



- Chief Minister Sarma launches Atmanirbhar Assam Abhiyan 2.0
- CEM Debolal Gorlosa inaugurates cancer care facility in Haflong
- India joins US-led 'Pax Silica' alliance
- Youth Congress workers hold 'shirtless protest' at AI Summit, 10 detained

27 YEARS OF DEDICATED JOURNALISM

THE HILLS TIMES

www.thehillstimes.in

PUBLISHED SIMULTANEOUSLY FROM GUWAHATI & DIPHU *Voice of the hills people*

Vol .No. II Issue No. 343 RNI-ASSENG/2023/86488 GUWAHATI, SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 2026 PAGES 12 PRICE ₹ 8



सत्यमेव जयते
Government of Assam

87th CRPF DAY PARADE 2026



(Chief Guest)

Shri Amit Shah

Union Home Minister and Minister of Cooperation

August Presence

Shri Lakshman Prasad Acharya
Governor, Assam

Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma
Chief Minister, Assam

Shri Sarbananda Sonowal
Union Minister, Ports, Shipping
and Waterways

DIPR/D/HLT/303/21-Feb-26

📅 21 February 2026 ⌚ 11:00 AM 📍 Arjun Bhogeswar Baruah Sports Complex, Sarusajai, Guwahati

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India-US interim trade pact likely to be operationalised in April: Goyal

NEW DELHI, Feb 20: An interim trade agreement between India and the US is likely to be signed in March and operationalised in April, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said on Friday.

Earlier this month, India and the US released a joint statement announcing a framework for an interim trade agreement.

To finalise the text of the first phase of the bilateral trade agreement, the chief negotiators of the two countries will meet in Washington next week.

The three-day meeting between the two teams will begin on February 23.

Goyal told reporters here that the pact is expected to be signed next month and may be implemented in April.

US Trade Representative (USTR) Jamieson Greer is likely to visit India in March to sign the agreement.

In an event at the AI Impact Summit here, US Ambassador Sergio Gor said that the India-US trade deal is set to be inked soon.

India on Friday joined the US-led strategic alliance Pax Silica aimed at building a resilient supply chain for critical minerals.

"From the trade deal to Pax Silica to defence cooperation, the potential for our two nations to work together is truly limitless," Gor said in his remarks.

The joint statement, released separately by the two nations earlier this month, lays down the contours of the deal. These now need to be translated into a legal agreement, for which the two sides will meet next week.

The Indian team will be headed by chief negotiator Darpan Jain, who is a joint secretary in the Commerce Ministry.

Under the pact, both sides would extend duty concessions to each other on a number of goods traded between them.

The US has announced that it will reduce the reciprocal tariffs on Indian goods from 25 per cent to 18 per cent. It has already eliminated the 25 per cent punitive tariffs on India for buying Russian crude oil. The move is a big relief to the domestic industry as they were facing steep 50 per cent tariffs by the US.

Goyal expressed hope that an executive order to cut the tariffs to 18 per cent would be issued by the Trump administration this month.

While speaking at the launch of seven components of the ₹ 25,060-crore export promotion mission (EPM), Goyal said the India-US trade agreement has opened huge business opportunities for Indian exporters.

He said that India has protected all the sensitive sectors, including agriculture.

"Now once that rate (50 per cent tariff) comes out to lower than any of our competitors, we are lower than anybody else who is an emerging market or a developing economy, and plus having safeguarded all the sensitive sectors, it's a great win-win solution for both countries," he said.

The minister said that labour-intensive sectors like apparel, leather and marine were suffering from high tariffs.

He also criticised Congress leader Rahul Gandhi for raising concerns about the deal.

Stepping up his attack on the government over the interim US

trade deal, Gandhi said the answer to why Prime Minister Narendra Modi agreed to a deal, where India gives so much and appears to get so little, and makes an "object surrender" lies in the "grips" and "chokes" placed on him.

Gandhi questioned that why the government has agreed to increase US imports by USD 100 billion a year without a reciprocal promise.

"I think he (Gandhi) lives in a world very detached from reality. All of you here are exporters. Were you happy with the 50 per cent tariff? Was your business prospering? Were your jobs safe? Was Tirupur able to export apparel? What was happening to your leather industry where lakhs of workers are working? What had happened to our marine seafood exports? All labour-intensive sectors were suffering," he said.

He added that businesses will prosper at the 18 per cent rate that India negotiated under the trade pact with the US.

It will help boost exports of gems and jewellery, and spices also, he said. On imports from the US, Goyal said India needs high-tech devices like GPUs (Graphics Processing Units), coking coal and aircrafts.

"We need airplanes in India. As our steel production doubles and is slated to double from 140 million to 300 million tonnes in the next 5-6 years, huge investments, almost ₹ 10 lakh crores investments are in the pipeline in the steel industry.

That steel will need coking coal.

"You are all businessmen in this room. Is it better to have two sources of a product or six sources of a product?" he asked.

India needs these products from trusted partners for its economic growth, the minister said, adding that exports will play an important role in the effort to push the country's growth.

"...very clearly, India is on the right track. We make sure that our sensitive defensive interests remain protected. All our agricultural produce in India remains protected from the markets where there is any competition. We ensure that we open our market for consumer benefit," he said.

Through this deal, he said, India has ensured to purchase high-quality pharma products, "super expensive and complicated" medical devices will come to India at lower or zero import duty.

"We are serving 1.4 billion consumers who are also a stakeholder in the development," he added.

According to the joint statement, India has expressed its intention to purchase USD 500 billion of US energy products, aircraft and aircraft parts, precious metals, technology products and coking coal over the next five years.

The reciprocal tariffs on India are now among the lowest compared to its competitor nations.

These countries include China (35 per cent), Thailand (19 per cent), Myanmar (40 per cent), Cambodia (19 per cent), Indonesia (19 per cent), Brazil (50 per cent), and Vietnam (20 per cent). During the April-January period of this fiscal year, the country's exports to the US increased 5.85 per cent to USD 72.46 billion, while imports rose 13.87 per cent to USD 43.92 billion. (PTI)



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AI growth inseparable from semiconductor push: IESA President Ashok Chandak

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 20: India's rapid progress in artificial intelligence is closely linked with its expanding semiconductor ecosystem, India Electronics and Semiconductor Association (IESA) President and CEO Ashok Chandak said at the India AI Impact Summit 2026.

He described the summit as a defining moment highlighting the convergence of AI strategy, semiconductor development and global technology partnerships, with participation from heads of state, ministers, global AI leaders and industry stakeholders.

Chandak said India is positioning itself at the centre of global AI transformation through a comprehensive approach that combines policy frameworks, talent development and infrastructure expansion.

He noted that recent initiatives

include the release of AI governance guidelines, expansion of AI fellowship programmes and strengthening of safety and standards institutions.

On infrastructure, he said India is rapidly scaling sovereign computing capacity, with tens of thousands of GPUs already operational and more planned in the coming months.

He added that large-scale investments projected in AI infrastructure, research and electronics manufacturing are expected to support one of the fastest-growing AI ecosystems globally.

Chandak emphasised that global leadership in AI depends heavily on secure semiconductor supply chains, including advanced chips, packaging, embedded systems and high-performance computing infrastructure.

Adobe to offer Photoshop, Acrobat, Firefly AI tools free for students in India

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 20: Adobe has announced a major initiative to provide free access to its flagship applications — including Photoshop, Acrobat and Firefly AI — to students across India, aimed at strengthening AI skills and supporting the country's growing creator economy.

The announcement was made at the India AI Impact Summit, where the company said the programme will be rolled out through accredited higher education institutions, enabling students to access industry-standard creative and productivity tools along with training, curriculum and certification support.

Officials said the initiative aligns with the Government of India's focus on artificial intelligence and its "Create in India" vision, as well as the Union Budget 2026 goal of generating millions of jobs in the Animation, Visual Effects, Gaming and Comics (AVGC) sector by 2030.

Under the programme, Adobe will partner with NASSCOM FutureSkills Prime to provide AI-first learning modules and certifications free of cost.

The offering will also support the establishment of Content Creator Labs in about 15,000 schools and 500 colleges across the country.

Adobe Chairman and CEO Shantanu Narayen said the initiative aims to equip millions of students with AI-ready creative skills, enabling them to build careers and contribute to India's digital economy.

The company said students will gain access to its generative AI capabilities, including tools designed to produce commercially safe AI-generated content while allowing flexibility to work with multiple AI models within Adobe applications.

India's macroeconomic fundamentals healthy, robust amid volatile financial markets: RBI Guv

MUMBAI, Feb 20: India's macroeconomic fundamentals are healthy and robust amid volatile financial markets, said RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra as all MPC members voted for status quo on policy rates at their meeting earlier this month.

According to the minutes of the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) released by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Friday, as most of the members, including the Governor, agreed that the current rate is "appropriate", considering the current growth-inflation dynamics. The MPC meeting, which was held from February 4 to 6, decided to leave the short-term lending rate (repo) unchanged at 5.25 per cent.

Despite escalating geopolitical tensions and increasing trade frictions posing huge challenges, global growth, supported by a surge in technology-related investments, conducive fiscal and monetary policies, and accommodative financial conditions, is expected to be marginally higher in 2026, minutes quoted Malhotra as saying.

Inflation outcomes may remain divergent across countries. Accordingly, central banks are likely to tread dissimilar policy paths while approaching the end of their easing cycles, he added.

"In the backdrop of large fiscal stimulus and geopolitical uncertainty, global investor sentiments are nervous and financial markets remain volatile," the governor added.

Overall, India's macroeconomic fundamentals are healthy and robust, including the external sector, remain healthy and robust, he said, adding that in terms of the inflation-growth dynamics, "we are in a sim-

ilar or slightly better position than at the last policy".

Growth prospects are looking up while inflation outlook remains broadly unchanged, and several recent developments on the external front have provided room for greater optimism, he said.

"Given the present state of the economy and its outlook — buoyant growth and benign inflation, I feel the current policy rate is appropriate. Accordingly, I vote for continuation of the policy repo rate at 5.25 per cent and retain the neutral stance," Malhotra added.

MPC Member and Deputy Governor Poonam Gupta opined that, underpinned by the continued buoyancy of high-frequency indicators and model-based projections, preliminary estimates of growth for 2026-27 by various agencies have been revised upwards.

The RBI has also slightly raised the real GDP growth projections for Q1 and Q2 of 2026-27, guided by the positive near-term outlook and the trade deals.

"Having already lowered the policy rate by a cumulative 125 bps in four of the last six meetings, with transmission of the last rate cut announced in December 2025 still unfolding, and as the data from the new series is awaited for both GDP and inflation, another rate cut does not seem warranted at this point in time," Gupta said.

Based on a comprehensive review of the domestic macroeconomic conditions and the outlook, the MPC was of the view that the current policy rate was appropriate, and had voted to continue with the existing policy rate.

RBI Executive Director and MPC Member Indranil Bhat-

tacharya, who also voted for retaining the current policy rate at its present level, said that given that inflation, excluding precious metals, is expected to remain benign for the foreseeable future.

He also favoured retaining the neutral stance of the monetary policy as it provides the flexibility to respond appropriately to the evolving situation.

Besides three members from the RBI, the MPC has an equal number of external members. All the external members — Nagesh Kumar, Saugata Bhattacharya, and Ram Singh — favoured continuing with the repo rate of 5.25 per cent.

According to the minutes, Kumar said the economic outlook for the Indian economy has brightened considerably since the December 2025 MPC meeting.

The conclusion of the long-pending EU-India FTA negotiations on January 27, followed quickly by the announcement of the US-India trade deal, has helped to lift the sentiment, which had been depressed by the imposition of 50 per cent tariffs on India's exports by the US since August 2025.

The momentum has been further boosted by the Union Budget 2026-27 proposals, including fostering the manufacturing sector, tourism, services, and the new Data Centres policy, while sustaining the big thrust to the infrastructure capex.

"Together, these developments have lifted India's economic outlook significantly," he added.

Kumar also said the most important implication of the new trade deals is that India is back at the table as the most promising destination for China+1 supply chain restructuring. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 3...

We do not want

with people like Zubeen Garg. "Zubeen Garg always spoke about unity and love. People, to a certain extent, would listen to these attacks, but nobody likes these attacks with such wrong statements," she added.

Instead of such politics, the Assam CM should speak about the development of the state, the Wayanad MP said. "Let him speak about what he has done for them. Let him speak about what he is going to do in the next five years. Today's youths want to know it," she added.

The youths and women want jobs, and today's public cannot be misled so easily with these things, she asserted. "People are seeing how Assam's assets are being handed over to one family and big industrialists. The assets that are being handed over to industrialists belong to the people of Assam. The lands that are being given are people's properties," Vadra claimed. She appealed to the people of Assam, especially the youths, to be aware and choose a politics that would speak positively, work for them and talk about how to make the state strong. "You have seen how much corruption has taken place. This corruption is a betrayal of the people of Assam. This money is not taken from our pockets.

"The people of Assam are seeing this and understanding it. And when they see it, they are also identifying that the time has come for a change," the Congress leader asserted. Vadra, who was in Assam to shortlist Congress candidates for the upcoming assembly polls, made an unscheduled visit to Garg's cremation ground 'Zubeen Khetra' at Sonapur on the outskirts of Guwahati in the morning without any media presence.

She was accompanied by Assam Congress President Gaurav Gogoi, Leader of the Opposition Debabrata Saikia and AICC General Secretary (in-charge of Assam) Jitendra Singh. Later, Vadra said, "We should not take political benefits from these things. This is an emotion. Yesterday also, I spoke to my party workers about it. When Zubeen ji died, we who are not from Assam saw how much people loved and respected him. Every member of each family cried. We saw all these on social media and the news."

Garg's every song, every word had the message of love and unity, and Assam's identity, culture, civilisation, and what Assam is, she added. "I told it yesterday also to my party workers that Zubeen ji was the voice of Assam's soul, Assam's expression. Assam's culture was sung by Zubeen Garg. If you listen, not a single song speaks about hating someone or attacking someone as an enemy," she added.

The Lok Sabha MP said that many people whom she spoke to felt that the everyday talk of violence and attack nowadays is not the culture of Assam. "We are also fighting for the same. In a way, our fight is also to protect Assam's culture and civilisation. And we have to understand this.

"We do not want to use Zubeen Garg for politics at all, and nobody should do it. He was above politics. His attachment to the people was emotional. He was not in politics or wanted to become the CM," she added.

Vadra stressed that people also did not associate with Garg due to politics, but because their hearts also carried the same feelings that the lyricist-singer-composer used to speak about. (PTI)

Cong accused of

roads have been upgraded, hundreds to thousands of bridges have been constructed, and four major new bridges have been dedicated to the people of Assam in the past decade by the 'double-engine' government.

"The BJP has made Assam secure and developed in the last 10 years, and in the next five years, it will make the state flood-free," he said. After the launch programme, the home minister inspected the India-Bangladesh boundary at the Nathanpur border village. Shah also reviewed the security arrangement along the international boundary and directed officials to maintain a strict vigil, officials said. The home minister placed a wreath at the martyrs' memorial in the BSF camp here and inspected the weapons on display, they said.

He also planted a banyan tree near the border. Assam shares a 267.5-km border, both land and riverine, with Bangladesh, covering parts of Dhubri, South Salmara-Mankachar, Cachar, and Karimganj districts.

He concluded his visit to Barak Valley and left for Agartala.

Shah was scheduled to return to Guwahati and attend the CRPF's annual day parade on Saturday at the Arjun Bhogeswar Baruah Sports Complex, being held in the Northeast for the first time.

He will also lay the foundation stone of the new campus of the 10th Assam police battalion at Kachutoli in Sonapur in the afternoon. This is Shah's third visit since December 29 to poll-bound Assam, where the ruling BJP is aiming to retain power for the third consecutive term.

The elections to the 126-member assembly of the state are likely to be held in March-April. (PTI)

Flights may operate

draws inspiration from Assam's biodiversity and cultural heritage, the official said. (PTI)

Priyanka shielding Gaurav

further dismissed allegations made by Himanta Biswa Sarma regarding Gogoi's alleged Pakistan links, stating that such claims would not be accepted by the people of Assam. "The accusations levelled by the Chief Minister against Gaurav Gogoi are not something the people of Assam will believe," she asserted.

Referring to the political atmosphere ahead of the Assembly elections, the Congress leader also alleged that the Chief Minister was resorting to fear-mongering as the polls draw closer. She strongly defended Congress MP Gaurav Gogoi, terming him a positive leader who believes in value-based politics. "Gaurav Gogoi is a positive individual who wants to practise politics rooted in values in Assam. The Chief Minister is scared as elections approach," Priyanka Gandhi said.

CM hails launch

The Barak Valley comprises the districts of Cachar, Hailakandi and Sribhumi. The Vibrant Village Programme is a flagship central initiative aimed at developing border villages through improved infrastructure, livelihoods and essential services while enhancing national security and preventing migration from border areas.

Akhil, Lurinjiyoti blame

immediately instead of being delayed repeatedly. "This cannot be 'date after date'. There must be an immediate and clear seat-sharing arrangement," he said, warning that prolonged indecision would only benefit the BJP. Echoing similar concerns, Assam Jatiya Parishad (AJP) president Lurinjiyoti Gogoi also issued a cautionary message to the Congress. He said that if the Congress was serious about defeating the BJP in Assam, it must understand the ground realities and respect the concerns of its allies.

"The Congress should realise that unity and timely decisions are crucial to take on the BJP. Any delay or lack of coordination will weaken the opposition's fight," Lurinjiyoti Gogoi said.

The developments come amid ongoing negotiations among opposition parties in Assam to forge a united front against the ruling BJP. However, differences over seat-sharing and coordination continue to pose challenges, raising questions over the cohesiveness of the proposed alliance ahead of the polls.

Almost 16,000 vehicles

"The absence of recorded reasons for this deviation raises concerns about regulatory lapses and possible procedural irregularities by the DTOs," it added. The report said that against a significant proportion (7.85 per cent) of issued Learner's Licenses and Driving Licenses, no dates of driving test were recorded, raising concerns regarding licensing practices without due evaluation.

"Analysis of driving test slots revealed improbably high daily testing numbers in 24 of 40 cases during 2019-24, indicating potential procedural lapses or compromised assessment rigour," it added.

CAG said that the audit observed systemic inefficiencies in vehicle registration at the dealers' point, leading to delays in registration ranging from 1 to 1,417 days beyond the stipulated time frame in selected eight districts during April 2019 to June 2023. "Additionally, addresses in respect of 35 per cent of registered vehicles were not duly linked to address proof documents," it added. Of the sampled 72 migrated vehicles, 55 remained registered in two states, causing taxation and enforcement discrepancies, the auditor said.

"Non-imposition of penalties on 4,200 delayed reassignment cases resulted in a revenue loss of ₹ 6.42 crore, calling for stricter oversight," it added. Outstanding one-time tax (OTT) in the selected eight districts amounted to ₹ 23.80 crore from 1,396 vehicles (2015-22) as of March 2024, CAG said. "Absence of documented demand notices for outstanding OTT highlights enforcement deficiencies, leading to potential revenue losses," it added.

CAG also said that 64 per cent of recorded offence penalties (2,71,388 cases) remained uncollected (2019-24) in seven DTOs, impairing enforcement efforts. "Deficiencies in pollution control enforcement were noted. Directives issued by the Pollution Control Board of Assam regarding emission standards and vehicle phase-out were inadequately implemented, raising concerns about regulatory effectiveness in air quality management," it added.

The exponential increase in Assam's vehicular population has outpaced the Transport Department's workforce capacity, with vacancy ranging from 30 per cent to 57 per cent, adversely impacting enforcement capabilities, the report pointed out. "Manpower augmentation is imperative to ensure regulatory efficiency and road safety compliance," it added. (PTI)

NSCN-IM cadre

pistol, one INSAS magazine, one pistol magazine, 18 rounds of 5.56 mm ammunition and two rounds of 9 mm ammunition from his possession. According to security sources, Wangpan was leading a group of four cadres who had reportedly entered the area with the intention of carrying out a kidnapping or targeted attack.

The timely action by the joint forces prevented a possible militant incident, they said.

An FIR has been registered at Longding police station under relevant sections of the Arms Act and the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, and further investigation is underway.

Security forces have also launched combing and search operations in nearby areas to track down other members of the group.

Massive fire engulfs

regarding the incident. It is to be mentioned that media personnel were prevented by security at the institute entrance from entering to collect news.

Administrative push in

representatives of recognised national and state political parties invited to monitor the process to ensure transparency. Officials said the initiatives reflect the district administration's dual focus on strengthening social welfare measures and ensuring readiness for the upcoming elections.

Quitting tobacco reduces

cessation. Tobacco cessation reduces oral cancer risk by 60 per cent after 10 years of quitting, but the risk never approached even closer to never users. Therefore, it is always better not to start tobacco consumption," Centre for Cancer Epidemiology Director and author of the study Dr Rajesh Dixit said. He further said that the genetic susceptibility for oral cancer also increases, especially when combined with lifestyle factors, such as tobacco use. Tobacco cessation means stopping the use of tobacco in any form, such as cigarettes, bids, gutka, khaini, or chewing tobacco, he added. More than 30 per cent of India's population consumes tobacco in one form or other. (PTI)

RELIABILITY IMPROVEMENT OF TELECOM NETWORK

Tender Notice No: 13RT of 2025-26.

Open E-tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following work: E-Tender No. N-2025-26-13RT-Dy/CSTENW; Name of work: Reliability improvement by repair, restoration, enhancement/modification of Telecom Network under Dy.CSTENW, NFR, HQ.

Tender Value: ₹78,33,751/-; Bid Security: ₹1,56,700/-; E-tender will be closed at 15:00 hrs. on 12-03-2026 and opened at 15:30 hrs on 12-03-2026. The complete information with the tender document of above e-tender will be available in website www.ireps.gov.in.

Sr. Signal & Telecom Engineer/Network, Maligaon

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MAINTENANCE & OPERATION OF VARIOUS WATER FILTRATION PLANT FOR WAY SIDE STATIONS

Tender Notice No: LMC/Engg/14 of 2026; Dated: 16-02-2026; E-Tender are invited by the undersigned for the following work:

SN:1: Brief Description of Item:

Maintenance & operation of various water filtration plant for way side stations (15 Nos. Langcholiat, Nailalung, Daidali, Dhansiri, Rangapahar, Khotkhohi, Bokajan, Chongajan, Naojan, Sarupathar, Barpathar, Bhilgaon, Jamuguri, Oating & Sukhovi) under the jurisdiction of ADEN/Dimapur for two (02) years

Tender Value: ₹2,94,16,482.90/-; Earnest Money: ₹2,97,100/-; Date & time of closing of tender at 15:00 hrs. on 16-03-2026 and opening at 15:00 hrs. on 17-03-2026. Complete information alongwith the tender document of above e-tender will be available up to 15:00 hrs. on 16-03-2026 in the website www.ireps.gov.in

DRM(W)/Lumding

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NAME CHANGE

I have Changed my name from KUTINA BEGUM TO NAZMA BEGUM by swearing a notarial affidavit at Srimanta Sankardevnagar, Hojai (Assam)

NAZMA BEGUM C/O- ABDUL SUKKUR Vill: Karaiyani, Dist-Hojai (Assam)

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SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 2026

THE HILLS TIMES 3

Shah launches part 2 of border village programme from Assam Cong accused of allowing influx by keeping border open

NATHANPUR, Feb 20: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday launched the second phase of the Vibrant Village Programme (VVP) from Assam and inspected a stretch of the Indo-Bangladesh border.

During the first of his two-day visit to the poll-bound state, he also accused the Congress of allowing infiltration and not initiating development during its rule.

Shah launched the second phase of the VVP across the country from here in Assam's Cachar district, and asserted that the project would help stop migration from border areas and prevent infiltration.

