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Seed capital handed over to 45,286 women in Bokajan and Mariani

Mission aims to economic empowerment of women: CM

HT Bureau
DIPHU, Feb 24: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma ceremonially launched the distribution of Entrepreneurship Seed Capital to 45,286 women beneficiaries under the Chief Minister's Women Entrepreneurship Mission at public meetings held in Bokajan and Mariani Legislative Assembly Constituencies.

Out of the total beneficiaries, 16,395 women from Bokajan and 28,891 women from Mariani received ₹10,000 each as the first installment of seed capital.

With this phase, a total of 28,90,131 women across 116 Assembly constituencies in the state have been covered under the scheme.

Addressing the gatherings, the chief minister said the ₹10,000 assistance marks the beginning of a larger financial support structure.

In subsequent phases, beneficiaries will receive additional assistance of ₹25,000 and ₹50,000, subject to proper utilisation of the final funds.



He reiterated that the mission aims to promote self-reliance and economic empowerment among women.

Referring to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision, Sarma said the government is

working towards transforming women into "Lakhpati Baideu," referring to women earning at least ₹1 lakh annually.

He stated that nearly 40 lakh women in Assam are currently associated with Self-

Help Groups (SHGs), and about 8 lakh women have already attained the Lakhpati Baideu status.

Highlighting the government's broader development initiatives over the past five years, the chief minister said 1.60 lakh youths have been provided government jobs, 40 lakh women are benefiting under the Orunodoi scheme, 32 lakh women under the entrepreneurship mission, and 4 lakh girl children under various financial assistance schemes.

During the Mariani programme, the chief minister also inaugurated and laid foundation stones for multiple development projects, including new police station buildings, stadiums, bridges, road projects and other infrastructure works worth several crores of rupees. He further announced upcoming initiatives, including a major dairy processing project in the region.

The meetings were attended by Members of Parliament, MLAs, officials of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council, senior government officers and other dignitaries.

APHLC politics may lead to unrest in KA: Himanta

BJP candidate for Bokajan constituency to be named shortly

HT Bureau
DIPHU, Feb 24: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday stated that the All Party Hill Leaders Conference (APHLC) brand of politics threatens to drag Karbi Anglong back into an era of instability and unrest.

Speaking on the sidelines of a large distribution ceremony at the Hanjanglangso Sports Association stadium, the chief minister asserted that the APHLC lacks public support and poses a risk to the region's present development momentum.

"Whoever aligns with the APHLC, they will go down with it. The people are not with the APHLC," he said.

"The way their politics is, Karbi Anglong will go back to the old days of dharna, agitation and

strikes. These things will return if they gain ground."

The chief minister was in Hanjanglangso to distribute ₹10,000 cheques to women beneficiaries under the Mukhyamantri Mahila Udyamita Abhiyan (MMUA).

The initiative covers members of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) under the State Rural Livelihoods Mission (SRLM) and National Urban Livelihoods Mission (NULM).

The seed capital is intended to help women start or expand small-scale enterprises, including traditional weaving and handloom units, animal husbandry and poultry farming, and small-scale retail and local trade activities.

Turning to the political landscape ahead of the Assembly elections, Sarma (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Oppn non-existent in 90-95 assembly seats: Himanta

Staff Reporter
GUWAHATI, Feb 24: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday claimed that the BJP faces virtually no effective opposition in a large majority of Assembly constituencies in the state, asserting that development-led governance has firmly consolidated public support for the ruling party.

Addressing a public gathering in Mariani, Sarma said that in nearly 90 to 95 Assembly seats in Assam, there is no strong opposition presence.

Taking a dig at the Congress and other opposition parties, he said their political relevance has significantly diminished due to lack of vision and organisational strength.

"The people of Assam are supporting the BJP because the state has witnessed unprecedented development. Those who think negatively about Assam and its future will be swept away by this storm of development," the chief minister said, projecting confidence ahead of the upcoming Assembly elections.

Sarma highlighted infrastructure growth, welfare schemes and improved governance as key factors behind the BJP's growing popularity across the state.

He said the government's focus on roads, bridges, healthcare, education and employment has transformed Assam and strengthened people's trust in the BJP.

The chief minister further criticised opposition parties for failing to connect with public aspirations, stating that the Congress and other opposition forces are busy with internal conflicts and political confusion instead of addressing people's issues.

On seat-sharing among BJP allies, Sarma said discussions are progressing smoothly and will be finalised soon. "The seat-sharing talks (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Gaurav in Parl panel with Philipnines 'by mistake': CM

HT Correspondent
GUWAHATI, Feb 24: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday maintained that Congress MP Gaurav Gogoi should have been assigned to an 'India-Pakistan' group rather than the parliamentary friendship panel with Philippines, in an apparent reference to his allegation of the opposition leader being a "Pakistani agent".

The state Congress, on the other hand, pointed that nomination of its president as the head of the 'India-Philippines Parliamentary Friendship Group' comes at a time when the CM is "running a malicious campaign" against Gogoi, a charge dismissed by him.

"He should have been given India-Pakistan group. By mistake he was given the India-Philippines group," Sarma told reporters on the sidelines of an official event at Mariani in Jorhat district, when asked about the appointment.

"It would have worked well," the chief minister added.

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla

had on Monday constituted Parliamentary Friendship Groups with more than 60 countries, comprising various opposition members, with Gogoi, the Jorhat MP who is also the Congress' deputy leader in the lower house, named as the head of the panel for Philippines.

The state Congress, sharing the official letter in a post on X, said, "This comes at a time when the Assam Chief Minister is running a malicious campaign against our leader — even going so far as to call him a 'Pakistani agent' (an allegation that Himanta Biswa Sarma himself punctured during the 'historic' 8th February Super FLOP press conference)."

"The people of Assam will give an appropriate answer to the chief minister in due course of time. Until then, the truth will continue to haunt him!" it added.

The CM and BJP have been alleging Pakistan links of Gogoi through his British wife Elizabeth Colburn, as the state gears up for Assembly (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

One-day special budget session of BTC held

Hagrama presents vote-on-account

HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, Feb 24: A one-day special budget session of the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) Legislative Assembly was held on Tuesday at the BTC Legislative Assembly Hall, Bodoifa Nwgrw, Kokrajhar, with a day-long programme.

The session commenced under the chairmanship of Speaker Tridip Daimary and began with the Question Hour.

After the Question Hour, BTC chief executive member Hagrama Mohilary, who also holds the Finance portfolio, presented a supplementary (additional) Vote-on-Account budget of ₹101 crore 20 lakh for the next four months, from April to July.

Following discussions in the House, the supplementary budget was unanimously passed.

During the Question Hour, members from both the ruling and opposition benches raised several issues, leading to extensive discussions.

Meanwhile, BTC Executive Member Dehasat Basumatary in-



formed the media that the Central Government has approved the establishment of a Kendriya Vidyalaya in Baksa district under BTC and has also proposed setting up another Kendriya Vidyalaya in Chirang district.

Responding to a query raised by MCLA Ridip Kumar Deka, education executive member Rabiram Narzary stated during the Question Hour that no financial grants had been provided over the past five years to higher secondary schools,

high schools, middle English schools and primary schools in Baksa and Tamulpur districts.

Expressing dissatisfaction over this response, opposition UPPL MCLA Daobaisa Boro reacted strongly, stating that the previous UPPL-led BTR government had rendered services and provided necessary financial assistance to schools in the region.

He said the earlier government had emphasised quality educational upliftment (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

BJP-AGP rift surfaces in Barhampur

HT Correspondent
NAGAON, Feb 24: Signs of strain between ruling allies Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) have emerged in the politically significant Barhampur Assembly constituency after AGP was allegedly prevented from holding a public meeting at Kathiatoli public playground a few days ago.

According to reports, some BJP workers barred AGP leaders from conducting the scheduled programme at the venue, triggering fresh speculation about internal tensions between the two alliance partners.

Barhampur has historically been regarded as a stronghold of regional politics.

The constituency was represented by AGP from 1985 to 2021.

In 1985, former AGP minister Girindra Kumar Baruah won the seat for the first time for the party.

Subsequently, former chief minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta held the (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Mizoram Assembly passes bill to amend Mizo marriage laws

AIZAWL, Feb 24: The Mizoram Assembly on Tuesday unanimously passed a bill to amend the existing "Mizo Marriage, Divorce and Inheritance of Property Act" enacted in 2014 to codify the customary laws concerning marriage, divorce and property inheritance.

The new legislation, introduced by Chief Minister Lalduhoma in his capacity as the Minister for Law and Judicial Affairs, introduced transformative changes to traditional practices regard-

ing polygamy, inter-community marriage, and women's property rights.

The central pillars of the amendment are the formal ban on polygamy or bigamy and enhancement of women's property rights when separated from their husbands.

Lalduhoma said that under the new provisions, no individual is permitted to take a second spouse while a previous marriage remains legally valid.

He said that divorcees in-

tending to enter a subsequent marriage must now produce a "divorce certificate" as proof that the separation from their previous spouse is legally finalised.

He noted that the amendment aligns the state law with the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023, the national penal code, which prohibits and criminalises bigamy and polygamy.

While the previous law applies to both Mizo men and women, who even married (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Six arrested for assaulting police team in Bijni

HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, Feb 24: Six persons have been arrested in connection with the alleged attack on a police team at No. 2 Bhalatal in Bijni under Chirang district on Monday night.

The arrested individuals have been identified as Abdus Salam, his wife Nureza Begum, Ali Hussain, Abdul Latif, Sahajamal Ali and Sahadat Ali.

According to police sources, Abdus Salam and Abdul Latif were accused in a land-related dispute case.

Acting on a warrant issued by the Bijni (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Congress activity always turns blessings for us: CM

Staff Reporter
GUWAHATI, Feb 24: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday reacted sharply to the "shamshana yatra" (funeral procession) organised by the Congress against former Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) president Bhupen Borah, terming the move politically immature and counter-productive.

Addressing reporters in Mariani, Sarma said that actions taken by the Congress often end up benefiting the BJP.

"Whenever the Congress does something, it turns out to be a blessing for us," the chief minister remarked, adding that such symbolic protests reflect the party's frustration rather than political strength.

Referring to Borah's exit from the Congress, Sarma recalled his own departure from the party years ago.

"When I left the Congress, they washed the premises of Rajiv Bhawan. However, I did not leave behind any bitterness," he said, drawing a contrast between his approach and the current political discourse within the opposition.

Bhupen Borah formally resigned from the Congress last week, citing prolonged neglect, lack of internal democracy and denial of opportunities to engage with the party's central leadership.

Shortly after quitting the party he had been associated with for more than three decades, Borah joined (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

7 other nations participate in IMACC 26

India hosts military adventure event

GUWAHATI, Feb 24: The Indian Army hosted a military adventure event in the foothills of the Eastern Himalayas, and seven other nations participated in it, a defence spokesperson said here on Tuesday.

The first-ever International Military Adventure Challenge Cup (IMACC) 2026 saw the participation of 12 teams, including one each from Bhutan, Brazil, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Nepal, Saudi Arabia and Sri Lanka.

Two teams from the Indian Army and one team each from the Indian Air Force (IAF), Indian Coast Guard and Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) also participated in the competition.

"The principal competitive segment of IMACC 2026 was held from February 18 to 23. The closing ceremony will be held on Wednesday, when the winners will also be feted," the defence spokesperson said.

"IMACC 2026 was designed



to test the essential qualities of a soldier, including physical fitness, mental resilience, teamwork, leadership and decision making under pressure. It featured terrain-based challenges conducted in tough mountain conditions, closely reflecting the realities faced by soldiers during operations," he said.

Duathlon and Triathlon events were organised as part of the competition, the spokesperson said.

The Duathlon comprised 21.1 km of running, followed

by 59.5 km of cycling. The Triathlon was conducted in full format, consisting of 21.1 km of running, 59.5 km of cycling and 32.5 km of rafting.

Both Indian Army teams, along with those from Sri Lanka and Nepal, participated in the Triathlon event.

The remaining teams -- Bhutan, Brazil, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Saudi Arabia, IAF, Indian Coast Guard and ITBP -- competed in the Duathlon segment.

"Two teams participated

every day with disciplined execution and strict adherence to safety protocols. Comprehensive medical arrangements and event management ensured smooth conduct and no major injuries were reported," the spokesperson said.

"In addition to the competitive events, cultural evenings were organised daily, showcasing regional heritage and traditional art forms, enhancing bonhomie, strengthening bonds of friendship and fostering mutual understanding among the participating nations," he added.

The spokesperson emphasised that international military sports have played an important role in building trust and cooperation among armed forces worldwide under the banner of the International Military Sports Council (CISM).

India has been an active participant in this global tradition and had earlier hosted the 4th CISM (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

No opposition alliance can be formed without Rajior Dal: Akhil Gogoi

Staff Reporter
GUWAHATI, Feb 24: Rajior Dal leader and Sivasagar MLA Akhil Gogoi on Tuesday said that opposition unity talks in Assam are moving in a positive direction, while asserting that no meaningful alliance can be formed by sidelining Rajior Dal ahead of the 2026 Assembly elections.

Speaking to reporters here, Gogoi said recent interactions with Congress leaders suggest a softening of earlier differences.

"Positive talks are going on regarding alliance. The Congress has taken a step forward and the ice has melted a little," he said, indicating progress in negotiations for a broader opposition front.

Akhil Gogoi, however, pointed out that while Congress MP Gaurav Gogoi has not directly contacted him so far, senior Congress leader and former Assam Pradesh Congress Committee president Ripun Bora has been in touch.

"Though I have not received a call from Gaurav Gogoi, Ripun Bora has contacted me," he said, adding that informal communication between the parties is continuing.

He further said that Assam Jatiya Parishad (AJP) president Lurinjyoti Gogoi, whose party is an ally of the Congress in Assam, has been in constant touch with him regarding

the alliance process.

According to Akhil Gogoi, Lurinjyoti Gogoi has assured him that Rajior Dal will not be excluded from any opposition arrangement.

"Lurinjyoti Gogoi has clearly conveyed that there will be no alliance without Rajior Dal," Akhil Gogoi said, underlining the party's insistence on respect, political space and issue-based understanding within any proposed coalition.

The opposition landscape in Assam has seen heightened political activity in recent weeks, with regional and national parties exploring the possibility of a united front to challenge the ruling BJP in the next Assembly elections.

Rajior Dal, which emerged from mass movements and grassroots activism, is considered a significant force, particularly in Upper Assam.

Earlier on Monday, Assam Legislative Assembly Opposition Leader Debabrata Saikia said in Delhi that discussions are still underway with Akhil Gogoi led regional outfit Rajior Dal and no final decision has been taken so far regarding any alliance or seat-sharing arrangement.

Speaking to reporters after a meeting of the Congress (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Gaurav slams abuse of Arunachal women in Delhi

GUWAHATI, Feb 24: Congress leader Gaurav Gogoi on Tuesday condemned the alleged racial abuse of three women from Arunachal Pradesh in New Delhi, and said it was a "stark reminder" that "prejudice" against people from the north-east still persists.

Three women from Arunachal Pradesh were allegedly subjected to racial abuse and intimidation by their neighbours in south Delhi's Malviya Nagar, following a dispute over repair work at their rented apartment, police said on Sunday.

"The racist abuse faced by Arunachali women in Delhi is deeply disturbing and unacceptable. No citizen should be made to feel alien in their own country. This incident is a stark reminder that prejudice against people from the North-East still persists," Gogoi said in a post on X.

"This incident cannot be dismissed as a routine dispute. The authorities need to act swiftly, ensure accountability under the law, and provide (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Tata Sons board defers decision on N Chandrasekaran's third term

MUMBAI, Feb 24: The board of Tata Sons on Tuesday deferred a decision on the re-appointment of Natarajan Chandrasekaran for a third term as Chairman, according to sources, signalling potential differences within the holding company of the coffee-to-cars-and-software conglomerate.

The board at its meeting here did not take any call on extending Chandrasekaran's term beyond the current one ending in February 2027, they added.

While no official statement was issued immediately following the meeting, sources said Noel Tata, Chairman of Tata Trusts, which owns 66 per cent in Tata Sons, raised concerns about losses in certain group companies.

Sources said Noel Tata was also not in favour of the listing of Tata Sons and wanted a written commitment.

Chandrasekaran, 62, received backing of several board members who felt the losses at one group company should not eclipse the group's overall performance or the chair's contribution



over the years. Some directors called for a vote, but Chandrasekaran urged a deferral.

Joining Tata Group in 1987, Chandrasekaran rose through the ranks to become the CEO of Tata Consultancy Services - the IT firm of the Tata Group - before taking charge as Tata Sons' chairman in February 2017.

Chandrasekaran is widely credited with steering the diversified conglomerate through a period of restructuring and consolidation. Under him, Tata Group's 15 largest listed companies almost doubled revenue and profits.

His tenure has been marked by a series of high-stakes strategic bets - from advancing plans to establish India's first homegrown semiconductor fabrication facility to taking over of

loss-making Air India and steering cash engine Tata Consultancy Services through the sweeping disruption triggered by artificial intelligence.

Founded in 1868 in Mumbai by Parsi industrialist Jamsetji Nusserwanji Tata, the Tata Group remained under the leadership of the Tata family for most of its 156-year history.

In 2012, Ratan Tata stepped down as chairman, handing over the reins to Cyrus Mistry of the Shapoorji Pallonji Group.

A dramatic boardroom fallout in 2016 led to Mistry's abrupt removal by Tata Sons, in a move widely seen as a coup engineered by Ratan Tata. A lifelong bachelor with no children, Ratan Tata had no direct heir within the family to succeed him.

Mistry died in 2022, but the Shapoorji Pallonji Group continues to hold an 18 per cent stake in Tata Sons, making it the largest minority shareholder.

Following Ratan Tata's death in 2024, his half-brother Noel Tata was appointed Chairman of Tata Trusts, the principal shareholder of Tata Sons.

Tata Trusts holds a 66 per cent stake in Tata Sons, giving it decisive influence over key strategic and governance decisions at the apex holding company of the Tata Group.

Tata Sons, in turn, oversees a portfolio of around 30 operating companies spanning various sectors, such as consumer goods, automobiles, information technology and aviation. Major group entities include Jaguar Land Rover, Tata Consultancy Services, Tata Motors and Air India.

The ownership structure places Tata Trusts at the centre of governance for the diversified conglomerate, with Tata Sons functioning as the principal investment holding and promoter entity for group companies. (PTI)

PhysicsWallah students shine in JEE Main 2026 Session 1

11 from Guwahati score 98.5+ percentile

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 24: Eleven students from PhysicsWallah (PW) in Guwahati secured 98.5 percentile and above in the JEE Main 2026 Session 1 examination, reflecting strong performance from the city's aspirants in one of India's most competitive entrance tests.

Among them, Gopesh Garodia from Guwahati emerged as the top performer with an impressive 99.86 percentile.

He was followed by Dhruv Agarwal, who secured 99.52 percentile, and Santanu Roy with 99.47 percentile.

The results of JEE Main 2026 Session 1 were declared by the National Testing Agency (NTA) on February 16, 2026. The examination was conducted across 658 centres globally.

Gopesh prepared through PW's tech-enabled Vidyapeeth centre and scored 99.31 percentile in Physics, 99.81 in Chemistry, and 99.85 in Mathematics, demonstrating consistent excellence across all three subjects.

Beyond Assam, several PW students also topped in their respective regions. Amiteshwar Singh from Jammu & Kashmir secured 99.83 percentile, Vishnu Bhardwaj Upadhyay from Meghalaya scored 98.96 percentile, and Hemakshi Kumar from the Andaman & Nicobar Islands achieved 98.26 percentile, emerging as leading scorers from their states.

Ankit Gupta, CEO of Vidyapeeth-Offline, PhysicsWallah, congratulated the students and said their performance is a

testament to their hard work and dedication.

He encouraged successful candidates to shift focus towards the upcoming JEE Advanced examination.

Addressing students who did not meet their expectations, he advised them to treat the results as constructive feedback and prepare strategically for JEE Main 2026 Session 2.

The achievements underscore PW's expanding presence in multiple geographies, including the Northeast.

Through its combination of online classes, offline Vidyapeeth centres, and hybrid Pathshala hubs, the organisation aims to make competitive exam preparation more accessible to students across diverse and remote regions.

Contd. from Page 1...

APHLC politics may

spoke about candidate selection and the impact of delimitation, which has increased the number of Assembly seats in West Karbi Anglong. He confirmed that the candidate for the Bokajan constituency has already been finalised, though the name has not yet been made public. "The name will be clear by March 15 or 16," he said.

With the increase in seats in West Karbi Anglong, the chief minister added that "obviously there will be a new face" representing the region. Commenting on former Congress state president Bhupen Bora, who recently joined the BJP, Sarma said Bora would seek a ticket from Ranganadi and Bihpuria and would be allotted one.

The chief minister's visit highlighted the government's emphasis on grassroots economic empowerment through women-centric schemes, while also signalling a firm political stance against regional rivals as the election cycle approaches.

BJP-AGP rift

constituency for over three decades, cementing AGP's dominance in the region. However, in the 2021 Assembly elections, owing to PK Mahanta's health issues and seat-sharing arrangements within the ruling alliance, AGP ceded the seat to BJP.

BJP candidate and current MLA Jitu Goswami went on to win the constituency by a narrow margin. Amid ongoing seat-sharing negotiations between the BJP and AGP ahead of the next Assembly elections, AGP has reportedly intensified its political activities in Barhampur in a bid to regain its grassroots base. As part of this effort, Nagoan district AGP president Monti Madhav Mahanta, along with other party leaders, planned a public rally at Kathiatoli public playground and erected a temporary tent at the site. Following these developments, a contractor allegedly close to the sitting public representative reportedly dumped piles of earth at the venue under the pretext of a project, effectively obstructing preparations for the AGP meeting.

The incident has fuelled discussions about internal friction within the alliance, particularly at a time when chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has reportedly hinted at a potential list of candidates, heightening anxiety and speculation among incumbent MLAs.

Political observers note that Barhampur, given its historical importance and shifting political equations, could once again emerge as a key battleground if the alliance dynamics between BJP and AGP continue to witness strain.

Hagrama presents vote

and social integration among citizens. Boro also expressed dissatisfaction over the budget presented by BTC CEM Hagrama Mohilary, stating that it was not meant for the common masses as claimed in the budget speech.

The session was attended by BTC chief executive member Hagrama Mohilary, deputy chief executive member Rihan Daimary, executive members of the ruling side, council members and opposition members.

Gaurav in Parl

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

Based on its findings, Sarma had alleged in a press conference on February 8 that Gogoi, Colburn and Sheikh had a "deeper connection", and that information from the Intelligence Bureau was secretly passed on to the neighbouring nation.

The state Cabinet has decided to refer the case and SIT report to the Ministry of Home Affairs for further investigation. Gogoi had dismissed the allegations of his Pakistani connections as "most mindless and bogus", and dubbed the press conference, where Sarma made the allegations, "worse than C-grade cinema", which was a "super flop". (PTI)

Oppn non-existent

with the BJP-led alliance will be concluded in the first week of March," he said, indicating that the ruling coalition is moving in a coordinated manner ahead of the polls. The BJP in Assam is currently allied with parties such as the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) and the United People's Party Liberal (UPPL), and seat-sharing negotiations are seen as crucial for maintaining alliance unity and electoral strategy. Political observers say Sarma's remarks reflect the BJP's aggressive campaign posture as the party seeks to retain power for a third consecutive term in Assam.

