 19:** A fresh review of the regions affected by Left Wing Extremism (LWE) has brought down the number of affected districts in the country to seven from eight, a development that aligns with the Union government's declaration on ending Naxal menace by March 2026.

The Ministry of Home Affairs has recently issued the new categorisation to all Naxal-affected states with effect from February 9, officials told PTI.

A comprehensive review of the "National Policy and Action Plan to Address LWE" was undertaken recently by the Union government, analysing 38 districts across nine states including Jharkhand, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Telangana and West Bengal.

The last such review was held in December 2025.

The national action plan regulates resources allocated to these states and districts under two broad heads of the Security-Related Expenditure category. These are "LWE-affected districts" and "legacy and thrust districts".

The LWE-affected districts have three further sub-sets.

According to the new classification, the "LWE-affected districts", where Naxal violence and activities are still being reported, have been reduced to seven from eight recognised in the December 2025 review.

These seven districts are Bijapur, Narayanpur, Sukma, Kanker and Dantewada in Chhattisgarh; West Singhbhum in Jharkhand, and Kandhamal in Odisha.

There are three sub-categories to LWE-affected districts: "most affected districts", "districts of concern" and "other LWE-affected districts".

The "most affected districts" continue to remain the same from the last review -- Bijapur, Narayanpur and Sukma in Chhattisgarh.

There are two "districts of concern", where Naxalism is waning but focused deployment of resources is still required. These are Kanker in Chhattisgarh and West Singhbhum in Jharkhand.

The "other LWE-affected districts" category has seen a reduction of one district from December 2025. At present, there are two districts in the category: Dantewada in Chhattisgarh and Kandhamal in Odisha.

Under the "legacy and thrust districts" category, there are 31 districts across nine states now, as compared to 30 in December 2025.

According to the home ministry's definition, "legacy districts" are those that are no longer LWE-affected but need support in terms of security and development works for some time. (PTI)

# PM Modi, Abu Dhabi Crown Prince commend two-way investment flows

**NEW DELHI, Feb 19:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, Sheikh Khalid bin Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, on Thursday commended the significant two-way investment flows between the two countries and encouraged the UAE Sovereign Wealth Funds to continue to invest in the Indian economy.

Modi and the Crown Prince, who had a meeting on the sidelines of the India AI Impact Summit here, also acknowledged the tremendous progress achieved in bilateral relations in a wide range of sectors, including defence and security, trade and investment, education and cultural cooperation.

The two leaders commended the significant two-way investment flows, and encouraged the UAE Sovereign Wealth Funds to continue to invest in the Indian economy, a statement issued by the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) said.

In this light, both leaders acknowledged the po-

tential of L'Imad as the newest sovereign fund to strengthen this partnership for mutual benefit.

They also discussed collaborative opportunities between India and the UAE in strategic sectors such as space, nuclear energy, technology and innovation.

Both leaders reaffirmed the importance of the India-UAE Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, which is underpinned by strong political, cultural, commercial, energy and people-to-people ties.

They also welcomed the following initiatives, which set the stage for enhancing bilateral cooperation in traditional as well as new areas of cooperation:

\* Finalisation of a MoU between the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare of India and the Ministry of Health and Prevention of the UAE on cooperation in the field of health and medicine. The MoU will promote joint efforts in profes-



February 16-20, 2026, Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi, India

for Development of Advanced Computing, and G42 and the Mohamed Bin Zayed University of AI for deployment of supercomputer cluster in India.

Its term sheet commences implementation of deployment of a supercomputer cluster in India announced jointly by Prime Minister Modi and UAE President Sheikh Mohamed Bin Zayed, during the latter's visit to India on January 19.

The supercomputer cluster will be part of the AI India Mission, making it accessible to both public and private sectors for research, application development, and commercial use.

\* Setting up an office of the Abu Dhabi National Insurance Company at the GIFT City in Gujarat.

Both the leaders noted that February 18 marked exactly four years since the signing of the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), during which bilateral trade and invest-

ment have witnessed "remarkable growth".

The Crown Prince also congratulated Prime Minister Modi on the success of the AI Impact Summit while Modi welcomed the initiative of Switzerland to host the next AI Summit, to be followed by the UAE.

The visit reaffirmed the tradition of regular leadership-level engagement between India and the UAE and also reinforced high-level political commitment to the India-UAE technology partnership, elevating AI and advanced technologies as one of the core pillars of the bilateral relationship, the statement said.

The AI Impact Summit is being held from February 16-20 at the Bharat Mandapam, in which several heads of state, more than 500 global AI leaders, 150 academicians and researchers, and 400 chief technology officers, vice-presidents, and philanthropists are taking part. (PTI)

## Proposed India-US trade deal compromises India's sovereignty, farmers' interests: Sachin Pilot

**MUMBAI, Feb 19:** Senior Congress leader Sachin Pilot on Thursday strongly criticised the proposed trade agreement with the United States, alleging it compromises India's sovereignty, farmers' interests, energy security and economic self-reliance.

Addressing a press conference, the Congress general secretary said trade agreements must be based on equality and mutual public interest, and cannot come at the cost of national interest or sovereignty.