Asserting that the development of border villages of the country is a priority for Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Shah said the second phase of the VVP will cover 1,954 villages under the 334 blocks of 17 states bordering Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Addressing the programme at Nathanpur village, Shah also accused the Congress of leaving the country's borders open, which led to infiltration in Assam, and claimed that the BJP government, headed by Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, has effectively dealt with the problem.

He alleged that the Congress did



not initiate any development programme during its rule in the state, but "now 14 kms of road are being constructed daily, which is the highest in the country".

Earlier, the border areas were considered the last villages, he said, adding that these were "not only the last in terms of locations but also the backwards in development, employment, education, electricity connection, road and telephone connectivity", he said.

He said that the ₹ 6,900 crore nationwide programme (VVP-II) will also cover 140 villages under the 26 blocks in nine districts of Assam.

der communities in alignment with the vision of the 'Viksit Bharat' 2047.

By strengthening these villages, the programme also enables residents to act as the eyes and ears of the nation, thereby contributing significantly to border security, the prevention of cross-border crimes and the strengthening of internal security.

"The Congress left the country's borders open, which led to infiltration in Assam. The party did not initiate any development programme during its rule in the state," Shah said, claiming that the "BJP government, headed by Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, has "effectively dealt with the infiltration problem".

He claimed that the Assam government has stopped infiltration, violence and insurgency in the state.

The BJP government has already started the process of making the state free from floods, Shah said.

"The Congress had given only ₹ 1.28 lakh crore for Assam from 2004 to 2014, but the PM has extended ₹ 15 lakh crore in the last 10 years for the development of the state," he said.

Shah said that over 24,000 kilometers of (CONTD-ON PAGE-2)

We do not want to use Zubeen for politics: Priyanka

'Dragging Gaurav's family, children into 'Pak link' allegation by Assam CM wrong politics' • Cong leader visits 'Zubeen Khetra' at Sonapur



GUWAHATI, Feb 20: Asking Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma to talk about jobs, Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Friday criticised the BJP leader, asserting that it is "wrong politics" of him to drag the family and children of the party's state unit president Gaurav Gogoi over his alleged Pakistan link.

Calling Zubeen Garg "the voice of Assam's soul" and "above politics", Vadra said people deeply associate with the celebrity singer, whose every word had the message of love and unity.

Vadra, the Chairperson of the screening committee for Assam Congress, concluded her two-day Assam trip after holding a series of meetings with senior party leaders from the state in order to finalise the candidate lists for the upcoming assembly elections.

"There are two types of leaders in politics -- one

who does positive politics and the other who does polarisation. Gaurav Gogoi is doing the politics of love," she said when asked about Sarma's repeated attacks on the Assam Congress chief over alleged Pakistan links.

Vadra asserted that Gogoi is "a positive person, and wants to bring positivity in politics".

"The way Gaurav and his family are being attacked, I feel it should be an example of wrong politics in Assam and India. Nobody's family or children should be attacked like this. And especially when everything is just false," she added.

Earlier this month, Sarma accused Gogoi, his wife Elizabeth Colburn and a Pakistani national, Ali Tauqueer Sheikh, of sharing a "deeper connection" and that sensitive information from Indian agencies had been passed to Pakistan. The CM had also claimed that Gogoi had surrendered his son's passport so that the minor could get British citizenship.

"I will say that Gaurav is moving on the right track. That is why such a demeaning attack is taking place," the Congress leader said.

Vadra further asserted that the people of Assam know that Gogoi is being attacked because the ruling party is afraid of him.

"He is a decent, positive man, and he wants to do a different kind of politics, which is Assam's real feelings... All the charges are nothing new," she added.

The Congress leader claimed that the politics of hatred is not Assam people's real emotion, and that is why they have associated (CONTD-ON PAGE-2)

CM hails launch of VVP-II in Cachar

STAFF REPORTER

GUWAHATI, Feb 20: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Friday said the launch of the nationwide Vibrant Village Programme-II (VVP-II) from Cachar district by Union Home Minister Amit Shah reflects the increasing importance of the Barak Valley in Assam's development roadmap and India's Act East vision.

In a post on social media, Sarma said the region, once considered neglected, has now emerged as a key focus area for both the State and the Centre.

He noted that the decision to roll out the programme from Cachar underscores its strategic and developmental significance in the national landscape.

The chief minister said his government has placed strong emphasis on accelerating growth in the Barak Valley through major infrastructure and connectivity initiatives.

Among the key projects, he highlighted plans for an upcoming expressway aimed at reducing travel time between Guwahati and Silchar to around five hours, which he said would boost trade, tourism and economic activity.

Sarma also shared updates on the proposed Barak Valley Secretariat, stating that the project would strengthen governance by bringing administrative services closer to the people and ensuring faster delivery of public services.

He reiterated the commitment of the "double engine government" to balanced and equitable development of both the Barak and Brahmaputra valleys, adding that multiple initiatives are being implemented to improve infrastructure, healthcare, education and employment opportunities in the region. (CONTD-ON PAGE-2)

Priyanka shielding Gaurav on Pak issue: State BJP chief

STAFF REPORTER

GUWAHATI, Feb 20: Assam BJP president Dilip Saikia on Friday criticised Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra alleging that she was attempting to mislead the people of the country to protect Congress leader Gaurav Gogoi.

Addressing the media, Saikia said that while the BJP welcomes Priyanka Gandhi to Assam, her statements and political activities in the state were aimed at shielding Gogoi rather than addressing real issues concerning the public.

He alleged that the Congress leadership was deliberately diverting attention from serious matters in the interest of its leaders.

"The issue related to Gaurav Gogoi's alleged Pakistan links is not a personal matter. It is a matter of national security and concerns the



safety of the country," Saikia said.

He asserted that such issues should not be trivialised or portrayed as political vendetta, adding that the people of Assam and the country have the right to know the truth.

The state BJP chief further claimed that instead of clarifying the allegations, the Congress was resorting to what he described as political posturing and emotional appeals.

According to him, Priyanka

Gandhi's visit was being used to create confusion and sympathy, rather than to provide clear answers on issues of national importance.

Saikia also accused the Congress of having a history of compromising on national interest for political gains.

He said the BJP would continue to raise questions related to national security and would not remain silent under any pressure.

He added that the BJP believes in transparent politics and accountability, and that any issue linked to the nation's security must be addressed responsibly.

Saikia asserted that the people of Assam are politically aware and will not be misled by what he termed as misleading narratives.

Earlier on Friday, Priyanka Gandhi (CONTD-ON PAGE-2)

Flights may operate from new terminal from March

New Guwahati airport terminal to become operational from tomorrow

GUWAHATI, Feb 20: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Friday said the ₹ 4,000-crore new terminal building of the Guwahati airport will become operational from February 22.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi had inaugurated the new terminal of the Lokpriya Gopinath Bardoloi International Airport (LGBIA) on December 20.

"From an open space to a world-class gateway in just a few years. This transformation reflects a clear vision for a more connected and confident Assam," Sarma said in a post on X.

"Inaugurated by Adamiya Shri @narendramodi ji, the @Guwa-

hatiAirport opens its doors to the world from Feb 22," he said.

Both domestic and international flights are likely to operate from the new terminal by March, while the old terminal will be converted into a cargo hub, an official said.

The ₹ 4,000-crore Integrated Terminal-2 Building is designed to handle 13.1 million passengers per year, he said.

The airport is named after Assam's first chief minister, whose 80-foot statue was also unveiled by Modi outside the terminal.

The new terminal has an area of 1,40,000 square metres, and its design (CONTD-ON PAGE-2)

Akhil, Lurinjyoti blame Cong for Oppn unity delay

STAFF REPORTER

GUWAHATI, Feb 20: Rajjor Dal Chief and Sivasagar legislator Akhil Gogoi on Friday expressed strong dissatisfaction over the outcome of the recent meeting between the Congress and Rajjor Dal, particularly over the issue of seat-sharing for the upcoming elections in the state.

Speaking to reporters, Gogoi said the Congress leadership had changed its stand on the seat-sharing arrangement, which, according to him, had caused confusion and mistrust among alliance partners.

He said he would be sending a letter to the Congress leadership to formally convey his dissatisfaction over the developments.

"We have asked for only 15

seats. But even within that, the Congress has changed seats involving important candidates," Akhil Gogoi said, alleging that the decisions taken were unilateral and did not reflect the spirit of alliance politics.

He added that such changes could adversely affect the collective objective of defeating the BJP.

The Rajjor Dal leader stressed that clarity and mutual respect were essential for any opposition alliance to function effectively.

He said repeated delays and shifting positions by the Congress were weakening the morale of grassroots workers and confusing voters. Akhil Gogoi further said that seat-sharing should be finalised (CONTD-ON PAGE-2)

Almost 16,000 vehicles registered in NE with single chassis, engine numbers: CAG

GUWAHATI, Feb 20: Nearly 16,000 vehicles have been registered with the same chassis and engine numbers across seven Northeastern states, signalling massive irregularities in the transport sector of the region, according to a latest CAG report.

In its report on State Revenues of Assam for the period ending March 2024, the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) also said that only around 26,000 transport vehicle permits were issued against almost 1.2 lakh registered vehicles from the 2019-24 period.

"In the course of test check of records of VAHAN database for the seven States of North Eastern (NE) Region, with that of Assam, it was observed that a total of 15,849 ve-

hicles having the same chassis number and engine number were registered in multiple states," the central auditor said.

Out of these vehicles, 12,112 vehicles (76 per cent) were allowed subsequent registration in Assam without any NOC, "which was irregular", it added.

"Significant deficiencies were observed in issuance of transport vehicle permits across eight test-checked DTOs, with only 26,105 permits (21.87 per cent) issued against 1,19,369 registered vehicles (2019-24)," CAG said.

The lack of stringent permit enforcement led to revenue losses, regulatory gaps and proliferation of unregulated commercial transport operations, it added.

CAG also said that out of 1.29 lakh commercial vehicles, 29,560 did not remit Motor Vehicles (MV) tax, leading to a tax deficit of Rs 61.28 crore and fine accrual of Rs 24.53 crore as of March 2024.

"Due to non-collection of fine for delay in payment of MV Tax in respect of 1.51 lakh vehicles in eight selected districts, there was a loss of revenue amounting to Rs 3.79 crore to the exchequer," it added.

The report further said that school buses across eight districts during 2019-24 were issued contract carriage permits instead of Educational Institution Bus (EIB) permits, and resulted in the bypassing of mandatory fitness tests, thereby defeating the purpose of EIB permits. (CONTD-ON PAGE-2)

NSCN-IM cadre arrested with arms in Arunachal

HT Correspondent

DIBRUGARH, Feb 20: Security forces arrested an NSCN-IM cadre and recovered arms and ammunition during a joint operation in Longding district of Arunachal Pradesh on Friday, officials said.

The operation was carried out by a joint team of the Assam Rifles, Special Task Force and Longding police at Tissing near Zedua village under Longding police station limits.

During the operation, security personnel apprehended an active NSCN-IM cadre identified as SS Captain Ponglem Wangpan (35), a resident of Longsom village in Longding district.

Officials said the forces recovered one 5.56 mm INSAS rifle, one 9 mm (CONTD-ON PAGE-2)

'About 20-25 per cent of cancers are oral cancer'

Quitting tobacco reduces oral cancer risk by over 60 pc: Study

MUMBAI, Feb 20: Stopping the consumption of tobacco dramatically reduces the risk of oral cavity cancer by more than 60 per cent, a study conducted by a Mumbai-based organisation has found.

The study, conducted by the Centre for Cancer Epidemiology of the Tata Memorial Centre (TMC), demonstrated that quitting smoking and chewing habits reduces the risk of oral cancer or buccal mucosa cancer compared with continuous consumption.

For this hospital-based case control study, enrolment was carried out in five TMC cancer centres located in Mumbai, Navi Mumbai, Barshi, Varanasi and Guwahati in India, during 2010-2022. The research was conducted on both men and women, aged 19-75 years.

For the first time, the study shows a 61 per cent reduction in



the risk of oral cavity cancer for smokers and a 42 per cent reduction for tobacco chewers compared to current users after quitting the habit for 10 years.

However, this risk reduction never approaches that of people

who have never consumed tobacco.

This indicates that current tobacco users benefit from quitting, as the risk is reduced by almost 50 per cent, although their risk remains higher than that of never

users.

This suggests that tobacco quitting works, but not starting tobacco habits is more important.

"About 20-25 per cent of our cancers are oral cancer, which is related to tobacco. Around 40 per cent of cancers, including bladder, kidney, esophageal, and pancreatic cancer, are also connected with tobacco. Therefore, quitting tobacco will reduce cancer in our country," the Advanced Centre for Treatment, Research and Education in Cancer (ACTREC), research wing of TMC, director Dr Pankaj Chaturvedi told reporters.

He said chewing tobacco with areca nut almost doubles the cancer risk, but it was similarly reduced by quitting.

"This is the first evidence demonstrating usefulness of tobacco (CONTD-ON PAGE-2)

Administrative push in Karbi Anglong focuses on child safety, poll preparedness

HT Bureau

DIPHU/HAMREN, Feb 20: The Karbi Anglong district administration on Friday undertook a series of initiatives focusing on social welfare and electoral preparedness, led by District Commissioner Aranyak Saikia.

At a coordination meeting in Diphu, Saikia reviewed preparations for the upcoming Assam 2.0 programme, expected to roll out within the next two to three weeks.

He stressed the need for systematic planning to manage anticipated participation and directed officials to complete venue arrangements, accommodation, transportation and security protocols.

The meeting also emphasised strengthening coordination among departments, including police, women's groups and civil stakeholders, to ensure smooth implementation of the programme.

Meanwhile, the District Child

Protection Unit organised a sensitisation workshop for media personnel as part of the 90-day "Suroxita Xaishab Sonali Axom" campaign. The session focused on child rights awareness, prevention of trafficking and child marriage, and responsible reporting practices to safeguard the dignity of victims.

Officials also highlighted the role of the 1098 Child Helpline as a round-the-clock support system for children in distress.

In Hamren, preparations for the 2026 Assam Assembly elections gathered pace with the announcement of Additional First Level Checking of electronic voting machines and VVPATs for the 111-Rongkhang (ST) and 112-Amri (ST) constituencies.

The checking will be conducted by a team of ECIL engineers under the supervision of the Additional District Commissioner (Election), with (CONTD-ON PAGE-2)

Massive fire engulfs CSIR-NEIST general stores in Jorhat

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, Feb 20: A huge fire broke out at the building housing the general stores section of the CSIR-North East Institute of Science and Technology (NEIST) at Pulibor in the early hours of Friday.

A CSIR-NEIST source stated that the general stores part of the building, which contained chemicals and many non-serviceable materials was largely damaged.

Fire tenders from Jorhat, other Fire and Emergency Services units, oil and defence installations across the district and also from Golaghat rushed to the site. It took several hours to bring the blaze under control by noon.

The cause of the fire is not yet known and the extent of the damage is yet to be assessed. Officials said that CSIR-NEIST authorities have lodged an FIR at Pulibor Police Station (CONTD-ON PAGE-2)

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Get your facts first, then you can distort them as you please - Mark Twain

Macron-Modi bonhomie

The optics of French President Emmanuel Macron's visit to India for a 4th official in quick time are unmistakable. When he landed in Mumbai a warm embrace from PM Narendra Modi welcomed him reestablishing the bonhomie enjoyed between them. Modi and Macron, had a jog along Marine Drive, and a joint appearance at the Gateway of India to launch the India-France Year of Innovation. But beyond the choreography of diplomacy lay a more consequential shift. Over three days, the two leaders elevated ties to a "Special Global Strategic Partnership," unveiled more than 20 agreements, and signalled that in an era of geopolitical churn, Paris and New Delhi intend to anchor each other. Modi described France as one of India's oldest and most trusted strategic partners, calling the relationship "a force for global stability" at a time of uncertainty. Macron returned the compliment, calling the bilateral bond "remarkable and unique," rooted in trust, openness and a shared refusal of hegemony. The language was deliberate. With the Russia-Ukraine war grinding on, Gaza unsettled, and the Indo-Pacific increasingly contested, both leaders positioned their partnership as pragmatic, values-based, and autonomous.

The symbolism was reinforced by the formal elevation of ties and a review of the long-horizon blueprint guiding cooperation through 2047. The message: this is not transactional diplomacy; it is generational statecraft. The core of Macron's visit was defence. India and France renewed their 10-year defence cooperation agreement during the sixth annual dialogue, converting past momentum into a decade-long commitment. The shift in emphasis is telling: less about off-the-shelf purchases, more about co-development, co-production, and industrial integration. A headline outcome was the agreement to manufacture Hammer air-to-ground missiles in India through a joint venture between Bharat Electronics Limited and Safran Electronics & Defense. For India, it strengthens indigenous production and embeds French technology in local supply chains. For France, it deepens industrial presence in one of the world's fastest-growing defence markets.

The Rafale conversation hovered over the visit. India recently cleared a proposal to procure 114 additional Rafale fighter jets under a government-to-government framework—potentially one of its largest defence acquisitions in years. During talks in Bengaluru, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh pressed for up to 50 percent local content and engine manufacturing and overhaul in India. The subtext is clear: strategic autonomy requires industrial sovereignty. Paris appears receptive, but negotiations will determine how much technology and production actually migrates to Indian soil. Now, the shift toward co-production suggests a deeper convergence: France diversifies its Indo-Pacific footprint as the United States recalibrates; India hedges its dependence on any single supplier while preserving strategic flexibility.

Asia-Pacific to miss 88 per cent of the sustainable development goals by 2030

By: Dr. Gyan Pathak

Asia-Pacific region will miss 103 of 117 measurable targets – or 88 per cent – across the 17 global Sustainable Development Goals, adopted by world leaders in 2015, a new report by the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) has warned.

As for India, it seems comfortable with only four targets, in which more than 75 per cent of the measured targets showing positive trends. In 9 of the goals, between 50 per cent and 75 per cent of the measured targets show positive trends. In one goal, between 25 per cent of the measured targets show positive trend. In three goals, fewer than 25 per cent of the measured targets show positive trends.

The Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2026 has said that Climate inaction, biodiversity loss and rising emissions are pushing the region further off course on SDGs, and it is set to miss nearly nine out of ten targets by 2030. It is worth mentioning that the goals focus on ending extreme poverty and hunger, ensuring access to clean water and sanitation, and providing quality universal education, among other targets, by 2030.

While we have only five years left until 2030, the region is clearly falling behind. This report reveals a stark contradiction: while the region has achieved notable success in reducing poverty, improving health and well-being and driving rapid industrialization, these gains are being undermined by failures to protect the environment and reduce inequality. Our current development trajectory is unsustainable, and the window for corrective action is closing rapidly.

The data present a clear and alarming verdict: the region is not on track to achieve any of the 17 SDGs. At the current pace, 88 per cent of measurable targets will be missed. Although progress is evident for a handful of targets, most require a dramatic acceleration. In critical areas such as climate action, marine conservation and biodiversity, the situation has not just stalled – it is deteriorating.

While data availability for SDG indicators has improved, reaching an average of 55 per cent in 2025, critical gaps remain. Persistent data

gaps exist for SDG 5 (Gender equality) and SDG 16 (Peace, justice and strong institutions). Closing these gaps is essential for informed policymaking and accelerating progress towards the 2030 Agenda.

The data tell two contrasting stories: one where the region is advancing and another where it is falling behind. The region continues to make notable progress towards SDG 9 (Industry, innovation and infrastructure), which has no targets in decline, and SDG 3 (Good health and well-being), bolstered by steady reductions in maternal and child mortality. There have been improvements towards SDG 1 (No poverty) and SDG 6 (Clean water and sanitation), though these areas still require acceleration. However, despite these achievements, the region is not on track to achieve any of the 17 SDGs, underscoring the urgent need for coordinated and accelerated action.

Advances achieved so far are now at risk. An alarming pattern of regression is undermining previous gains, most notably in the environmental sphere. SDG 14 (Life below water) faces significant setbacks in sustainable fishing and coastal conservation. Progress on SDG 13 (Climate action) remains a grave concern as the level of total greenhouse gas emissions in the region continues to increase. Similarly, progress towards SDG 15 (Life on land) is hampered by accelerating biodiversity loss and land degradation.

On the current trajectory, the region will miss 103 of the 117 measurable targets. The lack of adequate data for 52 targets underscores a critical evidence gap, limiting the ability to track progress and inform effective implementation. Existing data show that the region is on track to achieve only 14 targets by 2030, with seven SDGs having no targets on track.

Evidence also warns that the pledge to "leave no one behind" is faltering, as seen in setbacks on target 4.5 (on ensuring equal access to education) and target 16.3 (on ensuring equal access to justice). Furthermore, insufficient data on SDG 5 (Gender equality) and SDG 16 (Peace, justice, and strong institutions), goals central to this ambition, obscure our understanding of how effectively the most vulnerable are being reached. (IPA Service)

The crisis of the Assamese language

The foundation of the Assamese nation's existence, self-respect, and intellectual consciousness is our ever-beloved mother tongue. Language is not merely a medium for expressing thoughts; rather, it is the supreme carrier of a nation's history, traditions, culture, and mindset. Whenever a crisis descends upon a language, it is quite natural for the very foundation of the existence of the entire nation that speaks that language to shake. The kind of apprehensions, concerns, and discussions that have emerged regarding the future of the Assamese language in recent times are not just emotional outbursts; rather, they demand a deep, realistic, and impartial analysis. The whirlwind of globalization, intense economic competition, and the rapid changes in our own mentality have brought our dear language to a complex crossroads. To comprehend the true nature of this crisis, it will not suffice to merely blame external factors and wash our hands of it; the time has come to objectively examine our internal weaknesses, our mentality, and our shortsightedness as well.

When discussing the crisis of a language, the first thing that comes to mind is the number of users of that language and the scope of its usage. The biggest and most terrifying challenge facing the Assamese language at present is the growing distance from the new generation. A language survives in the tongues, pens, and minds of the people who speak it. However, in today's environment, it is observed with great sorrow that a large section of the new generation is gradually moving away from the Assamese language, creating a pale atmosphere. The main reason for this is not just the change in the education system, but parents' mentality is equally responsible for it. In many areas of society, it is seen that parents, in their efforts to make their children suitable for the modern and competitive world, have bid farewell to the mother tongue from home. A misconception has taken root among them that only by mastering another global language can one achieve success in life and become modern. This notion has created such an artificial environment in our society where speaking or reading and writing in one's own language is considered a sign of 'backward' or 'rustic' mentality. When a child learns to speak in another link language instead of the mother tongue in the urban environment at home, it not only distances itself from the language but also becomes permanently disconnected from its roots, its grandparents' folktales, and its nation's culture.

Economic utility and market necessity are among the primary driving forces for the practice and expansion of a language. We cannot deny that in the current materialistic and competitive world, people naturally want to acquire those skills that show them a secure path to livelihood. Unfortunately, it has been observed that the application and necessity of the Assamese language in our state's workplaces and market economy are gradually decreasing. Apart from a portion of government work, the use of Assamese in the vast and potential private sector market is very limited and, in many cases, can be said to be non-existent. The arrival of multinational companies and the direct integration of our economy with the global market have created a notion that knowing Assamese is not essential for career building or business success. This economic insecurity has deterred many talented students and the young generation from practicing their mother tongue. A language cannot be merely an object of emotion; it must become a means of sustenance. If we cannot link the Assamese language with economy and productivity, there is a strong possibility that in the future, its relevance will be

confined only to the books in libraries and the walls of discussion circles.