The chief minister has repeatedly emphasised development and political stability as the cornerstone of the BJP's electoral narrative. Meanwhile, opposition parties have dismissed Sarma's claims as overconfidence, asserting that electoral contests will ultimately be decided by voters. However, with alliance talks nearing completion and campaign activities intensifying, Assam's political landscape is set for a high-voltage battle in the coming months.

Mizoram Assembly passes

outside the Mizo community, the amendment will not apply to Mizo women who marry outside their community (non-Mizos). "If a Mizo woman marries a non-Mizo, she will forfeit her Mizo status or identity, and her children will not be eligible to claim Scheduled Tribe (ST) status. In essence, they will no longer fall under the jurisdiction of this law," the chief minister said.

Addressing long-standing concerns regarding the financial security of women, Lalduhoma highlighted new protections against the exploitation of customary practices.

He said that in the existing law while women could claim the only dowry she brought at the time of marriage upon divorce or separation after 'Sum Chhuah' (returning bride's price), under the new law women will have the right to claim up to 50 per cent of the properties and assets acquired jointly during the marriage after divorce or Sum Chhuah.

Lalduhoma further said that 'Leprosy' has been removed as a ground for divorce. "Since we take vows to remain faithful 'for better or for worse,' and because leprosy is considered a misfortune rather than a fault, we believe it is inappropriate to use it as a reason for separation," he said.

The amended law will now be called 'The Mizo Marriage and Inheritance of Property (Amendment) Act' and will extend to the entire Mizoram except to those communities in the three Autonomous District Council (ADCs) in the southern part of the state, which have their own distinct customary laws, the chief minister added. (PTI)

Six arrested for

Sub-Divisional Judicial Magistrate's Court, a nine-member police team led by Officer-in-Charge of Bijni Police Station, Ritu Jyoti Nath, went to apprehend the accused on Monday night. However, the accused persons, along with some family members, allegedly launched a group attack on the police team during the operation. Chirang Senior Superintendent of Police Dhruva Bora visited Bijni Police Station on Tuesday afternoon following the incident and addressed a press conference regarding the matter.

Further investigation into the case is underway.

Congress activity always

the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), on February 22, marking a significant political shift ahead of the upcoming Assembly elections. Bora's resignation and subsequent induction into the BJP has triggered strong reactions within the Congress, leading to protests and symbolic demonstrations by party workers.

The Congress leadership has accused Bora of betraying the party, while BJP leaders have welcomed his decision, calling it a reflection of growing disillusionment within the opposition camp.

Meanwhile, Sarma also spoke about ticket distribution in the hill district of Karbi Anglong, stating that the BJP would take decisions after assessing ground realities and organisational feedback.

He indicated that the party would prioritise winnability and local support while finalising candidates.

Political observers say Bora's switch to the BJP could have an impact on Assam's opposition dynamics, particularly at a time when Congress is attempting to rebuild alliances and consolidate its base.

The BJP, on the other hand, continues to project confidence, asserting that recent political developments indicate growing public support for the ruling party across regions of the state.

Gaurav slams abuse

the complainants full protection and support. Equal citizenship should translate into equal respect and equal protection in every part of the country," the deputy leader of the Congress in Lok Sabha said.

According to the police, the incident took place around 3.30 pm on February 20, when drilling and electrical installation work was being carried out in the women's fourth-floor apartment. (PTI)

No opposition alliance

Screening Committee in the national capital, Saikia urged all concerned to refrain from spreading misinformation on the issue. "Talks with the Rajgor Dal are continuing and no decision has been taken till now. I appeal to everyone not to indulge in any kind of misinformation," he said.

India hosts military

Military World Games in 2007, one of the largest military sporting events in the world, he said. The launch of IMACC marks a new and innovative step in this tradition, he added. (PTI)

PhonePe launches biometric authentication for UPI payments up to ₹5,000

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 24: PhonePe has rolled out biometric authentication for UPI payments, enabling users to authorise transactions using fingerprint or facial recognition instead of manually entering a UPI PIN for payments up to ₹5,000. With this launch, PhonePe becomes one of the first major digital payments platforms to introduce device-level biometric authentication for UPI transactions at scale.

The new feature is aimed at delivering a faster, seamless 'one-touch' payment experience while enhancing transaction security.

The biometric system leverages a smartphone's native security features, allowing users to complete payments through fingerprint or face authentication. The feature is designed to reduce common friction points in digital payments, including failed transactions due to forgotten or incorrectly entered UPI PINs.

In addition to improving convenience, the feature strengthens security by reducing risks such as "shoulder-surfing" or PIN exposure, particularly in crowded public environments.

PhonePe has also integrated a fallback mechanism that enables users to

switch back to the standard UPI PIN in case biometric authentication fails due to poor lighting or sensor issues.

In accordance with regulatory guidelines, biometric authentication will be applicable for UPI transactions up to ₹5,000.

Payments exceeding this limit will continue to require UPI PIN authentication to maintain enhanced security.

The biometric payment option can be used across various everyday use cases, including peer-to-peer transfers, QR code payments at retail stores, online transactions, and checking bank balances.

HDFC Bank inaugurates Tech & Digital Factory in Guwahati

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 24: HDFC Bank, India's leading private sector bank, inaugurated its new Tech & Digital Factory in Guwahati, marking a major step in strengthening the state's technology ecosystem.

The facility will function as a centre for advanced technology development, innovation and talent incubation in Assam, with a focus on Artificial Intelligence (AI), digital capabilities and cybersecurity.

The new unit was inaugurated by Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma in the presence of Kaizad Bharucha, Deputy Managing Director - HDFC Bank; Ramesh Lakshminarayan, Chief Information Officer, HDFC Bank; senior government officials; representatives of participating educational institutions; and bank officers. This is HDFC Bank's first Tech & Digital Factory in Assam

and its fourth nationwide, following similar facilities in Mumbai, Bengaluru and Gurugram.

The Guwahati centre is expected to create career opportunities for skilled professionals in the state, enabling them to contribute to next-generation banking technology.

The Bank aims to strengthen AI, Cloud, Data and core engineering capabilities through this facility, while opening up digital product creation capabilities in the region.

The initiative is part of HDFC Bank's partnership with the Government of Assam under Advantage Assam 2.0, signed in February 2025.

Under this collaboration, the Bank and the state government have introduced a structured skill-building curriculum focused on BFSI and fintech sectors, aligning academic knowledge with industry requirements.

PNB launches Digital Location Management Solution to boost hyperlocal visibility

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 24: Punjab National Bank (PNB), one of India's leading public sector banks, has launched its Digital Location Management Solution (DLMS), a centralized hyperlocal platform aimed at strengthening the Bank's digital visibility and seamlessly guiding customers from online searches to physical branches, ATMs and Banking Note Acceptors (BNAs).

The DLMS platform provides dedicated microsites for every PNB branch, ATM and BNA across the country.

Accessible via <https://locate.pnb.bank.in>, the solution ensures accurate, verified and uniform location information across major digital publishers such as Google, Google Maps, DuckDuckGo, Brave, Ecosia and Waze, as well as AI-driven platforms including ChatGPT, Gemini and Perplexity.

Each individual microsite is integrated

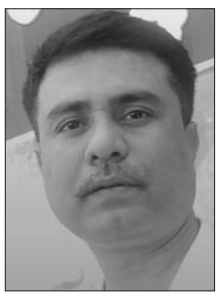
with its respective Google Business Profile (GBP) and serves as an authentic source of information.

Customers can access details such as branch address, contact information, IFSC code, business hours, directions, and ongoing offers and schemes.

To enhance accessibility and regional outreach, the microsites are available in eight languages, enabling customers across India to access banking information in their preferred language. The DLMS platform also incorporates QR-based review mechanisms and structured location data management, helping improve customer engagement and online discoverability.

With this initiative, PNB aims to strengthen its "phygital" banking model by integrating digital discovery with physical service touchpoints, ensuring a more seamless and reliable customer experience.

ACHIEVEMENT



Yugal Jyoti Borah has been awarded the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) by Mahatma Gandhi University, Meghalaya for his thesis entitled "Portrayal of Death and Immortality in the Poetry of Emily Dickinson". He carried out his research work under the supervision of Dr. Deepa Phukan Baruah. He is the elder son of Late Leela Kanta Borah and Late Ketakee Borah, Village & P.O. Boraah Gaon, Golaghat, Assam. He is currently serving as an Assistant Professor in the Department of English, Marangi Mahavidyalaya, Golaghat, Assam.

AFFIDAVIT

I, Ful Puma, DOB-01/12/1980, C/o-Saidan Amsong, a resident of Saruamli, P.O.- Bargaon and P.S.- Baithalango, district, West Karbi Anglong (Assam), do hereby solemnly affirm and declare an oath before the notary public of Morigaon, that my actual name is Ful Puma, which is mentioned in my Aadhaar Card bearing No-8769-5088-0404, Voter Id No-JRF0002394 and Pan Card No-EVNP0509R. But in my Langpi Dehangi Rural Bank Passbook Vide A/C No-7437010049765 under Bargaon Branch, wherein my name has been wrongly recorded as Fulswari Amsong instead of Ful Puma. Both Ful Puma and Fulswari Amsong are names of one person who is myself.

No.KDB/BTC/NIT/2024-25/808

Date 18/02/2026

SHORT 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 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 works under 6th Finance Commission Fund for the year 2025-26. The Tenders will be received by the undersigned up to 2.00 P.M. on 03.03.2026 and will be opened on the same date & place at 2.30 P.M.

Against the scheme shown below-

Sl. No.	Name of Scheme	A.A. Amount	Earnest Money	Cost of Tender paper	Time of Completion
1	E/F and S/G at Tilapara village.	19,00,000.00	19000/- (1% for ST, SC & OBC) & Rs. 38000/- (Gen)	Rs. 570.00	3 Months

Details NIT may be seen in all working days during office hours in the office of the undersigned. Tender papers will be issued to the contractors or their authorized agent from 25.02.2026 to 13.03.2026 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, Titagaruri

IPR(BTC)/C/2025-26/4148

Memorandum submitted to Chief Minister through Morigaon DC

District literary body demands implementation of Official Language Act

HT Correspondent

MORIGAON, Feb 24: A team of members of the Morigaon district literary body has submitted a memorandum of demands to the Chief Minister of Assam through the District Commissioner, Morigaon, urging the compulsory use of the Assamese language in offices, courts and institutions through proper implementation of the Assam Official Language Act, 1960.

The district literary body, responding to a call by the state literary organisation Assam Sahitya Sabha, sent the memorandum demanding that, based on the linguistic situation following the enforcement of the States Reor-



ganisation Act, 1956, the government should recognise Assamese as an official language. The Assam Sahitya Sabha has long been urg-

ing the government to ensure proper enforcement of the Act in the state.

Although the Assam Official

Language Act, 1960, was legally accepted following the Assamese Language Movement of 1960, the Act has not yet been properly implemented, the memorandum stated. It further mentioned that despite government Notification No PLB 560215/78 dated 14/04/2025 and government Letter No PLB 560215/117 dated 15/10/2025 directing proper implementation of the Act in government offices, courts and institutions, no effective implementation has been observed to date.

The organisation has demanded that the Chief Minister of Assam take strict measures to ensure proper implementation of the Act across the state.

Yandaboo Treaty marks 200 Years in Assam

Commemoration highlights colonial legacy and lessons for the future

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Feb 24: The 200th anniversary of the Yandaboo Treaty was observed in Nagaon on Tuesday, with prominent citizens and historians gathering to reflect on its significance.

Signed on February 24, 1826, the treaty marked the end of the Ahom kingdom and the beginning of British rule in Assam.

Speaking at the event, Dr Indrajit Bezbaruah, Principal of Samaguri College, described the treaty as a turning point in Assam's history, leading to the decline of the Ahom dynasty and the eventual annexation of the state by the British. He noted that the agreement was a result of the expansionist policies of both the British East India Company and the Burmese kingdom.

The programme was organised by the Sangrami Satirtha Assam Movement, Nagaon and attended



by several prominent citizens including Dr Durlav Chamua, Kshitish Das and Dipak Saikia. Speakers emphasised the importance of remembering history to learn from it rather than dwell on past misfortunes.

The Yandaboo Treaty is widely regarded as a dark chapter in Assam's history, symbolising the loss of independence and the start

of colonial rule. However, it also triggered resistance and nationalism in the region, which eventually contributed to India's broader struggle for independence.

The event concluded with a call to honour the sacrifices of Assam's people in the fight for freedom and to work towards building a stronger and more united state.

Mayor lays foundation stone for yoga hall at Yoga Tirtha Project

HT Correspondent

GUWAHATI, Feb 24: Mayor Mrigen Sarania laid the foundation stone for a yoga hall at the Yoga Tirtha Project in Maligaon on Tuesday.

The project is being implemented under the development scheme of the Guwahati Municipal Corporation. The Yoga Tirtha Project is managed by the Bharatiya Yoga Sanskriti and Yoga Chikitsa Kendra, which has received recognition from the University of Health Sciences, Assam Government. The yoga hall to be constructed at a cost of ₹ 10 lakh is expected to strengthen the project's initiatives.

Speaking at the ceremony, Mayor Sarania highlighted the importance of yoga in promoting physical and mental well-being and lauded the efforts of the Kendra in providing yoga education and training to youth across the state.

The Kendra offers diploma and degree courses in yoga, including postgraduate programs and has trained over 5,000 youth to date. The Chief Minister of Assam, Himanta Biswa Sarma has sanctioned ₹ 10 lakh for the project and the Kendra expressed gratitude for his support.

The foundation stone laying ceremony was attended by yoga experts, instructors and enthusiasts, including prominent yoga personality Anah Bandhu Ghosh.

BSS holds awareness meet to promote Bodo language

HT Correspondent

HOWRAGHAT, Feb 24: In a significant move to preserve and promote the Bodo language, the Karbi Anglong District Sahitya Sabha (KADBSS) organised a large-scale educational awareness campaign on Tuesday. The initiative saw simultaneous meetings held across six Bodo-medium primary schools under the Manikpur Primary Bodo Sahitya Sabha in the Langhin area.

This campaign is part of a broader, month-long mission by the district literary body to ensure the linguistic heritage of the Bodo community remains secure and vibrant.

The KADBSS has been actively reaching out to various pockets of the district throughout February. The schedule of their recent outreach includes four villages in the Howraghat area, two villages in the Howraghat Tiniali area, four villages in the Langhin area, seven villages in the Langhin Manikpur area and six villages under the Langhin Manikpur Primary Bodo Sahitya Sabha.

The meetings saw a massive turnout from various influential Bodo organisations, reflecting a united front for the cause of education and language.

"The primary objective of these sessions is to sensitise parents and local communities about the importance of Bodo-medium education in keeping our mother tongue alive for future generations."

Representatives from the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU), Kachari Samaj, All Bodo Women's Welfare Federation (ABWWF), Bodo Employees' Association and the Gaon Burha Association participated in the discussions.

Key officials and leaders present included Dalsing Basumatary, Munindra Narzary, Sumeshwar Basumatary, Magej Narja Boro, Barendra Basumatary, Subhash Basumatary, Dinesh Daimary, Nakul Chandra Brahma, Rituraj Basumatary, Bistiram Daimary, Sonaram Basumatary, Tanuram Daimary, Joybhadra Basumatary, Nirmal Basumatary, Hanuram Gayary, Dharmendra Khakhlary, Rajaram Basumatary, Charan Basumatary, Minalini Hajowari, Nabin Basumatary, Ratendra Basumatary and Tarun Mosahary, among others.

Special immunisation drive launched in West Karbi Anglong

HT Correspondent

HAMREN, Feb 24: In a concerted effort to strengthen the district's public health system, West Karbi Anglong officially launched the 'Special Immunisation Drive 1.0' on Monday. Rolled out in alignment with a statewide initiative, the campaign aims to achieve 100 per cent vaccination coverage by targeting children and pregnant women who have missed routine immunisation.

The inaugural ceremony was held at Amlong Sub-Health Centre under Baithalango Block Primary Health Centre. The event witnessed the participation of healthcare officials and frontline workers committed to preventing vaccine-preventable diseases in the region.

The drive was spearheaded by Dr Clement Teron, District Immunisation Officer (DIO), who emphasised that the campaign's success depends on reaching the most vulnerable sections. He stated that ensuring timely vaccination for every child and expectant mother is essential to safeguard them against life-threatening diseases. The drive focuses on identifying "left-out" beneficiaries who have not received any dose of essential vaccines, "drop-out" beneficiaries who began but did not complete their immunisation schedule and children residing in remote and hard-to-reach areas where geographical barriers hinder healthcare delivery.

The launch programme was attended by Gabin Tokbi, Consultant, Universal Immunisation Programme; Songja Ingri (IFV) and officials from the National Health Mission (NHM).

ASHA and Anganwadi workers will play a crucial role in the implementation of the drive by conducting door-to-door surveys to identify missed beneficiaries. Departmental authorities have issued strict instructions to ensure comprehensive monitoring, with the objective of achieving zero exclusion in the district.

By mobilising local health centres and community health workers, West Karbi Anglong aims to set a benchmark in rural healthcare delivery and ensure a healthier future for the next generation.



Dhubri court concludes 17-year-old murder case

HT Correspondent

DHUBRI, Feb 24: In a case pending for over 17 years, the Court of the Additional Sessions Judge, Dhubri on Tuesday convicted eight persons for the fatal assault of Anowar Hussain in January 2010.

Additional Sessions Judge Syed Burhanur Rahman sentenced each convict to eight years of rigorous imprisonment and a fine of ₹ 10,000, under Section 304 Part I read with Section 149 of the Indian Penal Code.

The case (Sessions Case No 31 of 2013, FIR No 25/2010) arose from an assault at Adabari Chowmore on January 11, 2010. According to the prosecution, the victim was attacked around 7:30 AM with iron rods, grill bars and other blunt objects over a monetary dispute of ₹ 500, resulting in grievous head injuries. Hussain later died in Guwahati.

During the trial, 14 witnesses—including eyewitnesses, investigating officers and the medical officer were examined. The post-mortem confirmed death due to coma from blunt force head injuries. The Court relied on eyewitness accounts and medical evidence to establish that the accused

formed an unlawful assembly and caused the fatal assault.

The case was marked by extraordinary procedural measures. On January 6, 2026, two bedridden accused—Sirajul Haque and Moinal Haque @ Khuta, filed petitions citing paralysis. Judge Rahman personally visited their residences to record their Section 313 statements, an uncommon judicial step.

The judgment was also pronounced outside the regular courtroom with one convict present in an ambulance within court premises due to medical constraints. The Court emphasized that procedural flexibility can be exercised without compromising due process in exceptional circumstances.

While the defence raised discrepancies in witness testimony and non-recovery of the weapon, the Court held that reliable ocular and medical evidence sufficiently established guilt, including vicarious liability under Section 149 IPC for unlawful assembly.

The case, nearly 17 years old, now concludes at the trial court level, notable both for its substantive judgment and the extraordinary measures taken to accommodate incapacitated accused while upholding legal procedures.

Bodoland researcher to present Golden Langur study at Cambridge



HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, Feb 24: Rishi Basumatary, a PhD scholar at the Wildlife Institute of India and a resident of Thuribari village in the greater Basugaon area of Chirang district, BTC (Assam), has been selected to deliver an oral presentation at the Student Conference on Conservation Science (SCCS) 2026 to be held at the University of Cambridge, United Kingdom, from March 28 to April 3, 2026.

He will present his research titled "Bridging a Fragmented Future: Understanding Distribution, Habitat-use, Corridor Connectivity and Threats to the Endangered Golden Langur (*Trachypithecus geei*) in India." The study focuses on the endangered Golden Langur, the mascot species of Bodoland.

The presentation is based on his MSc (Wildlife Science) dissertation conducted at the Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun, under the supervision of Dr Anukul Nath, with co-supervision from Dr G V Gopi and Dr Dilip Chetry.

Citizens from the greater BTC region and wildlife conservation communities have extended warm congratulations and best wishes to Basumatary.

Tribal bodies oppose open-cast mining at Saliki

HT Correspondent

MARGHERITA, Feb 24: Tribal organisations from the Tirap Tribal Belt have strongly opposed the proposed open-cast coal mining project by North Eastern Coalfields (NEC) at Saliki village, Lekhapani, which falls under Tinsukia district.

Addressing a press conference on Monday, representatives of tribal organisations along with residents of Saliki village alleged that NEC, Margherita, a subsidiary of Coal India Limited, is making unilateral preparations to begin open-cast mining without conducting proper consultations or discussions with the affected villagers.

Leaders of the tribal organisations claimed that a No Objection Certificate (NOC) was obtained during a Tirap Colliery Gaon Panchayat meeting without the knowledge or informed consent of the people of Saliki village. They termed the move arbitrary and contrary to the interests of indigenous communities residing in the area.

Nayung Mossang, president of the All Assam Tangsa Students' Union, stated that during the British colonial period in 1943, the Tirap Frontier Tract was created with its headquarters at Margherita



to protect indigenous aboriginal tribal communities such as the Singpho, Tangsa, Sema Naga, Tai-speaking groups including Tai Phake and Tai Khanti.

He further said that after India's Independence, the Government of Assam officially notified the Tirap Frontier Tract as the Tirap Tribal Belt vide Notification No TAD/R73/50/43 dated March 13, 1951, with the objective of safeguarding the land, culture and rights of indigenous tribal people. He added that the area was historically part of the erstwhile North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) before administrative reorganisation.

Alleging that the management of North Eastern Coalfields, Coal India Ltd, Margherita, has decided to turn the historic Saliki village into a coal dumping ground,

Mossang said the move would affect biodiversity and erase the history and culture of the area. He demanded boundary demarcation, maintenance of safety distance, scientific and environmentally safe mining practices, proper rehabilitation and welfare measures, reservation in employment for local youths and contractual opportunities for local people. He warned that otherwise, strong agitation programmes would be launched in the Margherita region.

The tribal organisations further warned that if NEC proceeds with open-cast mining in violation of due procedures, environmental norms and statutory regulations and attempts to forcibly commence operations, they will launch democratic protests in strong opposition.

District ASHA conference held in Sivasagar

HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, Feb 24: The Sivasagar District Commissioner, Mridul Yadav, on Tuesday, handed over cheques of Rs 2 lakh each as gratuity to five retired ASHA workers—Kanchan Baruah, Tagarmai Hazarika, Mithamai Konwar, Bidyut Phukan and Labanya Kalita at a meeting held in Milan Mandir.

Jt. Director of Medical and Health Services, Dr Makhan Kalita, delivered the welcome speech, lauding the ASHA workers' contributions to improving health services.

Several ASHA workers, including Usha Ghatowar,

Rupali Konwar, Simpy Begam, Rewati Bhumik, Ranamoni Gogoi, Minu Khanikar, Minakhi Mili, Junmoni Bori, Jyoti Barua, Kunja Barua, Bobita Bora, Bitali Bora, Bijaya Das, Minaxi Lahan, Bonti Gogoi, Ankita Tati, Minaxi Chetia and Alpona Barua were felicitated for their dedicated service.