"No trade pact that mortgages the country's interests can be acceptable. Any agreement that attacks the livelihood of farmers, undermines energy security or weakens India's sovereignty and self-reliance will not be accepted by the people," he said.

There have been non-Congress governments earlier, but never before has the "red line" been crossed in trade agreements, bilateral agreements, WTO negotiations or FTAs in a way that put the country's food providers and dairy farmers on the margins, Pilot claimed.

Under the February 6 "framework agreement" with the United States, the Narendra Modi government has agreed to open India's agricultural market to American farm and food products at zero duty, said Pilot while terming this a direct blow to Indian farmers.

He claimed duty-free imports of products such as processed maize



(DDG), sorghum and soybean oil from the US would adversely affect domestic producers across several states, including Maharashtra, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh.

Pilot also raised concerns that cotton imports from the US and changes in textile trade dynamics involving Bangladesh could hurt India's farmers and textile industry.

"Opening imports of fruits, nuts and other agricultural produce from the US without tariffs would impact growers in states such as Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Jammu and Kashmir and across other regions producing bananas, groundnuts and horticulture crops," Pilot added.

Pilot also questioned whether

the agreement could indirectly allow entry of genetically modified agricultural products into India, which he said could threaten seed purity and biodiversity. He criticised provisions related to removal of "non-tariff barriers", claiming they could dilute farm subsidies and regulatory protections.

On energy security, the Congress leader alleged the agreement would restrict India's ability to import crude oil from countries like Russia and Iran and compel purchases from the US at potentially higher prices.

"Such conditions would undermine India's strategic autonomy and raise serious questions about economic independence," he said.

Pilot also criticised a reported clause requiring India to import

USD 500 billion worth of American goods over five years, questioning whether such a commitment aligns with India's economic interests and trade balance.

"People are asking whether this is a strong government or a compelled one, and whether India is moving towards self-reliance or dependence. The country deserves answers from the government on the implications of the proposed agreement," Pilot said.

The Congress leader charged that the Union government has squeezed farmers whenever it has got a chance.

"Forget bonuses, relief or loan waivers, in this deal especially small and marginal farmers have been sacrificed," he alleged.

Pilot charged that the US appears to be exerting pressure on the Indian government, which is not limited to agriculture.

It affects independent foreign policy and energy security of the country, he said, adding how another country can dictate from where India should or should not buy oil.

"This deal is one sided. No government in its right mind would accept and celebrate such a deal. Unless there is pressure," the Congress leader said.

This government focusses on propaganda, management and public relations rather than accountability, he added. (PTI)

**KOLKATA, Feb 19:** Rebel BJP MLA Bishnu Prasad Sharma joined the ruling TMC on Thursday, delivering a setback to the saffron camp barely two months before the 2026 West Bengal assembly elections and stirring fresh political churn in the Darjeeling Hills.

Sharma, the Kurseong MLA elected on a BJP ticket in 2021, formally joined the TMC at Trinamool Bhavan, the party's headquarters here, in the presence of senior leaders Bratya Basu and Shashi Panja, marking a dramatic turn in his fraught relationship with the BJP over the Gorkhaland issue.

The Gorkha leader's switch assumes added significance with the term of the 294-member West Bengal assembly set to expire in May and Rajya Sabha elections scheduled next month.

With Sharma's exit, the BJP's strength in the assembly has come down to 64, a factor that could weigh on electoral arithmetic in the Upper House polls, where MLAs are the electors. For nearly two years, Sharma had been publicly airing his discontent with the BJP, accusing it of renegeing on promises made to the Gorkhas.

He had repeatedly raised the demand for a separate Gorkhaland state and, at times, even pitched for a separate North Bengal, arguing that the Hills needed focused administrative attention and development. His rebellion became overt



during the 2024 Lok Sabha polls when he contested from Darjeeling as an Independent, opposing the BJP's decision to renominate sitting MP Raju Bista.

The gamble failed electorally, but politically it deepened the fissures.

On Thursday, Sharma declared that he was joining the TMC not for a ticket but to align with Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's politics.

"I am a free bird. I have not disrespected the mandate of the people of Kurseong. Some will criticise me, but I do not care," he said.

Accusing the BJP of misleading the Gorkhas, he said, "For 17 years, the Gorkha people have been living in darkness. The BJP is showing them a torch and calling it the sun. Should I play the politics of jumla (rhetoric) with my electorate? The BJP will do nothing for the Gorkhas."

In a pointed attack on the Centre, he alleged that funds meant for Bengal were blocked. "Yet development did not stop.

Mamata Banerjee is the only leader who can challenge today's degrading nationwide politics," he said, adding that he had been "forced to indulge in communal slogans" in his previous party despite believing that "humanity is the only religion".

Sharma also alleged that the Centre's interlocutor on the Hills issue lacked official sanction and was being projected before elections to "mislead" people once again.

His criticism of the BJP had earlier put him at odds with his party during a rare moment of consensus in the assembly.

A few years ago, when the TMC government moved a resolution opposing any attempt to bifurcate West Bengal, the BJP, despite accusing the ruling party of politicising the issue, supported the motion in a rare show of bonhomie.