The radical change in the education system and the current deplorable condition of Assamese-medium schools have made this crisis more intense and complex. In a society, mother-tongue schools are not just educational institutions; they are the life centers for the practice of that society's language and culture. However, due to lack of infrastructure, shortage of teachers, government neglect, and lack of proper implementation of the new education policy, public faith in government-sector Assamese-medium schools has drastically declined. On the other hand, the rapid expansion of private-sector English-medium schools and their eye-catching infrastructure have built an alternative and attractive education system. As a result, not only the upper class but also middle-class and lower-middle-class parents, even if it means sacrificing meals, are withdrawing their children from Assamese-medium and enrolling them in English-medium. This has also created social inequality, where an invisible yet strong wall has risen between those who know the mother tongue and those who do not. The problem is not just the medium; the problem is quality. If high-quality education in science, technology, medicine, and commerce cannot be provided in Assamese, students will be compelled to resort to other languages for higher education. The lack of textbooks and research books in Assamese at the higher education level has also fueled this crisis.

In this twenty-first century of rapid expansion of science and technology, the presence and dominance of a language in the digital world have become indispensable for its survival. At present, the main medium for knowledge exchange, entertainment, news, and communication is the internet or the web. However, the content in Assamese in this vast and infinite digital world is still not sufficient. Although the practice of Assamese writing has increased through social media, reliable content on knowledge-based information, encyclopedias, research papers, and technical subjects is not easily available in Assamese on digital platforms.

The technical complexities regarding our language's script have not been completely resolved, and due to the lack of proper technical tools, we have often failed to present our language in the correct form in the global forum. New technologies like artificial intelligence and machine learning have created a new competition among languages worldwide. Languages with strong digital databases will be able to keep pace with future technology. To survive in this competition, we need such a technological infrastructure that can easily transform Assamese into the language of computers and mobiles. The delay in this area will deter our future generation from using Assamese in the digital world.

The rapid change in demographic structure has also had a direct and profound impact on the Assamese language. Migration and population mixing at various times have altered the linguistic map of the state. At one time, Assamese was the link language among various ethnic groups in the Northeast. It was the medium for exchange of ideas between hill and plain people. However, in recent times, it has been observed that in some regions, other languages have occupied the place of Assamese as local or link languages. This change is not just a numbers game; it also carries indications of social and cultural dominance. If the language loses its dignity in its own state or city, its psychological impact is far-reaching. The increasing

prevalence of other languages instead of Assamese in markets, public places, and transport vehicles has reduced the practical importance of the language. However, in this regard, we cannot just blame external factors. We also need to see how much affection and respect we have presented our language to others. If the acceptability and liberality of our language decrease, its scope will also shrink. What measures we have taken to attract people from other ethnic groups to Assamese is also a matter worth pondering.

The cultural world, especially literature, music, theater, and cinema, plays an important role in the expansion and development of a language. Assamese literature has a rich and glorious history, but the decreasing number of readers in the current society is a matter of concern. As the habit of reading books diminishes, the new generation's connection with the language's vocabulary, sentence structure, and expression style is weakening. The popularity of audio-visual media is increasing, but there is scope for deep questions regarding the standard of language used there. Often, it is seen that in the name of popular culture or modernity, a distorted form of the language is propagated, which damages the pure structure of the language. The same decay is observed in song lyrics and media language. The unnecessary and haphazard use of English and Hindi words, extreme neglect of correct pronunciation and grammar, has gradually trivialized the language. For a language to survive, it is essential that its gravity, elegance, and beauty remain intact. When responsible institutions like news media propagate wrong language, it sends wrong messages to society and lowers the language's standards.

The inferiority complex hidden in our mentality is also one of the main factors of

this crisis. Many of us think that speaking in Assamese, wearing Assamese attire, or practicing Assamese culture will not give us importance in modern society or will undervalue us. This mentality has disconnected us from our roots and pushed us towards a kind of cultural slavery. Yet, if we look at the developed countries of the world, we see how proud they are of their languages. In powerful countries like Japan, France, China, or Germany, it is natural to conduct all kinds of higher education, research, and administrative work in their own languages. They have established their languages with pride in the global forum. In our case, this lack of self-respect is acutely observed. When we unnecessarily use English or Hindi mixed language in public places, meetings, or even family chats, we indirectly weaken our own language. This respect for the language should not be shown only on a specific day or in a meeting; it must become an inseparable part of our daily life.

The crisis of the language is not just a crisis of language; it is also a crisis of thinking power. One can think as deeply in one's own language, express emotions as naturally, which is almost impossible in another language. When a generation forgets to think in its own language, its original thinking power and creativity also get hindered. This could be one of the main reasons for the decreasing number of original literary creations or original research in today's Assamese society. We have borrowed knowledge from others, true, but we have failed to assimilate that knowledge in our language and create new knowledge. The death of a language does not mean just the loss of words; along with it, a nation's worldview, philosophy, and life sense are lost. This language is the key to the treasure of knowledge left by our ancestors. If we lose this key, we will be deprived of our inheritance.

In digital future why mother tongues matter more than ever

By: Lalit Garg

International Mother Language Day, observed on 21 February, is not merely a ritual to safeguard linguistic culture; it is a celebration of humanity's cultural soul. In 2026, the theme "Youth Voices for Multilingual Education" underscores the idea that the linguistic direction of the future will be shaped by young generations. This year is especially significant as it marks the 25th anniversary (Silver Jubilee) of the observance. Proclaimed by UNESCO in 1999 and celebrated globally since 2000, the day has become a powerful symbol of linguistic rights and cultural identity.

The 2026 focus encourages young people aged 13 to 18 to engage actively in dialogue on preserving linguistic diversity, expanding education in mother tongues, and redefining the role of languages in the digital era. A mother tongue is not merely a collection of words; it is the first expression of a human being's mind, intellect, and emotions. From birth, a child absorbs language through a mother's lullabies, sounds, and conversations—long before any formal education begins. This language forms the foundation of thought, creativity, and identity. Research has consistently shown that when early education is delivered in a child's mother tongue, comprehension, analytical ability, and self-confidence increase significantly. Yet, globally, nearly 40 percent of children do not receive education in a language they speak or understand. This disparity highlights the urgent need for inclusive linguistic policies.

The historical roots of this day trace back to 21 February 1952, when students in former East Pakistan protested for the recognition of Bengali as their mother tongue. Many were martyred in police firing. Later, East Pakistan became independent as Bangladesh. In memory of those language martyrs, International Mother Language Day stands today as a symbol of linguistic dignity and freedom. It reminds us that language is not only a means of communication but also the foundation of self-respect and independence. The 2026 theme places youth participation at the center. Today's young generation lives in a digital ecosystem shaped by social media, artificial intelligence, and online education. This raises a critical question: Do digital platforms provide adequate space for mother tongues? Artificial

intelligence can help revive endangered languages by creating dictionaries, audio archives, and translation systems. However, if technological advancement remains confined to a few dominant languages, linguistic inequality may deepen. Young people must therefore harness technology for the empowerment of their mother tongues—through apps, blogs, podcasts, YouTube channels, and digital libraries—bringing their languages onto global platforms.

According to UNESCO, cultural and linguistic diversity is essential for sustainable societies. Under its mandate to promote peace, the organization works to preserve differences in cultures and languages, fostering tolerance and mutual respect. Multilingual and multicultural societies survive through their languages, which transmit traditional knowledge and cultural heritage sustainably. Yet linguistic diversity continues to face grave threats as more languages disappear. The loss of a language is not merely the loss of words; it is the extinction of traditions, folklore, songs, and entire worldviews. In a multilingual nation like India, this challenge is also an opportunity. The People's Linguistic Survey of India reports that hundreds of languages have vanished in recent decades. If the younger generation becomes disconnected from their mother tongues, their cultural roots weaken. Educational institutions must therefore promote multilingual education, incorporate local literature and folk culture into curricula, and provide platforms for youth expression in native languages.

A widespread misconception persists that only foreign languages guarantee progress. While global languages are important for international engagement, neglecting one's mother tongue undermines originality and innovation. Education in the mother tongue fosters deeper understanding and creative thinking. India's National Education Policy 2020 rightly emphasizes early education in mother tongues, supported by scientific research showing that students internalize knowledge more effectively when taught in a familiar language. Another misconception in India is that English alone represents the language of knowledge and advancement. However, research by UNESCO and other institutions confirms that education in one's native language ensures holistic development. From a scientific perspective, mother tongue-based education is both ra-

What could be the ways to escape from this deep crisis is also a topic for discussion. There is no magical solution to it, but change can be brought through well-planned and long-term efforts. We need to bring back an Assamese environment in our homes. Parents and senior family members must ensure speaking in Assamese with children at home. To make children interested in the mother tongue, a reading environment must be created at home itself. Strict and realistic policies must be adopted to make the use of Assamese mandatory in both government and private sectors. Merely writing in Assamese on signboards or banners does not end the responsibility; the dignity of Assamese must be ensured in administrative work, court judgments, government applications, and business transactions. The education system must make the mother tongue more attractive and contemporary. Subjects in science and technology must be made available in high-quality Assamese in the curriculum so that students can realize that through this language too, they can acquire world knowledge and build careers. Teachers must be given appropriate training to make language education enjoyable.

Similarly, extensive research and innovation are needed to ensure a strong presence of Assamese in the world of technology. Governments and technologists must emphasize creating Assamese software, mobile applications, translation machines, and online content. The digitization process of the language must be accelerated so that the future generation can find and use their language on the device in their palm. To establish Assamese literature and culture in the global forum, emphasis must be placed on translated literature. If our creations are translated into other languages and the world's best creations into Assamese, the scope and depth of the language will increase. Moreover, the coordination of Assamese with the languages and cultures of various ethnic groups living in the state must be strengthened further. Assamese is not just the language of a specific group; it is the connecting bridge of the larger Assamese society. To strengthen this bridge, mutual respect, trust, and exchange are essential. Only by increasing the prevalence of Assamese parallel to the development of ethnic languages will it become universally acceptable.

The crisis of language is actually the crisis of a nation's consciousness. Language cannot be protected merely by government policies, street movements, or laws; it requires the spontaneous love, respect, and responsibility of the general public. As long as an Assamese feels proud introducing himself as Assamese, as long as books are sold in our book fairs, as long as mothers sing lullabies to their children, as long as the young generation exchanges opinions in Assamese on the internet, this language will not die. But if we sleep in the slumber of complacency or just sing the glories of the past, it will not happen. The form of the language may change with the flow of time, new words may be added, but its soul must always remain alive and strong. The collective of each of our personal efforts can rescue our language from the quagmire of crisis. This responsibility is on each of our shoulders, so that in the coming future, our descendants cannot question us why we could not protect our inheritance. By accepting reality, restraining emotions, and advancing with a firm plan, surely the Assamese language will shine again with its own glory and stand tall as a powerful language in the global forum. This is a silent but powerful struggle, where our weapons must be our knowledge, our consciousness, and our indomitable self-respect. (The author is the recipient of the 'Yuba Lekhak Sanman - 2025' from the Government of Assam)

tional and effective.

How can youth be drawn toward their mother tongues? First, language must be presented not as a burden but as a matter of pride. When we connect the achievements of our writers, scientists, and national icons with our native languages, it instills confidence and dignity. Second, creative platforms must be provided—poetry recitations, theatre, debates, blog writing, and digital content creation. Third, families must play a role; when daily conversations occur in the mother tongue, natural affinity develops. Sensitivity toward linguistic diversity is equally essential. India is home to hundreds of languages and dialects, each carrying a distinct worldview. No language is superior or inferior; all deserve equal respect. Hindi serves as a link language, yet Tamil, Bengali, Marathi, Gujarati, Odia, Assamese, Kannada, Malayalam, Punjabi, Kashmiri, and many others enrich the nation with their cultural treasures. Sanskrit preserves ancient wisdom, while regional languages carry living traditions.

In the digital era, youth should resolve to create at least one meaningful piece of work in their mother tongue—whether a blog, story, song, or educational video. Artificial intelligence-based translation tools and language models can help bring local content to global audiences. This not only preserves languages but also opens economic opportunities. Startups, e-learning platforms, and digital publishing in local languages can generate employment and foster inclusive growth. International Mother Language Day 2026 conveys a clear message: linguistic diversity is humanity's true wealth. Achieving sustainable development requires inclusive education, and inclusive education rests upon mother tongue-based learning. When youth raise their voices in support of multilingual education, transformative social change becomes possible.

Today, we must take a collective pledge—to honor our mother tongues, establish them on digital platforms, and pass their legacy to future generations. Language is our soul; keeping it alive is our responsibility. On this International Mother Language Day, let the message resonate clearly: youth are the guardians of our linguistic future. When young generations remain rooted in their cultural foundations, the world becomes more inclusive, tolerant, and culturally enriched. (The author is a journalist, writer and columnist)

AI squeezes entry level jobs

By: Pranjal Sharma

As global labour markets enter 2026, two reports have issued a dual warning: Rapid artificial intelligence (AI) adoption is not just threatening routine roles, but it is complicating the entry-level path for the world's highly educated youth.

AI challenges employment opportunities for the youth, the International Labour Organization (ILO) has said.

Concerns have recently emerged about the impact of AI adoption on young workers, particularly those seeking their first job in high-skilled occupations, said the UN agency in its Employment and Social Trend Report 2026.

'Preliminary evidence for high-income countries suggests that youth with advanced education entering the labour market may face greater difficulties because of AI adoption,' the ILO added.

Entry-Level Jobs

"An analysis by risk of exposure to AI shows that younger individuals (aged 15 to 24) with an advanced education level face a greater risk of automation than their less-educated counterparts.

'While the full impact of AI on youth employment remains uncertain, its potential magnitude warrants close monitoring,' said the report.

Automation Risk

Monitoring will be important as the Global Risk Perception report by the World Economic Forum (WEF) has flagged talent shortage as a key challenge.

A WEF poll on global economic outlook emphasised the impact of AI on labour market.

'The employment picture in relation to AI is expected to evolve over time: Two-thirds [of respondents] expect modest job losses over the next two years, but views diverge sharply over the longer term: 57 per cent anticipate net losses over 10 years, while 32 per cent foresee gains as new occupa-

tions emerge,' the poll said.

Companies are addressing the risk of talent mismatch by deepening their engagement with academia.

Take Wipro, for instance.

The information technology company saw the gap between academic instruction and industry demands as a critical challenge, prompting it to adopt a new strategy to improve workforce readiness.

Wipro collaborated with engineering and technology colleges that topped the National Institutional Ranking Framework to establish centres of excellence at 60 campuses in India.

These centres co-develop specialised curricula in AI, data science, cybersecurity, Cloud technologies, 5G connectivity, and embedded systems.

Several of these tailored programmes offer academic credits and create a structured pathway for internships and potential full time-roles, strengthening the in-

dustry-academia link.

Wipro collaborates with Indian Institute of Technology Delhi, the Indian Institute of Science and BITS Pilani to enable company employees to pursue advanced courses through work-integrated learning programmes.

By partnering with various national skill development initiatives, including Nasscom's Future Skills Prime, the company says it has contributed to the upskilling of tens of thousands of students and professionals in advanced digital disciplines.

Wipro says its efforts also extend to faculty development, with thousands of academics receiving training in AI and digital technologies.

Talent Shortage

Wipro launched a programme called 'Train to Hire' in mid-2024 to ensure that new and existing employees are equipped with the skills needed for an AI-driven future.

By identifying high potential



students during their academic programmes and offering targeted skilling aligned with real project environments, Wipro increases the likelihood that new hires understand contemporary enterprise demands.

This early alignment not only accelerates productivity but also reduces the time typically required for onboarding and training.

Upskilling and Reskilling

"Our goal with centres of excellence was to bridge the gap between academic learning and industry need," said Sanjeev Jain, chief operating officer, Wipro.

"These centres have transformed how students enter the workforce by equipping them with industry-relevant skills," Jain added.

"Students trained at these centres are better prepared, signifi-

cantly reducing post-joining training and accelerating deployment on projects, improving employability and helping fulfill business requirements faster."

Industry leaders across various sectors will have to adopt a proactive strategy to address the talent gap.

Without new strategies, the risk of talent shortages will grow steadily. (Courtesy: Rediff.com)

UPSC Civil Services (Pre) Examination 2026 – 933 Posts, Online Apply

Last Date: 24/02/2026.

Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) has released the official notification for the recruitment of 933 vacancy through Civil Service (Prelims) Examination 2026. Interested and eligible candidates may apply online here .

Name of examination: Civil Services (Preliminary) Examination 2026

No of vacancy: 933 posts

Name of services:

- Indian Administrative Service
 - Indian Foreign Service
 - Indian Police Service
 - Indian Audit and Accounts Service, Group 'A'
 - Indian Civil Accounts Service, Group 'A'
 - Indian Corporate Law Service, Group 'A'
 - Indian Defence Accounts Service, Group 'A'
 - Indian Defence Estates Service, Group 'A'
 - Indian Information Service, Group 'A'
 - Indian Postal Service, Group 'A'
 - Indian Post & Telecommunication Accounts and Finance Service, Group 'A'
 - Indian Railway Management Service (Traffic), Group 'A'
 - Indian Railway Management Service (Personnel), Group 'A'
 - Indian Railway Management Service (Accounts), Group 'A'
 - Indian Railway Protection Force Service, Group 'A'
 - Indian Revenue Service (Customs & Indirect Taxes) Group 'A'
 - Indian Revenue Service (Income Tax) Group 'A'
 - Indian Trade Service, Group 'A' (Grade III)
 - Armed Forces Headquarters Civil Service, Group 'B' (Section Officer's Grade)
 - Delhi, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Lakshadweep, Daman & Diu and Dadra & Nagar Haveli Civil Service (DANICS), Group 'B'
 - Delhi, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Lakshadweep, Daman & Diu and Dadra & Nagar Haveli Police Service (DANIPS), Group 'B'
 - Pondicherry Civil Service (PONDICS), Group 'B'
 - Pondicherry Police Service (PONDIPS), Group 'B'
- Exam Notice No: 05/2026-CSE Dated 04.02.2026
Helpline No: 11-24041001 or email ID – upscsoap@nic.in
Eligibility Criteria of UPSC Civil Services (Pre) Examination

Age Limit: A candidate must have attained the age of 21 years and must not have attained the age of 32 years on the 1st of August, 2026 i.e., the candidate must have been born not earlier than 2nd August, 1994 and not later than 1st August, 2005.

Age Relaxation: Category-wise age relaxation is as mentioned below.

- # SC/ ST: 5 years
- # OBC: 3 years
- # PwBD (Unreserved): 10 years
- # PwBD (OBC): 13 years
- # PwBD (SC/ ST): 15 years

Educational Qualification: A candidate must hold a degree of any of the Universities incorporated by an Act of the central or State Legislature in India or other educational institutions established by an Act of Parliament or declared to be deemed as a University under Section 3 of the University Grants Commission Act, 1956 or possess an equivalent qualification.

Appearing Candidates: Candidates who have appeared at a qualifying examination the passing of which would render them educationally qualified for the Commission's Examination but have not been informed of the result as also the candidates who intend to appear at such a qualifying examination will also be eligible for admission to the written part of Civil Services Examination, 2026. However, all such candidates, who are declared qualified by the Commission for Interview/Personality Test, will be required to produce proof of passing of the requisite qualifying examination within the time limit prescribed in Rule 13 of CSE, 2026.

UPSC Civil Services (Pre) Examination Scheme

The Civil Services Examination will consist of two successive stages :

- Civil Services (Preliminary) Examination (Objective type) for the selection of candidates for the Main Examination; and
- Civil Services (Main) Examination (Written and Interview) for the selection of candidates for the various Services and posts noted above.

Examination Centres @ Assam: Jorhat and Dispur .

Application Fee: Category-wise application fee is as under.

Category	Fee
SC/ST/Women/PwBD category	Nil
Other category	Rs. 100

How to Apply for UPSC Civil Services Examination ?

Interested and eligible candidates may apply online for these vacancy through online mode by visiting official UPSC Recruitment Portal. Candidates may follow below mentioned steps to apply for UPSC Civil Services Recruitment.

- # Scroll down, go to Important Web-Links section .
- # Click on the "Online Application Form" and register yourself.
- # Next again click on "Online Application Form" and Log in.
- # Fill your all personal and educational details and upload necessary documents.
- # Make payment of application fee as per your category and submit the form.
- # At the end, take a print out of the application form .

Important Dates of UPSC Civil Services (Pre) Examination 2026

- # Starting date of submission of online application: 4th February 2026
- # Last date of submission of online application: 24th February 2026, 6 PM
- # Date of Preliminary Exam: 24th May 2026

RRB Group D Recruitment 2026 – 22195 Group D/ Level 1 Posts

Last Date: 02/03/2026.

Railway Recruitment Board has released an employment notification for the recruitment of 22195 Group D/ Level 1 Vacancy under various zones of Railway Recruitment Board (RRB) against Advertisement No. CEN 09/2025. Interested and eligible candidates may apply.

RRB Group D Recruitment 2026

Name of post: Various Posts in Level 1 of 7th CPC Pay Matrix [Assistant TRD, Assistant Operations (Electrical), Assistant TL and AC, Assistant (S and T), Pointsman B, Assistant Track Machine, Trackmaintainer-IV, Assistant Bridge, Assistant Carriage and Wagon, Assistant Loco Shed (Electrical), Assistant P.Way]

No of posts: 22195 posts

RRB-wise/ Zone-wise Vacancy:

- # Western Railway (Mumbai): 3148
- # North Western Railway (Jaipur): 974
- # South Western Railway (Hubli): 90
- # West Central Railway (Jabalpur): 1147
- # East Coast Railway (Bhubaneswar): 803
- # South East Central Railway (Bilaspur): 1199
- # Northern Railway (New Delhi): 3537
- # Southern Railway (Chennai): 1036
- # North Eastern Railway (Gorakhpur): 1196
- # Northeast Frontier Railway (Guwahati): 1776
- # Eastern Railway (Kolkata): 1180
- # Central Railway (Mumbai): 2012
- # East Central Railway (Hajipur): 976
- # North Central Railway (Allahabad): 1183
- # South Eastern Railway (Kolkata): 955
- # South Central Railway (Secunderabad): 1016

Pay: Pay Level-1 of 7th CPC Starting Basic Pay ₹ 18000/-
Advt No: CEN 09/2025

Helpline for candidates:

For any queries related to submission of Application of CEN 09/2025 (10:00 AM to 5:00 PM on all working days)

Email: rrb.help@csc.gov.in

Phone: 9592001188 / 01725653333

Eligibility Criteria of RRB Group D Recruitment

Age Limit: Age limit must be between 18 to 33 years as on 01/01/2026.

Age Relaxation: Category-wise age relaxation is as mentioned below.

- # SC/ ST: 5 years
- # OBC: 3 years
- # PwD (Unreserved): 10 years
- # PwD (OBC): 13 years
- # PwD (SC/ ST): 15 years

Educational Qualification: Candidates must be 10th pass or ITI or equivalent or National Apprenticeship Certificate (NAC) granted by NCVT.

Application Fee:

Category	Fee
SC/ ST / Ex-Serviceman / PwBD / Female / Transgender / Minorities / Economically backward class.	Rs. 250
Others	Rs. 500

Refund of Examination Fee: Candidates belonging to PwBD, Female, Transgender, Ex-Servicemen, SC, ST, Minority Communities, and Economically Backward Classes will receive full refund of Examination Fee Rs.250/- after the examination. All other candidates will receive a refund of Examination Fee Rs.400/- out total paid Rs. 500/- after the examination.

How to Apply for RRB Group D Recruitment ?

Interested and eligible candidates may apply online for these vacancy through online mode by visiting official RRB Recruitment Portal. Candidates may follow below mentioned steps to apply for RRB Group D Vacancy.

Scroll down, go to Important Web-Links section .

Click on the "Online Application Form" and complete the registration process by clicking "Register Now".