Led by Chinu Bargohai, ASHA workers from the Geleki sector performed a chorus during the conference, which was chaired by Mridupawan Dutta. District Commissioner Yadav assured that grievances of ASHAs working in rural areas would be addressed soon.

Seven-day fair showcases local craftsmanship and promotes women-led enterprises

Karbi Anglong Swadeshi Mela begins in Diphu

HT Bureau

DIPHU, Feb 24: In a significant move to bridge rural craftsmanship and mainstream commerce, the seven-day "Rajyik Udyam Samagam - Swadeshi Mela" officially kicked off on Tuesday at the Diphu Government Boys' Higher Secondary School playground.

The mela provides a strategic platform for locally produced goods from the Karbi Anglong region, facilitating their entry into broader state and national markets.

The event was inaugurated by the Chief Executive Member of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council, Tuliram Ronghang, who performed the ribbon-cutting and



interacted with local artisans while inspecting indigenous products on display.

Organised collaboratively by the Assam Small Industries Development Corporation Limited and the

District Industries & Commerce Department, the fair emphasises grassroots economic growth. Executive Member Prabhat Chandra Taro encouraged women entrepreneurs to register their businesses during the mela to access long-term government support.

The inaugural ceremony witnessed a high-profile turnout, including Amarsing Tisso, Raju Tisso and senior officials from the District Industries & Commerce Department.

The Swadeshi Mela will run daily through March 2, 2026, featuring handloom products, organic food items and traditional crafts unique to the Karbi Anglong hills.

OBITUARY

Rohini Kumar Baruah, retired Principal of Jagannath Barooah College, a distinguished sports organiser and politician, passed away on Tuesday morning at his residence in Jorhat, due to age-related ailments. He was 88.

Born on April 1, 1938, Baruah began his career as a teacher at Dauli Bagan Higher Secondary School. He eventually served as Head of the Department and became Principal in 1996, retiring in 1998.

Baruah was actively involved in politics since joining the Bharatiya Jana Sangh in 1964. During the Emergency and the historic Assam Movement, he guided students while also facing police atrocities. He is survived by his wife, son, daughter, son-in-law, grandchildren. District BJP president Shantanu Pujari, Hemanta Kalita, Kamakhya Mohan Das, Siddhanku Ankur Baruah, and officials from the District Sports Association, Jorhat Club and Kushal Konwar Indoor Stadium expressed their condolences.

Major police success in Tamulpur: 4 goat thefts arrested

HT Correspondent

TAMULPUR, Feb 24: In a major breakthrough, police in Tamulpur successfully busted a goat theft gang during a special operation in the area. The action came following increasing complaints of theft incidents, which had created concern among local residents.

According to police sources, a four-member gang involved in stealing goats was identified and apprehended after a targeted drive. The arrested accuseds have been identified as Manab Rabha, Hriday Rabha, Pankaj Rajbongshi and Bishal Jyoti Saraniya.

During the operation, police also recovered goats that had been stolen from Bhanu Das of Bhakatpara. The recovered livestock was later handed back to the rightful owner, bringing relief to the victim and local villagers.

Residents of the area have welcomed the swift action taken by the police and have demanded strict punishment for those involved in theft activities. Locals said that repeated incidents of theft have created fear and insecurity, especially in rural areas. Concerned citizens have also urged the police administration to intensify drives against criminal activities and make the district free from theft, robbery and drug-related crimes. They expressed hope that such firm action will help restore safety and confidence among the people.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world. - Nelson Mandela

AI summit and New Delhi declaration

India's recent AI summit concluded with the New Delhi Declaration, engaging 88 nations and marking a major milestone in global AI regulatory efforts, highlighting India's growing influence on the international stage. The declaration presents a global vision for "collaborative, trusted, resilient, and efficient" artificial intelligence, highlighting that its benefits must be shared by all of humanity to realise its full potential. AI has become very popular in the last decade, especially in the past five years. It has many benefits but also poses risks, making the topic complicated. People around the world are worried about these risks. The recent summit was the first of its kind in the region and focused on these growing concerns about AI. India has signed an agreement to join Pax Silica, a U.S.-led group focused on building a strong supply chain for critical minerals and artificial intelligence (AI). The summit attracted major investments for India, with the Adani Group and Ambani each committing \$1 billion and Microsoft investing \$50 billion. This summit highlights India's commitment to aligning its AI standards with global frameworks, with a focus on inclusion, responsibility, and international leadership in AI regulation.

As artificial intelligence (AI) becomes more integrated into daily life—from healthcare to entertainment—the need for regulatory oversight is growing. The AI is a double-edged sword. While it can help increase efficiency, there are also possible risks. What is AI technology, and why is the world concerned? There is cause for concern, as it is a double-edged sword. There is fear that the AI will take over the world. The AI can help improve patient care and resource management in organisations, but it raises ethical, privacy, and security concerns. There's also anxiety about job displacement and bias in credit systems and the criminal justice system, with predictions that AI could eliminate 85 million jobs globally by 2025. The summit showcased India's expanding digital infrastructure and the government's proactive steps, including a comprehensive AI roadmap, to establish the country as a global leader in technology and AI development.

The India AI Mission has allocated ₹10,372 crore to enhance the artificial intelligence ecosystem. Additionally, more than 38,000 GPUs have been integrated into a centralised computing facility, and 12 indigenous foundation models are currently under development. Consequently, India is positioning itself as both a developer and a facilitator in the emerging era of AI. AI is now a vital part of India's defence sector, according to Dr Chandrika Kausik, Director General of DRDO. Policymakers are worried that the lack of transparency in private markets, such as private credit and private equity, could hinder the identification of early warning signs of trouble. India's challenges include striking a balance between innovation and government overregulation of AI. It could stifle creativity and hinder the development of groundbreaking technologies. At the same time, a lack of regulation could lead to dangerous results.

Trump, Tariffs and the Rule of Law

By: Satyabrata Borah

In American politics, tariffs have always been more than dry instruments of economic policy. They carry emotional weight, tapping into ideas of national strength, fairness and protection. Few leaders understood this better than Donald Trump. For him, tariffs were not just tools to balance trade or revive manufacturing, but symbols of presidential will. They were proof that a single leader, armed with resolve and authority, could bend global commerce to America's advantage. It is against this backdrop that the recent posture of the U.S. Supreme Court toward presidential power takes on deep significance. By carefully circumscribing the reach of the presidency, including in areas closely linked to trade and executive authority, the Court has done more than check one man. It has reaffirmed a constitutional balance that protects American democracy from the temptations of overreach.

Donald Trump's approach to tariffs was rooted in a personal style of governance that blurred the line between executive discretion and executive dominance. He believed, and often said openly, that past presidents had been too timid, too bound by rules and institutions. In his view, the presidency was meant to be a powerful office, capable of decisive action without being slowed down by Congress, courts or international bodies. Trade policy became a prime arena for this philosophy. By invoking rarely used statutory provisions and national security justifications, Trump imposed sweeping tariffs on allies and adversaries alike. Steel, aluminium, Chinese goods, European products, all became targets in what he framed as a long overdue correction.

To many of his supporters, this was refreshing. After decades of factory closures and stagnant wages, tariffs felt like action. They felt like someone was finally fighting back. But beneath the political theatre lay a serious constitutional question. How much power should a president have to reshape the economy on his own authority. At what point does flexibility become excessive? And who decides when that line has been crossed.

The U.S. Supreme Court, often portrayed as remote and ideological, has in this context played a stabilising role. Through a series of rulings and legal signals, it has pushed back against the idea of an unchecked executive. It has not targeted Trump personally, nor has it ruled tariffs unconstitutional per se. Instead, it has reinforced principles that limit the concentration of power in the White House. In doing so, it has reminded Americans that the presidency, however powerful, remains a constitutional office, not a personal mandate.

This matters because Trump's tariff strategy relied heavily on broad interpretations of executive authority. Laws such as the Trade Expansion Act and the International Emergency Economic Powers Act were designed to give presidents flexibility in extraordinary circumstances. They were never meant to serve as blank cheques for reshaping trade relations on a whim. By questioning expansive readings of these statutes, lower courts and the Supreme Court have signalled that emergency powers must remain tethered to genuine emergencies and subject to judicial review.

The human dimension of this legal restraint is often overlooked. Tariffs are not abstract numbers. They affect workers, farmers, consumers and small businesses. When tariffs were imposed suddenly, without legislative debate or clear long term planning, uncertainty spread quickly. Farmers worried about retaliatory measures. Manufacturers struggled with rising input costs. Consumers paid higher prices. The courts, by insisting on limits and procedures, indirectly gave voice to these diffuse but real concerns. They slowed down decisions that could reshape livelihoods overnight.

Donald Trump, of course, saw this differently. For him, judicial scrutiny was obstruction. He framed court interventions as examples of an unelected elite undermining the will of the people. This narrative resonated with a segment of the electorate that felt alienated from institutions. Yet it also revealed a deeper tension. Democracy is not just about elections. It is about restraint, process and accountability. The Supreme Court's role is not to endorse popular policies but to ensure that power is exercised lawfully.

In circumscribing presidential powers, the Court has also protected future presidents from the temptations that Trump embodied so vividly. The precedents set during his tenure will outlast him. They send a message to any leader, regardless of party, that the tools of executive power have boundaries. This is especially important in an era of polarisation, where the stakes of political victory feel existential and the pressure to act unilaterally is intense.

There is also an international dimension to this story. Trump's tariffs strained relationships with allies who were used to predictable, rules based American leadership. Sudden tariff hikes justified on national security grounds left partners confused and resentful. By reasserting limits on presidential authority, the Supreme Court has helped restore some measure of credibility to U.S. institutions. It reassures the world that American policy is not solely dependent on the impulses of one individual, but anchored in a system of checks and balances.

Critics argue that judicial restraint on tariffs ties the hands of the president in a competitive global environment. They point to China's state driven trade practices and argue that speed and decisiveness are essential. This argument has merit, but it also overlooks the long term costs of executive overreach. When one president stretches his authority, he sets a precedent that the next can exploit for entirely different ends. What seems useful today can become dangerous tomorrow.

The Supreme Court's approach has been notably cautious. It has not sought to micro-manage trade policy. Instead, it has focused on constitutional structure. Who has the authority to make major economic decisions. How clear must Congress be when it delegates power. What standards guide executive discretion. These questions may sound technical, but they strike at the heart of democratic governance. By insisting on clarity and accountability, the Court has strengthened the role of Congress, the branch closest to the people. This rebalancing is particularly significant given Congress's own reluctance to

India-Brazil realignment: A calculated strategic move

The digital century is being forged not merely in lines of code but in the geology beneath the earth's surface. Rare earth elements and other critical minerals have quietly become the indispensable feedstock of the global technological order. From semiconductors and smartphones to electric vehicles and renewable energy systems, these materials function as the hidden circuitry of modern power. Any nation aspiring to leadership in artificial intelligence, advanced manufacturing, and clean energy must therefore secure both access to these resources and resilience in their supply chains. For India, the challenge is particularly acute. Its digital ambitions are expansive and credible, yet its mineral dependencies remain structurally exposed. The recent visit of Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva to India must be read against this strategic backdrop, where economics, technology, and geopolitics are converging with unusual intensity.

For years, India has relied heavily on China for rare earths and several other critical minerals that underpin its electronics and high-technology sectors. This dependence has long been viewed as a manageable economic reality, but the volatility of China-India relations has transformed it into a strategic vulnerability. Beijing's demonstrated willingness to use trade levers in moments of geopolitical friction has sharpened concerns in New Delhi about supply security. In an era where technological ecosystems can be disrupted by export controls, the risk is no longer hypothetical. A disruption in rare earth supplies could ripple across India's semiconductor ambitions, electric mobility plans, and renewable energy rollout. It is this structural anxiety that gives the India-Brazil engagement a significance that goes well beyond diplomatic ceremony.

The visit of President Lula signals a careful recalibration in India's external economic strategy. India and Brazil have long enjoyed cordial relations rooted in their shared identity as major democracies of the Global South. Yet the contemporary moment demands that such relationships evolve from symbolic solidar-

ity into operational strategic partnerships. With global supply chains under strain and geopolitical alignments in visible flux, New Delhi appears increasingly intent on building diversified resource corridors. Lula's Delhi visit, therefore, represents not merely a reaffirmation of goodwill but a deliberate attempt to institutionalise cooperation in sectors that will define future economic power.

The signing of ten agreements spanning critical minerals, digital cooperation, health, MSMEs, entrepreneurship, and mass communication underscores the breadth of the emerging partnership. Among these, the pact on rare earths and critical minerals stands out as the most consequential. Brazil's geological endowment is formidable. It holds significant reserves of lithium, niobium, graphite, and several rare earth elements that are essential to modern industrial ecosystems. By factoring Brazil into its supply matrix, India gains an opportunity to hedge against potential disruptions while simultaneously building more resilient and diversified sourcing networks. For a country whose digital economy is expanding rapidly, such hedging is not optional; it is strategic insurance.

The importance of rare earths extends most visibly into the semiconductor domain. Semiconductors serve as the brains, memory, and power regulators of virtually every modern electronic device, from consumer gadgets to advanced defence systems. Their production depends heavily on a stable supply of specialised minerals. India has already articulated an ambitious semiconductor manufacturing roadmap, but raw material security remains one of its weakest links. Collaboration with Brazil, therefore, could help close a critical gap in India's technological value chain. Over time, such cooperation may also encourage joint investments in mineral processing and refining, areas where value addition is highest and strategic autonomy most meaningful. Technology collaboration be-

tween the two nations adds another layer of depth to the partnership. India's Digital Public Infrastructure model has emerged as one of its most successful governance exports, integrating identity, payments, and service delivery at national scale. The proposed Centre of Excellence for Digital Public Infrastructure in Brazil reflects growing international interest in this model. If implemented effectively, it would not only deepen bilateral ties but also position India as a norm-setter in digital governance frameworks across the Global South. In strategic terms, the move helps India translate its domestic digital successes into geopolitical capital, while offering Brazil tools to accelerate its own digital transformation.

Energy cooperation forms another pillar of the evolving relationship. Brazil is widely regarded as a global leader in biofuels, particularly ethanol, an area where it has decades of operational experience. India, for its part, is pushing aggressively toward energy transition while attempting to reduce its heavy dependence on imported fossil fuels. Collaboration in bio-fuel technologies and supply chains could therefore produce mutual gains. Initiatives under platforms such as the Global Biofuel Alliance offer a structured pathway for joint innovation, standard-setting, and market expansion. At a time when energy security is increasingly intertwined with geopolitical autonomy, such cooperation helps both countries reduce exposure to supply networks that may be influenced by Beijing's strategic calculations.

Agriculture presents yet another domain of promising convergence. Both India and Brazil rank among the world's major food producers, and both face the mounting pressures of climate variability, soil stress, and the need for productivity gains without ecological degradation. Joint research on climate-resilient crops, sustainable farming techniques, and food security frameworks could generate significant dividends. More importantly, such cooperation would strengthen South-South knowledge flows, re-

ducing reliance on technology paradigms dominated by advanced Western economies. In the long run, this could contribute to the emergence of alternative agricultural innovation ecosystems rooted in the developmental realities of the Global South.

Trade expansion remains a practical benchmark of the partnership's seriousness. The shared ambition to push bilateral trade beyond \$20 billion within five years reflects recognition that political goodwill must be matched by commercial momentum. Current trade volumes, while respectable, remain below potential for two economies of such scale and complementarity. Critical minerals, energy cooperation, pharmaceuticals, agricultural products, and digital services together provide a broad canvas for expansion. If logistical bottlenecks and regulatory frictions are addressed, the India-Brazil corridor could evolve into one of the more consequential South-South economic axes of the coming decade.

The geopolitical resonance of the partnership is equally noteworthy. Both India and Brazil have consistently advocated a more multipolar international order and have pressed for long-overdue reform of the United Nations Security Council. Their cooperation within forums such as BRICS, the G20, and the IBSA Dialogue Forum reflects a shared desire to amplify the voice of the Global South in global governance. By deepening bilateral ties in strategically sensitive sectors, the two countries are effectively reinforcing the economic foundations of that diplomatic alignment.

None of this, however, should be viewed through a simplistic anti-China lens. India's objective is not decoupling for its own sake but diversification for resilience. Even so, the structural asymmetry in rare earth supply chains makes diversification urgent. China currently dominates multiple stages of the global rare earth value chain, from mining to processing and refining. Without alternative partnerships, India's technological ambitions would remain exposed to external pressure points. Brazil's resource base offers a credible pathway toward partial risk mitigation, though building

fully resilient supply chains will require sustained investment, infrastructure development, and regulatory coordination over many years. There are also practical challenges that both sides must navigate. Mineral extraction projects are capital-intensive and often face environmental scrutiny. Logistics between South Asia and South America remain costlier than intra-Asian supply chains. Regulatory harmonisation, investment protection frameworks, and private-sector participation will all determine whether the current political momentum translates into durable economic outcomes. Yet the strategic logic of cooperation is strong enough to justify the effort. In an era of fragmented globalisation, partnerships that combine resource security with technological collaboration are likely to define the next phase of international economic relations.

If the visit of President Lula is remembered as a turning point, it will be because it reflects a broader shift in India's strategic thinking. New Delhi is increasingly aware that digital leadership cannot rest solely on software prowess or market size. It must be anchored in secure access to the physical materials that power the digital economy. By reaching out to Brazil, India is signalling a more mature phase of economic statecraft, one that integrates resource diplomacy, technology partnerships, and geopolitical positioning into a coherent framework.

The India-Brazil synergy, if sustained with seriousness and follow-through, has the potential to reshape segments of the Global South's economic architecture. It strengthens supply chain resilience, widens technological cooperation, and reinforces the push toward a more balanced multipolar order. Much will depend on execution in the years ahead. But the direction is unmistakable. In the contest to shape the digital future, the countries that align their mineral security with technological ambition will hold the decisive advantage. India's outreach to Brazil suggests it has begun to internalise that reality. (The writer can be reached at dipakkurmipltd@gmail.com)

DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Dipak Kurmi

Collaboration in bio-fuel technologies and supply chains could therefore produce mutual gains. Initiatives under platforms such as the Global Biofuel Alliance offer a structured pathway for joint innovation, standard-setting, and market expansion. At a time when energy security is increasingly intertwined with geopolitical autonomy, such cooperation helps both countries reduce exposure to supply networks that may be influenced by Beijing's strategic calculations.

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presented even complex social, economic, and political issues in a remarkably fluent, engaging, and understandable manner. He was strict and uncompromising in preserving the purity of language. He continuously inspired the next generation of journalists to remain conscious of the correct use of language. The structure of every sentence and the choice of words in his writing left a distinctive impact on the reader's mind. Every word flowing from his pen acted as a weapon to awaken the dormant conscience of society. He repeatedly demonstrated through his long career that the primary objective of the media is not to create cheap sensationalism but to truly educate, awaken, and make society conscious. His fearless and outspoken character earned him boundless respect across all sections of society.

Beyond being a successful journalist or skilled editor, Dhirendranath Chakraborty's contribution as a worthy guide and mentor will remain eternally memorable in Assam's history. Many young journalists who came into his proximity and worked under his supervision later secured their own distinctive and influential places in Assam's journalistic world. He consistently taught novice journalists the lessons of truthfulness, dutifulness, and impartiality. From the initial stage of news gathering to its presentation, he continually provided constructive advice on how to maintain unwavering social responsibility. The inspiration received from such a colossal personality encouraged many young journalists to embrace journalism not merely as a livelihood but as a powerful medium for societal change. He never hesitated to raise his voice for the rights of society's neglected, exploited,

Dhirendranath Chakraborty: Inspiration for Assam's journalistic world

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuvan

The demise of the renowned journalist and uncompromising thinker Dhirendranath Chakraborty marks the closing of a long, vibrant, and glorious chapter in Assam's journalistic sphere. Over several decades, he kept society constantly alert through a strong, impartial, and resolute voice in the world of Assamese news. Transcending the ordinary boundaries of news presentation, he embraced journalism as a sacred social responsibility and a solemn vow. In the current era of rapidly changing media, the ideals he established are not only rare but also an invaluable asset and subject of study for future generations.

During his career, he served as editor of leading newspapers such as "Dainik Asom", "Dainik Janambhumi", "Ajir Batari", and the weekly "Pragijotish", elevating the standards of Assamese journalism to a unique and enviable height. His uncompromising stance on truth and unwavering commitment to society distinguished him from ordinary journalists, conferring upon him the stature of a towering figure. His writings always reflected a deep and genuine love for the soil and people of Assam. The profound and impartial analyses he offered on problems at every level of society served as a mirror to that society. Even amid storms of political and social unrest, he never deviated even slightly from his principles, guiding a disoriented society in the right direction through the sharpness of his pen. Each of his editorials and essays was a reflection of incisive and far-reaching ideas. These writings did not merely provide readers with information; they compelled them to become thoughtful and to delve deeply into every event in society. Alongside fearlessly pointing out the flaws and deviations in the social system, he always offered positive and constructive criticism, transforming his critique from personal animosity into a tool for societal reform.

One of the most prominent and attractive features of Dhirendranath Chakraborty's journalism was his immense respect for the Assamese language and his masterful use of words. The language in his writings was profoundly dignified yet easily comprehensible to the common reader. He



presented even complex social, economic, and political issues in a remarkably fluent, engaging, and understandable manner. He was strict and uncompromising in preserving the purity of language. He continuously inspired the next generation of journalists to remain conscious of the correct use of language. The structure of every sentence and the choice of words in his writing left a distinctive impact on the reader's mind. Every word flowing from his pen acted as a weapon to awaken the dormant conscience of society. He repeatedly demonstrated through his long career that the primary objective of the media is not to create cheap sensationalism but to truly educate, awaken, and make society conscious. His fearless and outspoken character earned him boundless respect across all sections of society.

Beyond being a successful journalist or skilled editor, Dhirendranath Chakraborty's contribution as a worthy guide and mentor will remain eternally memorable in Assam's history. Many young journalists who came into his proximity and worked under his supervision later secured their own distinctive and influential places in Assam's journalistic world. He consistently taught novice journalists the lessons of truthfulness, dutifulness, and impartiality. From the initial stage of news gathering to its presentation, he continually provided constructive advice on how to maintain unwavering social responsibility. The inspiration received from such a colossal personality encouraged many young journalists to embrace journalism not merely as a livelihood but as a powerful medium for societal change. He never hesitated to raise his voice for the rights of society's neglected, exploited,

and oppressed classes. Fearlessly bringing the errors and faults of the ruling machinery before the public, he relentlessly fought for the justice of ordinary people. Because of his strong and fearless stance, many powerful individuals held his pen in respectful fear. Yet, beyond the broader interest of society, there was no personal enmity in his struggle, which established him as a truly compassionate human being.