Sharma, however, had opposed the resolution and continued to advocate for Gorkhaland, going against the broader political messaging at the time. (PTI)

## Congress resolve for welfare, economic empowerment of all remains firm: Kharge

**NEW DELHI/HYDERABAD, Feb 19:** Days after the Congress won the Telangana local body polls, the party's top brass held a review meeting with state leaders, with AICC chief Mallikarjun Kharge asserting that its resolve for social welfare, economic empowerment, and justice for all remains firm.

The meeting, held at Kharge's residence at 10, Rajaji Marg in Delhi, was attended by Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi and Congress general secretary (organisation) K C Venugopal, among others.

Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy, Deputy Chief Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka, Telangana Pradesh Congress Committee president Mahesh Kumar Goud, and Telangana Minister for Public Enterprises and Minority Welfare Mohammad Azharuddin were also present.

In a post on X, Kharge said, "After our emphatic victory in the Telangana local body elections, we held a comprehensive review with @INC\_Telangana leaders and ministers to chart the road ahead and advance the vision of Prajaya Telangana."

"Our resolve for social welfare, economic empowerment, and justice for all remains firm and is reflected

in our guarantees. We will continue striving to realise the aspirations of every citizen and build a truly inclusive Telangana," he said after the meeting.

In a boost to the Reddy-led government, the Congress scored an emphatic victory in the municipal elections in Telangana, while the BRS and BJP also made their presence felt.

Of the 116 municipalities and seven municipal corporations where elections were held on February 11, the ruling Congress secured mayoral posts in five corporations and chairperson posts in 89 municipalities.

Chief Minister Revanth Reddy said the meeting discussed in detail the action plan required to further strengthen the Congress in Telangana, the development and welfare programmes implemented by the government over the past two years, and the results of the recent municipal and gram panchayat elections. State Congress president Mahesh Kumar Goud told reporters in Delhi that the national leadership expressed satisfaction with the poll results.

He quoted Kharge as saying that the municipal election results reflect public approval of the government's welfare and development programmes. (PTI)



## Alliance partners welcome DMDK into DMK fold, BJP slams Premalatha Vijayakanth's move

**CHENNAI, Feb 19:** Parties in the DMK-led SPA on Thursday welcomed DMDK joining the alliance, while the BJP slammed the move, stating that the "soul of Vijayakanth will not forgive" the party for forging ties with the DMK.

Earlier in the day, the late actor Vijayakanth, founded DMDK, joined the Secular Progressive Alliance here for the upcoming Tamil Nadu assembly polls.

Tamil Nadu Congress said DMDK forming an alliance with the DMK is a "significant development" in the state politics. TNCC president K Selvaputhagai said, "In view of the forthcoming assembly election, DMDK joining the DMK is a significant development in Tamil Nadu politics."

"I welcome the decision taken by (DMDK General Secretary) Premalatha Vijayakanth and DMDK executives for taking a great decision. I congratulate. This

alliance was formed with the aim of prioritizing social justice, secularism, democratic values that will have the power to fulfill the people's expectations," he wrote in a social media post.

"Formed for the welfare, progress and prosperous future of the state, this alliance will surely achieve victory," he said.

Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (MDMK) leader Vaiko, another ally of the SPA, hailed the development as 'sweet news'.

"We happily welcome them. The SPA gets strengthened by this alliance. Victory for the DMK-led alliance has been confirmed with this," he told reporters in Madurai.

However, the Tamil Nadu BJP unit reacted sharply and criticised the move as a 'betrayal' of the DMDK founder's legacy.

The movement created by the Captain joining the anti-people DMK, will "never be forgiven by

the Captain's Soul", it said on its social media handle. The DMDK founder is fondly addressed as 'Captain.' BJP leader Tamilisai Soundararajan said, "As far as I am concerned, they (DMDK) have boarded a sinking ship. Invoking the legacy of Captain, they have forced their cadres to act as captains of a vessel that is already going down."

Tamil Maanila Congress (TMC) chief G K Vasan, who is part of NDA in Tamil Nadu, said the alliance between the DMDK and the DMK was against the expectations of the people.

"As long as Captain was alive, he never formed an alliance with the DMK. People will not accept this alliance," he told reporters in Tiruchirappalli. Actor-Politician Vijay led-Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK) said not even one per cent of the people will accept this DMDK-DMK alliance. (PTI)

## DRDO conducts key test for Gaganyaan drogue parachute

**NEW DELHI, Feb 19:** India's human spaceflight programme Gaganyaan has achieved a key milestone with the DRDO conducting a test that proved India's expertise in designing and manufacturing high-strength ribbon parachutes, the defence ministry said on Thursday.

The test was conducted on February 18 at the Rail Track Rocket Sled (RTRS) facility of the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) at the Terminal Ballistics Research Laboratory (TBRL) in Chandigarh, the ministry said in a statement.

"India's human spaceflight programme has achieved a key milestone with the successful qualification level load test of drogue parachute for the Gaganyaan programme," it said. The test proved India's expertise in designing and manufacturing high strength ribbon parachutes, the ministry said. (PTI)

## Withdraw 'disrespectful' remark against Rahul Gandhi and apologise: Pilot asks Rijju

**MUMBAI, Feb 19:** Congress leader Sachin Pilot on Thursday hit out at Union minister Kiren Rijju for passing a "disrespectful and inappropriate" remark against Rahul Gandhi, and asked him to apologise for it. He was answering a query regarding Rijju's reported statement in which he described Gandhi as the "most dangerous person" for India's security, and a purported video of a man claiming to be from Karni Sena issuing death threats to the Congress leader.