In the next stage, fill your all personal and educational details and upload necessary documents.

At the end, pay the application fee as per your category and submit the form.

Don't forget to take a print out of the application form .

Important Dates of RRB Group D Recruitment 2026

Starting date of submission of online application: 31st January 2026, 00.00 Hrs

Last date of submission of online application: 2nd March 2026, up to 23:59 Hrs

Selection Process of Railway Group D Recruitment

The recruitment process for RRB Group D posts comprise of the following stages:

- Computer Based Tests (CBT)
- Physical Efficiency Test (PET)
- Document Verification (DV) and
- Medical Examination (ME)

Computer Based Test (CBT)

A Computer Based Test (CBT) will be held with duration of 90 minutes among all eligible candidates. The Questions will be of objective type with multiple choices. The basic structure of CBT is as follows.

Topic/s	No. of Questions	Marks
General Science	25	25
Mathematics	25	25
General Intelligence & Reasoning	30	30
General Awareness & Current Affairs	20	20
Total	100	100

Negative Marking: There will be negative marking and 1/3 marks shall be deducted for each wrong answer.

Cut-Off Marks: Minimum percentage of marks for shortlisting in various communities: UR-40%, EWS-40%, OBC (Non creamy layer)-30%, SC-30%, ST-30%. These percentage of marks for eligibility may be relaxed by 2 marks for PwBD candidates in case of shortage of PwBD candidates against vacancies reserved for them.

Syllabus for RRB Group D CBT

The syllabus for RRB Group D is as mentioned below.

- Mathematics
 - Number system, BODMAS, Decimals, Fractions, LCM, HCF, Ratio and Proportion, Percentages, Mensuration, Time and Work, Time and Distance, Simple and Compound Interest, Profit and Loss, Algebra, Geometry and Trigonometry, Elementary Statistics, Square root, Age Calculations, Calendar & Clock, Pipes & Cistern etc.
- General Intelligence and Reasoning
 - Analogies, Alphabetical and Number Series, Coding and Decoding, Mathematical operations, Relationships, Syllogism, Jumbling, Venn Diagram, Data Interpretation and Sufficiency, Conclusions and Decision making, Similarities and Differences, Analytical Reasoning, Classification, Directions, Statement – Arguments and Assumptions etc.

c. General Science

The syllabus under this shall cover Physics, Chemistry and Life Sciences of 10th standard level (CBSE).

d. General Awareness on Current Affairs

in Science & Technology, Sports, Culture, Personalities, Economics, Politics and any other subject of importance.

Physical Efficiency Test (PET)

Based on the merit of the candidates in the CBT, candidates shall be called for PET three times the community wise total vacancy of the Posts notified against RRBs/RRCs. However, Railways reserve the right to increase/decrease this ratio as required to ensure availability of adequate/reasonable number of candidates for all the notified posts.

Parameter Male Female

Weight Carrying Should be able to lift and carry 35 Kg of weight for a distance of 100 meters in 2 minutes in one chance without putting the weight down
Should be able to lift and carry 20 Kg of weight for a distance of 100 meters in 2 minutes in one chance without putting the weight down

Running Should be able to run for a distance of 1000 meters in 4 minutes and 15 seconds in one chance. Should be able to run for a distance of 1000 meters in 5 minutes and 40 seconds in one chance

Passing Physical Efficiency Test (PET) is mandatory and the same will be qualifying in nature. The criteria for PET are as under:

Document Verification and Empanelling of Candidates

Based on the performance of candidates in CBT subject to their qualifying in PET, the number of candidates to be called for Document Verification (DV) will be equal to the number of notified vacancies (i.e. in the ratio of 1:1).

In case of two or more candidates securing same normalized percentile score, their merit position shall be determined by age criteria i.e. older person shall be placed at higher merit and in case age being same, then alphabetical order (A to Z) of the name shall be taken into account to break the tie.

Appointment of selected candidates is subject to their passing requisite Medical Fitness Test to be conducted by the Railway Administration, final verification of educational and community certificates and verification of antecedents/character of the candidates.

SBI CBO Recruitment 2026 – 2273 Circle Based Officer Posts, Online Apply

Last Date: 25/02/2026.

State bank of India (SBI) has released an employment notification for the recruitment of 2273 Circle Based Officer (CBO) vacancy on regular basis for its various circles across the country. Interested and eligible candidates may apply online here.

Name of post: Circle Based Officer

No of posts: 2273 posts

No of posts @ North Eastern Circle: 79 posts

Pay: Presently, the starting basic pay is Rs. 48,480/- in the scale of Rs. 48480-20000/7-62480-2340/2-67160-2680/7-85920 applicable to Junior Management Grade Scale-I plus 2 advance increments.

Advertisement No: CRPD/CBO/2025-26/18

Helpdesk: In case of any problem in filling up the form, payment of fee/ intimation charges or receipt of Admission/ call letter, queries may be made at telephone no. 022-22820427 (between 11:00 AM to 05:00 PM on working days) or lodge their query on http://cgrs.ibps.in.

Eligibility Criteria of SBI CBO Recruitment

Age Limit: Candidate age should not be below 21 years and Not above 30 years as of 31.12.2025 i.e. candidates must have been born not later than 31.12.2004 and not earlier than

01.01.1996 (both days inclusive).

Age Relaxation: The category wise age relaxation is as mentioned below.

- # SC: 5 years
- # ST: 5 years
- # OBC: 3 years
- # PwBD/ UR-EWS: 10 years
- # PwBD/ OBC: 13 years
- # PwBD/ SC-ST: 15 years

Educational Qualification: Graduation in any discipline from a recognised University or any equivalent qualification recognised as such by the Central Government including Integrated Dual Degree (IDD). Candidates possessing qualifications such as Medical, Engineering, Chartered Accountant, Cost Accountant would also be eligible.

Experience: Minimum 2 years' experience (Post Essential Academic Qualification Experience) as on 31.12.2025 as an officer in any Scheduled Commercial Bank or any Regional Rural Bank as listed in Second Schedule of Reserve Bank of India.

Experience: Minimum 2 years' experience (Post Essential Academic Qualification Experience) as on 31.12.2025 as an officer in any Scheduled Commercial Bank or any Regional Rural Bank as listed in Second Schedule of Reserve Bank of India.

Local Language: The candidates applying for vacancies of a particular Circle, should be proficient (reading, writing and understanding) in any one of the specified opted local language of that Circle (mentioned against each Circle). The test of knowledge of specified opted local language of the applied circle will be conducted as a part of selection process. It will be conducted for provisionally selected candidates (based on performance in online test, Screening and interview) before joining the Bank. Candidate who fails to qualify this test will not be offered appointment. Candidates who produce 10th or 12th standard mark sheet/ certificate evidencing having studied the specified opted local language of the applied circle as one of the subjects will not be required to undergo the language test.

Application Fee:

Category	Fee
UR/ OBC/ EWS	Rs 750/-
SC/ ST/ PwBD	Nil

How to Apply for SBI Recruitment ?

Interested and eligible candidates can apply online through the SBI Career website https://bank.sbi/careers or https://www.sbi.co.in/careers starting from 29th January 2026 onwards. To apply online they may follow below mentioned steps.

Scroll down, go to Important Web-Links section .

Click on Online Application Form link .

A new webpage will be opened.

Enter all your personal and educational details as required .

Upload your passport sized photograph and signature and other required documents.

Pay the application fee as per your category and at the end click on submit button .

Don't forget to take a print of submitted application form .

Important Dates of SBI CBO Recruitment 2026

Starting date of online application submission: 29th January 2026

Last date of online application submission: 25th February 2026

Over ₹ 65 crore distributed to 6,561 beneficiaries in Sonitpur

Chief Minister Sarma launches Atmanirbhar Assam Abhiyan 2.0

HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, Feb 20: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma launched the first instalment of financial assistance under the State government's flagship Mukhyamantrir Atmanirbhar Assam Abhiyan 2.0 to young entrepreneurs from Sonitpur, Biswanath and Darrang districts at a function on Thursday at Kumar Gaon in Tezpur. Through the programme, more than ₹ 65 crore was distributed among 6,561 aspiring entrepreneurs, including 2,869 from Sonitpur, 1,864 from Biswanath and 1,828 from Darrang. The first instalment has now reached 50,376 beneficiaries across 25 districts with a cumulative outlay of ₹ 461 crore.

Addressing the gathering, the CM described the financial assistance as "a ladder for building the future of our young people" and urged beneficiaries to "climb it with confidence, discipline and honesty." He emphasised that government jobs alone cannot



provide employment for all and highlighted the need to create a strong entrepreneurial ecosystem in Assam.

Sarma also referred to Assam's 'Shradhanjali' scheme for migrant workers and outlined broader employment opportunities, including the semiconductor unit at Jagiroad and the thermal power project at Chapar in Dhubri, which are expected to

generate thousands of jobs.

Explaining the scheme, he said beneficiaries receive ₹ 75,000 as the first instalment, ₹ 25,000 after a three-day training programme and the remaining ₹ 1 lakh after one year. Proper fund utilisation is monitored, with eligible beneficiaries able to access higher bank credit under schemes like Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana.

The Abhiyan aims to cover 74,444 beneficiaries across Assam, including ₹ 2 lakh for general category recipients and ₹ 5 lakh for professional category recipients, with half as a grant and half as an interest-free loan.

The programme was attended by Health and Family Welfare Minister Ashok Singhal, MP Ranjit Dutta, several MLAs, former MP Pallab Lochan Das and senior officials.

CEM Debolal Gorlosa inaugurates cancer care facility in Haflong

New centre brings early detection, chemotherapy and palliative care

HT Correspondent

HAFLONG, Feb 20: In a major boost to healthcare in Dima Hasao, Chief Executive Member (CEM) of the North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council (NCHAC), Debolal Gorlosa inaugurated the Cachar Centre Hospital & Research Centre Haflong Campus (CCHRC) at the Dima Hasao TB Centre within Haflong Civil Hospital on Thursday.

The inauguration was attended by NCHAC Chairman Mohet Hojai, Executive Members Samuel Changsan, Donpainon Thaosen, Probata Johori, MACs Dhriti Thaosen, Monjoy Langthasa and Joint Secretary Rebecca Changsan, ACS, among others.

Addressing the gathering, CEM Gorlosa reiterated his administration's commitment to strengthening the district's medical infrastructure for quality healthcare access. He urged the public to adopt healthy lifestyles, including regular physical activities like gym and yoga and appealed to citizens to avoid tobacco consumption to reduce cancer incidence.



Executive Member Samuel Changsan highlighted the transformative significance of the new centre, which will provide early cancer detection, chemotherapy and palliative care within the district, reducing the physical and financial burden on patients who previously had to travel to Silchar or Guwahati.

Dr Iqbal Bahar, representing CCHRC, thanked CEM Gorlosa and noted the facility was developed with NCHAC support and HDFC Ergo General Insurance CSR funding. He said many cancer cases in Dima Hasao are linked to oral and throat cancers.

The programme was attended by health officials, NGOs, Gaon Burahs, media personnel and members of the public, marking a major step forward in specialised healthcare access in the hill district.

NFR lifts speed restriction on Simaluguri–Moranhat stretch

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 20: Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) has successfully completed major curve realignment work between Simaluguri and Moranhat Sections in the Tinsukia Division, removing a Permanent Speed Restriction (PSR). The work marks a significant milestone in strengthening rail infrastructure and enhancing operational efficiency in the section.

The project involved complex engineering activities executed during the traffic block with close coordination among the Engineering, Operating and Traction Distribution (TRD) departments. The existing 4-degree curve was realigned and connected with a newly laid 2-degree curve. New Overhead Equipment (OHE) wires and masts were also installed to ensure seamless electric traction operations.

Previously, the section had a 400-metre-long 4-degree curve. Under the new alignment, a 660-metre-long 2-degree curve has been laid on a newly developed formation of approximately 650 metres. The maximum slew during realignment was 27.77 metres.

As part of the enhancement, a new Bridge No 31 (4m x 4m, total length 10.2m) has been constructed



on the realigned stretch, ensuring improved track stability, safety and long-term durability.

With the completion of the work, the 80 kmph PSR has been permanently removed. The track now permits a Maximum Permissible Speed (MPS) of 110 kmph, reducing travel time and enhancing punctuality.

This accomplishment underscores NFR's commitment to modernising rail infrastructure, improving safety standards and providing faster, safer and more reliable train services across the region.

37th Central Foundation Day of ATSU to be celebrated

HT Correspondent

MORIGAOON, Feb 20: The 37th Central Foundation Day of the All Tiwa Students' Union (ATSU) will be celebrated with pomp and gaiety on February 25 at Bihutali, Morigaon town, which was disclosed by the members of the central committee in a press meet held at Bihutali ground on Friday. In the press meet, ATSU's president Prasant Masrang, general secretary Tarun Madar, office bearer Kandarpa Hukai and other central leaders advocated for the unification of the two split factions before the upcoming foundation day. They said the ATSU will continue its democratic movement until the basic problems of the Tiwa community are resolved. "So we should unite, avoiding mutual conflicts, towards the upliftment of the ethnic community of Assam," they added.

The organisation also disclosed the schedule of the foundation day celebration. The flag will be hoisted by ATSU's president Prasant Masrang. Thereafter, the memorial service will be inaugurated by general secretary Tarun Madar.



The event will be inaugurated by Water Resources and Public Relations Minister Piyush Hazarika. The event will be attended by Morigaon District Commissioner Anamika Tewari, Senior Superintendent of Police Prakash Sonwal and Assam Sourav Awardee Nadiram Deuri. The opening ceremony will be chaired by Prasant Masrang. The meeting will be attended by Dr Ronuj Pegu, Minister of State for Education and Upland Tribal Affairs, as the chief guest. The event will also honour Kris-

nakanta Handique Awardee Maneswar Deuri and Assam Government Cultural Artist Pensioner Suven Bardoloi. The meeting will be attended by Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council Chief Executive Member Tonkeswar Rabha, ATSU's Advisor Rimal Amsi, founder GS Hemanta Kumar Deuri and Nikhil Bodo Students' Union's president Dipen Bodo as guests of honour. The ATSU central leadership said the meeting will be attended by several ethnic youth and student leaders.

Dibrugarh Press Club to get permanent office complex

HT Correspondent

DIBRUGARH, Feb 20: In a significant milestone for the media fraternity of Upper Assam, the Dibrugarh Press Club (DPC), the region's oldest media organisation, is set to have its own permanent office complex at the abandoned tea plantation site of Jalannagar South Tea Estate Private Limited in Jalannagar South. The foundation stone of the proposed building is expected to be laid by Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, informed DPC president Manash Jyoti Dutta.

The development comes following approval from the Government of Assam and the formal relinquishment of a plot of land measuring 3 Kathas 9 Lessas by the tea estate management in favour of Dibrugarh Press Club. The land is under Mancotta Khanikar Mouza in Dibrugarh West Revenue Circle.

Expressing gratitude, the DPC thanked the state government and district administration for facilitating the allotment of land within the city, fulfilling a long-pending demand of the media fraternity. The Club also conveyed special appreciation to Mrigendra Jalan and Mrityunjay Jalan, directors of the tea company, besides the management and plantation workers of Jalannagar South Tea Estate for relinquishing the plot.

For journalists who have long functioned without permanent infrastructure, the development is being viewed as a historic and transformative step. The proposed complex is envisioned as a modern, fully equipped media hub designed to cater to the evolving demands of contemporary journalism. In addition to administrative office space, it will house a spacious conference and seminar hall with advanced audio-visual facilities, a digital newsroom and co-working space, a well-stocked reference library and a media resource centre. A dedicated media training hall will support capacity-building programmes and skill development workshops for young and working journalists. An exhibition-cum-museum section will document and showcase the history and evolution of journalism in Upper Assam, preserving rare photographs, documents, and memorabilia. DPC president Manash Jyoti Dutta stated that efforts will be made to involve members of the tea plantation workers' community by creating employment opportunities during both construction and operational phases, reflecting the Club's commitment to inclusive growth and community engagement.

Relocation of bus stand, restriction on e-rickshaws creates hurdles

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Feb 20: The decision by the district administration to relocate the Batadroba-Dhing bus stand to the outskirts of Nagaon town has caused immense hardship for the public. The ban on entry of tempos and e-rickshaws from Huz Bakultola has forced people to take a longer route, resulting in increased travel time and expenses.

People traveling from Dhing-Batadroba to Nagaon town are forced to take a detour of six to seven kilometers from Huz Bakultola, leading to increased fares of Rs 50-60 for tempos and e-rickshaws. Patients, women employees and other commuters are facing significant difficulties.

The public has demanded that the district commissioner allow a limited number of tempos and e-rickshaws to enter the town from Huz Bakultola via the Dhing Gate flyover. Residents have also called for the introduction of a city bus service in Nagaon. Local MLA Rupak Sarma and Nagaon district commissioner Debashish Sarma had previously announced plans for a city bus service, but it has not yet been implemented.

Disaster Management meeting held at Tamulpur

HT Correspondent

TAMULPUR, Feb 20: An important meeting of the District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA), Tamulpur was held on Friday in the conference hall of the District Commissioner's office. The meeting was chaired by the District Commissioner and Chairperson of DDMA, Simi Karan, IAS.

During the meeting, a detailed review was conducted of the damages caused by disasters during the financial year 2025-26. Heads of departments including Soil Conservation, PWD (Roads), Assam Power Distribution Company Limited (APDCL), Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), Irrigation and others participated and presented reports on the losses incurred under their respective departments.

Discussions were also held regarding proposed schemes to be submitted under the State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF). The concerned departments were directed to submit necessary proposals at the earliest and ensure proper implementation of approved projects.

The meeting further reviewed certain pending bills and payment-related matters under the DDMA, Tamulpur. The District Commissioner emphasised the need for stronger inter-departmental coordination in disaster management and noted that with the monsoon season approaching, all concerned departments must remain prepared for possible floods and storms.

Officials from the District Commissioner's office, along with departmental heads and staff were present at the meeting, informed Sub-Divisional Information and Public Relations Officer Bijoy Bezbaruah.

New auditorium of Purana Amolapatty Namghar inaugurated

HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, Feb 20: Inaugurating the newly constructed auditorium of Purana Amolapatty Namghar Samaj, built with contributions from social worker Devajit Kakati and his wife Dr Kabita Sharma Kakati, Nanigopal Devagoswami, Satradhikar of Dakshinpat Satra, said that religion means a way to meet God or strengthen our communion with God.

Satradhikar Nanigopal Devagoswami presented a letter of appreciation to the donor family of Devajit Kakati and Dr Kabita Sharma Kakati for their generosity in constructing the auditorium. Goswami, while explaining the importance of Shradhdha, said that it is the offering of a son to his father with gratitude and respect. "The father's place is higher than that of the gods and through serving the father, we can receive the blessings of the gods. A father dedicates his life to build the future of his children so that they become builders of human society."

As a grateful son of a good father, Devajit Kakati and his wife have benefited the Namghar community by donating this temple.

Nipan Bardoloi, executive president of Purana Amolapatty Namghar Samaj, presided over the meeting, which was attended by prominent educationists Dipali Chaliha, Dr Rajiv Barua, Babul Bardoloi, Jatindra Narayan Sharma and Rajani Changkakati.

BTC CEM launches major healthcare, education and digital infrastructure projects

Initiatives include Critical Care Hospital, University administrative building and Digital Studio

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Feb 20: Marking a significant boost to healthcare infrastructure in the region, BTC Chief Executive Member (CEM) Hagrama Mohilary on Friday laid the foundation stone for the construction of a 50-bedded Critical Care Hospital Block (CCB) under PM-ABHIM at Kokrajhar Medical College & Hospital, Kokrajhar.

A ceremonial Bhumii Pujan was also performed on the occasion in the presence of Derhasaat Basumatary, EM, Health & Family Welfare, BTC and other dignitaries and officials. The project, to be completed within 18 months will be executed at an estimated cost of ₹ 23.75 crore. The proposed G+3 structure will be equipped with essential service facilities, including firefighting and fire alarm systems, to ensure enhanced patient safety and operational efficiency.

Further, the BTC Chief inaugurated the Maternity and Child Health Wing at Kokrajhar Medical College & Hospital, which is expected to become operational for public services within approximately 15 days. He also took a detailed tour of the facilities and



reviewed the infrastructure and services available at the new wing.

Later in the day, the BTC Chief performed Bhumii Pujan for construction of Kokrajhar

University administrative building for its elevation as a university under TNEIF on Engineering, Procurement and Construction (EPC) Mode-I Basis (Package No II). Der-

hasaat Basumatary, EM; Jubiraj Basumatary, MCLA; Dhaneswar Goyary, MCLA; Prof Ganesh Ch Wary, Vice Chancellor, Kokrajhar University, along with other dignitaries were present at the Bhumii Pujan programme at Harinaguri.

In addition, the BTC Chief laid the foundation stone for construction of a state-of-the-art Digital Studio at Haloadal village in Kokrajhar district, to be developed at an estimated cost of ₹ 10 crore. The proposed studio aims to promote filmmaking, digital content creation and creative industries within the district while providing professional facilities for movie shooting, set design, animation, audio recording and VFX production. The project is also expected to enhance skill development and employment opportunities for local youth and position Kokrajhar as a regional hub for digital media and creative arts in BTC and Assam.

The series of initiatives highlights the continued commitment of the BTC administration towards strengthening healthcare, higher education and digital infrastructure in the region.

Traffic chaos persists below Hojai Railway over bridge

HT Correspondent

HOJAI, Feb 20: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma inaugurated the railway over bridge (ROB) connecting Purana Bazar (old market) to Notun Bazar (new market) and West Karbi Anglong on March 15, 2024. Calling it a "historic day," the CM said it would greatly ease long-standing traffic congestion caused by frequent railway gate closures. He had also promised to discuss other key issues with railway officials for public convenience. Yet nearly two years later, the road under the bridge is choked with chaos. Except for the centre of the bridge, where temporary lights are installed, the rest remains unlit at night. Roadside shops and stalls have narrowed the street below the ROB, making it hard for vehicles to pass. E-rickshaw and auto-rickshaw drivers stop randomly to pick up passengers, causing frequent jams.

Social worker Anup Kumar Barthakur said, "The CM's inauguration of ROB ended the delays caused due to frequent railway gate closures, but now shops and e-rickshaws block the road below ROB, creating another problem. The district administration should take necessary steps, shift vendors and set e-rickshaw zones to fulfill CM's vision."

Youth Gourav Ghosh added, "Traffic is worse than before. One e-rickshaw halts everything—customers skip the market due to these delays. Worse, no street lights on the ROB plunge it into darkness evenings and nights, scaring users and dimming Hojai's town beauty." Daily commuter Alok Das said, "It's too dark and unsafe on the unlit bridge at night."

Local residents have appealed for street lights and clearing of the roads below. They urged the Hojai District Administration to relocate shops below and beside the ROB, enforce rickshaw rules, install lights and widen paths. Only then, they say, will the CM's "historic bridge" truly serve the public.

In Tripura, Home Minister dismisses Hindi imposition claims Amit Shah hails 21 peace accords, says Northeast transformed under PM Modi



HT Correspondent
AGARTALA, Feb 20: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Thursday said the Northeast has been transformed into a "land of development" under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, highlighting the signing of 21 peace accords and the rehab-

ilitation of over 11,000 youths who had joined insurgent movements.

Addressing a gathering in Tripura, Shah said the Centre's sustained efforts over the past decade have brought lasting peace and stability to the region, which had long grappled with insurgency

and unrest. "In the last ten years, 21 peace accords have been signed in the Northeast and around 11,000 youths have laid down arms and joined the mainstream," he said.

The Home Minister asserted that the government's development-focused approach has replaced what he described as decades of neglect.

He said improved connectivity, infrastructure projects and investment initiatives have accelerated growth across northeastern states, integrating them more closely with the rest of the country.