Dhirendranath Chakraborty was a living witness to many important, sensitive, and complex periods in Assam's social and political history. In every moment of the state's rises and falls, crises and struggles, he did not remain a mere silent observer but played the role of an active watcher and guide. No matter how complicated or terrifying the situation, he performed his journalistic duty with great courage and impartiality. He always envisioned a peaceful, progressive, and prosperous Assam where people of all communities could live together in mutual harmony and brotherhood. To realize this dream, he wielded his pen tirelessly until his last breath. In the present time, when fake news and yellow journalism raise various questions about the credibility of the media, the ideals of a truthful, dedicated, and fearless journalist like Dhirendranath Chakraborty must be upheld and carried forward by the new generation. His philosophy of life, profound commitment to journalism, and mindset of social reform will forever serve as a guiding light for future generations. May the departed soul of Dhirendranath Chakraborty attain eternal peace, and may his ideals continue to illuminate Assam's intellectual society forever. (The author is the recipient of the 'Yuba Lekhak Sanman - 2025' from the Government of Assam)

What are the symptoms of anemia in females?

By: Hana Ames

The symptoms of anemia, such as fatigue, are typically the same across the sexes. However, females may experience these symptoms more severely.

Anemia is a condition involving a deficiency in the number or quality of red blood cells in the body, which can reduce the blood's capacity to carry oxygen.

This article examines how anemia can affect females.

Are the symptoms of anemia different in females?

Anemia symptoms are generally the same for both sexes, as they primarily relate to the blood's reduced capacity to carry oxygen to tissues and organs.

However, the severity of the condition's symptoms can vary between males and females. A 2022 editor's letter suggested that females may experience fatigue and other symptoms more intensely.

The common anemia symptoms include:

- Fatigue and weakness
- Pale or yellowish skin
- Shortness of breath
- Dizziness or lightheadedness
- Cold hands and feet
- Irregular heart rate
- Chest pain
- Headaches

How does anemia affect females overall?

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), anemia is a serious global health concern, particularly affecting:

- Menstruating people: People with heavy menstrual periods may experience more noticeable fatigue and weakness due to increased blood loss. These can worsen anemia symptoms.
- Pregnant people: During pregnancy, the body's blood volume increases, which can dilute red blood cells and lead to anemia. Symptoms like fatigue and shortness of breath may be more noticeable, and people may mistakenly link them to the pregnancy itself rather than anemia.

• People who have given birth: After childbirth, people may experience postpartum anemia due to blood loss during delivery and worsening symptoms, such as fatigue.

The WHO estimates that anemia affects 37% of pregnant people and 30% of women between the ages of 15 and 49 years old.

Anemia in females can have the following effects:

- Reduced energy levels: Anemia's hallmark symptom is fatigue, which may severely limit a person's ability to perform some daily activities, exercise, and work or family responsibilities.
- Weakened immune function: Anemia can weaken the immune system, which might make females more likely to get infections and illnesses.
- Pregnancy complications: Severe anemia during pregnancy can increase the risk of preterm delivery or delivering a baby with a low birth weight. It can also affect the person giving birth, increasing the risk of infections and blood loss during labor and delivery.

• Menstrual symptoms: Those with anemia may experience more severe menstrual symptoms, including heavy bleeding, which can worsen anemia.

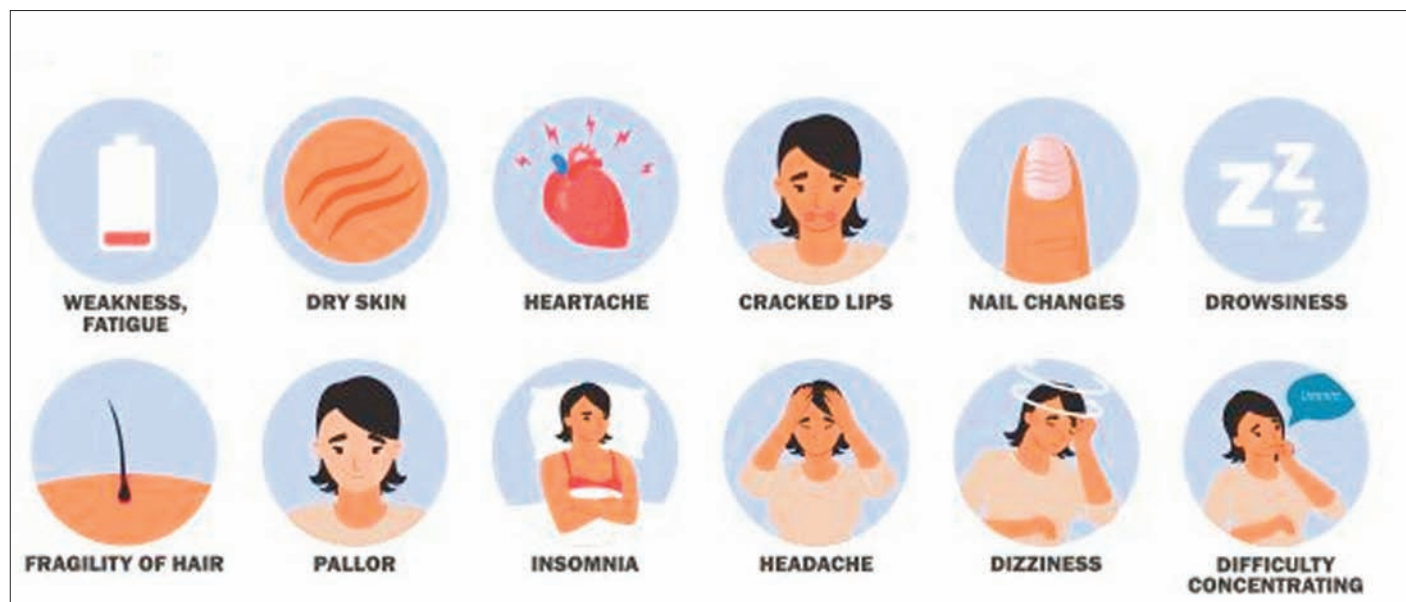
• Heart health concerns: Chronic anemia can lead to increased heart rate and can stress the cardiovascular system, potentially contributing to conditions such as heart disease or heart failure. Those with anemia and heart failure may be older and female.

When to contact a doctor for anemia

If someone experiences any of the following symptoms, especially if they persist or worsen, it is advisable for them to contact a doctor:

- Unexplained fatigue or weakness
- Pale or yellowish skin
- Shortness of breath, especially with minimal exertion
- Dizziness or lightheadedness
- Cold hands and feet
- Irregular or fast heart rate
- Chest pain
- Headaches
- Menstrual concerns

Those who experience heavy menstrual bleeding or long periods may wish to consult a healthcare professional, as these can be significant risk factors for developing iron deficiency anemia.



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Those who experience heavy menstrual bleeding or long periods may wish to consult a healthcare professional, as these can be significant risk factors for developing iron deficiency anemia.

It is a good idea for pregnant people to contact their healthcare professional regularly and mention anemia symptoms. Anemia during pregnancy can affect the person giving birth and the fetus, and early treatment is crucial.

Diagnosing anemia in females

The complete blood count is the primary test for diagnosing anemia. It measures several levels, including:

- Hemoglobin: Higher or lower levels of hemoglobin can show anemia. Hemoglobin is a protein rich in iron that carries oxygen around the body.
- Hematocrit: This refers to the percentage of blood volume made up of red blood cells. Low levels suggest anemia.
- Red blood cell count: Red blood cells carry oxygen from the lungs. A low red blood cell level can mean anemia.
- Mean corpuscular volume: This shows the average size of

red blood cells. High or low levels can point out anemia. It can also help differentiate between types of anemia.

Depending on the results of the complete blood count, further tests may be necessary to identify the anemia's cause:

- Iron tests: These measure serum iron, ferritin, and transferrin saturation to assess iron deficiency.
- Vitamin B12 and folate levels: Low levels of these vitamins can cause anemia.
- Reticulocyte count: High levels show the bone marrow produces red blood cells at an increased rate, often in response to anemia.

Treating anemia in females

Treatment for anemia in females depends on the type, cause, anemia severity, and underlying health conditions contributing to it.

Potential treatment options may include:

- Iron supplements

• Dietary changes

- Vitamin B12 supplements
- Folate supplements

• Management of the underlying condition

Outlook

The outlook for females with anemia is generally positive, especially when a person receives an early diagnosis and the appropriate treatment.

The outlook depends on the cause of the anemia, its severity, and the underlying health conditions that are present.

Frequently asked questions

The following are questions people frequently ask about anemia.

How do you feel when you have anemia?

When someone has anemia, they may feel tired and weak.

Other common symptoms include shortness of breath, dizziness, cold hands and feet, pale or yellowish skin, and an irregular or fast heart rate.

Some people also experience

headaches and difficulty concentrating.

What can help anemia immediately?

If the anemia is due to deficiency, immediate help may involve taking iron or vitamin supplements and eating a diet rich in these nutrients.

Treatments like blood transfusions or intravenous iron therapy may be necessary in severe cases to quickly increase red blood cells or iron levels.

What happens if anemia is untreated?

Without treatment, anemia can lead to serious health concerns such as severe fatigue. These can affect the ability to perform everyday tasks, lead to heart health concerns, cause complications during pregnancy, and increase the likelihood of infections. Over time, the symptoms can worsen and lead to health complications.

When anemia is an emergency?

Doctors consider anemia an emergency in several situations, such as when it leads to severe symptoms like chest pain, shortness of breath, or fainting. These symptoms can show that the body's organs do not receive enough oxygen.

Also, low hemoglobin levels, significant blood loss, or rapid red blood cell decline require immediate medical attention.

Summary

Anemia symptoms do not typically vary between the sexes. However, females may experience more severe symptoms.

By addressing anemia effectively, doctors can significantly improve the health, well-being, and quality of life of females affected by this condition. (Courtesy: Medical News Today)

Women were at the forefront of Bangladesh's 2024 uprising. But are the polls doing right by them?

By: Catherine Davison

When a youth-led uprising in Bangladesh toppled the regime of former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in August 2024, women were at the forefront of the protests.

But as Bangladesh heads to the polls today in what observers describe as its first free and fair election in decades, many of those women say they feel excluded from the very democratic transition they helped to create.

"Women were only shown as a symbol of the uprising," said Umama Fatema, one of dozens of former student leaders who believe that the interim government, installed after Hasina was ousted, includes few women in meaningful leadership roles.

"After the uprising, the students who went into the government's cabinet were all men, and women have been deliberately set aside," she said.

"The government was brought down, essentially, with the large participation of women," said Safad Saaz, member of the Forum for Women's Political Rights, a recently formed organisation aiming to improve women's political participation. "We would not be here now having these elections, if it wasn't for those young women."

"But since then, women have been largely excluded from the political decision-making process, she said, with rising levels of gender-based harassment and a resurgence of hardline religious groups that seek to limit women's roles in public life.

In these elections, women make up fewer than 4% of candidates. Several major parties, including the Islamist party Jamaat-e-Islami – expected to secure a significant share of the vote – have nominated no female candidates at all.

On Sunday night, women in Dhaka took to the streets to protest growing gender-based discrimination and exclusion from the political arena.

For more than three decades, politics in Bangladesh was defined by a power struggle be-

tween two women: Sheikh Hasina, and her opponent and three-time prime minister Khaleda Zia, who died in December.

But beyond its leaders, Bangladesh has long struggled with low female political representation. A goal to increase representation to 33% has been pushed back to 2030 and remains far off target.

Advertisement

After Hasina fled – she is said to be in hiding in India – an interim government led by Nobel Peace Prize winner Muhammad Yunus was set up. Many were initially hopeful that the NGO leader, who has campaigned for human rights for decades, would bring about gender equality reforms. "There was this aspiration for a sort of Bangladesh 2.0," said Saaz, where women "would be able to take part much more in a lot of different areas." Instead, activists report rising online and offline harassment of women, particularly those running for office. Human rights groups have warned that attacks on women, girls, and religious minorities are on the rise across the country.

"When the candidate is a female [she] faces at least one degree higher challenge or harassment or bullying" than her male counterparts, said Nabila Tasnid, a candidate for the National Citizens Party (NCP), the party formed by student leaders after the uprising.

A candidate from the Bangladesh Socialist party, Shima Datta, said that safety concerns have limited her mobility on the campaign trail.

"The male candidates are campaigning up until late night, but I need to come home by 10pm," said the 52-year-old Dhaka 7 candidate.

Women in politics also face more judgement than men, said student leader Fatema.

"For a boy, it's a political judgment, but for a girl, it's a judgment of how she looks, how she wears a dress, how her teeth are, how her nose is, how she talks," she said. At the same time, Islamist and conservative views have gained traction, with some women reporting harassment for

not covering their hair and calls for restrictions on women's participation in public life, including activities such as women's football matches.

In an interview with Al Jazeera, Shafiqur Rahman, leader of the Islamist-leaning party Jamaat-e-Islami, caused outrage by declaring that it was "not possible" for a woman to lead the party in the future.

NCP's alliance with the party left many of its women candidates feeling betrayed, leading some to resign and run instead as independent candidates. "That was a difficult time," said Tasnid, who is one of just two women NCP candidates left contesting the election.

Rights-based groups have accused the interim administration of sidelining recommendations put forward by the Women's Affairs Reform Commission. The July Declaration, a political manifesto to mark one year since the uprising, was also drafted without any women representation, said Saaz. "When that document doesn't have any women as part of the process... that kind of sets the stage for how you're viewing women," she said. The lack of women representation has led to many issues prioritised by women being neglected, said Saaz.

"So many things that women actually need and want are never raised within Parliament at the national level," she said. Of 350 seats, 300 are directly contested, with another 50 reserved for women. But reserved seats do not meaningfully increase women's political representation, Safad said. Because the women are nominated by party leaders to take up the seat, they are then "behind to the top management who nominate them," she said. Women should be "elected, not selected," agreed Datta. Woman candidates who are directly elected are better placed to represent the concerns of women in their constituencies, she said. "As a woman I can go door to door, enter the home and talk to female constituents. That is not possible for men," said Datta. (Courtesy: The Wire)

This dynamic is not confined to one country or one legal system. It reflects a broader global pattern in which gendered vulnerability intersects with wealth, mobility, and institutional insulation.

The significance of the Epstein case, then, lies not only in the crimes it documents, but in the questions it forces us to confront. Justice cannot be reduced to prosecution alone. It requires scrutiny of how power circulates, how silence is maintained, and how certain forms of exploitation are normalised while being publicly disavowed.

Irigaray's intervention reminds us that systems of exchange do not disappear when they modernise. They change form. Until these underlying structures are addressed, scandals will continue to provoke outrage without producing transformation. What shocks us will remain familiar, even when it should not. (Courtesy: Youth Ki Awaaz)

Legal settlements, non-disclosure agreements, delayed prosecutions, and fragmented testimonies all work to prevent the formation of a collective narrative that might challenge the structure itself. What shook the system was not the existence of abuse, but its exposure.

Scandals emerge when systems of exchange fail to remain discreet. Documents surface. Survivors speak publicly. Networks become visible. Institutional discomfort often stems less from violence than from the risk

Holi skin and hair care tips

By: Shahnaz Husain

Holi Hai!! The vibrant festival of colours of happiness is just around the corner. Barely a few days are left before you head to play joyfully and get soaked in colour game. The Holi fever has set it and it is the time of the year when you are excited about looking like a multi-coloured canvas.

The festival brings with itself, a whiff of mishmash of dry gular and buckets of water.

When you decide to indulge in a burst of colours, what bothers people most is how to deal with skin and hair issues caused by the rampant use of harmful toxin colours that can make your skin, hair dry and frizzy.

While you've zeroed in on where you're going to be celebrating Holi with splashes of harmful toxins, make sure to follow these Holi skin care tips to give your hair and skin that extra protection from chemical laden harsh colors to counter ill effects on colour stained faces, parched hair and irritated skin.

Holi is celebrated at a time when nature renews and refreshes herself. With a little care, we can do the same and also sustain our youth and beauty.

The dry "Gulal" and the wet colours of today are not derived from natural sources. They contain chemicals, shiny particles of mica and even lead, which not only irritate the skin, but collect on the scalp. Since Holi is played out of doors, sun-exposure can also have a detrimental effect on the skin. Apart from harmful UV radiation, sun-exposure makes the skin dry by causing depletion of moisture and also tans the skin. The skin can become dry and dull after playing holi.

Remember to apply a sunscreen 20 minutes before going out to in the sun. Use a sunscreen of SPF 20 and above. If your skin is prone to pigmented patches, select one with a higher SPF. Most sunscreens have built-in moisturizers. If your skin is very dry, first apply the sunscreen, wait for a few minutes and then apply a moisturizer. Light daytime make-up may be used. Touch up your eyes with eye pencil or kajal and use a lip gloss.

The real problem is removal of colours after playing holi. Do not wash your face with soap immediately, because soap is alkaline and causes further dryness. Instead, use a cleansing cream, or lotion. Apply and massage it on the face. Then wipe off with moist cotton wool. Remember to cleanse the area around the eyes too, using a light touch. A cleansing gel helps to dissolve the colours and facilitates their removal.

To make your own cleanser, take half a cup of cold milk and



add one teaspoon of any vegetable oil, like "til," olive or sunflower oil. Mix well. Dip cotton wool into this mixture and use it to cleanse the skin.

Sesame seed (til) oil can be used to remove colours from the body, massaging it on the skin. This not only helps to remove the colours, but gives added protection to the skin. Sesame seed (til) oil actually helps to counteract sun-damage. While bathing, scrub the body gently with a loofah or wash cloth. Immediately after your bath, apply a moisturizer on the face and body, while the skin is still damp. This helps to seal in moisture.

The day after holi, you may have to deal with the effects of sun-exposure, like dryness or tanned skin. Mix two tablespoons of honey with half a cup of curd. Add a pinch of turmeric. Apply this on the face, neck and arms. Leave it on for 20 minutes and wash off with water. Honey is a powerful natural moisturizer and helps to soften the skin, while curd will nourish and restore the normal acid-alkaline balance. It also removes tan.

Hair Care

Apply a protective leave-on conditioner or hair serum before playing Holi. They coat the hair and protect it from chemical colours, pollutants and sun-exposure. They also add shine to the hair.

While washing the hair, first rinse with plenty of plain water to wash away the dry colours and tiny particles of mica. Then apply a mild herbal shampoo, working it into the hair with the fingers. Massage the scalp gently and rinse thoroughly with water again. Add the juice of a lemon to a mug of water and use it as a last rinse. This helps to restore the acid-alkaline balance of the scalp.

Beer can also be used as a last rinse. In fact, it will soften and condition the hair. Add the juice of a lemon to the beer. Pour over the hair after shampoo. Leave on for a few minutes and rinse off with plain water.

If there is itching, add two tablespoons of vinegar to a mug of water and use it as a last rinse. This helps to reduce itching. However, if the itching contin-

ues, and there is rash and redness, there may be an allergy to the colour. Consult a doctor as soon as possible.

Within the next few days give your hair a nourishing treatment. Mix egg yolk with almond oil or olive oil and massage it lightly into the hair and scalp. Then dip a towel in hot water, squeeze out the water and wrap the hot towel around the head, like a turban. Keep it on for 5 minutes. Repeat the hot towel wrap 3 or 4 times. This helps the hair and scalp absorb the oil better. Wash your hair after an hour.

Next day give your hair a nourishing treatment. Mix one tablespoon of pure coconut oil with one teaspoon castor oil. Heat and apply on the hair. Then dip a towel in hot water, squeeze out the water and wrap the hot towel around the head, like a turban. Keep it on for 5 minutes. Repeat the hot towel wrap 3 or 4 times. This helps the hair and scalp absorb the oil better. Wash your hair after an hour.

Conditioning with henna would help to restore damage to the hair, adding shine and body. To the henna powder, add four teaspoons each of lemon juice and coffee, two eggs, two teaspoons oil and enough curd to mix into a paste. Apply on the hair and wash your hair after an hour.

Make your own natural colours for Holi

Simmer Tesu flowers in water. Leave overnight. Strain and use the water to play Holi. Tesu flowers leave a yellow colour. The botanical name of Tesu is Butea monosperma.

Henna powder can be mixed with gram flour (besan) or maize flour (makki) and used as dry green colour. Turmeric (haldi) can be used both as dry and wet colour. Turmeric can be mixed with gram flour for dry colour. Or, it can be added to water and boiled. Leave overnight and then use.

Boil beetroot in water. This leaves a bright magenta colour. Cool and use the water. Or extract beetroot juice, add a little water and then use it. (The author is an internationally famous beauty expert and is called the herbal queen of India)

4 YEARS SINCE RUSSIA'S ALL-OUT INVASION

Zelenskyy says Putin has 'not broken' Ukrainians

KYIV, Feb 24: President Volodymyr Zelenskyy declared Tuesday that Russia has not "broken Ukrainians" nor triumphed in its war, four years after an invasion that has severely tested the resolve of Kyiv and its allies and fuelled European fears about the scale of Moscow's ambitions.

In a show of support, more than a dozen senior European officials headed to the Ukrainian capital to mark the grim anniversary of the conflict, which has killed tens of thousands of people, upended life for millions of Ukrainians, and created instability far beyond its borders.

Zelenskyy said his country has withstood the onslaught by Russia's bigger and better equipped army, which over the past year of fighting captured just 0.79 per cent of Ukraine's territory, according to the Institute for the Study of War, a Washington-based think tank. Russia now holds nearly 20 per cent of Ukraine.

"Looking back at the beginning of the invasion and reflecting on today, we have every right to say: We have defended our independence, we have not lost our statehood," Zelenskyy said on social media, adding that Russian President Vladimir Putin has "not achieved his goals."

"He has not broken Ukrainians; he has not won this war," Zelenskyy said.

Despite the show of defiance, Ukraine has struggled to hold off Russia's onslaught, and the war has brought widespread hardship for Ukrainian civilians. Russia's aerial attacks have devastated families and denied civilians power and running water.

As the war of attrition enters its fifth year, a US-led diplomatic push to end the largest conflict on the continent since World War II appears no closer to finding compromises that might make a peace deal possible.

Negotiations are stuck on what happens to the Donbas, eastern Ukraine's industrial heartland that Russian forces mostly occupy but have failed to seize completely, and the



terms of a postwar security arrangement that Kyiv is demanding to deter any future Russian invasion.

Zelenskyy urges Trump to visit

At a makeshift memorial in Kyiv's central square, where thousands of small flags and portraits show photos of fallen soldiers, Zelenskyy said he would like U.S. President Donald Trump to visit and witness for himself Ukrainian suffering.

"Only then can one truly understand what this war is really about," Zelenskyy said.

Trump, who once vowed to end the war in a day, has repeatedly changed his tone to ward Putin and Zelenskyy over the past year: sometimes criticizing the Ukrainian leader's negotiating position while reaching out to the Russian leader and at others lashing out at Putin for heavy barrages and appearing more sympathetic to the Ukrainian predicament.

Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said that the invasion would continue in pursuit of Moscow's goals. They include a demand that Ukraine renounce its bid to join NATO, sharply cut its army, and cede vast swaths of territory.

Zelenskyy said he expected a fresh round of US-brokered talks with Russia within the next 10 days.

A nightmare for Ukrainians

The number of soldiers killed, injured or

missing on both sides could reach 2 million by spring, with Russia sustaining the largest number of troop deaths for any major power in any conflict since World War II, a report last month from the Center for Strategic and International Studies estimated.

European leaders see their countries' own security at stake in Ukraine amid concerns that Putin may target them next.

German Chancellor Friedrich Merz wrote on X that "for four years, every day and every night has been a nightmare for the Ukrainians — and not just for them, but for us all. Because war is back in Europe."