Addressing a press conference here, Pilot said, "When ordinary journalists criticise the government, they face FIRs and jail. But when threats are issued against the Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha (Rahul Gandhi), there is silence. This shows the government's intention. LoP is a constitutional position. To describe him as a security threat is inappropriate and disrespectful. Even as such open threats are being made, the government is not taking any action."

"The statement 9against Gandhi) should be withdrawn and an apology should be issued," the Congress general secretary said, adding that it is the job of the LoP to seek accountability from the government and ask ques-

tions. To a query on the plane crash in which Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar was killed on January 28, Pilot said, "I do not want to speculate. There should be a transparent, time-bound inquiry. If there are doubts, a high-level investigation should clarify facts."

When asked about the demand for leadership change in the opposition INDIA bloc, he said, "Leadership decisions are internal matters. The alliance worked remarkably well in the last Lok Sabha election. The gap in numbers between the INDIA bloc and the NDA was not very wide. We are working together strongly and will continue to do so."

The Congress has been helming the INDIA bloc, a coalition of Opposition parties formed before the 2024 Lok Sabha elections to counter the ruling BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA). However, voices from disgruntled Congress members and those associated with the UPA dispensation suggested that the leadership of the opposition alliance should be given to West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee or Tamil Nadu CM M K Stalin. (PTI)

## NGT forms panel, seeks comprehensive plan to protect coastal erosion of Sunderbans

**NEW DELHI, Feb 19:** The National Green Tribunal has formed a three-member panel to prepare a comprehensive plan for protecting the coastal erosion of the Sunderbans in West Bengal, while underlining that adhoc measures would not suffice.

The tribunal took note of a report by the state's environment department that the "Gangetic alluvial delta is facing acute erosion along the coasts". It also noted that the Geological Survey of India (GSI) has submitted a report revealing that the Sunderbans "collectively lost over 250 sq km of land between 1969 and 2019".

The green body was hearing a matter regarding erosion along the Sunderbans coast, especially on Ghoramara Island, and the issue of protecting the surrounding mangrove forest.

In an order dated February 17, a bench of NGT Chairperson Justice Prakash Shrivastava and expert member A Senthil Vel noted the replies filed by the state government's environment department, GSI and West Bengal Coastal Zone Management Authority.

Flagging some "ad hoc measures", the tribunal said these would not yield fruitful results in the long run and hence, a comprehensive approach was required.

It constituted a joint committee comprising the director general of forests, the state's principal chief conservator of forests and a



representative from the Bhubaneswar regional office of the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.

"The joint committee will collect all the relevant facts and will prepare a comprehensive plan for the protection of the mangrove forest in the areas under consideration in its original application. It will also suggest

steps that can be taken for the protection of the coastal erosion in that area, and further enhancing the mangrove coverage," the tribunal said.

It said the committee will complete the exercise within six months and submit a report. The report has to mention the agencies responsible for the implementation of the

scheme along with timeline.

Regarding the reply submitted by the state's environment department, the tribunal noted that it disclosed that "the Gangetic alluvial delta is facing acute erosion along the coasts" and that Ghoramara Island had been facing "erosion activity".

"Some of the reasons for the same have also been disclosed. This affidavit further refers to the studies revealing that the islands of the Sunderbans are vulnerable and some of them are susceptible to erosion," the NGT said.

It also noted GSI has submitted a report revealing "Indian Sunderbans have collectively lost over 250 sq km of land between 1969 and 2019, particularly from the sea-facing and southern estuarine zones".

"In Ghoramara Island, there is a reduction in the land area from 8.59 sq km in 1969 to 3.83 sq km in 2019," it said.

The tribunal said that the state's Coastal Zone Management Authority had filed the affidavit mentioning certain protection measures, but it did not disclose any comprehensive plan to protect the mangroves in that region and to prevent or control the erosion of the islands or coastal areas.

The matter has been posted for further proceedings on May 28.

The NGT is hearing the matter after taking suo motu cognisance of a news report regarding the erosion. (PTI)