Shah also addressed concerns raised by opposition parties regarding the alleged imposition of Hindi. He said what he termed a "false campaign" claiming that Hindi was being forced upon people had been dismantled over the past decade.

"There is no competition between Hindi and other Indian languages. Hindi and local languages are like two daughters of the same mother," Shah said. He added that promoting Hindi would not weaken regional languages but instead strengthen them, as all Indian languages share a common cultural foundation.

Emphasising linguistic harmony, Shah said the government remains committed to preserving and promoting all Indian languages while encouraging greater use of Hindi as a link language. He maintained that unity in diversity remains the cornerstone of India's linguistic and cultural identity.

Meghalaya assembly proceedings suspended as mark of respect to deceased MP Syngkon



SHILLONG, Feb 20: The Meghalaya assembly on Friday suspended all scheduled business, as legislators, led by Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma, paid tributes to Shillong MP Ricky A J Syngkon, who died on Thursday.

Speaker Thomas A Sangma said the House would take up only obituary references during the day, as a mark of respect to the Voice of the People Party (VPP) leader.

A revised calendar of sittings will be circulated later, he said. The Meghalaya budget for 2026-27 was scheduled to be presented in the assembly on Friday.

Syngkon, 54, reportedly collapsed while playing futsal on the outskirts of the city, and doctors at a private hospital declared him dead around 8:45 PM on Thurs-

day. The CM described Syngkon's death as a profound loss for Meghalaya.

"It is with a very deep sense of sorrow that I stand here today to pay our respect to the late Syngkon," Sangma said.

He said Syngkon's charm and simplicity made people feel instantly connected to him.

Leader of Opposition, Mukul Sangma, said the parliamentarian was a passionate public figure, who entered politics with the resolve to represent the people.

"We have lost a very promising young man, who was just in the initial innings of public life and making a mark not only at the state and regional level, but also at the national level," he said. (PTI)

Nagaland University confers Lifetime Achievement Awards at ICCMR-2026

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, Feb 20: A galaxy of eminent science academicians were honoured with Lifetime Achievement Awards by Nagaland University during the Inaugural Ceremony of the International Conference on Chemistry in Multidisciplinary Research (ICCMR-2026), organised by the Department of Chemistry from 18-20 February 2026. At the inaugural ceremony held on February 18, at I Ithoshe Kinimi Hall, Lumami, the awards were presented to Prof AK Mallik; Prof VS Raja; Prof MA Quraishi; Prof M Indira Devi and Prof Nitin Chattopadhyay.

Prof AK Mallik of Punjabi University, Patiala; Prof VS Raja of Indian Institute of Technology Bombay (IITB); Prof MA Quraishi formerly of IIT (BHU) Varanasi and associated with AKS University, Satna; Prof M Indira Devi of Nagaland University and Prof Nitin Chattopadhyay formerly of Jadavpur University, Kolkata, were recognised for their extensive contributions to materials chemistry, corrosion science and green chemistry, physical chemistry, photochemistry, biophysical chemistry, surface chemistry, fluorescence sensing, nanotechnology and interdisciplinary chemical research. (PTI)

Four militants arrested

IMPHAL, Feb 20: Security forces arrested four militants belonging to various proscribed outfits in Manipur for their alleged involvement in extortion activities, police said on Friday.

Two members of the banned People's Liberation Army were apprehended from the Makhra area in Imphal West district and Porompat in Imphal East on Thursday, a police statement said.

"One 9 mm pistol with a magazine and four live rounds were recovered from their possession," it said. An active cadre of outlawed Prepak (Pro) was also arrested from the Khewa Bazar in Imphal East district on Thursday.

A member of the banned UPPK was apprehended from the Malom Tuliha Makhra Leikai area in Bishnupur district a day ago, the police statement said.

In a separate operation, security forces recovered a cache of arms and ammunition from the Keirak Awang Loukon Chingol area in Kachching district, it said.

Security forces have been conducting search operations in Manipur since ethnic violence broke out two years ago.

More than 260 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in ethnic strife between Meiteis and Kuki-Zo groups since May 2023. (PTI)

Hydropower to drive Arunachal's next growth leap: CM Khandu

ITANAGAR, Feb 20: Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu on Friday said hydropower will anchor the state's next phase of economic transformation, with projects worth around ₹ 2 lakh crore set to take off in the coming years.

Addressing the Statehood Day celebrations at IG Park here, Khandu said his government had declared 2025-2035 as the 'Decade of Hydropower' and underscored the sector's central role in shaping Arunachal Pradesh's future.

"Currently, 1.2 GW of projects is operational and 4.8 GW is under construction. The 2,000-MW Subansiri Lower Project is slated for completion by this year, while the 2,880-MW Dibang Project is targeted for 2032," he said.

The chief minister said the upcoming projects are expected to generate ₹ 4,000 crore annually, besides creating over 30,000 direct and 16,000 indirect jobs.

Khandu said that Arunachal Pradesh, rich in coal and minerals such as graphite has already auctioned several mining blocks, with further surveys and investigations underway

to explore additional opportunities.

He also asserted that Arunachal Pradesh has transitioned from a frontier economy to one of the fastest-growing states in the country.

"Since 2015, the Gross State Domestic Product has grown by 166 per cent... and per capita income by over 105 per cent. The state budget has increased by 218 per cent during the period," he said.

Terming connectivity the foundation of development, Khandu said road length in the state has increased by 251 per cent.

As many as 4,060 km of national highways are under construction, while over ₹ 55,000 crore has been committed for the frontier highway, he said.

In healthcare, Khandu said the government has announced a ₹ 3,666 crore expansion plan.

Education reforms under the 'Mission Shiksha Arunachal 2029' include ₹ 750 crore investments, school upgradation, hostel construction, AI-enabled monitoring systems and India's first 3D-printed classrooms, the chief minister said. (PTI)



Arunachal vital to India's strategic strength: Governor

Khandu focuses hydropower, connectivity and security on 40th Statehood Day

ITANAGAR, Feb 20: Arunachal Pradesh Governor K T Parnaik on Friday said the northeastern state is a vital pillar of India's strategic strength, energy future and environmental security.

Addressing a function here on the occasion of its 40th Statehood Day, he said Arunachal Pradesh stands at the forefront of national security, hydropower potential and the country's Act East vision.

"Arunachal's geographical location reinforces national security while serving as a gateway to Southeast Asia. Rich in hydropower potential, forests and biodiversity, the state is poised to become a hub of energy self-reliance and sustainable growth," he said.

Arunachal Pradesh attained full statehood on February 20, 1987.

Over the past four decades, he said, the state has made remarkable strides in education, healthcare, connectivity, digital development and cultural preservation despite challenging terrain and climatic conditions.

Speaking on the occasion, Chief Minister Pema Khandu said hydropower will anchor the state's next phase of economic transformation, with projects worth around ₹ 2 lakh crore set to take off in the coming years.

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The governor asserted that the state has leapfrogged from 1G to 5G connectivity, expanding e-governance and digital services.

"Over 1.5 lakh women are now linked to self-help groups, with more than 13,000 'Lakshmi Didis' emerging as symbols of self-reliance. The promotion of startups, MSMEs, natural farming and

food processing is turning youth into job creators rather than job seekers," he said.

"Difficult terrain, landslides and border vulnerabilities require continued focus on infrastructure and security," Parnaik said.

The security situation in Tirap, Changlang and Longding districts "remains sensitive" and requires sustained efforts to ensure peace and development, he said.

During his address, Deputy Chief Minister Chowna Mein described the journey from the days of the North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA) to full-fledged statehood as "remarkable", marked by progress from isolation to integration and from limited connectivity to expanding infrastructure.

Mein also highlighted growth in agriculture and horticulture, noting that Arunachal Pradesh has emerged as India's leading producer of kiwi and the first to receive organic certification for its cultivation, with over 28,000 hectares under organic farming. (PTI)

Rio calls for Naga unity, renewed political talks with Centre CM briefs party on Shah meeting, FNTA, financial concerns and regional issues

HT Correspondent
DIMAPUR, Feb 20: Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio on Tuesday stressed the need for unity among Nagas and renewed political engagement with the Centre, stating that the opposition-less government in 2026 is focused on resolving the Naga political issue.

Addressing a grand reception at the NPF office in Chümoukedima, Rio briefed party leaders on his recent visit to New Delhi, discussions on the Frontier Nagaland Territorial Authority (FNTA), financial concerns and other key policy matters.

Detailing his February 3 meeting with Union Home Minister Amit Shah, Rio said a Political Affairs sub-committee represented the state to discuss constitutional provisions, the Naga flag and integration issues. Shah agreed to process the Naga political issue at the political and ministerial level and to form a committee with officials and intelligence experts for further dialogue.

On FNTA, Rio described it as an administrative arrangement to address developmental aspirations in eastern Nagaland while maintaining state unity. Highlighting financial concerns ahead of the 16th Finance Commission, he cautioned against inadequate funding, informing Union Finance Minister



Nirmala Sitharaman that it could trigger public unrest.

On Manipur, Rio said discussions involved BJP Northeast in-charge Sambit Patra and explored inclusive arrangements among Meiteis, Nagas and Kukis, proposing Deputy Chief Minister positions for Naga and Kuki leaders. He cautioned against contradictory statements by leaders, including those associated with former Chief Minister S C Jamir, which could weaken the state's negotiating position.

Regarding the proposed visit of American evangelist Franklin Graham, Rio noted the Government of India granted conditional permission, which organisers did not accept. He also addressed issues on Protected Area Permit (PAP),

Free Movement Regime (FMR), border concerns and oil and gas exploration along the Assam-Nagaland border, with a Cabinet sub-committee formed for deliberations.

Rio highlighted the importance of emotional, cultural and social integration of Nagas across states for a durable settlement, even if physical integration is not immediately feasible. He said PAC would continue engagement with Naga national groups and party leaders should strengthen the organisation at all levels.

Earlier, NPF Secretary General Achumbemo Kikon said the party delegation led by Rio pressed Amit Shah to restore Naga political talks to the political track and raised issues including PAP, border fencing and appointing a political representative for the Naga issue. The tripartite FNTA agreement was termed a significant milestone following the September 12, 2024 consensus resolution.

NPF Advisor Abu Metha highlighted the party's growing role in Manipur, with five MLAs in the ruling alliance and a Deputy Chief Minister post, urging unity among Nagas across states. Rio thanked party leaders and supporters for the grand reception and said the smooth NPF-NDPP merger reflects the spirit of unity in the state.

Rahul Gandhi, Abhishek Banerjee express condolences

SHILLONG, Feb 20: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Friday condoled the demise of Shillong MP Ricky A J Syngkon and said his commitment to public service and the people of Meghalaya would be remembered with respect.

Syngkon, 54, reportedly collapsed while playing futsal on the outskirts of Shillong and doctors at a private hospital declared him dead around 8:45 PM on Thursday.

"Saddened by the passing of Dr Ricky A J Syngkon, Lok Sabha MP from Shillong, Meghalaya. His commitment to public service and the people of Meghalaya will be remembered with respect. My condolences to his family, friends and supporters," Gandhi said in a post on X.

Meghalaya assembly proceedings were suspended on Friday, as a mark of respect to the deceased parliamentarian.

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.

Also, TMC general secretary Abhishek Banerjee on Friday expressed grief over the demise of Shillong MP Ricky A J Syngkon, describing him as a committed public representative devoted to the welfare of people.

"I am deeply saddened by the passing of Ricky A J Syngkon, the MP from Shillong and a committed public representative whose life was dedicated to the welfare and aspirations of his people.

"He represented the hopes of his constituency with sincerity, conviction and an abiding sense of responsibility. In public life, he was known for his grounded approach, accessibility to the people and steadfast commitment to regional identity and development," the TMC MP said in a post on X. Banerjee said Syngkon's untimely demise is a profound loss to the people of Meghalaya and to the larger democratic fraternity of the country.

"I extend my heartfelt condolences to his family, colleagues and supporters in this hour of grief," he added. (PTI)

No. KDB/BTC/15th FC(Untitle)/NIT/2025-26/1629

Dated Kokrajhar the 17th Feb., 2026

NOTICE INVITING TENDER

Sealed tenders affixing a non-refundable Court Fee Stamp of Rs.8.25 (Rupees Eight & Twenty-Five Paise) only with a validity period of 180 (one hundred eighty) days. Which will subsequently to be converted and drawn up in the APWD's printed F-2 forms are invited from the registered contractors of class-II and Class-I (A, B & C) category of Assam PWD (Roads & Building) and BTC, according to their eligibility for submitting tenders for the following work under 15th Finance Commission fund for the year 2024-25 during 2025-26. The tenders will be received by the undersigned up to 2.00 P.M. on 11.03.2026 and will be opened on the same date & place at 2.30 P.M.

Against the scheme shown below:-

Sl. No.	Name of Scheme	Estimated Amount	Earnest Money	Cost of Tender	Time for completion
1	Const. of CC Block road from Rainadabri High School to Molandubi Kashipara road.	19,00,000.00	(ST, SC, OBC-1% & Gen-2%)	570/-	3 months
2	Const. of C.C. Block road at Boro Adhabani Village near Saiguri PWD road to Dolor.	19,00,000.00	(ST, SC, OBC-1% & Gen-2%)	570/-	3 months
3	Const. of Boundary Wall at Garjasali of Purana Titaguri Village.	19,00,000.00	(ST, SC, OBC-1% & Gen-2%)	570/-	3 months
4	Const. of CC Block road from Titaguri L.P. School Via Raju's house at Titaguri Village.	17,00,000.00	(ST, SC, OBC-1% & Gen-2%)	510/-	3 months
5	Const. of Boundary wall of Shiv Mandir at Harinaguri Nepali Basti. (ID-1150 Activity Code)	19,00,000.00	(ST, SC, OBC-1% & Gen-2%)	570/-	3 months
6	Const. of road with CC Block Road from Laoti PWD road to Swankar Wary House.	16,00,000.00	(ST, SC, OBC-1% & Gen-2%)	480/-	3 months
7	Const. of C.C. Block road from main road to Mahendra's House at Kathalguri Village.	15,00,000.00	(ST, SC, OBC-1% & Gen-2%)	450/-	3 months
8	Const. of road with CC Block road from Bishmun Village to Danpur to 14.	15,00,000.00	(ST, SC, OBC-1% & Gen-2%)	450/-	3 months
9	Const. of Sand Graveling of road at Village Siljan.	18,00,000.00	(ST, SC, OBC-1% & Gen-2%)	540/-	3 months

Details NIT may be seen in all working days in the office of the undersigned. Tender paper will be issued to the contractors or their authorized agent from 17-02-2026 to 11-03-2026 in the office of the undersigned on payment of cost of Tender paper in the form of demand draft/Banker Cheque from any Nationalized Bank, duly pledged in favour of Principal Secretary, BTC, Kokrajhar, payable at Kokrajhar.

Sd/-

Block Development Officer,
Kokrajhar Dev. Block, Titaguri

IPR(BTC)/C/2025-26/4104

AI and critical minerals supply chains to bolster India joins US-led 'Pax Silica' alliance

NEW DELHI, Feb 20: India on Friday joined the US-led strategic alliance called 'Pax Silica' that aims to build a resilient supply chain for critical minerals and artificial intelligence with both sides projecting it as an initiative to cut over-dependence on one country, seen as an oblique apparent reference to China.

US Under Secretary for Economic Affairs Jacob Helberg, welcoming India to the coalition, flagged challenges arising out of "massively over-concentrated" supply chains for critical minerals and "threats of economic coercion and blackmail".

Though Helberg didn't name any country, it was almost clear that his remarks were directed at China's export controls on rare earth minerals and related products.

China has been controlling the flow of rare earth minerals which have a wide range of applications including in electronics, clean energy, aerospace, automotive, and defence sectors.

US Ambassador Sergio Gor, welcoming India to Pax-Silica, said the country brings strength to the coalition.

"Policies that will reinforce US-India tech cooperation will power AI innovation and adoption for years to come. We can share trusted AI technology with the world and especially with partners like India," he said.

"And critically, India brings strength. Peace doesn't come from hoping adversaries will play fair. We all know they won't. Peace comes through strength. India understands this. India understands strong borders," he said.

"India understands this part of the world. That strength, that sovereignty is exactly what Pax-Silica amplifies. Because here's the truth, strength multiplies when it's connected."

India signed a pact to formally join the Pax Silica at a ceremony held at the AI Impact Summit. It was attended by Union Minister for Electronics and Information Technology Ashwini Vaishnav, Helberg and Gor.

In his address, Vaishnav framed the moment as one that transcends



a ceremonial signing.

"We are not just holding a summit; we are building the future," he said, emphasising that new foundations and new opportunities are being created for the younger generation.

He underscored India's growing semiconductor capabilities, stating, "Today, India's talented engineers are designing the world's most advanced two-nanometer chips. The semiconductor industry will require around one million new skilled professionals, and this is a very big opportunity for India."

New Delhi's decision to join the coalition came amid efforts by both sides to finalise the proposed trade deal and move forward on several other initiatives to solidify bilateral ties after a period of severe strain.

"For too long, we have allowed the foundations of our economic security to drift. We find ourselves grappling with a global supply chain that is massively over-concentrated," Helberg said.

"We watch as our friends and allies face daily threats of economic coercion and blackmail, forced to choose between their sovereignty and their prosperity."

Helberg said the US and India are affirming their embrace of a pro-innovation approach to AI and forging a supply chain for a solid foundation for prosperity.

"So today, as we signed the Pax-Silica declaration, we say no to weaponised dependency, and we say no to blackmail. And together, we say that economic security is national security."

"But we must be precise about what that word means. There are some who use the words like global governance and sovereignty in the same breath, just like Orwell used," he said.

The senior Trump administration official added: "We are building a new architecture that diffuses intelligence, placing the awesome power of AI into the palm of our people's hands and unleashing a wave of unprecedented possibility."

In his remarks, Gor said Pax-Silica will define the 21st century economic and technological order and said India will play a key role in the new initiative.

"India's entry into Pax-Silica isn't just symbolic. It's strategic. It's essential. India is a nation with deep talent, deep enough to rival challengers," he said.

"India's engineering depth offers critical capabilities for this vital coalition. In addition to talent, India has made important strides towards critical mineral processing capacity, and that's something that we're fully engaged on also," he said.

The US ambassador also spoke about the "limitless potential" for cooperation between India and the US.

"From the trade deal to Pax-Silica to defence cooperation, the potential for our two nations to work together is truly limitless. And I aim to fulfill that over the next three years that I'm here," he said.

Gor also made a mention of the proposed India-US trade pact. "Earlier this month, we con-

cluded the interim trade agreement, a deal that shapes the economic contours of the Indo-Pacific. We overcame friction points that had held us back for far too long," he said.

"That agreement wasn't just about trade flows or tariff schedules. It was about two great democracies saying we will build together, not just buy from one another. And now today, we take the next step," he said.

The US envoy described Pax-Silica as a "coalition of capabilities" that replaces "coercive dependencies with a positive sum alliance of trusted industrial bases."

"We welcome India joining to co-found the future. Pax Silica is about whether free societies and it will control the commanding heights of the global economy," he said.

"It's about whether innovation happens in Bengaluru and Silicon Valley or in surveillance states that use technology to monitor and control their people. We choose freedom. We choose partnership. We choose strength. And today, with India's entry into Pax Silica, we choose to win," he added.

Pax Silica was launched in December to build a secure, resilient, and innovation-driven supply chain for critical minerals and artificial intelligence (AI).

The Pax Silica Summit was held in Washington on December 12 where partner nations signed the Pax Silica declaration.

The declaration lays out a shared vision of deep economic and technology cooperation across supply chains -- from raw materials through semiconductors and AI infrastructure -- and commitment to mutual prosperity and security.

The member nations of the Pax Silica included Australia, Greece, Israel, Japan, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Singapore, the United Arab Emirates and the United Kingdom.

Gor last month announced an invitation to New Delhi to join the strategic alliance.

One of the key pillars of Pax Silica was to establish a durable economic order to drive AI-powered prosperity across partner nations. (PTI)

Youth Congress workers hold 'shirtless protest' at AI Summit, 10 detained

NEW DELHI, Feb 20: A group of Indian Youth Congress workers on Friday staged a dramatic 'shirtless protest' at an AI Impact Summit exhibition hall, walking around holding T-shirts with slogans against the government and the India-US trade deal printed on them, before being whisked away by security personnel.

A senior police officer said that around 10 people were detained when they were protesting at the AI Summit. "They were removed immediately and were taken to Tilak Marg police station. No one will be allowed to breach the law and order situation," the officer said.

The BJP slammed the Congress for its youth wing workers' protest, alleging that a "ruckus" was created at the venue to sabotage India's global image at the behest of former party chief Rahul Gandhi.

The protesters marched inside Exhibition Hall No 5, wearing or holding white T-shirts with images of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and US President Donald Trump printed on them, along with slogans such as "India-US Trade Deal", "Epstein Files" and "PM is compromised", soon resulting in a commotion.

The ensuing melee witnessed heated exchanges between some of the attendees of the mega event and a few protesters.

Posting a video of the protest, the Indian Youth Congress (IYC) said the question being asked is: Why exactly did young Congress workers need to raise their voices against the "compromised PM inside the AI Summit?"

"In a country where the media,



the system, and the prime minister himself have already been compromised, what platform remains to raise a voice against it? If we protest on the streets, we are stopped. Under the guise of IT Rules, social media posts against the government are taken down. The media has become the government's mouthpiece. So, what avenue remains open to us?" the Youth Congress asked.

"We are not against the AI Summit. We are against the compromises being made with India's interests. When the country's farmers are being bargained away, anti-India trade agreements are being signed, and the youth is kept unemployed while being dragged into politics of hate, should we stay silent?" it asked.

"This country belongs to 140 crore citizens. If we know how to walk the path shown by Mahatma Gandhi, we also know how to walk the path shown by Sardar Bhagat Singh. We will never allow the interests of the country's youths and farmers to be bargained away. In-
quilibrium Zindabad," the IYC said in

its post in Hindi.

A Delhi Police personnel on duty said they are going to heighten security inside the halls after the "unfortunate episode".

The protest, which lasted a few minutes before the group was bundled out of the hall, caught the guests and other visitors by surprise, many of whom watched the unfolding scenes in disbelief, given the significance of the AI Summit that India is hosting.

The AI Impact Summit is being held from February 16-20 at Bharat Mandapam, in which several heads of state, global AI leaders, academicians and researchers, heads of global tech giants and philanthropists are taking part.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the AI Impact Summit 2026 here on Thursday in the presence of several world leaders and heads of global tech giants.

After being whisked away from the hall, the protesters marched towards the lobby, stood against a massive backdrop mounted there and shouted slogans against the government. (PTI)

EC to visit Tamil Nadu, Puducherry from Feb 25 to 27

NEW DELHI, Feb 20: The Election Commission, led by Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Gyanesh Kumar, will visit Tamil Nadu and Puducherry from February 25 to 27 to assess poll preparedness in the state and the Union territory where assembly elections are likely to be held in April, officials said on Friday.

Besides Tamil Nadu and Puducherry, assembly polls are due in Assam, Kerala and West Bengal.

The Election Commission (EC) visited Assam this week to assess poll preparedness. CEC Kumar told reporters in Guwahati that the EC would finalise the poll schedule for the northeastern state keeping in mind the

festival of Bihu, which falls on April 14.

It is usual for the EC to visit states where polls are due before announcing the election schedule.

The terms of the five assemblies end on different dates in May and June. While the five-year term of the Puducherry Assembly ends on June 15, the terms of Assam, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal assemblies end on May 20, 23, 10 and 7, respectively.