"We will only end it by being strong together, because the fate of Ukraine is our fate," he added.

Putin's dangerous gamble

Putin believes that time is on the side of his bigger army, Western officials and analysts say — and that Western support will trail off and that Ukraine's military resistance will eventually crumble. Already Trump has ended new military aid to Ukraine — though other NATO countries now buy American weapons and give them to Kyiv.

But French President Emmanuel Macron described the war as "a triple failure for Russia: military, economic, and strategic."

The war "has strengthened NATO — the very expansion Russia sought to prevent — galvanized Europeans it hoped to weaken, and laid bare the fragility of an imperialism from another age," Macron said on X.

The European Union has also sent financial aid, but has sometimes met with reluctance from members Hungary and Slovakia.

While NATO countries have come to Ukraine's aid, Russia has been helped by North Korea, which has sent thousands of troops and artillery shells; Iran, which has provided drone technology; and China, which the United States and analysts say has provided machine tools and chips.

A defining conflict

of the waterway.

Canada moves to revoke Tahawwur Rana's citizenship: Report

TORONTO, Feb 24: Ahead of Prime Minister Mark Carney's visit to India, the Canadian government is pushing to revoke the citizenship of a Pakistan-born, Tahawwur Rana Hussain, accused of playing a key role in the 2008 Mumbai terror attack. Rana, 64, is a Pakistan-born Canadian national and close associate of one of the main conspirators of the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks, David Coleman Headley, alias Daoud Gilani, a US citizen.

Documents obtained by Global News show that immigration officials have notified Rana that they intend to strip him of the Canadian citizenship he acquired in 2001.

He immigrated to Canada in 1997 and was later convicted in the US of plotting to attack staff at a Danish newspaper.

Rana, the mastermind behind the 26/11 attack, which killed 166 people, was extradited from the United States to India in April 2025. He was arrested by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) as soon as he landed in New Delhi. In its decision, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) wrote that Rana's citizenship was being revoked not for terrorism, but rather because he lied on his application form, the report added.

When Rana applied for citizenship in 2000, he claimed to have lived in Ottawa and Toronto for the previous four years, with only a six-day absence from the country, the IRCC wrote in a report. An RCMP investigation, however, determined he had actually spent almost that entire time in Chicago, where he owned several properties and businesses, including an immigration firm and a grocery store. (AP)

Hong Kong protests after Panama takes control of 2 key ports on Panama Canal

BANGKOK, Feb 24: Hong Kong is protesting Panama's seizure of two ports on a canal vital for global trade that were operated by a Hong Kong-based company for decades, the city's government said Tuesday. Hong Kong's Commerce and Economic Development Bureau said in a statement it had lodged "stern protests" with Panama's consulate, adding that it had expressed strong opposition and dissatisfaction and would "staunchly support the legitimate rights and interests of Hong Kong corporations overseas."

The ports located at the mouth and tail of the Panama Canal, which have been operated by a subsidiary of CK Hutchison since 1997, became embroiled in a legal dispute after getting caught in the middle of the US and China's competition for in-

fluence in the region. The ports became the focus of global attention after US President Donald Trump accused China of "running the Panama Canal." Panama's government took control of the two ports on Monday after the country's Supreme Court struck down a law approving the concession contract for Panama Ports Company, a subsidiary of CK Hutchison. That ruling stripped the port of legal basis for its operations, and the company is now bringing arbitration proceedings against the country.

China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs also weighed in Tuesday. "China will firmly safeguard the company's legitimate and lawful rights and interests," said spokesperson Mao Ning at a daily press briefing. Panama said it would ensure smooth operation

of the waterway.

The director of ports for Panama's Maritime Authority, said at a press conference that the agency "took possession of its ports and will guarantee continuity of operations." He added that the entity's board of directors will approve a plan for transitional operation for up to 18 months until long-term operators are selected.

Later in a televised message to the nation, President José Raúl Mulino said that the seizure was not an expropriation, but the government would keep control of the ports "until their real value is determined for corresponding actions." He also assured that "everything done was not against anyone, but in compliance with the law," referring to challenges from the company and China's government. (AP)

The criminal ascent of 'El Mencho' as Mexico's most powerful drug lord

MEXICO CITY, Feb 24: Like many drug lords, Nemesio Oseguera Cervantes kept a low profile until he was killed by the Mexican army Sunday in the western state of Jalisco. Despite building one of Mexico's most powerful criminal organizations over two decades, the only known photographs of the known as "El Mencho" come from his earlier arrests on robbery and drug charges in California in the 1980s and early 1990s.

The Mexican army killed Oseguera Cervantes Sunday in Tapalpa, Jalisco state, as special forces attempted to capture him.

From Michoacan to California

Oseguera Cervantes, 59, was originally from the farming community of El Naranjo, in the neighboring state of Michoacan.

He was born Rubén Oseguera Cervantes, but for unknown reasons later added Nemesio, the origin of

his nickname "El Mencho," said Carlos Flores, a researcher with the Center for Research and Higher Education in Social Anthropology.

When he was young, Oseguera Cervantes migrated to the United States and settled in California. There he married into the "Cuisinis" gang led by his new brother-in-law, Abigaél González Valencia, also known as "El Cuiini."

Return to Mexico

After serving three years in prison for heroin trafficking, Oseguera Cervantes was deported to Mexico. Back in Michoacan, he began working more closely with "Los Cuisinis," which were tied to drug lord Armando Valencia Cornelio, alias "El Maradona," leader of the now defunct Milenio cartel.

That's when in the 1990s, Oseguera Cervantes "was in contact with a significant organization" that trafficked cocaine with Colombians

China restricts exports to 40 Japanese entities with ties to military

BANGKOK, Feb 24: China restricted on Tuesday exports to 40 Japanese entities it says are contributing to Japan's "remilitarisation," in the latest escalation of tensions with Tokyo. Beijing has shown continued displeasure with Tokyo since Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi in November implied Japan could intervene if China used military force against Taiwan, an island democracy China claims as its own.

The Chinese Commerce Ministry put 20 Japanese companies on an export control list and 20 others on a separate watchlist.

Companies on the export control list will not be able to import from China dual-use goods, which can be used for civilian and military purposes. They include multiple business subsidiaries of Mitsubishi Heavy Industries involved in shipbuilding and the production of aircraft engines and maritime machinery, as well as some of Kawasaki Heavy Industries and Fujitsu, among others. Foreign organisations or individuals are also banned from providing dual-use items originating in China to the 20 entities, the ministry said.

"All ongoing related activities must cease immediately," its statement read.

The separate watchlist has 20 Japanese companies for which Chinese exporters are required to submit individual export license applications, along with risk assessment reports and written pledges that the dual-use items will not be used by Japan's military. It includes

France ups the ante in spat with US ambassador

Ministers will no longer meet him: Barrot



PARIS, Feb 24: France's spat with the US ambassador to Paris took another turn Tuesday with the French foreign minister saying the top US diplomat in France must respond to a summons and won't have access to French government officials until he complies.

French authorities had summoned Ambassador Charles Kushner — the father of US President Donald Trump's son-in-law and adviser Jared Kushner — for a meeting on Monday over comments from the Trump administration that France objected to. But Kushner did not show up, the foreign ministry said.

The US Embassy did not immediately respond to repeated requests for comment.

Speaking Tuesday, French Foreign Minister Jean-Noël Barrot described the failure to attend the meeting as "a surprise" that flew in the face of diplomatic protocol and will dent Charles Kushner's ability to serve as an ambassador.

"It will, naturally, affect his capacity to exercise his mission in our country," Barrot said, speaking to public broadcaster France Info.

He said that Kushner "is bringing difficulties on himself. Because for an ambassador to be able to do his job, he needs access to members of the government. That's the basics."

"There is nothing more usual than summoning an ambassador when explanations need to be made," he said. "When these explanations have taken place, then the US ambassador in France will, naturally, regain access to members of the French government."

The US Embassy did not respond to an Associated Press request for comment on Monday before the planned meeting, and follow-up re-

quests on Tuesday also got no immediate reply.

France's foreign ministry had summoned Kushner over Trump administration tweets relating to the beating death in France of a far-right activist, Quentin Deranque. The 23-year-old student, described as a fervent nationalist, was beaten by a group of people earlier this month in the city of Lyon, in fighting that erupted between far-left and far-right activists. He later died of brain injuries.

In a post last week on X, the State Department's Counterterrorism Bureau said "violent radical leftism is on the rise and its role in Quentin Deranque's death demonstrates the threat it poses to public safety."

The US Embassy in Paris posted the same statement in French.

Barrot said France needs to discuss the comments with Kushner.

"We must have an explanation with him," Barrot said. "We don't accept that foreign countries can come and interfere, invite themselves, into the national political debate."

The foreign minister argued that the dust-up with Kushner should not hurt broader US-France relations.

"Not showing up is his personal responsibility," he said. "It does not affect the relationship between France and the United States in any way."

Last August, Paris also summoned Kushner over a letter he wrote to French President Emmanuel Macron, alleging that France did not do enough to combat antisemitism. The foreign ministry called his allegations "unacceptable." At the time, Kushner also did not respond to the summons but sent his No. 2 instead. (AP)

Imran Khan taken to Islamabad hospital for eye treatment, shifted back to jail

ISLAMABAD, Feb 24: Pakistan's incarcerated former prime minister Imran Khan on early Tuesday was taken from jail to a hospital here for treatment of an eye ailment and later shifted back, officials said.

Khan was diagnosed last month with right central retinal vein occlusion (CRVO) affecting his vision.

He was brought to the Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (PIMS) for a second dose of anti-VEGF intravitreal injection, a doctor at the hospital said. He had received treatment earlier on January 24.

"Prior to the procedure, he was examined by a board of specialists: a consultant cardiologist who also performed echocardiography and ECG (result: normal) and a consultant physician."

"After obtaining informed consent, and under standard monitoring, precautionary measures and protocols in the operation theatre, he was injected with a second dose of intravitreal injection of anti-VEGF under the guidance of microscopy by consultant ophthalmologist, and a consultant vitreo-retinal surgeon of PIMS and Al-Shifa Eye Hospital," the doctor said.

The procedure was carried out in a day-care surgery and Khan's vitals remained stable throughout, the doctor added. He was discharged after the procedure with instructions for care and follow-up.

PIMS is a leading public hospital, while Rawalpindi-based Al-Shifa Trust Eye Hospital is a prestigious eye hospital run by a private trust.

Earlier, Khan's family and his party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), had demanded that he be treated at Shifa International Hospital, a private facility in Islamabad.

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Tariq Fazal Chaudhry said it was "necessary to clarify that the government

took him (Khan) to PIMS under strict security arrangements while fulfilling all legal and humanitarian requirements."

"According to doctors' instructions, there was an improvement in the eyesight after the first procedure, keeping in view which expert physicians recommended a second procedure. Today's process was completed successfully and after clearance from the medical team, he was shifted back to Adiala," he posted on social media.

Chaudhry reaffirmed that providing medical facilities to prisoners was the responsibility of the state and said all arrangements were made transparently and in accordance with regulations. He added that Khan would be administered a third injection on March 24.

Meanwhile, PTI demanded "transparency, not secrecy" in Khan's treatment and reiterated its call for him to be shifted to Shifa International Hospital for what it described as independent and transparent medical care.

In a social media post, Khan's sister Aleema Khanum said: "We do not trust the diagnosis or test reports from government medical facilities."

"From the news, we found out that Imran Khan was taken to PIMS again in the middle of the night, supposedly for his second injection in the eye," she said, demanding that the family be informed before any medical procedure.

Separately, the Tehreek-e-Tahafuz-i-Ayin-in-Pakistan opposition alliance staged a protest outside the Supreme Court demanding Khan's release from jail. The alliance had also held a protest on Monday seeking early hearings of cases against him.

Khan has been in jail since August 2023 following his conviction in a corruption case. (PTI)

BAFTA and BBC apologize for racial slur during awards show

LONDON, Feb 24: The British Academy Film Awards and BBC apologized Monday for a racial slur that was broadcast during Sunday's show while two stars of the film "Sinners" were onstage.

The Tourette syndrome campaigner who shouted the slur said he was "deeply mortified" and what he said was "not a reflection of my personal beliefs." The highly offensive word could be heard as "Sinners" stars Michael B. Jordan and Delroy Lindo, who are both Black, were presenting the award for best visual effects during Sunday's ceremony.

Host Alan Cumming had earlier told the audience that Tourette syndrome advocate John Davidson was in attendance.

The incident prompted the British Academy of Film and Television Arts to apologise for "offensive language that carries incomparable trauma and pain for so many," adding "We would like to thank Michael and Delroy for their incredible dignity and professionalism."

Davidson, a Scottish campaigner for people with Tourette syndrome, who inspired the BAFTA-nominated film "I Swear," said in a statement Monday that he was "deeply mortified if anyone considers my involuntary tics to be intentional or to carry any meaning."



Tourettes Action — a Tourette syndrome charity — called for understanding of the condition.

"We deeply understand that these words can cause hurt but at the same time, it is vital that the public understands a fundamental truth about Tourette syndrome: tics are involuntary. They are not a reflection of a person's beliefs, intentions, or character," said Emma McNally, CEO of Tourettes Action.

Tourette syndrome, a neurodevelopmental disorder, is characterised by sudden, involuntary movements or sounds called tics that tend to wax and wane but can worsen with excitement or anxiety, according to the US National Institutes of Health.

After the slur was shouted during Jordan and Lindo's presentation, Cumming apologised to the audience at London's Royal Festival Hall for the "strong and offensive language."

"Tourette syndrome is a disability and the tics you have heard tonight are involuntary, which means the person who has Tourette syndrome has no control over their language," Cumming said. "We apologise if you were offended."

Davidson said in his statement that "I chose to leave the auditorium early into the ceremony as I was aware of the distress my tics were causing." The epithet could be heard when the BBC broadcast the ceremony about two hours after the live event. The broadcaster apologised for not editing it out before the broadcast, though the offensive word could still be heard on its iPlayer streaming service on Monday morning. The program was later removed, and the BBC said the slur would be edited out.

"Some viewers may have heard strong and offensive language during the Bafta Film Awards," the BBC said in a statement. "This arose from involuntary verbal tics associated with Tourette syndrome, and as explained during the ceremony it was not intentional. (AP)

Chief Minister briefs Prime Minister on peace efforts Manipur CM, Deputies meet PM Modi in Delhi

NEW DELHI, Feb 24: Manipur Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh on Monday called on Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

He was accompanied by Deputy Chief Ministers Losii Dikho and Nemcha Kipgen.

This was the first meeting of the chief minister and his two deputies with the prime minister after assuming the charge of Manipur on February 4.

"CM of Manipur, Shri @YKhemchandSingh, along with Deputy CMs, Smt @Kipgen-Nemcha, Shri Losii Dikho met Prime Minister @narendramodi," the PMO wrote on X.

The chief minister briefed PM Modi on the steps taken up by the new state government to bring peace and harmony in the state, a Manipur government release said, adding that he also urged the prime minister to take special care of women's empowerment in both the hills and the valley.

The Manipur chief minister and his two deputy chief ministers have invited the prime minister to visit the state.

Earlier, the chief minister and his two deputies also met Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan.

"Honoured to call on Hon'ble



Union Minister for Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare and Rural Development, @ChouhanShivraj yesterday at his residence, accompanied by Hon'ble Deputy Chief Ministers Smt @KipgenNemcha and Shri L Dikho," he wrote on X.

The chief minister said in a significant step towards rehabilitation and inclusive development in Manipur, Chouhan approved the

construction of 5,000 new houses for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) under Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana Gramin (PMAY-G) to facilitate their urgent resettlement with dignity and security.

The chief minister on Monday called on Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and BJP president Nitin Nabin separately. (PTI)

'Racial abuse' of 3 women from Arunachal in Delhi shameful, sought strict action: Khandu

ITANAGAR, Feb 24: Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu on Tuesday condemned the "shameful incident" of racial abuse of three women from the state in the national capital and said he has sought strict action against the culprits.

Three women from Arunachal Pradesh were allegedly subjected to racial abuse and intimidation by their neighbours in south Delhi's Malviya Nagar following a dispute over repair work at their rented apartment, police said on Sunday.

"Strongly condemn the shameful incident of racial abuse faced by our three young sisters from Arunachal Pradesh residing in Malviya Nagar, South Delhi. Such behaviour is absolutely unacceptable and has no place in our society," Khandu said in a post on X.

"Immediately after learning about the matter yesterday, I spoke with the Commissioner of Police, Delhi Police and sought swift and strict action. The CP is personally in touch with me. The accused are currently absconding and I have been assured that they will be apprehended at the earliest and dealt with as per law," the CM said.

According to the police, the incident took place around 3.30 PM on February 20, when drilling and



electrical installation work was being carried out in the women's fourth-floor apartment.

"We stand firmly with our three sisters and their safety, dignity and justice remain our highest priority," Khandu said.

The Arunachal Pradesh State Commission for Women (APSCW) also deplored the incident, describing it as a "grave violation of constitutional values".

"Such acts are a grave violation of constitutional values of equality, dignity and respect for women of North East India," it said in a statement.

The commission urged the authorities to ensure an impartial and time-bound investigation. Khandu's Sikkim counterpart Prem Singh Tamang said the incident was concerning and unfortunate.

"Such instances remind us of the importance of upholding dignity and mutual respect at all times. The Northeast is an integral part of our nation and every citizen deserves dignity, equality and respect. Let us remain mindful of one another and continue striving for a society rooted in understanding, dignity and mutual respect," Tamang said. (PTI)

Researchers to be sent Cambodia for ancestry study

SHILLONG, Feb 24: Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma on Monday told the Assembly that his government will send researchers to Cambodia to study links between Khasi and Mon-Khmer groups through DNA testing and linguistic research.

Replying to the debate on the Governor's Address, Sangma said the government will also launch micro-level studies into Garo ancestry, believed to be linked to Tibet and expand research into the state's history and roots in the next financial year. Close to 50 researchers under the CM Research programme are documenting traditions and culture across Meghalaya.

Sangma said the government has sanctioned ₹ 15 crore for Seng Khasi's indigenous culture centre and ₹ 17.26 crore to develop amenities at Smit for the Nongkrem dance and Pomblang ritual, with ₹ 13.56 crore already released. Boundary walls and public facilities have been built at Lum Pomblang.

Heritage funding also includes ₹ 50 lakh for an open-air museum at Wahmawpat in Mawsynram, an 18th-century settlement and ₹ 1 crore for Syrwet U Barim to document oral wisdom.

"We realise the tradition and importance of this location and preserve the rich history of our people," he said. (ANN)

Vice President to inaugurate convocation of Tripura Central University on March 8

AGARTALA, Feb 24: Vice President C P Radhakrishnan will inaugurate the convocation of Tripura Central University at Suryamaninagar in West Tripura on March 8, an official said on Monday.

Governor Indrasena Reddy Nallu, Chief Minister Manik Saha, Varsity Chancellor Ahmed Javed and Acting Vice Chancellor Prof Shyamal Das will be present at the programme.

"Vice President CP Radhakrishnan is scheduled to inaugurate Tripura Central University's 14th convocation at Suryamaninagar in West Tripura on March 8. Governor Indrasena Nallu Reddy, Chief Minister Manik Saha and Chancellor of the varsity Ahmed Javed will also remain present in the programme," said acting Registrar, Prof Sameer Kumar Shil.

"Gold medals will be awarded to the first-place students in undergraduate and postgraduate courses in 2024-2025 at the convocation ceremony. Altogether 145 students of 2024 and 138 students of 2025 will be honoured," he said.

Shil said the authorities will award PhD degrees to 149 students during the convocation ceremony.

"The convocation ceremony was not held in the last two years, 2024 and 2025. As a result, the students of the state are facing problems. Certificates will be given to the students through the convocation ceremony to solve their problems," he said. (PTI)

Prog to strengthen sustainable aquaculture practices held in NU

HT Correspondent
DIMPAUR, Feb 24: The ICAR-National Bureau of Fish Genetic Resources, Lucknow in collaboration with Nagaland University, held an awareness-cum-capacity building programme at the Lumami campus of the university on Tuesday to strengthen sustainable aquaculture practices and promote scientific fisheries development in the North Eastern Hill (NEH) region.

Addressing the programme virtually, Dr Kajal Chakraborty, director, ICAR-NBFGR, Lucknow, presented an overview of the bureau's initiatives in the NEH region.

He highlighted fish germplasm conservation, brood bank development, biosecurity measures and farmer-oriented capacity-building interventions aimed at enhancing regional fisheries productivity.

The inaugural session included the release of farmers' extension booklets in Nagamese and Ao languages to support scientific fish farming practices at the grassroots level.

Senior functionaries of the university emphasised the importance of integrating indigenous ecological knowledge with modern aquaculture technologies to improve productivity and sustainability.

Prof B Kilangla Jamir, VC (in-charge), Nagaland University, underscored the vast fisheries potential of Nagaland, noting the state's abundant streams, ponds, springs and terrace-based water systems.

FIR lodged against four of Gujarat family for misconduct at Arunachal resort

ITANAGAR, Feb 24: An FIR was lodged against four members of a tourist family from Gujarat for allegedly abusing and threatening staffers of a resort in Dibang Valley district of Arunachal Pradesh, police said on Tuesday.

The accused, identified as Aastha Patel, Dhruv Patel, Smita Patel and Devendra Kumar Patel were booked under BNS sections pertaining to assault or use of criminal force against a woman, obscene acts and criminal intimidation, along with provisions of the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act.

The case was registered at Anini police station after a video, which went viral on social media, showed two persons abusing and threatening the staffers of the resort, where they had checked in on February 18.

According to the police complaint filed by the resort management, the guests were informed on arrival that outside food and alcohol were not permitted on the premises in line with standard hospitality policy.

However, on February 20, the family allegedly brought alcoholic beverages from outside and reacted aggressively when they were reminded of the rules.

The FIR alleges that Aastha and Dhruv Patel used obscene and sexually derogatory language against the female staffers, while Dhruv also attempted to physically assault one employee. The accused also allegedly damaged the resort's rules display frame and threatened to defame the property and have it shut down using "influential connections".

The resort's managing director Rezina Mihu said she intervened after being informed about the incident, adding that the district tourism officer was present and efforts were made to resolve the matter amicably.

"We tried to speak politely, but they continued to get enraged. Our young staffers, many from interior areas, were shaken by the incident," she said, stressing that the resort wel-



comes all tourists but could not ignore such behaviour.

A senior police officer said they came to know about the incident only after the video went viral on social media.

"We sent policemen to verify the matter. The accused had checked out in the morning of February 21," the officer said.

Attempts have been made to contact the accused, but they have not responded, he said.

Meanwhile, Anini-based Biodiversity and Tourism Management Society has strongly condemned the incident.

It expressed dismay over the intimidation of local staffers, calling it contrary to responsible tourism principles of respect and dignity.

The society extended solidarity to victims and urged authorities to conduct a fair, swift investigation and action. "Tourism must bridge cultures and drive sustainable development without compromising community safety and well-being," BTMS stated, emphasising Anini's hospitality tradition rooted in mutual respect.

It appealed to all stakeholders to uphold civility for Dibang Valley to remain a safe destination for all. (PTI)

Nagaland farmers report visible climate change impacts on crops

HT Correspondent
DIMAPUR, Feb 24: Farmers in eastern Nagaland are reporting visible impacts of climate change on their crops, according to findings from an ongoing research project funded by the North Eastern Council (NEC), Government of India.