Viksit Bharat  
Viksit Arunachal

GOVERNMENT OF  
ARUNACHAL PRADESH

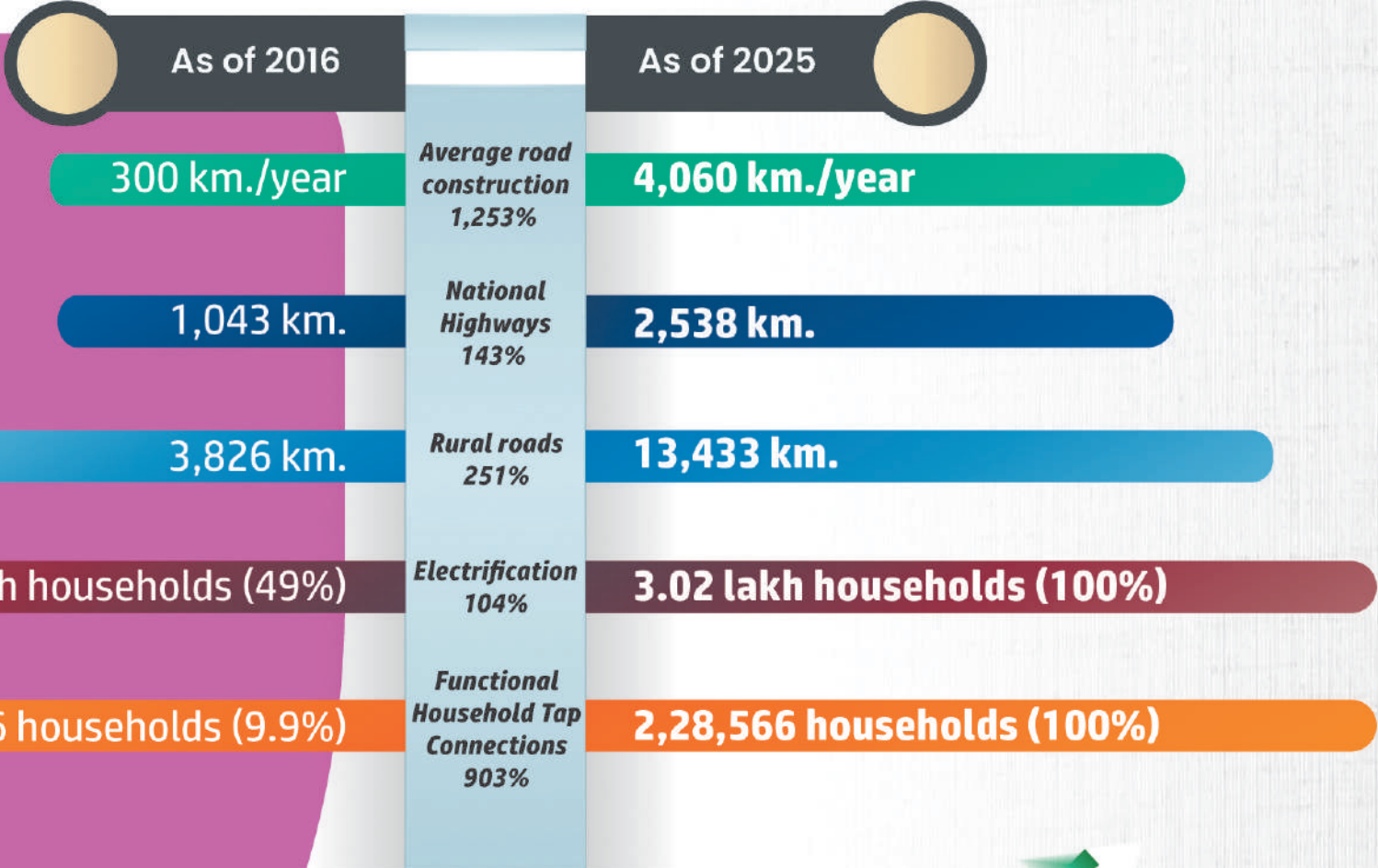


Arunachal Pradesh celebrating

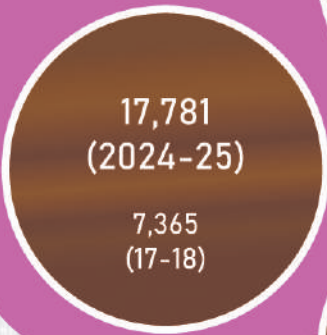
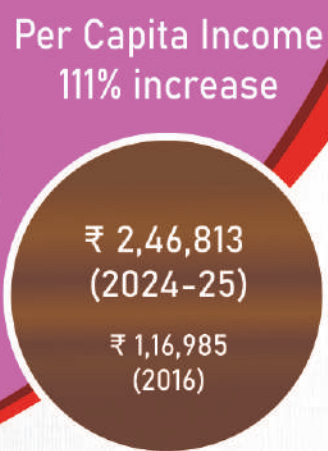
# 40th Statehood Day

40 Years of Glory; A Future of Infinite Possibilities

**Arunachal  
Rising –  
Faster, Higher,  
Stronger**



GSDP 134.74% increase



HYDROPOWER

Tato-II (700 MW)  
HEO (240 MW) &  
Tato-I (186 MW)  
approved



TEACHER POSTING AS PER NORMS

90% (2025)  
24% (2016)



INSTITUTIONAL DELIVERIES

79.2% (2025)  
52.5% (2016)

JAI HIND, JAI ARUNACHAL

## 'Four and four is a result, you want in the next stage again. So let's just take it one day at a time'

# West Indies brush aside Italy by 42 runs to sign off group stage on high

**KOLKATA, Feb 19:** Skipper Shai Hope's second consecutive fifty and a disciplined performance by bowlers powered West Indies to a comfortable 42-run victory over Italy, ensuring that the Caribbean finished their group stage campaign unbeaten in the T20 World Cup here on Thursday.

Despite a shaky batting performance, the Caribbean pace and spin attack clicked in unison, ensuring a winning momentum heading into the Super Eights from Group C.