Last time, assembly polls in West Bengal were held in eight phases — by far the maximum. In Assam, elections were held in two phases, and in a single phase in Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Puducherry. (PTI)

'Shamful act': Sirsa slams Rahul over Youth Congress protest at AI Summit

NEW DELHI, Feb 20: Delhi Environment Minister Manjinder Singh Sirsa on Friday condemned a protest by the Indian Youth Congress during the AI Impact Summit 2026 at Bharat Mandapam.

Sirsa alleged that senior Congress leader Rahul Gandhi orchestrated the demonstration and led the Indian Youth Congress (IYC) workers to behave in a "shameful" manner in front of foreign guests.

Reacting to the incident, Sirsa said, "Today, Rahul Gandhi made the IYC workers protest at the summit" and claimed that they removed their clothes and dance in front of international attendees.

"This is a very shameful act," the minister said.

Sirsa further alleged that Gandhi was "perhaps not even aware of how far the Congress has fallen". He claimed that Gandhi was encouraging such acts in front of foreign guests "to satisfy his greed for power".

While protesting against governments is a democratic right, the minister added that such a low mentality reflects the current state of the Congress.

"The Gandhi family should think about how low the Congress has fallen. They have forgotten how to respect the country in front of foreign guests. They have forgotten these values. We are very sorry about this," Sirsa said.

A group of IYC workers on Friday staged a dramatic 'shirtless protest' at an AI Impact Summit exhibition hall, walking around holding T-shirts with slogans against the government and the India-US trade deal printed on them, before being whisked away by security personnel.

A senior Delhi Police officer said around 10 people were detained when they were protesting at the summit. "They were removed immediately and were taken to Tilak Marg police station. No one will be allowed to breach the law and order situation," the officer said. (PTI)

Answer to 'abject surrender' lies in 'grips', 'chokes' placed on PM: Rahul on India-US trade deal

NEW DELHI, Feb 20: Stepping up his attack on the government over the interim US trade deal, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Friday said the answer to why Prime Minister Narendra Modi agreed to a deal, where India gives so much and appears to get so little, and make an "abject surrender" lies in the "grips" and "chokes" placed on him.

The leader of opposition (LoP) in the Lok Sabha also claimed that with this deal, India is going to become a "data colony".

Gandhi, who has been attacking the BJP-led government and accusing it of a sell-out through the deal, posted a video on X in which he invoked his recent speech in Parliament in which he had drawn a Jiu-Jitsu analogy.

In his post on X, Gandhi said, "Why did I use a Jiu-Jitsu analogy in my Parliament speech on the trade deal? Why were our farmers sacrificed to please the Americans? Why was India's energy security compromised by allowing the US to dictate our oil supplies?"

"Why agree to increase US imports by \$100 billion a year without a reciprocal promise? Why did I say this deal could turn India into a data colony? Why would Modi ji agree to a deal where India gives so much and appears to get so little? The answer to this abject surrender lies in the "grips" and "chokes" placed on the PM. In the video, Gandhi said a lot of people have asked him why he used a Jiu-Jitsu analogy in his Parliament speech.

"The reason I used the idea of a grip and a choke is because these exist in Jiu-Jitsu and how you control an opponent in that sport. But they also exist in the political realm. And in my experience of politics, I have seen political grips and political chokes are mostly hidden. The average person cannot see them," he said.

"And you have to look carefully to see where the choke is being applied and where the grips are placed. So that was the idea behind using this. It expressed very

powerfully what our prime minister is going through," he said.

The LoP said that on the one hand is the criminal case against businessman Gautam Adani in the US and on the other hand is the Epstein scandal.

"Three million files not released. We all know that (Union minister) Hardeep Puri is involved in the files, we know Mr. Anil Ambani is involved in the files and we also know the prime minister's name appears and the PM is most likely involved in the files," he said.

On the other side, there is China, Gandhi said and referred to the unreleased book of former Army chief MM Naravane.

"So on one side there is the Chinese who are sitting in our border and on the other side there is the US. Our PM is torn between these grips. He is trapped, everybody knows it, everybody can see it. The problem is that the real grip on Mr Narendra Modi is the fake image that he has built, that has been built for him, an image that has required huge amounts of money," he said.

"The key to that image is now in the hands of the US and that is why Indian farmers are going to suffer, Indian textile is going to suffer, we will be forced to buy imports from the US.

"But most important is the data. The fact that our data is being handed over by Mr Narendra Modi to American companies, to the US, for a pittance. Mark my words, we are going to become a data colony. Why did a country of the size of India hand away everything, including our data, textile industry and our agriculture sector, for what and why? The answer is in the grips and chokes that are applied on the PM," Gandhi added.

The Congress has alleged that Modi has "surrendered" before US President Donald Trump in agreeing to the deal, which, it claimed, will "devastate" the livelihoods of crores of farmers across states and sacrifice India's energy security, digital sovereignty and economic self-reliance. (PTI)

ken. But this does not mark the end of the heat spell. In fact, it has only just begun. Several more records are likely to be challenged in the coming days," Arif said.

He said February this year is on track to turn out as one of the warmest on record for Jammu and Kashmir.

The Meteorological Department has said February would most likely remain dry as there was no forecast of any major rain/snow spell till the month end.

The MeT officials said Kashmir is currently 56 per cent rainfall deficit, while Jammu was 35 per cent.

The weather is likely to remain largely dry till February end with a possibility of light rain/snow at isolated places on 27-28, they said.

The MeT Officials said there would be a further rise in the minimum as well as the maximum temperature at most places in Kashmir during the next seven days. (PTI)

Region record high day temperatures across valley Kashmir sees warmest February in decade

SRINAGAR, Feb 20: Kashmir is experiencing an unusually warm winter, with day temperatures settling 9-11 degrees above the normal in several areas making the month of February so far the warmest in about a decade, officials said on Friday.

The day temperature has been hovering several degrees above the seasonal average for the last few days as bright sunshine marks the winter days, they said.

On Thursday, the maximum day temperature remained 9-11 degrees above the normal in many parts of Kashmir.

Srinagar city recorded the maximum of 20.1 degrees Celsius on Thursday, 9.7 degrees above the seasonal normal, the officials said.

They said it was the highest maximum temperature in the month of February since 2016. On February 24, 2016, the city had recorded a high of 20.6 degrees Celsius.



Gulmarg saw the day temperature rise to 11.4 degrees Celsius, 9.9 degrees above the normal. It was the highest ever day temperature in north Kashmir's Baramulla district, and equalled the all-time February record set on February 11, 1993.

Kashmir valley also recorded the day temperature above the normal, the officials said.

Independent weather forecaster, Faizan Arif, said the heat spell in the valley was just getting started.

"As predicted earlier, a few temperature records have already been bro-

ASSAM RIFLES PUBLIC SCHOOL (HIGH), DIPHU (ASSAM)
(CBSE AFFILIATED SCHOOL)

VACANCY FOR TEACHERS/NON-TEACHING STAFF

1. Walk in interview will be conducted on **06 Mar 2026 (Friday)** at 8:00 AM at ARTC & S, Diphu to fill up the following vacancies in Assam Rifles Public School (High), Diphu, Assam:-

POST	VACANCIES	MIN QUALIFICATION REQUIRED
Principal	01	(i) Post Graduate from recognized university. (ii) M.Ed/B.Ed (iii) Min 05 Years Teaching Experience. (Fluency in written/spoken English)
TGT (Science/Bio)	01	(i) M.Sc/M.A/Equv PG degree. (ii) B.Ed from recognized university. (Fluency in written/spoken English)
TGT (Science/Phy & Chem)	01	
TGT (Hindi / Sanskrit)	01	
TGT (English)	01	
TGT (Maths)	01	
TGT (Social Science)	01	
TGT Computer	01	(i) Bachelor's Degree in Computer Science/IT (B.Sc, BCA, B.Tech/BE) with at least 50% marks or PGDCA qualified. (ii) B. Ed from recognized university. (iii) Working experience in min two High Level Languages. (iv) Proficiency in teaching in English.
PRT	08	(i) BA/B.Sc/Equv Qualification with min 60% marks preferred. (ii) B.Ed/ET/ETT/Similar Qualification. (iii) Fluency in written/spoken English.
PRT (Computer)	01	(i) Bachelor's Degree in Computer Science/IT (B.Sc, BCA, B.Tech/BE) with at least 50% marks or PGDCA qualified. (ii) B. Ed from recognized university. (iii) Working experience in min two High Level Languages. (iv) Proficiency in teaching in English.
Art Teacher	01	(i) Graduate with Drawing and painting/ Art/ Fine Art with minimum two years full time diploma from a recognized institute.
Music Teacher	01	(i) Graduate in/with Music from a recognized university. OR (ii) The New Diploma/ Degrees awarded by the concerned agencies institutions.
PT Teacher	01	(i) Bachelor of Physical Education (B.P.Ed) Four Years Degree Course OR (ii) Three Years Graduation+ One Year B.P.Ed. Diploma OR (iii) B.Sc. Physical Education; Health Education & Sports + One Year B.P.Ed Diploma
Clerk	01	(i) Graduate or 1 year experience in a clerical work /minimum 1 year in Computer diploma. (ii) Typing with minimum speed of 40 WPM. (iii) Knowledge of Computer MS Office. (iv) Basic knowledge of tally and accounts.
Maid	04	(i) Min VIII th Pass.
Peon Cum Gardener	01	(i) Min VIII th Pass.
Safai Wala	01	(i) Min VIII th Pass.

2. Candidates who are willing to work in Assam Rifles Public School (High), Diphu to apply with resume, qualification certificates, additional certificates, experience certificate (if available), valid mobile number, E-mail and copy of Aadhar before **28 Feb 2026** at the following address:-

OIC
Assam Rifles Public School (High), Diphu ARTC&S
Karbi Anglong, Assam
PIN: 782460

3. For any queries, please contact 9957607131 (Admin Staff) or email at principal@highschool@diphu@gmail.com.

4. All expenses will be borne by the candidates themselves.

5. Pay and perks will be as per prevailing scales in comparable institutions.
Note: All candidates are required to carry PAN Card / UID or any other valid Identity Card & original certificate for educational qualification during interview.

Tharoor bats for open data regulatory framework with strong privacy protection

NEW DELHI, Feb 20: Asserting that open data can be genuinely transformative, Congress MP Shashi Tharoor on Friday batted for a credible regulatory framework for it and asserted that strong anonymisation and privacy protection must be ensured so that transparency does not come at the cost of individual rights.

He said the task is not to choose between openness and control but to design systems that honour both, and asserted that India, alongside its partners, has the opportunity to help define the rules of a fairer digital order, rather than submit to subaltern status under a new extractive 'Digital Raj'.

Speaking at a session at the India AI Impact Summit titled 'Exploring a Regulatory Framework for Open Data', Tharoor stressed that openness alone is not a panacea, as without safeguards, openness may devolve into tokenism.

"We all know open data can be genuinely transformative. We have seen how making government data publicly accessible can strengthen democratic accountability — whether it is citizens tracking public spending, researchers analysing welfare delivery, or civil society organisations flagging gaps in implementation," Tharoor said.

India's own open government data platform has been used to track welfare coverage and expose leakages in implementation that might have otherwise remained invisible, he said.

"But the value of open data extends beyond transparency alone. When the United States chose to release meteorological data freely, they did more than increase transparency — they laid the groundwork for entire private ecosystems in weather forecasting, logistics, insurance, and risk assessment.



"What began as public infrastructure became the foundation for commercial and technological growth. Its importance becomes even clearer in times of crisis," he said.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, openly shared health data and public dashboards enabled faster responses, improved coordination across agencies, and supported more informed public debate, Tharoor pointed out.

"Across these examples, the lesson is consistent — when data is treated as shared infrastructure rather than as a guarded asset, it lowers barriers, improves decision-making, and enables societies, particularly in the developing world, to turn information into durable capacity," he said.

And yet, openness alone is not a panacea as open data, if poorly

structured, can generate new vulnerabilities even as it promises transparency, Tharoor said.

"Without safeguards, openness may devolve into tokenism — data sets released without context, quality control, or enforceable standards or worse, into asymmetrical extraction. There is a trilemma of digital governance: digital ascendancy, digital capitalism, and digital sovereignty.

"Today, most of the world's large Cloud servers and advanced artificial intelligence (AI) systems are owned and operated by a small number of technology companies based primarily in the United States and parts of Europe. This is digital ascendancy," he said.

If countries do not invest in their own digital infrastructure and regulatory capacity, the benefits of open data can accrue disproportionately outside their jurisdiction, he argued. "One-sided concessions on digital taxation and digital trade are a form of data capitulation: Indonesia and Malaysia have succumbed in their trade agreements with the US. We must not," he asserted. Tharoor said the issue is not cross-border data flows per se, as digital cooperation depends on them.

The concern is whether openness is reciprocal and capacity-enhancing, or whether it systematically positions some countries as suppliers of raw data while others capture downstream gains in AI, advanced analytics, and platform governance, the Thiruvananthapuram MP said. The answer, therefore, is not to retreat from openness, but to shape it deliberately. If openness without strategy creates imbalance, openness with guardrails can create resilience, he said.

"A credible regulatory framework for open data must begin with clarity of purpose: why is this data being released, for whom, and under what safeguards? It must ensure strong anonymisation and privacy protections so that transparency does not come at the cost of individual rights," Tharoor said.

The European Union (EU) has demonstrated how strong regulatory architecture, through instruments such as data protection and digital market rules, can shape global standards, Tharoor said.

"India, by contrast, has shown how digital public infrastructure can scale inclusion at the population level. India is putting innovation ahead of regulation. These are not competing models; they are complementary experiments in digital governance, and increasingly, the

Global South is not merely observing this evolution, it is participating in it," he added. India's experience with India Stack illustrates what this participation can look like, he said.

"By building interoperable layers — digital identity through Aadhaar, real-time payments through UPI, document exchange through DigiLocker — India has created a public digital backbone that supports innovation while remaining accessible and adaptable. Crucially, this architecture has been offered as a template for other developing countries seeking scalable and affordable digital solutions," Tharoor said.

In doing so, India has reframed digital infrastructure not as proprietary leverage, but as a developmental public good, he added.

India is not approaching the digital future as a passive market; it is shaping it as an architect, Tharoor said. (PTI)

AI Summit

UP court sentences ex-junior engineer, wife to death for sexual exploitation of 33 children

NEW DELHI, Feb 20: A special court in Uttar Pradesh's Banda on Friday sentenced a former junior engineer of the state's Irrigation Department and his wife to death for the sexual exploitation of 33 minor boys — some as young as three — over a decade, officials said.

The POCOS court termed the crimes as "rarest of rare" and held Ram Bhawan and his wife Durgawati guilty of systematically abusing children between 2010 and 2020. The duo circulated over two lakh objectionable videos and photographs of the victims to nearly 47 countries via the internet.

The couple was convicted under provisions of the Indian Penal Code and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act by the court of Additional District and Sessions Judge (POCSO) Pradeep Kumar Mishra.

They were found guilty of offences including aggravated penetrative sexual assault, using a child for pornographic purposes, storage of pornographic material involving children, and abetment and criminal conspiracy, Special Public Prosecutor Saurabh Singh said.

The court directed the Uttar Pradesh government to pay Rs 10



lakh in compensation to each of the 33 victims. "The court further ordered to distribute the cash amount seized from the house of the accused among the victims in equal proportion," the CBI said in a statement.

During the probe, it was found that Ram Bhawan, a resident of Naraini town in Banda district, had been living in a rented room in Chitrakoot district where the offences were committed, with his wife allegedly assisting him, the agency said.

The prosecutor said court records indicated that the accused lured and threatened the minors over several

years, subjecting them to physical and mental abuse. The objectionable material was allegedly used for blackmail and other criminal activities.

The court termed the crimes as "rarest of rare" based on "unparalleled depravity and systemic nature of their crimes".

"Such offences not only destroy the lives of children but also shake the moral foundation of society. Any leniency in such cases would send a dangerous message," the court said.

"The sheer scale of this victimisation across multiple districts, combined with the extreme moral

turpitude of the convicts, marks this as a crime of such an exceptional and heinous nature that it leaves no room for reformation, necessitating the ultimate judicial deterrent to meet the ends of justice," it said.

The court directed the state government and departments concerned to take "concrete steps" for the rehabilitation, psychological treatment and secure future of the victims.

Ram Bhawan was booked by the CBI on October 31, 2020, along with other accused, on the allegations of sexual abuse of children; using children for pornographic purposes; and creation and dissemination of Child Sexual Abuse Material over the Internet.

"During the investigation of the case, it surfaced that the accused persons had committed various forms of perversity, including aggravated penetrative sexual assaults against 33 male children, some of them as young as three years of age," a CBI spokesperson said.

She said the investigation also revealed that some of the victims had suffered injuries to their private parts during penetrative sexual assault.

"Some of them have remained admitted in the hospital. A few of the

victims developed a squint eye. Victims are still suffering from psychological trauma caused by the predators," she said.

The sexual predators remained active in the general area of Banda and Chitrakoot in Uttar Pradesh between 2010 and 2020, she said.

"Ram Bhawan used to apply different forms of modus operandi on children, including access to online video-games and giving money/gifts to allure them," she said.

He got exposed by the CBI while it was monitoring CSAM (child sexual abuse material) content on the internet.

"The investigation remained sensitive towards the minor victims while conducting their examinations and ensured their emotional well-being through counselling.

"During the investigation, seamless coordination was ensured with forensic experts, medical experts dealing with child sexual abuse cases and child protection authorities. Investigation also ensured handling and preservation of digital evidence," she said.

Within months of taking up the case, the CBI filed a charge sheet against Ram Bhawan and his wife on February 10, 2021. (PTI)

Activist arrested for uploading fabricated audio, documents to defame KAS officer



BENGALURU, Feb 20: Social activist Snehamayi Krishna was arrested for allegedly creating fake documents and uploading a fabricated audio clip on social media to defame a senior KAS officer, police said on Friday.

Krishna, a resident of Mysuru, was taken into custody by the Central Crime Branch, they said.

The activist was the complainant in the Mysuru Urban Development Authority (MUDA) land allotment case, based on which a case was registered against Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, his wife Parvathi B M, her brother Mallikarjuna Swamy, and others.

On Thursday, Krishna alleged corruption against Karnataka Chief Secretary Shalini Rajneesh and senior Karnataka Administrative Service (KAS) officer D B Natesh, a former MUDA Commissioner.

The government rejected the allegations, stating that due process was followed and a prior sanction for investigation had already been granted.

Krishna also lodged a complaint with the Enforcement Directorate and the Income Tax Department on Wednesday, alleging the exchange of a huge amount of cash in Mysuru.

He also shared a photograph of the vehicle allegedly used in the transaction.

In a communication, Rajneesh's office said Krishna had objected to Natesh's promotion, citing a case registered under Section 13(1)(e) of the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988.

"The allegations made in your complaint are baseless," the government said.

Following the complaint, a case was registered on February 18 at

the Bengaluru City Cyber Crime Police Station.

According to police, Krishna allegedly created fake documents and an audio clip using the complainant's photograph and uploaded them on his Facebook account as part of a defamatory campaign targeting the officer.

"During the investigation, evidence was collected from the complainant and social media platforms, and the audio clip uploaded on Facebook was examined," a statement from the office of Bengaluru Police Commissioner Seemant Kumar Singh said.

Following a court-issued search warrant, police searched the accused's residence and seized relevant documents, it added.

Police said a notice had been issued to Krishna to appear before them; he has since been secured and is being questioned in connection with the case.

In the MUDA case, allegations were made that compensatory sites were allotted to Siddaramaiah's wife in an upscale area of Mysuru, with a higher property value than the location of her land that had been acquired by MUDA.

MUDA had allotted plots to Parvathi under a 50:50 ratio scheme in lieu of 3.16 acres of her land, where it developed a residential layout.

Under the scheme, MUDA allotted 50 per cent of developed land to landowners in exchange for undeveloped land acquired for residential layouts.

The Karnataka Lokayukta police, which registered the case against Siddaramaiah, his wife, and his brother-in-law, later gave them a clean chit by filing a closure report in court. (PTI)

SKM slams JNU admin over punitive action against students' union office-bearers

NEW DELHI, Feb 20: The Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM) on Friday strongly criticised the action by the JNU administration against the four elected office-bearers of its students' union and other student leaders, claiming that the move undermines the democratic rights of the entire student community.

In a statement issued here, the SKM demanded immediate withdrawal of the rustication orders and fines, and also appealed to President Droupadi Murmu, who is a visitor at the university, to revoke the "unjust rustication".

"SKM strongly criticises the decision of the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) administration to rusticate all four elected office-bearers of the JNU Students' Union (JNUSU) along with its former president for two semesters, declare the campus 'out of bounds' for them, and impose heavy fines, as a direct attack on the democratic fabric of the university," the umbrella body of farmers' organisations said in the statement.

Accusing the JNU administration of "criminalising" protest and dissent, SKM said decisions such as installation of facial recognition technology in the library have also

been imposed without any democratic discussion.

It alleged that heavy fines and punitive actions in the name of "discipline" has become routine in JNU.

"The administration has assumed the role of judge and executioner, severely undermining teaching, research, and institutional decision-making processes. Against this, the students are on indefinite strike. SKM extends unconditional solidarity to all the students and hope that they emerge victorious in this fight to save campus democracy," the statement said.

The SKM demanded immediate withdrawal of the rustication orders and fines imposed on all JNUSU office-bearers and the former president.

"We also reiterate our appeal to the Honourable Visitor i.e. the President of India, to revoke the unjust rustication of the students; and remove the present vice-chancellor in order to restore a democratic and accountable administration in JNU," it said, expressing solidarity with students and teachers in defending JNU's democratic traditions and academic freedom. (PTI)

One man committee: Retd IAS officer to 'examine' SIT note on Tirupati laddu adulteration



AMARAVATI, Feb 20: The Andhra Pradesh government on Friday appointed retired IAS officer Dinesh Kumar as the one-man committee to examine the CBI-led SIT's self-contained note over the alleged adulteration of Tirupati laddu ghee, and recommend suitable action against erring people.

The one-committee comes in the wake of the Supreme Court-appointed CBI-led SIT completing its probe and filing the chargesheet.

It submitted the final chargesheet to the Court on January 23, along with a Self-Contained Note (SCN) recommending the initiation of suitable action as deemed fit against erring committee members and senior TTD officials over the laddu ghee issue.

"Dinesh Kumar is appointed as One-Man Committee to examine the Self-Contained Note and to recommend initiation of suitable action as deemed fit against erring Committee Members and senior Of-

ficers of TTD for lapses, omissions, and failures in the relaxation as well as enforcement of ghee tender conditions," chief secretary K Vijayanand said in a government order (GO).

Likewise, the 1983 batch officer will examine whether decisions were taken with due diligence, recorded justification and procedures.

He will identify the extent of administrative responsibility and recommend appropriate administrative or disciplinary action.

"The committee shall submit its report within 45 days from the date of issue of this order," said Vijayanand, adding that this GO shall not prejudice proceedings pending before any court.

Back in September 2024, Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu had claimed that animal fat was used in preparing Tirupati laddus (consecrated sweet) during the previous YS Jagan Mohan Reddy-led regime in the state, triggering a massive political row.

During an NDA legislative party meeting in the southern state in 2024, Naidu had alleged that the erstwhile YSRCP government did not even spare Sri Venkateswara temple and used substandard ingredients and animal fats for making laddus, which are revered and sought after by crores of devotees.

The allegations sparked a massive controversy across the country, hurting the sentiments of crores of Hindus, leading to the Supreme Court-appointed SIT, which completed its probe.

Besides animal fats, Naidu recently alleged that Tirupati laddus were also adulterated with "chemicals used to clean bathrooms" during the previous YSRCP government. (PTI)

South Asia climate health desk, research consortium launched

NEW DELHI, Feb 20: Two new initiatives to protect South Asians from extreme heat — a rapidly escalating threat to human health and economic stability in the subcontinent — were launched on Friday during Mumbai Climate Week, officials said.