The observations were made during a field visit to Noksen, Logsing and Moalenden areas in Tuensang district on February 21 by principal investigator Dr Ashutosh Tripathi and co-principal investigator Prof Ashutosh Tripathi of the department of environmental science, Nagaland University, a Nagaland varsity release stated on Tuesday.

The research team was assisted by No-hochem Sangtam, Fazl Ali College, Mokokchung.

During interactions with farming communities, villagers reported experiencing erratic rainfall, delayed monsoons, rising

temperatures and sudden heavy showers, all of which have disrupted traditional cropping patterns. Cultivation of paddy, sugarcane, orange, chilli and other vegetables has been particularly affected. Many farmers reported declining yields and increased pest incidence. Shifts in rainfall timing have also adversely impacted jhum cultivation practices and soil fertility cycles.

The NEC-supported project, titled "Evaluation of Climate Change Perception, Knowledge and Responses in Tribal Communities of Nagaland, NE India," seeks to document grassroots experiences and recommend region-specific adaptation strategies. The researchers observed that while farmers are adjusting sowing dates and diversifying crops as coping mechanisms, there remains a pressing need for stronger institutional and technical support to enhance climate resilience in the region.

Two held in Manipur for 'smuggling' 24 wild mountain goats from Myanmar

IMPHAL, Feb 24: Security forces arrested two persons in Manipur's Tengnoupal district for allegedly smuggling 24 wild mountain goats from Myanmar, police said on Tuesday.

Acting on a tip-off, a team of security forces intercepted a four-wheeler at Tengnoupal town and recovered the 24 ibex (wild mountain goats), a species of mountain goats protected under the Wildlife Protection Act, from the vehicle, a police statement said.

The wild mountain goats were smuggled from Myanmar and taken to Pallel, it said.

"The driver and the occupant of the vehicle, who were smuggling the exotic species have been arrested," the statement said. (PTI)

Centre approves construction of 5,000 houses for displaced people in Manipur

Houses to be built under PMAY-G for IDPs affected by ethnic violence

IMPHAL, Feb 24: Union Agriculture and Rural Development Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has approved the construction of 5,000 houses for rehabilitation of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Manipur, officials said.

Chouhan cleared the construction of the houses under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Gramin (PMAY-G) for the IDPs affected by the ethnic violence in the northeastern state, after meeting Manipur Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh on Monday evening in New Delhi, they said.

The Union minister also assured all help to bring peace and normalcy in the state, an official statement said.

At least 260 people have been killed



and thousands rendered homeless in the ethnic violence between Imphal Valley-based Meiteis and hills-based Kuki-Zo groups since May, 2023.

Earlier this month, the Manipur government had submitted a proposal for

the construction of 5,000 houses for IDPs. The state government had in January said it aims to resettle 10,000 internally displaced families by March 31.

Till date, 16,500 IDPs have been resettled in the state, it had said. (PTI)

Shillong Airport set for expansion: Dy CM

SHILLONG, Feb 24: Shillong Airport is set for expansion to handle bigger aircraft after land acquisition has been completed with private landowners and defence approvals is expected by next month, Deputy Chief Minister S Dhar told the state Assembly on Tuesday.

Replying to a cut motion in the Assembly, Dhar said Shillong airport at Umroi currently handles only ATR-72 aircraft due to its 1,829-metre runway, but a master plan prepared with the Airports Authority of India aims to extend it to 2,400 metres.

The expansion requires 22 additional acres, including 11.75 acres of private land and 10.3 acres held by the Defence Ministry.

He said the Ri-Bhoi deputy commissioner completed the acquisition of the private land parcel on January 28 at a cost of ₹ 72.17 crore, and the transfer to the Airports Authority of India is underway.

The Ministry of Defence has granted advance working permission and an MoU for land exchange is expected to be signed in March 2026. Dhar said the project would enable narrow-body aircraft operations and boost tourism and investment in Meghalaya.

Meanwhile, Deputy Chief Minister Prestone Tynsong informed the House that the reconstruction cost of the Tara Garh state guest house was revised from ₹ 15 crore to ₹ 24.91 crore after a contractor quoted rates 12.38 per cent above the scheduled rate.

He said the ₹ 12.89 crore of the total amount

was earmarked for fittings and furnishings and maintained that the Schedule of Rates (SOR) 2021-22 was followed.

Describing the facility as setting a new benchmark, Tynsong said visitors had likened it to a five-star hotel.

"It is one of the best state guest houses in India," for the first time ever we have a state guest house with a standard of five-star," he said, adding that the guest house has 18 rooms, including six VVIP suites.

Health Minister Wailadmiki Shylla told the Assembly that the state currently has only four anesthesiologists, contributing to a shortage of specialists in hospitals. He said the government has received finance sanction and would soon recruit doctors on a contractual basis through the Medical Recruitment Board.

Replying to a question, Shylla said the Bhaibari Community Health Centre faced specialist shortages due to a non-functional operation theatre and absence of an anesthesiologist, adding that the facility would be upgraded to a referral unit once specialists are appointed.

The CHC handled 1,840 inpatients and 51,242 outpatients in 2025-26, including 868 deliveries, he said.

Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma also assured the House that the government would expedite the establishment of a veterinary college, two fishery colleges and a dairy college proposed in 2022, citing the large number of people engaged in livestock rearing. (PTI)

No. SMED/DMCH/Misc./2019/04/Pt-5/
Advertisement

Applications are invited from eligible candidates for a **Walk-In Interview** for engagement to the post of Temporary Electrician for operation and maintenance of the **33/11 KV Substation of Diphu Medical College & Hospital, Diphu.**

Vacancy Details

Sl. No	Name of Post and Number	Essential Qualification and Minimum Experience	Fixed Pay
1	Electrician on temporary basis (5 nos)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Class X pass along with ITI certificate from Govt. Institution. Must have 5 years of experience in Operation & Maintenance (O&M) of 33/11 KV sub-stations, electrical installation, or power station works. Experience in operation and maintenance of 33/11 KV Substation will be preferred. 	Rs. 10,000 per month

Interview Schedule & Requirements

- Walk-In Date:** Thursday, 6th March, 2026, at the Academic Block, Diphu Medical College & Hospital, Diphu from 2 PM onwards.
- Documentation:** Interested candidates may attend the interview along with Original Mark-sheets, 2 copies of passport photos, ITI Certificate, and Experience Certificates, which should be brought at the time of interview.
- No TA/DA will be admissible for appearing in the interview.
- The final decision of the undersigned shall be final and binding in all matters related to this recruitment.
- The undersigned reserves the right to cancel or modify the advertisement without assigning any reason thereof.

Sd/-
Principal cum Chief Superintendent
Diphu Medical College & Hospital, Diphu

DIPR /D/HLT/306/25-Feb-26

অসম পাবলিক সার্ভিস কমিশন
ASSAM PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION
Jawaharnagar, Khanapara, Guwahati-781022.

No.79PSC/Estt-11/2025-26 Dated Guwahati the 24th February, 2026

NOTIFICATION

In pursuance to this office notification No.199PSC/CON/Exam-21/2025-2026 Dated 20th February, 2026, it is for general information to all candidates who qualified the Phase-I Screening Test (OMR based) for recruitment to the post of Grade-IV in the office of the Assam Public Service Commission that the Interview/Viva-Voce will be held w.e.f. **10.03.2026 to 18.03.2026** as per the advertisement in the venue mentioned below.

Date of Viva-Voce/Interview	Venue	Reporting Time
10 th , 11 th , 12 th , 13 th , 16 th , 17 th and 18 th March, 2026	O/O. Assam Public Service Commission, Khanapara, Guwahati-22	9.00AM

The intimation letters shall be uploaded in the Assam Public Service Commission's website on 5th March, 2026 and no individual intimation will be sent separately. The candidates shall have to download their intimation letter from the website of Assam Public Service Commission www.apscc.in. For any query in this regard please contact telephone No. 0361-2363117 during office hours w.e.f. 05.03.2026.

Sd/-
Secretary,
Assam Public Service Commission,
Jawaharnagar, Khanapara, Guwahati-22

DIPR /D/HLT/305/25-Feb-26

Booked in POCSO case, Avimukteshwaranand Saraswati says won't resist arrest

VARANASI, Feb 24: Days after he was booked for alleged sexual abuse of two persons, Swami Avimukteshwaranand Saraswati on Monday said he will not oppose his arrest and asserted that the "fabricated story" will be exposed sooner or later. Speaking to reporters, Saraswati said there are three courts -- the first is the public, which is following all the developments and will deliver its verdict; the second is his own conscience; and the third is the Supreme Court, which knows who is right and who is wrong.

"I have received clean chits from all three," he claimed. An FIR was lodged in Prayagraj against Saraswati and his disciple Mukundanand Brahmachari on Saturday on charges of sexually abusing two persons, including a minor, over the past year at a gurukul and religious congregations, in-

cluding the recently concluded Magh Mela.

The FIR was registered under the relevant sections of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act and the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita following an order of a special court.

Saraswati said the truth will eventually come to light and the "fabricated story" will be exposed sooner or later.

He claimed that he remained in the fair area in full view of CCTV cameras and the media during the Magh Mela.

Responding to the allegations linked to his gurukul, he claimed that the boys in question never studied there nor did they take admission, and that their marksheets indicated they were students of a school in Hardoi. He also dismissed claims about an alleged CD, asking why it has not been made



public if it exists.

According to the FIR, the accused, posing as religious preceptors, allegedly subjected the minor and another youth to repeated sexual assault on

multiple occasions over the past year.

It also alleged that the acts were carried out under the guise of guru seva and by misusing religious authority.

Saraswati hit the headlines recently for his confrontation with the organisers of the Magh Mela. He accused them of preventing him from taking a bath on Mauni Amavasya.

Meanwhile, Uttar Pradesh Congress president Ajay Rai has written a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi demanding that an independent, impartial and transparent investigation into the case against Saraswati.

This is essential to protect the constitutional dignity of religious autonomy, Rai said in his letter. He said Saraswati had previously publicly questioned the Uttar Pradesh government's ad-

ministrative system in connection with the stampede at the Maha Kumbh.

Subsequently, incidents such as his being prevented from bathing at the Magh Mela and alleged mistreatment of his disciples came to light, drawing widespread criticism. Criticism cannot be suppressed by punitive power, the Congress leader said. In light of the above constitutional principles, it is essential that the investigation is impartial, independent and completely free from political influence, Rai said.

This issue is not just about one individual, but is related to faith, constitutional rights and impartiality of governance, he said.

The people of the country want confidence that the rule of law is supreme in India and that abuse of any kind will not be protected, he said. (PTI)

Protest against VC turns violent in JNU, police register FIR

NEW DELHI, Feb 24: Several students were injured in a late-night clash between two student groups at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, with the Left groups and the ABVP accusing each other of unleashing the violence, and authorities vowing to crack down on any unruly behaviour on campus.

Tensions flared on the campus of Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) after a protest against the vice-chancellor turned violent around 1.30 am on Monday.

Following the incident, Delhi Police have registered an FIR after a complaint from the Chief Security Officer (CSO) of JNU regarding an incident involving JNUSU leaders and their associates on the intervening night, police officials said.

According to police, an FIR has been registered under sections 115(2) (voluntarily causing hurt), 126(2) (wrongful restraint), 191(2) (rioting), 189(2) (unlawful assembly), 121(1) (voluntarily causing hurt to public servant to deter them from their duty), 132 (assaulting or using criminal force to deter public servant from discharging their duty), 61(2) (criminal conspiracy) and provisions of the Prevention of Damage to Public Property Act.

Officials said the investigation has been taken up, and further details are awaited.

The Left-backed Jawaharlal Nehru University Students' Union (JNUSU) had called for an equality march, "Samta Juloo" towards the East Gate on Sunday night, demanding the resignation of Vice Chancellor Santishree Dhulipudi Pandit and the revocation of a rustication order.

While the protesters alleged that the administration did not engage with them and instead allowed the ABVP members to confront them, the Right-wing student body blamed the Left groups for instigating the violence.

Pandit recently triggered a row after she said in an interview that communities "cannot progress by being permanently a victim or playing the victim card", with the JNUSU terming the remarks "casteist" and "insensitive" to marginalised communities.

Videos shared by the rival student bodies purportedly showed masked people hurling stones and roaming with sticks on the campus.

Sharing a video showing a few people hurling stones on the campus, Left-affiliated student groups alleged that ABVP members started stone pelting when they gathered for a protest.

The ABVP also shared videos showing masked people walking inside the campus before the violence broke out.

Naming several students from the Left-backed student groups, the ABVP accused them of starting a physical altercation and later throwing stones at the ABVP members, even attacking women students.

The JNUSU, on its part, alleged that students demanding an apology and resignation of the vice-chancellor for her "casteist" remarks were attacked with stones and bricks, leaving several injured and forcing many to take shelter inside the central library.

In a statement, the JNUSU named several ABVP members, accusing them of leading a mob.

It also accused Pandit of not addressing them despite being aware of the protest.

"Members of the ABVP threw stones and bricks at the encampment site and physically attacked the protesting students with sticks, creating an atmosphere of fear on campus," the statement said.

It added that the JNUSU has called for a "Long March" to the Ministry of Education on February 26, and reiterated its demand for the vice-chancellor's resignation.

The university authorities, meanwhile, said that they have taken serious note of the incident and warned of strict action against any unruly behaviour on campus. In an official statement, the JNU administration said that several academic buildings inside the campus were reportedly locked by a group of protesting students. (PTI)

'Murder Of Democracy in India': Cong slams govt after IYC chief's arrest

NEW DELHI, Feb 24: The Congress on Tuesday condemned the arrest of its youth wing president Uday Bhanu Chib and other workers of the outfit, and alleged that Prime Minister Narendra Modi is desperate to divert attention from "uncomfortable truths" about him and his regime that the people have recognised.

Chib was arrested by Delhi Police in connection with the shirtless protest staged by a group of youth wing members at the AI Impact Summit here last week, officials said on Tuesday.

Police have also stepped up security across key locations in the capital in anticipation of possible protests following Chib's arrest, which took the total number of people held in the case to eight.

Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said the party will continue exposing the government for the "blatant lies it propagates" and used the acronym "MODI - Murder of Democracy in India" to take a swipe at the PM.

He said the Congress will continue exposing this government for the "blatant lies it propagates" and will unflinchingly fight this "murder of democracy".

"The INC condemns in the strongest possible terms the brazenly illegal arrest of the IYC President and Youth Congress workers for what was clearly a peaceful and legitimate protest," Ramesh said on X.

"The PM is clearly rattled by the disclosures in the Epstein files. He is also facing the mounting anger of farmers due to his betrayal of their interests and his surrender to President Trump on the trade deal,"



Ramesh claimed. "This is nothing but the politics of harassment. The PM is desperate to divert attention away from the uncomfortable truths about him and his regime that the people of our country have recognised," he said.

Ramesh said those who are afraid to intimidate and asserted that the Congress will not be deterred. "It will continue exposing this government for the blatant lies it propagates. The INC will unflinchingly fight this Murder of Democracy in India," he said.

Asked about Chib's arrest, Congress media and publicity department head Pawan Khara told PTI Videos, "It is the duty of the opposition to protest in a democracy but a dictator will never understand this." "If you hear the speech of that dictator in Meerut recently you will get to know that the world democracy does not exist in his dictionary," Khara said, in a swipe at the prime minister.

Chib as well as other colleagues are being arrested from various

parts of the country, Khara, who is in Bhopal for the party's Kisan Maha Chaupal against the India-US interim trade deal, said.

"This shows that Narendra Modi is scared of dissent and questions being asked of him. Narendra Modi is emerging as the most cowardly Prime Minister in the world. He is being blackmailed, he is a coward, he is scared," Khara alleged. "It has been the Congress' history that no matter how much oppression we face, we will continue to raise issues of the people and will keep fighting with 'Ahimsa'," he said.

In a post on X, the Indian Youth Congress said, "You can arrest a man. You cannot arrest a movement. The arrest of IYC President @UdayBhanuYIC and our workers for raising their voice is a direct attack on democratic rights."

"We strongly condemn this blatant misuse of power. Protest is not a crime. The fight has just begun," the IYC said.

Police had earlier arrested seven

Indian Youth Congress (IYC) workers, including three from Gwalior in Madhya Pradesh, for the protest at the Bharat Mandapam last Friday. They have been identified as Jitendra Yadav, Raj Gujjar and Ajay Kumar.

In addition, IYC's Uttar Pradesh general secretary Ritik alias Monty Shukla has been detained from Lalitpur in the state.

Senior officers said additional force has been deployed at the sensitive points, particularly in New Delhi, a hotspot for political demonstrations.

Security has been tightened around the Tilak Marg police station, where Chib is presently held, while barricades have been put up at the strategic points, with anti-riot teams on standby.

Quick Reaction Teams (QRTs) and additional companies of paramilitary forces have also been placed on alert to respond to any law and order situation, officials said. Senior officers have directed the field staff to ensure that traffic movement remains smooth.

On Friday, a group of IYC workers staged a dramatic protest inside Hall No. 5 of the summit venue by removing their shirts to reveal T-shirts printed with slogans against the government and the India-US interim trade deal, before being whisked away by security personnel. Police said the accused had registered online and obtained QR codes to gain entry into the venue.

The incident triggered a political slugfest, with the BJP calling it a "shameful act to tarnish India's image on the global stage", and the IYC defending it as a "peaceful" demonstration aimed at safeguarding national interests. (PTI)

BJP govt's first year gave Delhi new direction, remaining tenure to transform city: CM

NEW DELHI, Feb 24: The first year of the BJP government in Delhi was aimed at giving a new direction to the national capital and the coming years will transform the city, Chief Minister Rekha Gupta said on Monday.

Addressing a BJP outreach programme in North East Delhi Lok Sabha constituency, she said the party's government was formed through the collective efforts of its workers.

The BJP, which came to power in Delhi in February 2025 after a hiatus of 27 years, is holding 'Pravas' programmes of the CM in all the seven Lok Sabha constituencies to highlight the achievements of its government.

Gupta was accompanied by Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva and local MP Manoj Tiwari. The chief minister asserted that her government was committed to solve the smallest of issues faced by the people of Delhi.

The BJP government was formed through collective effort, she said, citing BJP workers' protests against the "wrongdoings" of the previous governments in Delhi over the last two decades.

Gupta said the position of the chief minister is not a privilege but a responsibility and the BJP is focused only on responsibilities.

Presenting the one-year report card of her government, she said that long-pending issues related to roads, sewer lines, schools and electric buses have been addressed, she said.

The first year of the BJP government was about changing the direction of Delhi, and the next four years will be about transforming it,

she added.

The BJP government provided 4,000 electric buses in one year, the highest in the country, and the Trans Yamuna Development Board was reconstituted and allocated Rs 700 crore for development works in the area, Gupta said.

Solutions to Delhi's problems will be visible in the coming years, she asserted, citing the ongoing work on sewerage treatment plants for Yamuna cleaning and opening of Atal Canteens for providing meals to the needy at nominal prices. North East Delhi MP Tiwari said, "There is a government in Delhi that is committed to resolving even the smallest problems of the people and in the coming times, you will all say that the city is transforming."

He said the Ayushman Bharat Yojana has been implemented in Delhi and under the scheme, people can avail free medical treatment up to Rs 10 lakh.

Tiwari said Wazirabad metro station has been renamed Jagatpur Wazirabad and congratulated the government for honouring the sentiments of the locals.

He said the work for widening Kanwar and Sonia Vihar roads is underway and thanked the government on behalf of the people of his constituency.

Delhi BJP president Sachdeva said Monday's programme was not a public rally but an interaction with party workers whose discipline and hard work helped the party form the government.

He said the BJP government is working among the people and understands that improving Delhi is its duty. (PTI)

Seva Teerth won't be a place for display of power, but a centre for empowerment: Cabinet resolution

NEW DELHI, Feb 24: The Union Cabinet, in its first meeting at Seva Teerth, the new PMO complex, resolved that every decision taken in the premises will be inspired by the sentiment of 'Nagrik Devo Bhava' and will be a centre for the empowerment of every Indian.

The meeting, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, also resolved that every effort of governance conducted from Seva Teerth will remain connected to the spirit of simplifying the life of the last person in the country.

According to the resolution, termed 'Seva Sankalp Resolution', a new beginning in India's development Journey, every decision taken in the new building will be inspired by a spirit of service toward 1.4 billion citizens and will be connected to the broader goal of nation-building.

"The Union Cabinet reiterates its resolve that every decision taken in this premises will be inspired by the sentiment of 'Nagrik Devo Bhava'. This place

will not be a centre for the display of power, but rather a centre for the empowerment of every Indian," the resolution read. "We reaffirm that, in line with our vision, we will further strengthen the governance model that is transparent, aware, and sensitive to the emotions of citizens," it said.

According to the resolution, work culture at Seva Teerth will be guided by the spirit of the fundamental ethos of the Constitution, and every decision will be accountable to the aspirations of the people. This meeting and this building are a direct expression of the reconstruction of New India, according to the 'Seva Sankalp' resolution.

"With this auspicious beginning, we welcome that future whose foundation has been laid by centuries of effort. After Independence, for so many decades, governments operated from the Prime Minister's Office in South Block, preserving the legacy and envisioning the future. We envisioned an India whose thought is indigenous, whose form is modern, and

whose capability is boundless. Today, Seva Teerth is the embodied manifestation of that very vision, which will enhance India's pride as the Mother of Democracy," it said.

The cabinet also remembered the history of the complex's location, which was the site of the temporary barracks from the British era. The resolution said that before colonial rule, India was a nation recognised both for its material grandeur and for its human values. It said that the concept of Seva Teerth is formed from the confluence of both these ideals.

"For us, constitutional values are the expression of that moral commitment which connects governance with the dignity, equality, and justice of every citizen. The work culture of 'Seva Teerth' will be guided by this very spirit, where every policy will be in accordance with the fundamental ethos of the Constitution and every decision will be accountable to the aspirations of the people," the resolution read. (PTI)



BHOPAL, Feb 24: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday said Prime Minister Narendra Modi should scrap the Indo-US trade deal, which he described as being against the interests of Indian farmers.

Addressing the 'Kisan Mahachaupal' farmers' rally in Bhopal, Gandhi likened the interim trade deal to an arrow piercing the hearts of Indian farmers.

"After the US Supreme Court ruling on the trade deal, I challenge PM Modi to scrap it...but he won't be able to do so," the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha said.

"The Indo-US trade deal is against the interests of our farmers and was done by PM Modi under the pressure of US President

Donald Trump because of Epstein files and to save industrialist Adani," he alleged.

The Congress leader also accused PM Modi of agreeing to sign the Indo-US trade deal without taking Union ministers Rajnath Singh (Defence), Shivraj Singh Chouhan (Agriculture) and Nitin Gadkari (Road Transport and Highways) into confidence. "This is not a deal, but an arrow struck in the hearts of the country's farmers," Gandhi said. He also alleged that through the trade deal, the PM has compromised the interests of India's agriculture, data, textile and import sectors.