Set a target of 166, Italy were bowled out for 123 in 18 overs with Matthew Forde (3/19), Shamar Joseph (4/30) and Gudakesh Motie (2/24) doing the bulk of the damage with the ball for West Indies.

Skipper Hope slammed a 46-ball 75 to guide West Indies to 165/6 after Italy opted to field.

Hope's fluent knock with six fours and four sixes held the innings together, but experienced spinners Ben Manenti (2/37) and Cris-han Kalugamage (2/25) choked the run flow in the back end to keep the total in check.

On a batting-friendly Eden surface with a lightning outfield, where England's 202 was nearly chased down by Italy in the previous game, the target looked underwhelming at the innings break.

But West Indies' bowlers got the job done without much hassle.

"Four and four is a result, you want in the next stage again. So let's just take it one day at a time," said Hope on his team's unbeaten run in the tournament so far.

Young pace-bowling all-rounder Forde,



who had conceded just 10 runs and taken a wicket against Nepal in Mumbai, set the tone in the powerplay with another tidy spell. He was exceptional with the new ball, returning figures of 2/17 in three overs.

Forde struck in his first over as Justin Mosca was bowled for 2, done in by an indicker. He then removed Syed Naqvi with a hard-length delivery that shaped away as the batter tried to smash and was caught at mid-off.

Shamar Joseph was the pick of the bowlers, using the short-ball strategy smartly. He ended Italy's resistance by taking the key wicket of Grant Stewart in the 15th over, ef-

fectively sealing the contest.

Wily left-arm spinner Motie was outstanding in the middle overs. He foxed the batters with his guile, keeping scoreboard pressure intact and removing JJ Smuts (24) and the in-form Ben (26) just when they were looking to accelerate.

At the halfway stage, with Ben at the crease, the chase still looked possible. But Italy kept losing wickets after the early blows from Forde.

The successive dismissals of Stewart and Manenti — who had shared a blistering 92-run stand off 48 balls against England — hurt

them badly.

Italy thus finished their campaign with one win from four matches, their lone victory coming against Nepal.

West Indies, who had already sealed their Super Eights berth, topped the group with all wins.

Put in, West Indies lost in-form Shimron Hetmyer (1) for a single-digit score for the first time in the World Cup, while opener Brandon King (4) also fell cheaply in the powerplay, but the Windies skipper batted effortlessly.

Italy struck with left-arm seamer Ali Hasan removing Brandon King (4) with his first ball. But Hope, fresh from an unbeaten 61 against Nepal, counterattacked in style drilling a wide half-volley from fast bowler Thomas Draca through extra-cover.

Hasan then erred in line as Hope crashed two more fours through the off side before pulling him for a six over square leg in a 14-run over.

Hope brought up a 28-ball fifty while striking four sixes and six fours in a 46-ball knock, but Roston Chase's sluggish 24 off 25 balls (2x4) hurt the momentum.

It dragged the Windies innings down, and even as Hope got boundaries at will, Chase looked tentative, and struggled to rotate the strike before holing out to deep forward square.

However, the Caribbeans managed to post enough for their bowlers to have a good chance against the relatively inexperienced rivals. (PTI)

## Skipper Harry Manenti warns Italy's 'trajectory' may stall without opportunities

**KOLKATA, Feb 19:** Stand-in captain Harry Manenti did not hide his frustration, saying Italy are on a strong "trajectory" but it could "drop off" if they do not get enough regular cricket at this level.

Italy's T20 World Cup debut was over with West Indies on Thursday securing a facile 42-run in their last Group C fixture to cruise to Super Eights with four wins out of four.

Italy had many memories to cherish, including a win against Nepal and giving England a scare while defending 202.

They also had their moments against West Indies here on Thursday when they restricted them to 165/6 after the two-time champions were looking at 200-plus total.

"It's not always the big dogs who win those games and who challenge and I think it's exciting for the World Cup," Manenti said in the post-match interaction.

"I think for the Associated Nations it is hard, and it's not going to change overnight. It's a work in progress for a lot of them."

Having pushed top Test teams close, Manenti felt the bigger challenge now is making sure their



progress doesn't stall due to lack of opportunities.

"We're on a really good trajectory. It'd be nice for us to keep tracking in that trajectory and not just drop off like a lot of countries and a lot of teams have over the years," said the skipper.

"If it stops now, for other Associate nations as well, not just us, but if it stops now, it's very hard for us to continue to break through like we are."

With their next T20 assignment likely only in 2027, Manenti underlined the challenge associate nations face, saying the progress made could stall if opportunities do not come consistently at this level. (PTI)

## Verona prepares its ancient arena for the Olympics closing ceremony on Sunday

**VERONA (ITALY), Feb 19:** A city forever associated with Romeo and Juliet, Verona will host the final act of the Milan Cortina Winter Olympics on Sunday inside the ancient Roman Arena, where some 1,500 athletes will celebrate their feats against a backdrop of Italian music and dance.

Acclaimed ballet dancer Roberto Bolle has been rehearsing for the closing ceremony inside the Arena di Verona this week under a veil of secrecy, along with some 350 volunteers, for a spectacle titled "Beauty in Motion," which frames beauty as something inherently dynamic.