The South Asia Climate-Health Desk, established as part of the WHO-WMO Climate and Health Joint Programme and implemented with the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM), India Meteorological Department (IMD), and other partners, will improve how climate and weather information is translated into action to protect people's health.

Complementing this work, the South Asia Scientific Research Consortium, supported through a Rockefeller Foundation grant to the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER)-Pune, will deepen the region's scientific understanding of how heat affects different populations.

"Few regions feel the impacts of ex-

treme heat as sharply as South Asia, and I welcome the clear determination to respond. We all know that every death primarily due to excess heat can be prevented and heat health action plans are saving lives.

"By uniting science, government leadership and support, and community action, countries here are proving that this challenge can be met," WMO Secretary-General Celeste Saulo said.

According to WMO, Asia is warming nearly twice as fast as the global average, intensifying extreme weather and placing growing pressure on lives and livelihoods, health systems, economies, and ecosystems across the region, putting the most vulnerable and exposed communities at critical risk.

"Extreme heat is a growing risk for lives and livelihoods in South Asia," said Mrutyunjay Mohapatra, IMD's Director General of Meteorology and Permanent Representative of India to WMO.

"IMD welcomes this partnership with

IITM under the South Asia Climate-Health Desk, which will strengthen the science-to-services pathway, improve early warning support for health, and help decision-makers act in time to protect communities during severe heat events," he added.

Led by IITM in partnership with IMD, the desk will help meteorological institutions and health partners in South Asia work together to develop more robust decision support tools, such as early warning and risk assessments.

"After a decade of punishing and increasingly deadly heatwaves across India and the wider South Asia region, it is clear that business as usual public health approaches are no longer enough," Naveen Rao, Senior Vice President of Health at The Rockefeller Foundation, said.

He added, "Protecting India's most vulnerable communities requires rethinking how we deliver care and invest in the solutions frontline providers and patients urgently need today." (PTI)

অসম পাবলিক সার্ভিস কমিশন
ASAM PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION
Assam Public Service Commission, Guwahati-781002

No.199PSC/CON/Exam-21/2025-2026 Dated Guwahati the 20th February, 2026

NOTIFICATION

The Assam Public Service Commission hereby declares today, the 20th February, 2026, the results of the **Phase-I: Screening Test (OMR based)** for recruitment to the post of **Grade IV in the office of the APC (Adv. No.30/2025 dated 08.09.2025)** conducted by the Commission on 04.01.2026. Candidates bearing the following Roll Numbers have been shortlisted in order of merit and will have to appear for **Phase-II: Interview/Viva-Voce**. The date(s) of the **Phase-II: Interview/Viva-Voce** will be notified shortly.

Roll number of candidates shortlisted to appear in the **Phase-II: Interview/Viva-Voce** is stated below (horizontally):

10157	10206	10584	10754	10947	10997	11006	11052	11205	11399
11485	11629	11681	11757	11941	12179	12205	12264	12358	12521
12542	12642	12651	12667	12721	12747	13213	13259	13328	13382
13618	13670	13764	13793	13817	13911	13948	14292	14870	15009
15010	15499	15646	15871	15926	16061	16075	16633	16703	16877
16901	17267	17338	17443	17539	17579	17732	17884	17924	17933
17952	17970	18173	18290	18342	18404	18522	18677	18921	18925
18947	19197	19203	19356	19672	19812	20068	20092	20373	20553
20582	20961	21180	21236	21243	21247	21439	21469	21601	21605
21660	21764	21799	21845	21863	21974	22040	22179	22466	22565
22654	22685	22902	23230	23258	23312	23522	23596	23734	23760
23773	23924	24204	24503	24512	24727	24810	24849	24878	25090
25242	25273	25323	25464	25735	25834	25928	26220	26302	26604
27117	27307	27411	27431	27435	27519	27568			

NB: Results may be accessed through the APC's website www.apsc.nic.in

Sd/-
Principal Controller of Examinations,
Assam Public Service Commission,
Jawaharnagar, Khanapara, Guwahati-22

DIPR/D/HLT/302/21-Feb-26

Kannada star Yash's 'Toxic' teaser unveiled



The teaser of the much-anticipated pan-India movie, *Toxic: A Fairytale for Grown-Ups*, starring Kannada superstar Yash, showcases a dark and brutal cinematic universe that features high-octane action sequences. The Geetu Mohandas-directed movie is billed as an action-thriller saga that unfolds in Goa between the early 1940s and the 1970s. In the film, Yash plays the role of Raya, a ruthless gangster. The one minute 55 second teaser reveals a massive, cinematic world that is both vibrant and brutal, and features Yash in a traditional circus setting and swiftly moves into an East Asian-inspired backdrop, spanning multiple time periods. Production banner KVN Productions shared the official teaser of the film on its social media page

with the message: "It's gonna get crazyyyy." Yash also serves as the co-writer with Mohandas on the film, which marks his first project since the blockbuster success of *KGF: Chapter 2* in 2022. Produced by Venkat K. Narayana and Yash under KVN Productions and Yash's *Monster Mind Creations*, *Toxic: A Fairytale for Grown-Ups* is slated for a worldwide theatrical release on March 19. *Toxic*, which will release in Kannada, Hindi, Telugu, Tamil and Malayalam, is set for a box office clash with Aditya Dhar's *Dhuradhar 2*. The film also features Nayanthara, Kiara Advani, Huma Qureshi, Rukmini Vasanth and Tara Sutaria. (PTI)

I KNOW WHAT MY VALUE IS: PRIYANKA ON HER HOLLYWOOD JOURNEY AND NEW MOVIE 'THE BLUFF'

Confident in her abilities and in what she brings to the table, Priyanka Chopra Jonas says she has never walked with a "sense of weakness", right from her first day in Hollywood to now when she is arguably the most bankable Indian name in the world of western showbiz.

Priyanka was one of Hindi cinema's highest paid stars when she decided to try her luck in Hollywood more than a decade ago. The opportunities were few, no one knew her, success was hard in coming but her innate belief in herself carried her through those early days. "Even if people didn't know me, it didn't matter. I know what I bring to the table, I know what my value is, so I was never less confident. I may have had fewer opportunities, I may have had less success, but I was always confident in my skill set and my ability to know my job," the 43-year-old told PTI in a Zoom interview from Los Angeles.

She has come a long way since. Beginning with the series "Quantico", where she played the lead as a FBI officer, and moving on to films such as "Baywatch", "Isn't It Romantic", "The Matrix Resurrections" and "Heads of States". In many of these, most of them actioners, she plays the lead.

She tried to break through the Hollywood circles first as a singer. That was not so successful and the star then moved into acting in films and shows. Priyanka, who also played a central role in the show "Citadel", said the confidence was always there.

Asked about the moment when she felt like she had arrived, not in terms of success but in confidence, she said, "Oh, my first day I arrived in Hollywood. I never walked with a sense of weakness." "I still don't feel like I have arrived. I feel like I have a lot more to do before I feel that. There are some amazing people who have done such brilliant work and I would love to be able to have a body of work that does that." Real success, she said, is having the privilege to both work in a job she loves and still have time for her family.

"Most people in life have to work every day, and some people don't even like the jobs that they have, but they have to do it to survive and to support their families. And I think, for me, that is the real win," said the actor, who is married to American singer Nick Jonas. The couple has a daughter, Malti Marie.

In 2016, she was asked about what she wanted to be 10 years later. Priyanka said she wanted to have

a "legacy". It's 2026 now but the meaning of the word has changed. "Now 10 years later I don't know what the word legacy means anymore. What it meant to my 30-

her. "How many women have ever played that character? There's maybe Zoe Saldana a little bit or Keira Knightley. But we've seen so many iconic

men play pirates over the years. I didn't even know that female pirates existed, that they were captains of their own ships, they had crew of men and they lived big, really interesting, insane lives," she said.

As she researched, she learnt about the amazing lives that women pirates led.

"I remember just seeing all of these amazing women pop up around the globe who had lived this

life. And that was the moment for me where I was like 'wow, this is something that can be really cool and really different if I can do it well.'"

Priyanka had to learn sword fighting for the role. It was also the time she was filming her 2025 movie "Heads of States" alongside Idris Elba and John Cena.

"I had to learn sword fighting with both hands and I had to do that while I was shooting 'Heads of State'. So it was a lot of work and I used to do it between shots, so while the camera was moving from one shot to the other I would move aside and learn my swords for the next movie."

The actor said she went to the Cayman Islands and researched on the Caribbean culture of indentured workers.

"(They) used to be picked up from India by the British Raj and just taken to different islands and left with no idea of their identity anymore and that's what happened to my character's family and her. There was so much in this movie which after I read it I was like 'yeah, we're doing this movie'," she said.

There's much else to look forward to -- season two of "Citadel" and "Varanasi" with S S Rajamouli that marks her return to Indian cinema. "The Bluff", directed by Frank E. Flowers, also stars Safia Oakley-Green, Temuera Morrison and Ismael Cruz Cordova. The movie, which is produced by filmmaker duo Anthony and Joe Russo's banner AGBO, will premiere on Prime Video on February 25. (PTI)



year-old self is completely different from what it means to me," she said.

"I want to be able to do work as an artist that pushes me where I surprise not just myself but an audience that has been so loyal to me for almost 25 years, where I can show different parts of me and give as an artist, and at the same time, be able to be present with my family. Now I feel like that would be my answer," she added.

Priyanka described herself as a very hard working person who spends a lot of time learning about "any character or any skill".

Up next is "The Bluff", a period actioner where she plays a pirate on the run. In her view, it is a conscious step towards "bifurcating and diversifying" the canvas of her English language work.

"I think 'The Bluff' is a deep dive into culture and history but at the same time it's a really fun, cool pirate movie. It's also drenched in drama, emotion and feelings. So it's like an action drama I would say and being able to explore different genres is really exciting to me, so I was very happy to be doing this movie," she said.

She plays Ercell "Bloody Mary" Bodden, a former pirate who is forced to confront her violent past when her old captain returns, pushing her into a deadly fight to protect her family and reclaim her strength.

The movie also features "The Boys" star Karl Urban in the role of Connor, Ercell's former captain.

Priyanka said the script held a certain novelty for

Anurag Kashyap's 'Bandar' to release on May 22

Filmmaker Anurag Kashyap's upcoming film, "Bandar", starring Bobby Deol, is scheduled to arrive in cinema halls worldwide on May 22.

Headlined by Deol, the movie is said to be inspired by real-life events and follows the story of a fading star accused of rape, shining a light on systemic injustices, silenced voices in courtrooms, and the harsh realities of a deeply flawed legal framework.

In an Instagram post, the makers announced the release date of the film. "See you at the movies on 22nd May 2026", the post read, alongside the poster of Deol from "Bandar".

Kashyap has written the script of "Bandar" in collaboration with Sudip Sharma and Abhishek Banerjee of acclaimed OTT shows, "Paatal Lok" and "Kohrra" fame. Sharma has been garnering rave reviews for his latest show, "Kohrra 2".

Last year in July, "Bandar" premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival in the special presentations category.

Actors Sanya Malhotra, Raj B Shetty, Jitendra Joshi, Sapna Pabbi, Indrajith Sukumaran, Riddhi Sen, and Nagesh Bhosle round out the cast of "Bandar".

The film is produced by actor-turned-producer Nikhil Dwivedi under his banner Saffron Magicworks, and Zee Studios.

Meanwhile, Kashyap's widely-acclaimed movie, "Kennedy", released on ZEE5 on Friday after a delay of three years. (PTI)



Sudip Sharma not allowed to make a crime drama without me: Jaideep Ahlawat on his cameo in 'Kohrra 2'

Jaideep Ahlawat features in a blink and you miss it cameo in Sudip Sharma's "Kohrra 2" and the "Paatal Lok" star says he was grateful to be a part of the story that is receiving a lot of acclaim on Netflix since its release.

Headlined by Mona Singh and Barun Sobti, the gripping crime drama revolves around their characters trying to unravel the mystery behind the murder of a woman in a Punjab village.

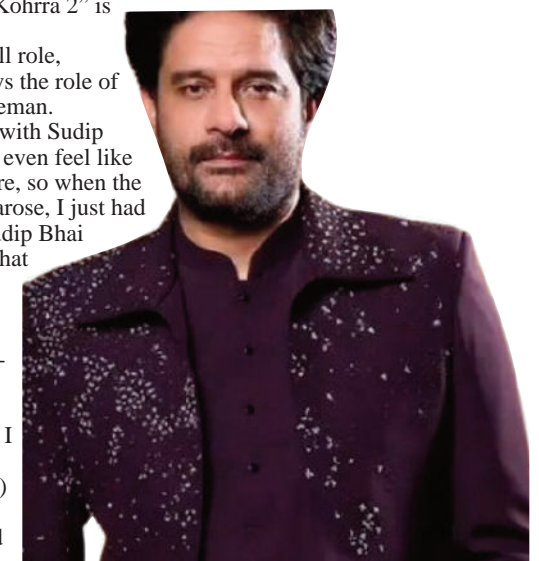
Ahlawat, who first broke out in a big way with Sharma's "Paatal Lok", said "Kohrra 2" is a rare gem.

In the small role, Ahlawat plays the role of a railway lineman.

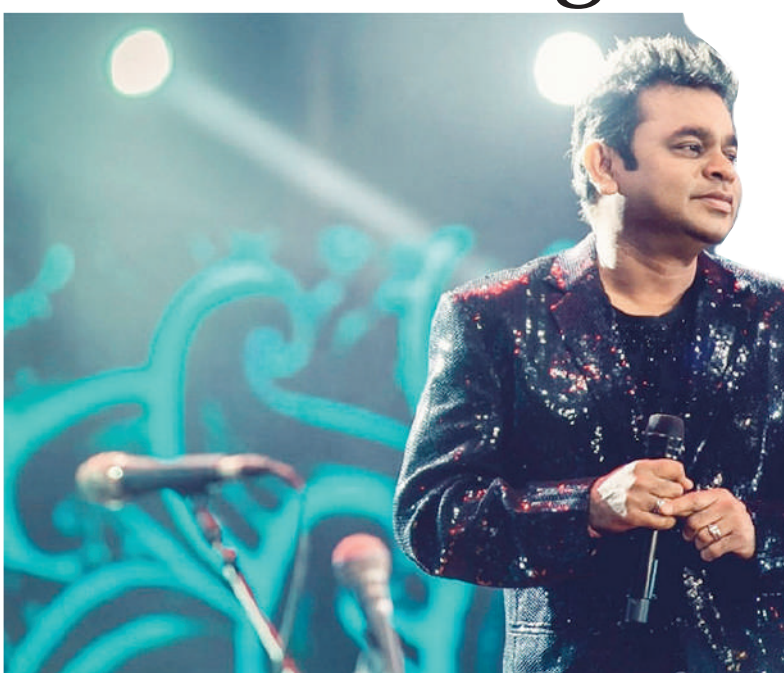
"Working with Sudip Bhai doesn't even feel like work anymore, so when the opportunity arose, I just had to take it? Sudip Bhai had no clue that I would be playing the role of the Railway lineman, but my shoot schedules crossed, I discussed it with (writers) Gunjit (Chopra) and Diggy (Sisodia) and thought this would be such an interesting bit," Ahlawat said.

"I don't think Sudip Bhai is allowed to make a crime procedural drama without me anymore haha! But seriously, Kohrra is a rare gem in storytelling, and I was grateful I could be a part of it somehow, even if it might be hard to catch on your first watch," Ahlawat said in a statement.

"Kohrra 2" broke into Netflix's Global Top 10 Non-English Shows this week. (PTI)



Musician A R Rahman agrees in SC to give credit for song to Junior Dagar Brothers



Music composer AR Rahman told the Supreme Court on Friday that he would give credit to the Junior Dagar Brothers in the song, 'Veera Raja Veera', from the 'Ponniyin Selvan: II' film.

A bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justices Joydip Chatterjee and Vipul Mehta described the personalities involved in the dispute as "reputed names of the music industry". It recorded Rahman's submissions and disposed of the plea.

Rahman's counsel, senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi, told the bench that the musician would give credit, which would read — "Composition inspired by Dagar-

wani tradition Dhrupad, first recorded as 'Shiv Stuti' by late Ustad Nasir Faiyazuddin Dagar and Ustad Nasir Zahiruddin Dagar, popularly known as Junior Dagar Brothers".

The court was hearing a plea moved by Dhrupad vocalist Ustad Faiyaz Wasifuddin Dagar against a September 2025 Delhi High Court that said there was no prima facie evidence of the Junior Dagar Brothers — Ustad Nasir Zahiruddin and Ustad Nasir Faiyazuddin — being the authors of a classical rendition of 'Shiv Stuti'.

The bench noted that the modified credit would be reflected across all social media and OTT platforms within five weeks.

The court directed Rahman to deposit Rs 2 crore, as fixed by the high court, before the

registrar general in the interim.

The bench clarified that it has not expressed any opinion and the pending civil suit among the parties shall proceed without influenced by its order.

While hearing the matter on February 13, the top court asked Rahman and the makers of the film, "Ponniyin Selvan: II", to have "some acknowledgement" of the Dagarwani tradition's contribution in the song 'Veera Raja Veera'.

Faiyaz Wasifuddin Dagar, the son of Faiyazuddin Dagar and nephew of Zahiruddin Dagar, had contended before the high court that he held the copyright in all original compositions of Junior Dagar Brothers, including 'Shiv Stuti', which was unlawfully infringed upon. (PTI)

Rory McIlroy handles the rain and then wind to share clubhouse lead at Riviera

LOS ANGELES, Feb 20: Rory McIlroy would have preferred playing in the rain compared with the wind that followed Thursday at Riviera. He handled both well enough for a 5-under 66 to share the clubhouse lead with Jacob Bridgeman in the Genesis Invitational.

Scottie Scheffler couldn't get off the course fast enough. He was tied for last in the 72-man field, without a birdie through 10 holes when play was suspended by darkness.

The rain that formed puddles on the already soft greens led to a three-hour stoppage. Players returned to far more difficult conditions with a wind that was strong and cold, and putting surfaces with a rare combination of being super soft and super quick.

McIlroy opened with three birdies in four holes. He saved par on the par-3 sixth by chipping over the bunker in the middle of the green. He dropped only one shot to join Bridgeman, who contended last week at Pebble Beach and played his best in the strongest conditions.

"I've started to just really enjoy this style of golf," said McIlroy, who grew up in Northern Ireland but spoke early in his career of his fondness for warmth and sunshine.

"If you had asked me 10 years ago, I didn't enjoy these conditions, but it's been a shift in a mindset and maybe just a continuation of trying to build upon the skill set that I have," he said. "Then when it does get to conditions like this, I'm a lot more prepared. I wouldn't say I enjoy them, but I can certainly handle



them better." Aaron Rai was at 6 under with two holes remaining when it was too dark to continue. The round was to resume Friday morning, and the forecast was dry for the rest of the week.

Ryan Fox had a 67, and Pebble Beach winner Collin Morikawa was in the group at 68.

But it was an odd combination of conditions, particularly the greens. Most amazing was Adam Scott's tee shot on the par-3 sixth that landed inches from the cup

and plugged into the turf. McIlroy was poised to make one last birdie when he ripped a 9-iron downwind from 181 yards near the pin, only to see it spin back off the front of the green.

Another shot rarely seen came on the short 10th when he was well left of the green in the rough, 60 yards away, to a pin all the way to the right. He flew it all the way to pin and it stopped inches from where it landed.

"I honestly don't know how they

got it to this. Like, I've never seen greens like this," said Morikawa, who grew up 30 miles away. "You could stop any club from anywhere — from the rough, flyer lies. I think I had two or three shots today, flyers out of the first cut and rough and I'm not worried about missing the green at all."

The biggest surprise was Scheffler, who was headed toward a third straight tournament where he failed to break par in the opening round. He hasn't done that since

his rookie season in 2020, and this was more frustrating based on how hard he slammed a bathroom door on No. 9.

He opened with a three-putt par from the 30 feet on the opening hole. He missed greens and missed putts from the 6-foot range. On the par-5 eighth, his tee shot found the barranca that divides the fairways, flew 30 yards beyond the pin, chipped to the fringe and three-putted from 20 feet.

He was 5 over for his round and had an 8-foot birdie putt — after missing the fairway to the left and his approach well to the right — on the par-5 11th hole.

Bridgeman, who reached the Tour Championship and is in the signature events for the first time, made his debut at Riviera with 15-foot eagle putt on the par-5 opening hole only to chop up the par-3 fourth, where the tee was played forward to make it only 220 (the scorecard yardage is 273). He was short on the apron, left his chip short and chipped the next one 35 feet by the hole.

But he was at his best when play resumed and the wind peaked, picking up five birdies in a 10-hole stretch and missing only one green after the delay.

"I think one of my strengths is fighting shots down, hitting shots where people don't really know how far it's playing, what the number actually is and just kind of feeling it out," Bridgeman said. "I think today, especially in the wind, it played into my favor. I got to hit some of those shots that I saw some people hitting high ballooning shots that were getting smoked by the wind." (AP)

Man United eases past Atletico to reach WCL quarters for first time



TURIN, Feb 20: Manchester United reached the quarterfinals of Women's Champions League for the first time while two-time champion Wolfsburg beat Juventus away to advance.

Manchester produced another dominant display to beat Atletico Madrid 2-0 and advance 5-0 on aggregate. Wolfsburg also won 2-0 and advanced to its 13th quarterfinal in 14 seasons with a 4-2 aggregate score.

Title holder Arsenal and Real Madrid advanced to the quarterfinals on Wednesday after eliminating OH Leuven and Paris FC, respectively.

After taking a healthy lead in Madrid, United continued in similar fashion at Leigh Sports Village. Julia Zigiotti Olme, who also scored one last week, broke the deadlock with a precise left-foot shot inside half an hour.

Jess Park doubled the lead with a stunning long distance drive before the interval as United set up a meeting with Bayern Munich in the quarterfinals.

Atletico defender Xènia Pérez was dismissed for her second yellow

card five minutes from time. Wolfsburg hits on counters in Turin, Wolfsburg soaked up the pressure before Vivien Endemann opened the scoring on a fast counterattack in the 18th minute when she collected a pass from Svenja Huth inside the box and slotted a low right-foot shot past goalkeeper Danielle de Jong.

Ana Capeta came close to equalizing when she hit the crossbar with the best of numerous chances for the hosts before substitute Cora Zicai scored the second in the sixth minute of stoppage time.

The German club rallied from two goals down at home in the first leg last week to draw 2-2 and set up a quarterfinal against record eight-time European champion Lyon.

The new Women's Champions League format has followed the men's that launched last year, with an opening league phase.

The top four in the standings — Barcelona, Lyon, Chelsea and Bayern — advanced straight to the quarterfinals. Teams placed fifth to 12th went to the playoffs and those from 13th to 18th were eliminated. (AP)

Chouhan outclasses rivals for first title in two years

KOLKATA, Feb 20: The seasoned Om Prakash Chouhan produced a late flourish to outclass his rivals and seize his 12th professional win on the final day of the DP World Players Championship here.

Chouhan (69-67-64-64), who was overnight tied third and one shot off the lead,

delivered a six-under 64 in round four to take his tournament total to 16-under 264 and secure his first victory in over two years.

The 39-year-old Chouhan's last day performance, featuring eight birdies and two bogeys, saw him walk away with the winning cheque of ₹ 22,50,000.

Chouhan climbed from 16th to fourth position in the DP World PGTI Order of Merit as a result of his victory.

Shaurya Bhattacharya (64-62-73-66), the leader for the first three days and Manu Gandas (66-69-64-66), the joint leader after round three, finished tied second with matching totals of 15-under 265.