Gandhi said he was not allowed to speak in the Lok Sabha after the President's address. On former Army chief Gen M M Naravane's memoir, the Congress leader said the decision to go to war is political, and not a military one.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, who was also present at the event, said the PM was coward, and added that the Indo-US trade deal shows the government's surrender. (PTI)

Govt set to launch HPV vaccination against cancer for girls aged 14; to use single-shot Gardasil

NEW DELHI, Feb 24: In a major step towards eliminating preventable cancers among women, the Union government will soon launch a nationwide human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination programme targeting girls aged 14 years, official sources said on Tuesday.

According to sources, the programme will use a single-shot Gardasil, a quadrivalent HPV vaccine, that provides protection against HPV types 16 and 18, which cause cervical cancer, as well as types 6 and 11. The drive would be a special vaccination campaign and not under the government's Universal Immunisation Programme. It is in line with the World Health Organisation recommendations, which identify HPV vaccination as a central pillar of the Global Strategy to Eliminate Cervical Cancer.

"Strong global and Indian scientific evidence confirms that a single dose provides robust and durable protection when administered to girls in the recommended

age group," an official source said.

The nationwide programme will target girls aged 14 years, an age at which the HPV vaccine offers maximum preventive benefit, well before potential exposure to the virus.

In the open market, quadrivalent Gardasil-4 is a two-dose vaccine - each costing Rs 3,927 -- for girls below 15 years. For those above 15 years, three doses of the vaccine are required. Gardasil-4 vaccine is manufactured by MSD India.

"Vaccination under the national programme will be voluntary and free of cost, ensuring equitable access across socio-economic groups. By prioritising prevention at the right age, the programme is expected to provide lifelong protection and significantly reduce the future burden of cervical cancer in the country," the source said.

The vaccine has an excellent safety record, supported by more than 500 million doses administered globally since its introduction in 2006. Widespread



vaccination has led to substantial reductions in HPV infection, precancerous lesions, and cervical cancer incidence in several countries. Once the vaccination programme is launched, India will join 160 countries that have introduced HPV vaccination in their national immunisation schedules. According to the source, over 90 countries are implementing single-dose HPV vaccination schedules,

the source said. HPV vaccines are among the most extensively studied vaccines worldwide, with evidence demonstrating 93 to 100 per cent effectiveness in preventing cervical cancer caused by vaccine-covered HPV types.

"The upcoming nationwide roll-out (of the vaccination programme) is a significant milestone towards achieving the vision of 'Swastha Nari', ensuring that pre-

vention, protection, and equity form the foundation of women's healthcare in the country," an official source said.

According to data, cervical cancer remains the second most common cancer among women in India, with nearly 80,000 new cases and over 42,000 deaths reported annually.

Scientific evidence establishes that almost all cases of cervical cancer are caused by persistent infection with high-risk types of Human Papillomavirus (HPV), particularly HPV types 16 and 18, which together account for more than 80 per cent of cervical cancer cases in India.

Despite being largely preventable through vaccination and early screening, cervical cancer continues to impose a heavy burden on women and families.

According to sources, the forthcoming vaccination programme directly addresses this challenge by preventing HPV infection before it can progress to cancer. The

drive will be conducted at designated government health facilities, including Ayushman Arogya Mandirs (Primary Health Centres).

All vaccination sites will be linked to 24x7 government health facilities, ensuring immediate medical support and reinforcing safety and parental confidence.

To ensure uninterrupted availability and uncompromised quality, the government has secured HPV vaccine supplies through a transparent, globally supported procurement mechanism, another official source said.

Under India's partnership with Gavi - The Vaccine Alliance, high-quality Gardasil vaccines -- approved by India's drug regulator and widely used internationally -- have been made available for the national programme.

"Parents and guardians across the country should come forward and ensure that their 14-year-old daughters are vaccinated against HPV once the programme is rolled out," the source said. (PTI)

J'khand: All 7 on board air ambulance killed in crash

RANCHI, Feb 24: All seven persons on board an air ambulance crashed near Simaria in Jharkhand's Chatra district, and their bodies have been brought to a hospital for post-mortem examination, officials said on Tuesday.

The Beechcraft C90 air ambulance, operated by Redbird Airways Pvt Ltd, was en route to Delhi from Ranchi when it crashed on Monday evening in the Bariatu Panchayat area of Simaria, located deep inside a forest, killing all seven onboard, including two pilots. "We have brought all the seven bodies for post-mortem at Sadar Hospital, Chatra. The crash is being investigated," an official told PTI.

The aircraft took off from Ranchi airport at 7.11 pm and went missing around 7.30 pm. It lost contact with the air traffic control about 20 minutes after departure, he said.

Ranchi airport director Vinod Kumar said inclement weather could be a possible reason behind the crash, though the exact cause would be ascertained after a detailed probe.

Jharkhand Health Minister Irfan Ansari said the state government will conduct a probe into how permission was given to the aircraft to fly during "inclement weather". He also said proper compensation would be given to the kin of the deceased.

Terminating the crash extremely unfortunate, Minister of State for Defence Sanjay Seth said unpleasant weather could be one of the reasons, which will be determined by



the probe. In a post on X, Jharkhand Governor Santosh Kumar Gangwar condoled the deaths.

"The news of the air ambulance accident is extremely heartbreaking. My deepest condolences to the families who have lost their loved ones in this tragedy. May god grant them the strength to bear this immense sorrow. Om Shanti," Gangwar said.

The deceased have been identified as Captain Vivek Bhatnagar, Captain Savrajdeep Singh, Sanjay Kumar, Dr Vikas Kumar Gupta, Sachin Kumar Mishra, Archana Devi and Dhuru Kumar. Meanwhile, a lingering sense of grief prevailed in Chatra district, as the near and dear ones of those killed in the crash expressed shock and disbelief.

Bajrang Prasad, the father of deceased Dr Vikas Kumar Gupta, said he had sold all his land to make his son a doctor, who was posted at Sadar Hospital in Ranchi.

"He has a seven-year-old son... He was meritorious and had completed his MBBS from Odisha's Cuttack," Prasad, who hails from Bihar's Aurangabad district, said.

Family members of Sanjay Kumar (41), however, blamed the "poor" health infrastructure behind the tragedy.

"Had we given proper treatment to my brother-in-law Sanjay in Ranchi, previous lives could have been saved. I lost both both Sanjay and sister Archana Devi in the incident," Kumar said.

The brother of Sachin Kumar Mishra said he had worked as a nursing staff for many years. "Sachin was everything to me. He was like my own child. For the past two to three years, he had been working in an ambulance service."

Chatra Deputy Commissioner Keerthishree G had earlier told PTI that the bodies of all seven deceased were retrieved from the

crash site and shifted to Chatra hospital for post-mortem examination.

In a statement, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) said the Beechcraft C90 aircraft (VT-AJV) was operating a medical evacuation flight on the Ranchi-Delhi sector when it crashed in Kasaria Panchayat of Chatra district.

"The aircraft was airborne from Ranchi at 19:11 IST. After establishing contact with Kolkata at 19:34 IST, the aircraft lost communication and radar contact with Kolkata at approximately 100 nautical miles south-east of Varanasi," it said, adding that there were seven people on board, including two crew members.

An Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB) team has been dispatched to the crash site.

According to the DGCA website, Delhi-based non-scheduled operator Redbird has six aircraft in its fleet, including the one that crashed.

Anant Sinha, CEO of Devkamal Hospital in Ranchi, told PTI that the air ambulance was arranged by one of their patients.

"The patient, Sanjay Kumar, a resident of Chandwa in Latehar district, was brought to the hospital with 65 per cent burn injuries on February 16. He was being treated in the hospital," he said.

The family members decided to take him to Delhi for better treatment, Sinha said.

"They arranged for an air ambulance on Monday. The patient left the hospital for Delhi around 4.30 pm," he said. (PTI)

Chhattisgarh govt presents ₹ 1.72 lakh cr budget for 2026-27

RAIPUR, Feb 24: Chhattisgarh Finance Minister O P Choudhary on Tuesday presented the annual budget of ₹1.72 lakh crore for the financial year 2026-27 in the state assembly, saying it is focused on inclusive growth, accelerating infrastructure and boosting investment.

The government will launch the Rani Durgavati Scheme, under which girls will receive ₹1.5 lakh on attaining 18 years of age, he said.

The budget places strong emphasis on the social sector, which accounts for 40 per cent of the total expenditure, while 36 per cent is earmarked for boosting economic activities and 24 per cent for administrative and general services.

It also lays importance on the overall development of Surguja, Bastar, and other regions previously affected by Naxalism.

The government announced the establishment of two 'Education Cities' in Abujhmad and Jagargunda, which were once considered Naxal bastions in Bastar region, with a budget allocation of ₹100 crore.

Special initiatives have also been planned to promote sports and preserve cultural identity, including the Bastar Olympics and Bastar Pandum, providing a platform for local talent and reinforcing the region's positive identity. Additionally, 1,500 new positions have been created for Bastar Fighters, a unit of state police.

A 50 per cent exemption on registration fees for women on the purchase of immovable property has also been provisioned.

Choudhary said Chhattisgarh, which was created in 2000, completed 25 years of its formation and celebrated its Silver Jubilee year as "Atal Nirman Varsh". During this period, the state has made remarkable progress on the path of economic development.

This is reflected in the growth of the state budget, which has increased 35-fold -- from just ₹ 4,944 crore at the time of state formation to ₹ 1,72,000 crore now, he said. The state budget 2026-27 is a decisive step toward achieving the goals outlined in the vision document "Chhattisgarh Anjor 2047" and strengthening the state's journey of sustainable development, he said.

Choudhary noted that the guiding principles of the previous two budgets were GYAN (Garib, Yuva, Annadata, Nari) and GATI (Good Governance, Accelerating Infrastructure, Technology and Indus-



trial Growth).

This year's budget is centred on 'SANKALP' -- Samaveshi Vikas, Adhosanrachna, Nivesh, Kushal Manav Sansadhan, Antyodaya, Livelihood and Policy se Parinam tak -- aimed at accelerating the state's development journey, he said.

"SANKALP reflects the government's commitment not merely to formulate policies but to ensure their effective implementation at the grassroots level so that policy intentions translate into measurable outcomes and development benefits reach every citizen and every region," he said.

A provision of ₹ 2,024 crore has been made in the budget for constructing the Matnar and Deurganga barrages on the Indravati river in Bastar, which was once a Naxal stronghold, he said.

The minister said ₹ 100 crore have been allocated for the construction of 'Education Cities' in Abujhmad and Jagargunda in Bastar region.

An allocation of ₹ 50 crore has been made for opening new medical colleges in Kunkuri, Manendragarh and Dantewada, he said, adding that to promote sports and culture, ₹ 10 crore has been allocated for the Bastar and Surguja Olympics.

Digital connectivity in remote regions will be strengthened with ₹ 5 crore approved for the Bastar Net project, he added.

The budget allocated ₹ 22,360 crore for education department, Rs 16,560 crore to panchayat and rural development department, ₹ 9,450 crore for the Public Works Department and ₹ 3,500 crore for the Water Resources Department.

The budget also has a provision of ₹ 250 crore to set up 23 new industrial parks to boost investment and employment generation.

Besides, ₹ 5 crore have been al-

located for tourism development at Mainpat in Surguja, while air services will be expanded in Jagdalpur and Ambikapur, Choudhary said.

Under the Krishak Unnati Yojana, a provision of ₹ 10,000 crore has been made to promote modern agricultural technology, better inputs, productivity enhancement and crop diversification, he said.

Under Viksit Bharat G RAM G Yojana, a provision of ₹ 4,000 crore has been made. The scheme will ensure 125 days of guaranteed employment annually in rural areas and support rural infrastructure development and public amenities, he said.

A provision of ₹ 200 crore has been made for new Chief Minister Adarsh Shahar Samridhi Yojana aimed at improving basic infrastructure, civic services and sanitation in municipalities and nagar panchayats, ₹ 200 crore for Chief Minister Drutgami Sadak Sampark Yojana focused on construction of high-speed 2/4-lane roads, ₹ 100 crore for Swami Vivekananda Utkrishi Shala Yojana dedicated to enhancing the quality of school education and ₹ 100 crore for Cashless Medical Facility to state government employees, he said.

The Chhattisgarh Assistance for Competitive Exams (CG ACE) scheme will be launched to provide financial assistance for competitive examinations under three components - 'Udaan' for preparation of NEET, JEE, CLAT, 'Shikhar' for UPSC and CGPSC examination and 'Manzil' for Railway, Banking, SSC examinations.

A provision of ₹ 33 crore has been made for it, he said.

Chhattisgarh Viability Assistance for Yatri Udaan (CG-VAYU) scheme will be launched which is aimed at promoting air services from Bilaspur, Jagdalpur and Ambikapur, for which ₹ 30 crore has been provisioned, he said. (PTI)

J-K: Over 1,000 doctor posts vacant; 480 posts referred to JKPCS

JAMMU, Feb 24: More than 1,000 posts of doctors are currently vacant across Jammu and Kashmir, according to figures shared by the Health and Medical Education Department.

Kashmir division accounts for 797 of these vacancies -- comprising 24 senior consultants, 253 consultants, 458 medical officers and 62 dental surgeons -- while Jammu division has 288 vacant consultant posts as on February 2026.

"The districts of the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir are not facing an acute shortage of specialists...In order to overcome shortage of doctors in peripheral and remote areas, the government has recently referred 480 posts of medical officers to the J-K Public Service Commission for selection of suitable candidate," the medical and health department said.

It said the department is monitoring issues related to the referral of direct recruitment vacancies as well as the filling up of promotion-quota posts on a priority basis, and necessary steps for filling up these vacancies have been taken from time to time.

After completion of the selection process of medical officers, the newly selected doctors shall be posted to far-flung and underserved areas and health institutions facing shortage of staff, as per requirement and policy in vogue, the department said.

It said the government is cognizant of the need to strengthen specialist services at peripheral hospitals. (PTI)

Elaborate security arrangements in Kashmir ahead of VP Radhakrishnan's maiden visit

SRINAGAR, Feb 24: Security has been beefed up across Kashmir ahead of Vice President C P Radhakrishnan's maiden visit to the Valley on February 26, officials said on Tuesday.

The vice president is scheduled to attend the 21st convocation of the University of Kashmir here.

Authorities have put in place a comprehensive, multi-layered security grid, particularly around the university campus in the Hazratbal area of the city and other vital installations, officials said. Elaborate arrangements have been made to ensure the safety of the vice president, residents, and visitors, they

said. Security forces have been deployed in strength at vulnerable locations, with heightened alertness maintained to counter potential terrorist threats. Checking and surveillance have been stepped up across the Valley, officials said.

Additional checkpoints have been set up at important entry points, especially around the city, and increased patrolling, area domination operations, and surprise inspections are being conducted along vital roadways to prevent any untoward incident, they said. Vehicles are being randomly checked at entry and exit points of the city, especially on the roads leading to the

university, officials said. They said the security forces have strengthened intelligence gathering mechanisms and are ensuring effective area and night domination. Counterinsurgency and quick reaction teams have been strategically deployed to ensure a swift response to any emerging situation, they added. Kashmir Police chief V K Birdi had last week reviewed the security measures in the valley ahead of the vice president's visit. Birdi, the Inspector General of Police (IGP) Kashmir, chaired a high-level security review meeting at PCR Kashmir here in preparation for the VVIP visit, a police spokesman had said. (PTI)

Hoax bomb threats in multiple courts disrupt judicial work in Bengal

KOLKATA, Feb 24: Judicial activities were disrupted on Tuesday, as at least six courts across West Bengal received bomb threats, throwing security personnel into a tizzy and prompting evacuation and search operations in court premises, officials said.

The city sessions court and CJM (Bankshall) court in Kolkata, sub-divisional courts at Asansol and Durgapur in Paschim Bardhaman district, and the courts at Chuchura and Arambagh in Hooghly district received bomb threats over email in the morning, a senior police officer said. However, the security forces found no explosive material during the search operations in courts, he said.

The city sessions court and the CJM (Bankshall) court were vacated, and Kolkata Police bomb squad personnel, accompanied by sniffer

dogs, checked the entire premises, the officer said. Similar operations were carried out at other courts in the state.

Asked if the simultaneous bomb threats in courts were linked to the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls being carried out by judicial officers, CEO Manoj Agarwal said it was up to the state police to conduct an inquiry and find out the truth and those behind the hoax. "I think the police are already probing the bomb threats, and whether it is linked to any ongoing election-related exercise in the courts," Agarwal said.

In a hurriedly called press meet at the state secretariat Nabanna afterwards, Chief Secretary Nandini Chakravorty said a probe has been initiated to ascertain the source of the threat mails, and whether one individual or a group is in-

involved. Chakravorty, who was accompanied by DGP Piyush Pandey and Kolkata Commissioner of Police Supratim Sarkar, told reporters that the West Bengal government is committed to provide security to judicial officers and others involved in the SIR process.

"There were separate mails threatening that bombs had been planted in two courts in the city, four other courts at the same time. All safety measures were taken, and a thorough check was conducted. However, nothing was found. The work at the courts resumed after the search," she said.

Asked if all the mails contained the same language, written in the same format and whether the sender's name/address was the same, she said, "Our investigating agencies are looking into all these aspects." (PTI)

Infant twins, children among 6 of family killed in Meerut house fire; short circuit suspected

MEERUT (UP), Feb 24: A devastating accident shook Meerut after a suspected short circuit triggered a massive blaze inside a house in the Lisadi Gate area, killing six members of an extended family, including two four-month-old twin sisters, and three children aged 4 and 12.

According to officials, the blaze at Iqbal Ahmad's residence on Monday night spread rapidly when most male members of the family were out to offer Ramzan namaz, leaving little time for the others to escape.

Police said the family was into tailoring and online garment business, for which a large quantity of cloth was stored on the ground floor of the three-storey house, causing the fire to spread rapidly.

Mohammad Farooq, a family member, said he had gone to offer namaz when he received a call about the fire.

"By the time I came back, a huge crowd had gathered outside the house. The blaze killed my daughter, my son, my younger brother's twin daughters and his son. My elderly mother survived the fire, though her blood pressure shot up due to the shock," Farooq said.

The deceased have been identified as Ruksar (25), Mahbish (12), Hammad (4), Akdas (4), Nabia (4 months) and Inayat (4 months), all residents of Gali No. 3 near the Surahi Wali Masjid in Kidwai Nagar, police said. One injured woman, Ameer Bano (55), is undergoing treatment at a hospital, they said. The victims were laid to rest at the Bale Miyan cemetery at Nauchandi on Tuesday afternoon.

Heart-wrenching scenes were witnessed when the coffins were carried out of the house, where a large number of people gathered to mourn the family's loss. Officials said the family members had given in writing that they didn't want a post-mortem of the bodies.

The incident occurred at Kidwai Nagar around 8 pm on Monday. Seven people were admitted to the hospital with burn injuries, of which six died, Meerut SSP Avinash Pandey told reporters. Police confirmed the deaths after midnight. A Dial 112 response vehicle was rushed to the spot within three minutes of receiving information about the blaze, followed by fire tenders, Pandey said. The narrow lanes in the locality posed a major challenge for the firefighters, prompting them to deploy motorcycles and later access the house from the adjoining rooftops, officials said.

The firemen had to break a wall to gain entry into the building. A local also assisted in the rescue efforts by placing a ladder to help evacuate those trapped on the first floor of the house, the SSP said.

While five people were rescued from the first floor, those trapped on the second floor were engulfed by dense smoke and flames.

"The biggest challenge was to contain the fire and prevent it from spreading to the adjoining houses," Pandey said. While a short circuit is suspected to have triggered the fire, police said the exact cause will be known after a thorough investigation. District Magistrate V K Singh, who visited the spot, termed the incident "heart-rending and extremely unfortunate". He said a detailed inquiry has been ordered, and prima facie it appears that an electrical fault in a machine or appliance may have sparked the blaze. Officials from the electricity department have been sent to the site, and their findings will be shared soon, he said.

The official confirmed that the family opted not to conduct a post-mortem of the bodies and that no demand for government assistance or compensation has been made so far.

Chief Fire Officer Surendra Singh said four fire tenders were pressed into service and, with the help of locals, seven people were pulled out and taken to a nearby private hospital, from where they were referred to the medical college, where six died. A relative said the house had a large stock of garments, which intensified the blaze.

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has expressed his condolences to the bereaved family and directed the officials concerned to expedite relief measures, an official statement said. (PTI)

Environmental impact should be more important than strategic importance: Litigant on Nicobar ruling

NEW DELHI, Feb 24: Days after the National Green Tribunal cleared the way for the Rs 81,000-crore Great Nicobar mega infrastructure project, Debi Goenka, the executive trustee of the Conservation Action Trust (CAT), said the tribunal's ruling should have been more concerned about the project's environmental impact than its strategic importance.

CAT, a Mumbai-based non-profit organisation formed to protect the environment, was part of the "first round" of litigation, which challenged the environmental clearance (EC) granted to the project before the NGT in 2022. The tribunal refused to interfere with the project's clearance at the time, too. "The NGT and even the Supreme Court are not willing to stay a project which impacts the environment if the government has a significant interest in it," Goenka said.

The tribunal's ruling on February 16 came in response to the "second round" of litigation, where it reviewed the findings of the High-Powered Committee, formed by the NGT in 2023 to "revisit" issues pertaining to coral conservation, the adequacy of



environmental data, and zoning violations.

In its order, the NGT adopted a "balanced approach" that weighed environmental safeguards against the project's strategic importance.

"There is already a defence establishment on the island that the armed forces have used for decades. I do not see how a commercial port enhances defence. Also, the NGT was meant to protect the environment. If it is more concerned with strategic interest than the environment, we do not need an environmental tribunal,"

Goenka said. The project, spread over 166 sq km, comprises the construction of a transshipment port, an integrated township, a civil and military airport, and a 450-MVA gas and solar power-based plant. The Centre has argued that as the project is located on the Great Nicobar island -- close to the Malacca Strait, a crucial international shipping lane -- it will help boost India's maritime trade and counter the growing presence of foreign powers in the region.

Environmentalists like Goenka, however, have said that these "ad-

vantages" will come at a severe environmental and social cost.

For instance, the environmentalists claimed that parts of the project fall under the 'CRZ-IA' area, which is the most ecologically sensitive area within the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) framework.

The area that the environmentalists referred to is the location of the proposed transshipment port, the southern tip of Great Nicobar at Galathea Bay, which is a giant leatherback turtle nesting ground, the site of corals and mangroves and where the endangered Nicobar megapodes live and nest.

"The project will destroy 130 sq km of pristine forest. We do not even know what endemic or endangered species these forests contain or their biodiversity value to mankind. The project will impact the corals in the area, and also destroy nesting sites of turtles," Goenka said.

But in its order, the NGT accepted the Centre's stand that, based on a site visit by a team from the National Centre for Sustainable Coastal Management (NCSCM), no part of the project was in a CRZ-I area.

The tribunal also accepted the Zoological Survey of India's (ZSI) finding that no major coral reefs existed in the Galathea Bay and only "scattered" coral colonies were there, which could be protected through translocation.

Goenka also said that the Great Nicobar project would adversely affect the indigenous communities, especially the Shompen people.