"Beauty cannot be fixed in time. This ancient monument is beautiful if it is alive, if it continues to change," said the ceremony's producer, Alfredo Accatino. "This is what we want to narrate: An Italy that is changing, and also the beauty of movement, the beauty of sport and the beauty of nature."

Other headlining Italian artists include singer Achille Lauro and DJ Gabry Ponte, whose hits could be heard blasting from the Arena during rehearsals this week.

Inside a tent serving as a dressing room, seamstresses put the finishing touches on costumes inspired by the opera world as volunteers prepped for the stage.

"It's really special to be inside the Arena," said Matilde Ricchi-



uto, a student from a local dance school. "Usually, I am there as a spectator and now I get to be a star, I would say. I feel super special."

The Arena has been a venue for popular entertainment since it was first built in 1 A.D., predating the larger Roman Colosseum by decades. Accatino said the ancient monument will produce some surprises from within its vast tunnels.

"Under the Arena there is a mysterious world that hides everything that has happened. At a certain point, this world will come out," Accatino said, promising "something very beautiful."

The ceremony will open with athletes parading triumphantly through Piazza Bra into the Arena, which once served as a stage for gladiator fights and hunts for exotic beasts.

The closing ceremony stage was inspired by a drop of water, meant to symbolically unite the Olympic mountain venues with the Po River Valley, where Milan and Verona are located, while serving as a reminder that the Winter Games are being reshaped by climate change.

While the opening ceremony was held in Milan, the other host city, Cortina d'Ampezzo, nestled in the Dolomite mountains, was considered too small and remote to host the closing ceremony. Verona, in the same Veneto region as Cortina, was chosen for its unique venue and relatively central location, said Maria Laura Iacone, the local organizing committee's head of ceremonies.

"Only Italians can use such monuments to do special events, so this is very unique, very rare," Iacone said of the Arena.

She promised a more intimate evening than the opening ceremony in Milan's San Siro soccer stadium, with about 12,000 people attending the closing compared with more than 60,000 for the opening.

Iacone said about 1,500 of the nearly 3,000 athletes participating in the most spread-out Winter Games in Olympic history are expected to drive a little over an hour from Milan and between two and four hours from the six mountain venues. (AP)

## The former powerhouse has failed to find any form of stability in a succession of coaches and crises

# Familiar face returns to Marseille where Habib Beye takes charge amid a title slide



**MARSEILLE (FRANCE), Feb 19:** Marseille is looking to reignite its season with a new coach on board.

The nine-time French champion appointed Habib Beye to replace Roberto De Zerbi following a bad patch of form that saw the club exit the Champions League and drop 12 points behind Ligue 1 leader Lens.

Beye, a former Senegal international who played for Marseille, will be in charge of Friday's trip to Red Star.

After leading Red Star to promotion to Ligue 2, Beye spent the last year and a half as the Rennes coach. The club sacked Beye this month.

### Key matchups

Marseille has failed to win its past three league games, badly damaging its title hopes. The results including a 5-0 mauling at PSG have left fans fuming. The club hopes Beye, a disciplinarian advocating ball possession and a strong attacking identity, will produce a jolt.

Beye's hiring "refocuses us on the challenges we still need to tackle between now and the end of the season," Marseille owner Frank McCourt said.

Since McCourt bought Marseille in 2016, the former powerhouse has failed to find any form of stability in a succession of coaches and

crises. It hasn't won the league title since 2010.

PSG abandoned the top spot to Lens after losing to Rennes 3-1 last week. Luis Enrique's team bounced back with a 3-2 win at Monaco in the first leg of their Champions League play-off and hosts last-placed Metz on Saturday. Lens welcomes Monaco the same day.

Third-placed Lyon, on a stunning 13-match winning run, plays at Strasbourg on Sunday.

### Players to watch

With the World Cup in his country looming, former Arsenal striker Folarin Balogun is hitting form at the right time. The American forward scored twice inside 18 minutes against PSG and has 10 goals and four assists this season.

At PSG, the man in form is Désiré Doué.

After his team quickly fell behind by two goals against Monaco midweek, Doué came to the rescue to turn things around. The France international was relentless and left his mark on the match after coming on as a replacement for Ousmane Dembélé. He first reduced the deficit, played a role in Achraf Hakimi's equalizer then netted the winner.

Dembélé is expected to miss PSG's match against Metz because of an injured left calf.

PSG was sanctioned with the partial closure of the Auteuil stand for two matches and a 10,000 euros (\$11,800) fine by the disciplinary committee of the French league following banners displayed and insults directed by supporters during the match against Marseille on Feb. 8, at the Parc des Princes. There were brief discriminatory chants about Marseille at the start of the game and the referee stopped play for about one minute around the 70th. (AP)

## All-round Australia defeat India by 19 runs in 2<sup>nd</sup> match to level women's T20I series



**CANBERRA, Feb 19:** A record opening stand between Georgia Vull and Beth Mooney paved the way for Australia to level a three-match T20I series with a 19-run victory against India in the second match here on Thursday.

Vull and Mooney added 128 runs for the first wicket to register Australia's highest opening stand against India in T20Is, with the hosts posting 163 for 5.

India, despite making a sparkling start to the chase, crumbled in the end to finish at 144 for nine. Ashleigh Gardner claimed 3/22, while Kim Garth, Annabel Sutherland and Australia captain Sophie Molineux took two wickets each.