Both Shaurya and Manu, who were in the hunt for the title for most part of the final round, fired scores of 66 on Friday.

Kshitij Naveed Kaul, another contender in round four, ended the week with a 65 to finish fourth at 14-under 266.

Chouhan brought his 'A' game to the Tollygunge Club course on Friday to end

his two-year-long winless streak. "After playing one season on the DP World Tour, I had become a little complacent and callous about my game and my swing also developed some glitches. I wasn't practicing as much as I used to earlier.

"But timely advice and encouragement from my wife brought me back on track. I got back to my old routine of putting in more hours of practice. I also started playing with a freer mind.

"This change in mindset and routine has reflected in my results since the start of the 2026 season as I have bagged a win, a top-10 and a top-20 in the three events played so far this year," said Chouhan.

Gandas' long birdie conversion on the final hole helped him finish tied second.

Bhattacharya's birdies on the 15th and 17th kept him in contention till the end before he too ended as joint runner-up.

Among the Kolkata-based players, Divyanshu Bajaj recorded the best finish as he took tied 25th place at three-under 277.

Honey Baisoya, the winner of the season's second event, continues to lead the 2026 PGTI Order of Merit with season's earnings of ₹ 33,95,250. (PTI)

F1 CEO Domenicali dismisses Verstappen's retirement hint over 2026 rule changes

LONDON, Feb 20: Formula 1 chief executive Stefano Domenicali has dismissed Max Verstappen's suggestion that new F1 regulations could influence the Dutch driver's future in the sport.

The four-time champion has been a vocal critic of the sweeping changes to F1 regulations for 2026, calling the cars, which rely more on electrical power than before, "no fun" to drive and likening them to all-electric series Formula E "on steroids".

In comments on an episode of the "Up to Speed" podcast released Thursday, Verstappen also said the regulations wouldn't help the "longevity" of his career.

"I met yesterday Max, because as you know Max is incredible and he has a way of saying something that could be sometimes interpreted in a certain way," Domenicali told reporters during pre-season testing in Bahrain on Thursday.

"I guarantee to you that Max wants (to) and does care about Formula 1 more than anyone else. He has a way of putting the point that he wants to say in a certain way, but we had a very constructive meeting."

Domenicali added: "My style is always to be very prudent and try to solve the things internally, as it should be, because we don't have to highlight things that actually are not in the interest of the fan. And we know that Max will be part of the future of Formula 1, and of course it's very important that we listen to him, and as we are listening to all the top drivers that are very important in this sport."

Verstappen made his F1 debut in 2015 at the age of 17, making him the youngest driver in the history of the sport, and has publicly mused over potential retirement before.

When he made his 200th career race start in 2024, Verstappen said he believed he was closer to the end of his career than the start. He's known for his enthusiasm for other racing series and made his debut in endurance sportscar racing in Germany last year.

In the podcast episode released Thursday, the 28-year-old Dutch driver was asked about how close he might be to retirement from F1. (AP)

Radha Yadav's all-round brilliance takes India A to Women's Rising Stars Asia Cup final

BANGKOK, Feb 20: Skipper Radha Yadav produced an excellent all-round effort to power India A into the final of the Women's Rising Stars T20 Asia Cup with a five-wicket victory over Sri Lanka A here on Friday.

Sri Lanka elected to bat after winning the toss, but the decision backfired spectacularly. The Indian bowlers, led by Radha, ran through the line-up to bowl them out for a paltry 118.

The left-arm spinner returned with fine figures of 4 for 19.

She was ably supported by an-

other left-arm spinner Tanuja Kanwar (2/20) and leg-spinner Prema Rawat (2/9).

For Sri Lanka, opener Sanjana Kavindi (31, 35b) offered a token fight.

The Lankans were placed at 71 for two in the 10th over but could not counter the Indian spinners from that point, losing the remaining eight wickets for 47 runs in a little over nine overs.

The only bright spot in their innings was a 36-run alliance between Kavindi and fellow opener

Hansima Karunaratne (14).

India did not have too many moments of worry during the chase, apart from losing three wickets for 21 runs at one stage. That included top-scorer Vrinda Dinesh (42).

But with Radha making an unbeaten 31 off 18 balls with seven fours, India sauntered past the rages in 13.3 overs.

In the final, India will face the winner of the other semifinal between Bangladesh and Pakistan which will be played later in the day. (PTI)

Olympic medallist boxer Vijender, tennis ace Bopanna to flag off New Delhi Marathon tomorrow

NEW DELHI, Feb 20: Olympic medallist boxer Vijender Singh and the country's ace tennis player Rohan Bopanna will flag off the 11th edition of the Cognizant New Delhi Marathon from the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium here on Sunday.

With over 30,000 participants expected to take part, the marathon is set to be one of the largest sporting events in the country.

Certified as a National Marathon by the Athletics Federation of India (AFI), recognised by the Association of International Marathons and Distance Races (AIMS), and acknowledged by World Athletics, the event continues to strengthen its position on the global athletic calendar.

This edition of the event has attracted participants from 31 countries, 490 cities, and 32 states and Union Territories of India.

The event will be held in four categories -- full marathon, half marathon, 10K and 5K. India will be represented by an elite contingent,



which includes Anish Thapa, A.B. Belliappa, Man Singh, Akshay Saini, T. Gopi, Bhagirathi Bisht, Nirmaben Thakor Bharatjee, Ashwini Madan Jadhav, Disket Dolma, and Stanzin Dolkar.

The marathon also serves as a qualifying race for the upcoming Asian Games. **Inclusivity and Social Impact**

Moroccan court sentences 19 soccer fans to prison over hooliganism at chaotic Africa Cup final

RABAT (MOROCCO), Feb 20: A Moroccan court sentenced 19 soccer fans to up to a year in prison on charges of hooliganism stemming from a chaotic Africa Cup of Nations final between Morocco and Senegal that saw supporters try to storm the field.

After a hearing that lasted more than five hours, the presiding judge ruled that the fans — 18 Senegalese and a French national — were guilty of more than half a dozen charges, including damaging sporting facilities and committing violence during a sporting event.

Eleven people were sentenced to one year in prison and handed a \$550 fine. Four were sentenced to six months and given a \$218 fine. The remaining four were sentenced to three months and a \$130 fine, lawyer Naima El Guellaf told The Associated Press.

One defendant fainted upon hearing the sentences. Others refused to rise from the defendants' bench when ordered to enter the small door leading to the holding cells. Family members, visibly shaken, insisted their relatives were innocent.

Attorneys said they plan to appeal the decision that they view as severe.

The defendants were arrested last month when outraged supporters tried to storm the pitch to protest a late penalty awarded to host Morocco during the final, which Senegal even-



ually won 1-0. They were held in custody for more than a month awaiting judgment.

During Thursday's hearing, attended by Senegalese and French diplomats as well as relatives of several defendants, attorneys argued that the court lacked sufficient grounds to convict their clients.

The public prosecutor sought the maximum penalties against the fans, arguing that they had disrupted the orderly conduct of the match. He added that the damage was estimated at more than \$476,719.

Morocco has long grappled with episodes of soccer-related hooliganism and courts in the North African nation routinely handle cases tied to such incidents. However, this case was unusual as it involved only foreign nationals.

President of Argentine soccer associations barred from leaving country after court ruling

BUENOS AIRES, Feb 20: A judge in Argentina has barred the president of the Argentine Football Association (AFA) and four other officials from leaving the country and summoned them to testify regarding the alleged misuse of social security contributions.

It is the first relevant legal action against Claudio Tapia, the AFA's top official, who is facing several investigations into his assets and the financial management of the organization.

Judge Diego Amarante summoned Tapia on Thursday for questioning on

March 5 in the Buenos Aires courts, according to documents obtained by The Associated Press.

"Chiqui" Tapia is accused of failing to pay social contributions amounting to 19 billion pesos (\$12.8 million) in 2024 and 2025. The complaint was brought by the Customs Collection and Control Agency (ARCA). The AFA president is obligated to appear in court, but he can refuse to testify.

Judge Amarante prohibited Tapia from leaving the country due to "the seriousness of the investigated events" and to "guarantee the comple-

tion of the legal proceedings."

If the travel ban remains in place after he testifies in court, Tapia will not be able to attend the men's Finalissima between Copa America champion Argentina and Euro 2024 winner Spain set to played on March 27 in Qatar.

Treasurer Pablo Tovigginio, Secretary General Cristian Malaspina, General Director Gustavo Lorenzo, and former Racing Club President Víctor Blanco will also have to appear to testify and will not be allowed to leave the country for the same reason. (AP)

added: "The participation of elite runners at the New Delhi Marathon reinforces its stature as one of the leading long-distance events in Asia and inspires every runner to push their limits."

AFI treasurer, Stanley Jones said the event is a perfect platform for country's long-distance runners to make a mark.

"The National Marathon serves as a premier platform for India's elite long-distance runners. With only the highest-performing athletes qualifying to represent the nation at events such as the Asian Games, competitions of this stature play a crucial role in identifying and preparing top talent," he said.

Sustainability Initiatives
The marathon continues its strong focus on environmental responsibility by implementing comprehensive waste segregation, promoting recycling across the venue, partnering with environmental organisations and local authorities and encouraging greener practices among participants. (PTI)

T20WC: NZ batters aim to tame Pak spinners in Super 8s clash



COLOMBO, Feb 20: The New Zealand middle-order's ability to mount a strong response when faced with the guile and variety in Pakistan's spin unit will be the deciding factor when the two sides face each other in the opening Super Eight Group 2 match of the T20 World Cup here on Saturday.

The Kiwi batters are yet to hit the top gear in the ICC showpiece, except for openers Tim Seifert and Finn Allen, who have three fifties between them.

But their middle-order colleagues have not been able to back them up sufficiently, as the likes of Glenn Phillips, Rachin Ravindra, Mark Chapman and Daryl Mitchell have struggled for consistency.

Phillips and Ravindra have a fifty each but they don't have anything much to show around overall.

From four matches, Ravindra has made 72 runs, but 59 of them came in a single match against Canada.

That they will be playing in Colombo for the first time in this tournament complicates matters further.

In contrast, Pakistan have been stationed in this port city since the beginning of the World Cup, and have already played two matches at the Premadasa.

Their bowlers, spinners to be particular, know the pace and length required to be effective on this sluggish pitch where shot-making needs more prudence than bravado.

Therefore, the New Zealand middle-order should support the Powerplay explosiveness off Allen and Seifert with a mature outing to take their side to a total of around 180 or while chasing a target in that vicinity.

Spinners -- Usman Tariq, Abrar Ahmed, Saim Ayub, Mohammad Nawaz and Shadab Khan -- give Pakistan a distinct edge, but they too have their own worries in batting.

Shadab Khan (88) is their highest run-getter after Sahibzada Farhan (220), the tournament's current top run-maker.

Pakistan batters will need to make a bigger collective contribution against an experienced outfit like New Zealand.

But none worries the Pakistan

management more than Babar Azam (66 runs in four matches, strike-rate: 115.78) as the former skipper is struggling to come to terms with the demands of modern T20 batting.

If Babar stumbles one more time, then the Pakistan management might bring in someone like Fakhar Zaman, who warmed the benches throughout the group stage matches.

They will also ponder over the inclusion of left-arm pacer Shaheen Shah Afridi, who was dropped for the must-win match against Namibia.

Afridi's three wickets in as many matches have come at an economy of 11.22, an evidence of his inability to employ variations on a slow pitch.

His turmoil is a lesson for New Zealand's pace-heavy attack.

Lockie Ferguson, Matt Henry, Jacob Duffy and James Neesham have been borderline expensive so far, and they will have to mandatorily revisit their strategies here.

The quartet needs to use variations such as knuckle ball, slower bouncer and leg cutter, which they employed sporadically in previous matches, more often here to get an upper-hand over Pakistan batters.

It's imperative to reduce pressure on spinners -- Mitchell Santner, Ish Sodhi and part-timers Ravindra and Phillips.

Teams :
Pakistan: Salman Ali Agha (c), Abrar Ahmed, Babar Azam, Faheem Ashraf, Fakhar Zaman, Khawaja Nafay, Mohammad Nawaz, Mohammad Salman Mirza, Naseem Shah, Sahibzada Farhan, Saim Ayub, Shaheen Shah Afridi, Shadab Khan, Usman Khan, Usman Tariq.
New Zealand: Mitchell Santner (c), Finn Allen, Mark Chapman, Devon Conway, Jacob Duffy, Lockie Ferguson, Matt Henry, Kyle Jamieson, Daryl Mitchell, James Neesham, Glenn Phillips, Rachin Ravindra, Tim Seifert, Ish Sodhi, Cole McConechie.
 Match starts at 7 pm IST. (PTI)

Ownership disputes emerge among PSL franchise



LAHORE, Feb 20: The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) is grappling with ownership disputes in at least two of the eight franchises in the Pakistan Super League (PSL), it has been learnt.

According to a reliable source aware of developments, a dispute has broken out in the newly auctioned Sialkot franchise over the majority ownership.

"One of the owners, Muhammad Shahid has filed a complaint with PSL CEO Salman Naseer that he holds 76% percent shares of the franchise but his other partners who have 24% percent shares are trying to sell shares of the franchise without his knowledge," the source said.

He said that Shahid, a businessman who resides abroad, had also posted a video on social media in which he said the other minor share holders were trying to making deals without his knowledge and consent and trying to dump more shares than they own.

The Sialkot franchise was bought for 185 crores by a consortium which includes Kamil Khan a close relative of one of Pakistan's former captains who has no link to the entire matter.

In another complaint one of the original owners of the Lahore Qalandars franchise, Fawad Rana after getting a court verdict in his favor has also filed a complaint with Naseer over majority ownership issues. Apparently according to court documents he had filed a petition against his brothers, Atif Rana and Sameer Rana in a court, claiming they sold shares belonging to his company without his knowledge and the court ruled in his favor. (PTI)

'BHAI' THE WAY Morkel brothers Albie and Morne set to match strategic wits

AHMEDABAD, Feb 20: It's not unusual to find brothers on the same side on a cricketing field but come Sunday in the T20 World Cup, two brothers who played together for several years will sit in opposing dugouts, plotting with rival teams, leaving a mother back home thoroughly confused about who to support.

Albie and Morne Morkel, the celebrated siblings of the South African team till not so long ago, find themselves in this unique situation. While Albie is working as South Africa's "specialist consultant" for this tournament, Morne is an integral part of India's Gautam Gambhir-led support staff as the bowling coach.

"No, we don't talk to each other. I think my mother, she's more worried than us. She doesn't know who to support, India or South Africa," Albie had said in just recently.

The two sides will clash in what will be their opening match of the World Cup's Super Eight stage after an unbeaten run in the group phase. Morne also acknowledged that communication hasn't been particularly frequent with his elder brother.

"I saw him arrive at the ground. But we haven't been talking a lot. Good to see him though," he said when asked about Albie here on Friday.

International cricket is replete with heartwarming stories of brothers combining forces on the field to become a part of the game's legend.

Whether it is the Chappells (Ian and Greg), the Waughes (Steve and Mark), the Amaramaths (Mohinder, Surinder and Rajinder), the Pathans (Irfan and Yusuf) and the Pandays (Hardik and Krunal), the Mohammeds (Hanif, Sadiq, Mushtaq, Wazir) or the Hadlees (Richard and Dale).

They add to the allure of the game.

Of course, there are aberrations too as Sam Curran turns up for England while his brother Ben (replacement player) is representing their native Zimbabwe like the duo's late father Kevin.

But Albie and Morne have added an altogether new dimension to the old adage that a brother is "your first friend, first teammate and also the first rival."

In terms of cricketing pedigree, Morne had a bigger canvas and built a good body of work across formats including 86 Tests in which he got 309 scalps. Albie was more of a white-ball regular for the Proteas with 108 games across T20s and ODIs in his kitty.

One of the lesser talked about aspect about Albie is that during his nascent years in Chennai Super Kings, he was Mahendra Singh Dhoni's 'Man Friday', especially in the first five seasons when lower-order hitting and death bowling made him an asset.

When asked about what exactly his role of being a specialist consultant means for the team, Albie didn't



really have a clear answer.

"...it's been an interesting term, a specialist consultant. I had to figure it out myself a little bit," he quipped before giving a lowdown on his job.

"I guess it's anything it takes to help the team do well in the World Cup. So do a bit of both, batting, and fielding, mostly focus around the bowling for now."

"And yeah, do some work with the lower order batters, swing work, and stuff like that," he had told reporters in New Delhi ahead of UAE match when someone asked him to define his position.

It might sound funny but top level cricket hasn't exactly witnessed a lot of "Battle of Brains" between real life siblings.

But one interesting example could be the 'Kolkata Derby' cricket match between East Bengal and Mohun Bagan where the 'Nandy -- brothers' Pranab and Palash -- coached the two Kolkata giants across at least 30 such games.

In football though, some of the illustrious siblings were in rival dug-outs.

The iconic Charlton brothers -- Bobby and Jack (England's 1966 World Cup winners) were coaching second division sides in the English league.

While Jack was managing Middlesbrough (back then in 2nd division), Bobby was the gaffer at the Preston North End.

The Coeman brothers -- the legendary Ronald and his slightly lesser successful brother Erwin -- briefly coached different national teams -- the Netherlands and Oman -- although their paths didn't cross.

However, the most iconic rivalry between brother coaches would be John and Jim Harbaugh -- the biggest coaches in the American Super Bowl (American Football) -- where their respective teams have often been locked in intense rivalry.

Whenever the sibling coached teams meet each other, it is dubbed as the 'Harbaugh Bowl'.

For the Morkels, the role entails being the best possible sounding board for their respective bosses -- Shukri Conrad of South Africa and Gautam Gambhir of India. (PTI)

'Usman Tariq has unique action, but we're aware of what they're going to bring'

COLOMBO, Feb 20: New Zealand middle-order batter Mark Chapman banked on the familiarity factor to tame the mystery spinner Usman Tariq-led Pakistan bowling unit in their T20 World Cup Group 2 Super 8s match here on Saturday.

Since 2024 August, New Zealand have played Pakistan in 20 bilateral matches across ODIs and T20s, and Chapman averred that those games have given his side a good understanding of Pakistan's attack.

"Obviously, Usman Tariq has a pretty unique action with the way that he stops at the crease, so I mean that's something to factor in. But for us, Pakistan have a number of really good spinners, so each of them poses their own threat," said Chapman in the pre-match press conference here on Friday.

"So, Pakistan is one of the teams that we've played probably the most frequently over the last few years. So, we're well aware of what they're going to bring. It's just about making sure we're really clear in the way that we want to play as a team," he added. (PTI)

Afghanistan's 'coach by chance' Trott bids emotional farewell after T20WC exit

CHENNAI, Feb 20: Overwhelmed by emotions but content with the memories he made, Afghanistan's English coach Jonathan Trott has bid adieu to the role that became his "by chance" four years ago.

The 44-year-old Trott exited from the position that was originally offered to fellow Englishman Graham Thorpe, who could not take it up at that time. Afghanistan ended their campaign on Thursday with an 82-run win over Canada in their final group game after being knocked out of Super Eights contention.

Trott fought back emotions as he recounted his tenure with the side that has grown to be a serious contender in the white ball formats.

With Trott at helm, Afghanistan came quite close to qualifying for the 2023 ODI World Cup semi-final, and made the cut for the knockout stage of the T20 World Cup 2024.

"Maybe the time's right, maybe it's

not. I don't know, but I wish everyone the best in the future. I'm very thankful for getting the opportunity. I got the opportunity by chance, really. Graham Thorpe was supposed to be the coach and he unfortunately couldn't take up the role," he said in the post-match interaction.

"I then got offered the job and took it with both hands. So I'm here by chance. I gave it my all. I hope the players can see the love that I have for the game and the care that I have for them as players and as people," he added.

Trott, who was born in South Africa, said one of the biggest takeaways for him was the personal growth of players that he witnessed first-hand.

"...the great joy for me in this job is being able to see the players develop off the field as well and lives change, not just on the field but the ability for players to change their families' fortunes and trajectory as a family and as a group of people," he said. (PTI)

Abhishek Issue: Will SA skipper Markram or left-armer Linde start against him?

AHMEDABAD, Feb 20: A stomach bug that drained his system, sluggish wickets that don't particularly respond to expansive bat swings or is it the emergence of some hitherto unknown technical weakness against spinners?

What ails Abhishek Sharma in the ongoing T20 World Cup is as much a talking point as India's seamless campaign despite his three consecutive ducks. But those who have closely tracked the format and the man, who is made for the format, are willing to vouch that "form is temporary, his confidence is permanent" and a big one is just around the corner in the Super Eight stage.

The prolific opener with a monstrous strike rate of 192-plus is enduring a sudden lean patch, which can primarily be attributed to his return to competitive cricket less than a week after hospitalisation.

The slow pitches haven't helped his cause either. So far, the team's collective might has successfully ensured that results are not impacted but with the Super Eights set to take off on Saturday, it would be crucial that his bat talks loudly. India take on South Africa on February 22 in their opening match of the stage.

And having keenly observed his previous dismissals, Proteas skipper Aiden Markram might be tempted to bowl his



dies match in Kolkata.

In the first league game, USA quick Ali Khan set a straight-field trap by placing a deep cover for his favoured lofted cover drive.

Subsequently, off-spinners Salman Ali Agha and Aryan Dutt accounted for the prolific southpaw during a wretched run.

But it is perhaps not off-spin particularly that is proving to be Abhishek's Achilles heel.

Rather, it is the slowness of surfaces at the Wankhede, Colombo and Motera that has undone him.

A noted IPL franchise batting coach, who has analysed and devised game plans against Abhishek during the league, sought to set the record straight.

Asked if teams have finally decoded Abhishek's batting, he response was a clear no.

"Not at all. Caught at deep extra cover (first game) was a bad ball which could have gone for six, or left or right of the fielder by a foot and it's four," the noted batting coach, who did not wish to be named, said while assessing all three dismissals.

"Bowled to an incoming ball from the off-spinner, as opposed to one turning away, doesn't suggest much. And caught at mid-on is neither here nor there," he added. (PTI)

केन्द्रीय रिजर्व पुलिस बल

देश के रक्षक

87 के.रि.पु. बल दिवस परेड 1939-2026 राष्ट्र सेवा के प्रति समर्पित

“सेवा और निष्ठा”

केन्द्रीय रिजर्व पुलिस बल: देश का अग्रणी सशस्त्र पुलिस बल

- ➔ 01 जॉर्ज क्रॉस, 03 किंग पीएमजी, 01 अशोक चक्र, 01 वीर चक्र, 14 कीर्ति चक्र, 52 शौर्य चक्र समेत 2556 वीरता पदकों से विभूषित।
- ➔ राष्ट्र की एकता एवं अखंडता को अक्षुण्ण रखती सम्पूर्ण भारतवर्ष में तैनात 248 बटालियनों।
- ➔ आतंकवाद, नक्सलवाद तथा उग्रवाद जैसी आंतरिक सुरक्षा चुनौतियों का सामना करने में अग्रणी।
- ➔ चुनाव एवं महत्वपूर्ण संस्थानों को अनेक सुरक्षा कवच प्रदान करने में अहम भूमिका।
- ➔ विशेषीकृत विंग, जैसे कोबरा (जंगल युद्ध), दुत कार्य बल (दंगा नियंत्रण), वीआईपी सुरक्षा।

87वीं के.रि.पु. बल दिवस परेड का सीधा प्रसारण गुपु केंद्र के.रि.पु.बल गुवाहाटी, असम से दिनांक 21.02.2026 को प्रातः 07:20 बजे से इस लिंक पर देखें— <https://www.youtube.com/@CRPFINDIAMHA>

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