The series-deciding third T20I will be played at the Adelaide Oval on Saturday.

India were 65/1 in the ninth over when their slide began as the visitors lost six wickets for seven runs towards the end.

India were off the blocks quickly as Shafali Verma's early fireworks was followed by Smriti Mandhana opening up. The two Indian openers put on 54 in the powerplay to put the team on track of the chase.

But Molineux applied the brakes when she pinned Shafali leg-before for a 23-ball 29 (5 fours) and Gardner got the key wicket of Jemimah Rodrigues (4).

India's run-rate slowed down with the two consecutive wickets and a third followed soon when Mandhana was caught sharply down the leg by Mooney off Garth.

With India struggling at 71 for three, skipper Harmanpreet Kaur (30) and Richa Ghosh (19) joined forces and did well to add 55 runs for the fourth wicket.

However, the asking rate kept moving up which in turn forced the Indians to take unwanted risks. Harmanpreet was caught

by her counterpart Molineux off Garth on the penultimate ball of the 17th over at extra cover, and three balls later, Ghosh was stumped off Gardner.

India's hopes suffered another big blow when Gardner had Deepti Sharma (0) caught by Sutherland in the 18th over, with India slipping to 128 for six.

Earlier, Vull (88) and Mooney (46) recorded the best-ever opening partnership for Australia of 128 runs against India as the hosts posted 163 for five.

Arundhati Reddy, who saw a catch being dropped off her final ball in the innings off Ashleigh Gardner (10 not out), once again delivered the goods dismissing both the Australian openers to return 4-0-30-2.

Vull and Mooney bettered the first-wicket stand in women's T20Is for Australia against India, which was of 115 runs set by the pair of Alyssa Healy and Mooney in March 2020 at Melbourne.

With the right-handed Vull taking charge of the scoring from the word go, the senior pro Mooney played a perfect second fiddle but missed her milestone by a narrow margin.

Vull made the most of some wayward bowling from Indians to strike 11 fours and one six, scoring 88 off only 57 balls. She picked gaps with precision and displayed an array of strokes on either side of the wickets to get her runs.

Mooney was caught at mid-on by Shafali Verma off Arundhati on the penultimate ball of the 15th over. The left-handed opening batter struck four fours during her 39-ball knock for 46 runs.

**Brief Scores:** Australia Women 163 for 5 in 20 overs (Georgia Vull 88, Beth Mooney 46; Arundhati Reddy 2/30) beat India Women 144/9 Harmanpreet Kaur 36; Ashleigh Gardner 3/22 by 19 runs. (PTI)

## Shivam Dube: India's silent hero this T20 World Cup



**AHMEDABAD, Feb 19:** India all-rounder Shivam Dube is rapidly enhancing his credentials as a premier power-hitter with impactful performances in the ongoing T20 World Cup.

After crucial cameos on tricky pitches against Namibia and Pakistan, Dube overcame a slow start to provide much-needed momentum to India's innings in the middle overs against the Netherlands here on Wednesday.

Tested by off-spinner Aryan Dutt initially and managing six off his first 11 balls, Dube stepped on the accelerator to end with a match-winning 31-ball 66 including half a dozen sixes.

Playing in his second T20 World Cup, Dube was always known for his siting-hitting prowess against the spinners but now he has made himself equally effective against the pacers.

His improved play against fast bowlers was on display against the Netherlands as he read the pace variations well from the hand of Logan van Been to dispatch him for three maximums.

Dube's game against the short ball has improved by a few notches and he credits it to the hard yards he put

in after moving to Chennai Super Kings in the IPL.

Such is his conviction that he doesn't get fazed by a few dot balls, as he knows the big hits will come eventually.

"Yes, obviously when you play dot balls in T20, you get pressure. But as a player, as a batsman, I know at that time that maybe right now if I am at 2 runs in 10 balls, but in the next 5 balls, if I hit 2 sixes, it will be covered.

"So that thing always stays in my mind. Yes, the wicket was gone so it is important that we have to build partnership so for that even if 2-4 balls are hit it is fine but later it gets covered," said Dube after bagging the player of the match award.

He attributed his success also to getting more game time in pressure situations.

"I have got the opportunity to play in that situation. So when you play, you learn always. So I have played and I have become little smart in that situation. So I know that yes, this bowler can come to me on this ball.

"These are the strengths. I think the fast bowler can bowl me short, slower, but I've worked really hard towards all those things and yes, now I'm getting better," he said. Dube's confidence levels are sky high and that reflected in the way he spoke about his maiden T20 World Cup fifty.

"So today was something I felt that today is my day and I need to be a little smart and I need to push myself and I need to stay till the end, but yes, I need to back my strength as well, so that's what I did and yeah the strength is there that is why I am known as power hitter."

On how CSK changed him as a cricketer, he added: "Yes, when I came to CSK, I was struggling (against short ball). And yes, in that (first) season, I got some runs. But it was important for me to come back strong in next season because I knew that I can dominate in IPL and international cricket as well so in that off-season I worked really hard towards short ball." (PTI)



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**Ranjeet Kr Dass**  
Minister, Panchayat & Rural  
Development, etc., Assam

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