"The Shompen are a small group existing only on this island. They have very little contact with civilisation and a lifestyle we still do not fully understand. They travel along stream beds because there are no roads in their forest. If the project destroys this forest, which is part of their territory, nobody knows the full impact, but it certainly will not be positive," the environmentalist said. The NGT has noted that the indigenous tribe will not be disturbed or displaced due to the project, and their habitat rights will be protected under the Forest Rights Act.

However, in January, the tribal council of Great Nicobar alleged that the island administration was pressuring them to surrender claims to these villages.

Tamil movie 'Made in Korea' set for March 12 release on Netflix

Streaming service Netflix on Tuesday announced that its upcoming Tamil film "Made in Korea", a cross-cultural coming-of-age drama about a young woman's dream journey from Tamil Nadu to South Korea, will premiere on its platform on March 12.

Produced by Rise East Entertainment and written and directed by Ra. Karthik, the film features Priyanka Mohan and popular South Korean actor Park Hye-Jin in the lead roles.

The story follows Shenbagam, fondly called Shenba,

whose childhood fascination with Korean culture inspires her to experience it for herself. When she unexpectedly finds herself in Seoul, reality proves far more challenging than she imagined, setting her on a heart-felt path of resilience, self-discovery, and new connection, according to the official logline.

Karthik said he was drawn to the cultural and historical links between Korean and Tamil heritage.

"I am quite fascinated with the deep cultural connections and historical similarities be-

tween Korean and Tamil heritage. This curiosity inspired me to tell a story that felt personal and full of hope.

"Made In Korea" is a slice-of-life film crafted with warmth, celebrating this unique cultural bond, and I'm thankful to Netflix for championing stories that transcend languages and bring global cultures closer together," the filmmaker said in a statement.

Monika Shergill, Vice-President - Content, Netflix India, said the film reflects the streamer's focus on stories

rooted in local cultures with global resonance.

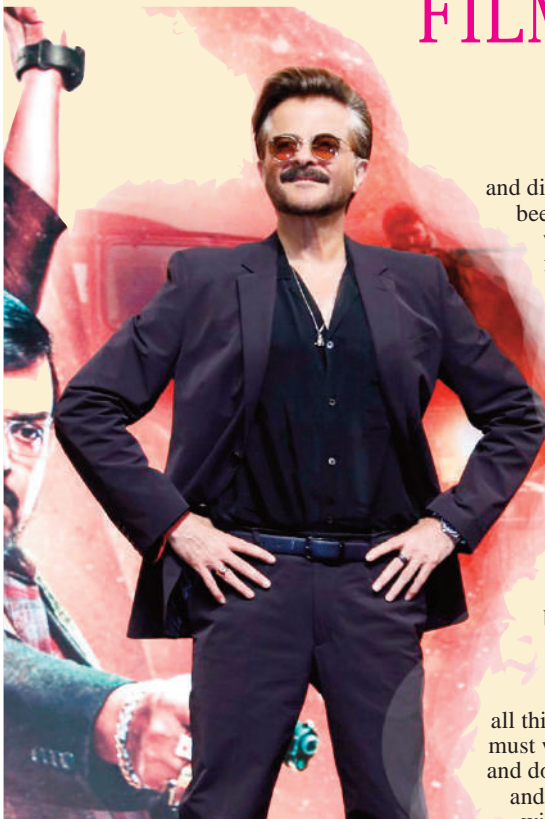
"It is intimate, endearing and globally resonant - exactly the kind of cross-cultural storytelling Netflix is proud to champion," she added.

Mohan, who essays the role of Shenba, said she felt an immediate connection to the character's journey.

"Shenba's dream of Korea comes from a place of wonder and curiosity. Being part of this Netflix film makes the journey even more special," the actor said. (PTI)



I'M JUST FULL OF GRATITUDE, NEVER THOUGHT I WOULD DO SO MANY FILMS: ANIL KAPOOR ON 40 YEARS IN CINEMA



and directors. It's been absolutely wonderful, fulfilling. I never thought I would do so many films and sit in front of you all. I'm just full of gratitude. It's just not my journey but the audience's journey.

"Looking all this, I feel I must work hard and do good films and associate

with good people. It motivates me when I see all the characters I did (in the past)," he told reporters here.

The film, which will be released on the streaming service on March 5, is directed by Suresh Triveni of "Tumhari Sulu" and "Jalsa" fame.

Described as an "adrenaline fuelled action drama", the film follows subedar Arjun Singh who grapples with civilian life, navigating a strained relationship with his daughter and societal dysfunction.

"When this role was offered, I knew there will be a lot of action. I was little tense before starting the shoot. There were

some issues in my legs but I didn't tell Suresh," Kapoor said. "But when camera rolls, I could do everything. I didn't understand this at all. I could do action, horse riding, bike riding, car driving, work in dust. Sometimes I work for 16 hours. Sometimes I work straight from 7 am to 12 noon of other day and pack up at 3 pm," he added.

The 69-year-old actor said his love for challenges and the camera drives him to give his best.

Kapoor added that when Triveni narrated him the story, he accepted the role in a heartbeat as he recognised that it was going to be the most challenging film of his career.

"I have done it as usual with all heart and soul. I worked very hard. Hoping you all will like the film and our work."

Actor Khushbu Sundar, who is returning to Hindi cinema after four decades with the film, credits Kapoor for her success in the south industry. Kapoor and Sundar worked in 1985 film "Meri Jung" which was Sundar's debut film.

"Life is a complete circle. You come back to where you start from. I started from Hindi films. I started with Anil ji, 'Meri Jung' and I'm back here on this dais, sharing it with Anil ji. It's great. All the career I built down south down, Anil ji had a huge contribution in it," she said.

Sundar said she is looking to do substantial roles in Hindi cinema.

"It's great that I'm back here and all I can say is that I hope that the journey continues. I live in Chennai, but I just hope that this starts the journey of me coming back to Hindi cinema and doing some very good, substantial films with good roles," she added.

Actor Mona Singh will be seen as an antagonist in the film. The actor, who earned a lot of critical praise for her role of a cop in "Kohrra 2", said "Subedar" gave her sleepless nights.

"I always try not to repeat my characters... I feel very lucky, grateful that I've friends like Suresh. When I was offered this role, I found it very challenging as I have not done anything like this before. Her name is 'Babli', but she is not bubbly at all. I like to do things which surprise me, challenge me, which give me some sleepless nights. I felt it all while playing this character and I enjoyed," she said.

Written by Triveni and Prajwal Chandrashekar, the film also features Radhikka Madan, Saurabh Shukla, Aditya Rawal and Faisal Malik in pivotal roles.

"Subedar" is produced by Abundantia Entertainment. Opening Image, Anil Kapoor Film & Communication Network Pvt. Ltd. It will premiere exclusively on Prime Video in Hindi, Tamil and Telugu across India and over 240 countries and territories worldwide. (PTI)

Amitabh Bachchan shooting for 'Kalki 2' in Hyderabad, shares BTS photo with Kamal Haasan

Megastar Amitabh Bachchan has shared behind the scenes photos with Tamil superstar Kamal Haasan from the sets of the "Kalki 2", which marks their first project together since 1985's "Geraftaar".

In a post on his official blog on Tumblr, the 83-year-old said he has begun shooting for the project, which is a follow-up to the 2024 Telugu blockbuster "Kalki 2898 AD".

"Meeting up with the great KAMAL HAASAN ... we shall be working together after ages .. last in 'Giraftaar'," Bachchan wrote.

In the photos, the two cinema icons are seen sharing a warm hug, with Bachchan dressed as Ashwatthama, the character he essayed in the first part.

"Kalki 2" began the work .. and shall ever cherish the love and anticipation of anticipated presence on the Sunday .. but hopefully shall be with all this coming Sunday," he added.

Inspired by Hindu scriptures, "Kalki 2898 AD" served as the first instalment in the planned Kalki Cinematic Universe in 2024.

Set in a post-apocalyptic world, the film followed a group of people set out to save a woman pregnant with Lord Vishnu's 10th and final avatar, Kalki, from an evil supreme god-king, Yaskin.

It featured Prabhas as Bhairava/Kama, Bachchan as Ashwatthama, Haasan as Supreme Yaskin and Deepika Padukone as Sumathi aka SUM-80.

The film released in June 2024 and earned over Rs 1000 crore at the global box office. Bachchan also shared images of a crowd waiting outside his Mumbai residence Jalsa to catch a glimpse of the actor.

"Told them that this Sunday I shall not be able to come .. since I was shooting in Hyderabad .. but still they come .. to confirm ... but apologies .. work first .. rest later," he said. (PTI)



Manipuri film 'Boong' wins BAFTA for Best Children's and Family Film, Dharmendra remembered

India found much to celebrate at the BAFTA awards with Manipuri coming of age film "Boong" winning the award for Best Children's & Family Film in a glittering ceremony that saw its director Lakshmi Priya Devi use the spotlight to pray for peace in her home state.

There were other India moments too that stood out at the British Academy of Film and Television Arts awards held on Sunday evening. As singer Jessie Ware performed the poignant "The Way We Were", the late actor Dharmendra was honoured in the In Memoriam section. Actor Alia Bhatt turned presenter for Best Film not in English Language category.

Produced by Farhan Akhtar and Ritesh Sidhwani's Excel Entertainment, "Boong" revolves around a young boy in search of his absent father who he wants to bring to surprise his mother. It was the only Indian film nominated at the awards. Last year, Payal Kapadia's "All We Imagine As Light" was nominated but didn't win.

"Boong", starring Gugun Kipgen and Bala Hijam, beat international competition from other nominees "Lilo and Stitch", "Arco" and "Zootropolis 2".

"The walk up till here felt like the last few steps to reach the summit of a mountain we never knew we were climbing in the first place. I just want to use this opportunity to say that we pray for peace to return in Manipur," Lakshmi Priya said in her acceptance speech about Manipur that has been going through violent ethnic clashes.

"We pray that all the internally displaced children, including the child actors in the film, regain their joy, their innocence, and their dreams once again. We pray that no conflict is ever formidable enough to destroy the one superpower



"Boong", starring Gugun Kipgen and Bala Hijam, beat international competition from other nominees "Lilo and Stitch", "Arco" and "Zootropolis 2"

that all of us have as human beings, that is forgiveness," she added.

In a backstage interaction with reporters, she said the movie was inspired by the folk tales of her grandmother.

"I come from a very troubled state in India. Those folk tales always cushioned me. There would be gunshots in the distance but I felt safe with her. I wanted 'Boong' to be an urban version of her folk

tales with the same kind of warmth that made you feel safe. It's also a closure for myself from those memories of having grown up in a place like that," Lakshmi Priya said.

Producer Akhtar said he has known Lakshmi Priya for two years and backing the film set in a region of India from which they rarely get to watch films "just felt right".

Congratulatory messages poured in after the win with messages from Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Manipur Chief Minister Y. K. Hemchandra Singh, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and many in the industry.

"Congratulations to all those associated with this film. This is indeed a moment of immense joy, especially for Manipur. It

also highlights the immense creative talent in our country," the PM said in a post on X. Singh said the BAFTA win for "Boong" is a moment of immense pride not only for Manipur but for the entire nation.

"Smt Lakshmi Priya Devi's victory at the 79th BAFTA 2026 exemplifies her commitment to impactful filmmaking, with 'Boong' claiming the top honour in the best children's & family film category, bringing accolades to Manipur and India," he said in a post on Facebook.

The win had made the entire nation proud, said Banerjee.

"Against all odds, this film was crowned Best Children and Family Film, becoming the first-ever Indian production to win in this prestigious category," the West Bengal chief minister said.

Dressed in a Gucci gown, Bhatt spoke about the importance of celebrating the language of cinema while presenting the Best Film not in English Language award to Norwegian filmmaker Joachim Trier for his film "Sentimental Value".

"Namaskar! Agla award ek aisi film ke liye hai, jo angrezi mein nahi hai," Bhatt said. "Don't reach for the subtitles just yet. I was only saying in Hindi that the next award is for a film not in the English language. Because while film speaks in countless voices, what we always celebrate is the language of cinema. And that one we all speak fluently. And the incredible nominees are," she added.

At the star-studded gala, held at the Royal Festival Hall by the river Thames, Oscar-front runner "One Battle After Another" won six awards while vampire saga "Sinners" and gothic horror story "Frankenstein" each won three prizes. (PTI)

Tom Hanks to star as Abraham Lincoln in 'Lincoln in the Bardo'

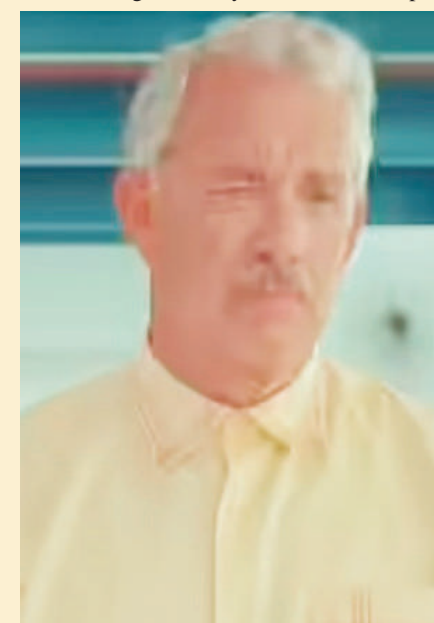
Tom Hanks
the Bard

Hollywood veteran Tom Hanks is set to portray former US president Abraham Lincoln in the upcoming film adaptation of the book "Lincoln in the Bardo".

Oscar-nominated filmmaker Duke Johnson, known for 2015's "Anomalisa", is attached to direct and produce the project with author George Saunders, who penned the 2017 bestselling novel, adapting the screenplay.

According to Variety, Hanks will also produce the project, which is a hybrid of live-action and stop-motion animation, through his Playtone banner with longtime collaborator Gary Goetzman.

While Lincoln's leadership during the Civil War and the abolition of slavery, as well as his assassination in 1865, have frequently been depicted on screen — most notably in Steven Spielberg's "Lincoln", which earned Daniel Day-Lewis an Oscar — "Lincoln in the Bardo" focuses on a more intimate chapter of the president's life: his relationship with his recently deceased 11-year-old son, Willie



Lincoln. Johnson, Paul Young and Devon Young Rabinowitz will produce the film for Starburns Industries. Steven Shareshian, Aaron Mitchell and Saunders will serve as executive producers. Production is set to take place in London.

Hanks has built a long career portraying real-life figures, including astronaut Jim Lovell in "Apollo 13", pilot Chesley "Sully" Sullenberger in "Sully", Washington Post editor Ben Bradlee in "The Post", children's television icon Fred Rogers in "A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood", and Walt Disney in "Saving Mr. Banks". (PTI)

SL seek course correction in must win game against Kiwis



COLOMBO, Feb 24: Sri Lanka will need to improve their batting against slower bowlers when they take on New Zealand in a must-win Super Eight game of the T20 World Cup here on Wednesday.

The home team batters failed to chase a below par 147 against England on a slow turner in Pallekele.

The pitches in Sri Lanka have been tougher for batting compared to co-hosts India and the trend is likely to continue at the Premadasa where bigger boundaries make six-hitting difficult.

Some of the shot selection was questioned following the heavy loss in the Super Eight opener and

Sri Lanka will need to learn from their mistakes.

"It's a T20 game, so obviously you come into a game, so you are looking to score as many runs as you can. So when the ball is not coming on to the bat, it's easier said than done," Sri Lanka's Indian batting coach Vikram Rathour re-

flected on the side's poor performance.

"Are there better options? Yes, definitely could have been taken. I thought on a wicket where the ball is stopping, so pushing is not a great idea. A couple of our wickets lost out on guys pushing for a single. I don't think that was a great

option in these conditions," he added.

While batting has been led by Pathum Nissanka, left-arm spinner Dunith Wellalage has been impressive with the ball. To be fair, even the pacers have delivered thus far in the competition.

New Zealand, who had to share a point with Pakistan following the wash-out at Premadasa, too have good spinners in their ranks including captain Mitchell Santner.

With rain unlikely, both teams would be pushing for their first win of the Super Eight stage.

New Zealand's opening duo of Finn Allen and Tim Seifert showed ominous form during the league stage and would be looking to extend that run. More runs are expected from the bat of Rachin Ravindra who got a much-needed fifty in his previous innings against Canada.

Sri Lanka: Dasun Shanaka (c), Pathum Nissanka, Kamil Mishara, Kusal Mendis, Kamindu Mendis, Kusal Janith Perera, Charith Asalanka, Janith Liyanage, Pavan Rathnayake, Wanindu Hasaranga, Dunith Wellalage, Maheesh Theekshana, Dushmantha Chameera, Matheesha Pathirana, Eshan Malina.

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 7PM IST. (PTI)

No Mourinho and Prestianni for Benfica in Champions League match against Real Madrid



MADRID, Feb 24: There won't be another confrontation between Vinicius Junior and Gianluca Prestianni in the Champions League this week.

Real Madrid and Benfica will meet at Santiago Bernabeu Stadium on Wednesday but UEFA banished Prestianni from the game on Monday following accusations he racially abused Vinicius in the first leg of the knockout round last week.

Madrid won 1-0 in Lisbon after Vinicius scored in the second half. But when the Brazil forward celebrated by the Benfica corner flag and upset the local fans and players, the game was halted for nearly 10 minutes. Prestianni confronted Vinicius, who accused the Argentine of calling him "monkey." Prestianni denied racially insulting Vinicius.

The anti-racism protocol was activated but no further action was taken during the match as there was no evidence against Prestianni, who covered his mouth with his shirt while talking to Vinicius. The Madrid forward was shown a yellow card after his celebration.

UEFA said the one-match suspension of Prestianni from its control, ethics and disciplinary body was related to discriminatory behavior.

"This is without prejudice to any ruling that the UEFA disciplinary bodies may subsequently make following the conclusion of the ongoing investigation and its respective submission to the UEFA disciplinary bodies," it said in a statement.

Benfica said in a statement that it lamented that Prestianni was suspended while the investigation was underway. It said it would appeal UEFA's suspension. Portuguese media said Prestianni was expected to travel to Madrid with the squad.

Prestianni did not play in Benfica's 3-0 win over AVS on Saturday in the Portuguese league because of a yellow card suspension, but he was expected to be on the field along with Vinicius during Wednesday's match at the Bernabeu. Vinicius scored Madrid's goal in a 2-1 loss at Osasuna on Saturday in La Liga.

Mourinho out
Missing for Benfica on Wednesday will be coach José Mourinho, who was sent off late in the first leg for complaining to the referee. The former Madrid coach criticized Vinicius for celebrating his goal by the Benfica flag.

Benfica said Mourinho was not going to attend the pre-game news conference on Tuesday, with his assistant taking over.

Mourinho said Saturday it was a "tough week" for everyone at Benfica. He declined to comment when asked if he regretted his criticism of Vinicius.

Surprising Bodo/Glimt
On Tuesday, small Norwegian club Bodo/Glimt will look to keep its surprising run going when it

takes a two-goal advantage for the second leg at Inter Milan.

The first leg win followed back-to-back wins against Manchester City and Atletico Madrid in the league phase.

Inter, last year's Champions League runner-up, will hope to overcome the deficit and show the loss in Norway was a fluke amid a run of seven wins in eight games across all competitions. It will have to do it without star forward Lautaro Martinez because of a left calf injury.

"We have to do what we know how to do, step onto the pitch with confidence, and be aware that if there's a team that can turn this tie around, it's ours," Inter coach Cristian Chivu said on Monday. "We mustn't lose our balance, confidence, or self-belief. A match lasts 90, 100, even 120 minutes, and maybe penalties after that. We mustn't rush to score and then leave ourselves open. It's about managing key moments."

Juve's crisis
Another Italian club which will need a comeback will be Juventus when it hosts Galatasaray on Wednesday after losing 5-2 in the first leg in Turkey.

Juventus has been struggling, though, and is coming off a 2-0 home loss to Como in Serie A that hurt its hopes of Champions League qualification next season. It was Juventus' third straight defeat across all competitions and its fifth game in a row without a win.

Focused PSG
Defending European champion Paris Saint-Germain and Monaco won in Ligue 1 this weekend ahead of their second leg in Paris on Wednesday. Monaco's 3-2 victory over Lens allowed PSG to regain the league lead after beating Metz 3-0.

In the Champions League, PSG came from two goals down against Monaco to win the first leg 3-2. Désiré Doué, who scored twice against Monaco, also found the net in the win against Metz.

Atletico Madrid rebounds
Atletico squandered a two-goal lead and conceded late in a 3-3 draw in its first leg at Club Brugge.

Diego Simeone's team rebounded ahead of Tuesday's return match by defeating Espanyol 4-2 in La Liga on Saturday. Ademola Lookman scored again, earning his fourth goal in six matches since being signed by Atletico.

"It's always important to win ahead of an important match like the one we have on Tuesday," Simeone said.

Elsewhere
Also on Tuesday, Newcastle will be in control when it hosts Qarabag defending a 6-1 first-leg win, while Bayer Leverkusen holds a 2-0 lead from its win at Olympiakos. Borussia Dortmund also won 2-0 in the first leg against Atalanta ahead of the return game in Italy. (AP)

Fiorentina rises out of Serie A drop zone

FLORENCE, Feb 24: Moise Kean scored for the third match in a row to help Fiorentina beat Pisa 1-0 and climb out of the Serie A drop zone.

The result lifted Fiorentina into 16th place and out of the relegation zone for the first time in months. It has the same amount of points as Cremonese and Lecce but was above both on goal difference.

Pisa, which has still won only once all season, was second to last with the same points as last-placed Verona. Both clubs were nine points from safety with 12 games remaining.

Kean followed recent goals against Torino and Como with an early strike from close range after a blocked shot fell kindly at his feet.

Pisa goalkeeper Nicolas made several fine saves while Fiorentina's second win in a row was only its second clean sheet of the year. Pisa has gone 15 matches without a league win.

Later, a second-half penalty gave Bologna a 1-0 win over Udinese and lifted it two places into eighth.

Federico Bernardeschi scored from the spot with 15 minutes left after Jesper Karlström was adjudged to have felled Santiago Castro inside the box. It was Bernardeschi's first goal since returning from a month out with a collarbone injury.

Bologna avoided a fifth consecutive defeat at home in Serie A for the first time since 1991. It climbed above Lazio and Sassuolo. Udinese, meanwhile, remained 11th. (AP)

For running away from dope test, AIU bans Indian runner Pooja Aatmaram for 3 years

NEW DELHI, Feb 24: Indian long-distance runner Pooja Aatmaram had made a nervous dash away from her Chaperone ahead of a scheduled in-competition dope test last year, revealed the Athletics Integrity Unit (AIU) as it handed her a reduced three-year ban for early admission of guilt.

The 30-year-old Pooja, who mostly competes in the 5000m and 10,000m events, had finished third in the Indian Grand Prix 2 in 2024 while representing Rajasthan, which remains her most noteworthy performance.

She was picked out for a dope test after winning the Indian Oil WNC Navy Half Marathon in Mumbai on November 23 last year.

"The Athlete was verbally notified of her selection for Testing immediately after she had finished the Race by a Doping Control Officer (DCO) and a Lead DCO. The Athlete failed to sign the Doping

Questions over EFI's role in facilitating duty exemption for pension-drawing Arjuna awardee



NEW DELHI, Feb 24: The conduct of the Equestrian Federation of India (EFI) has come under scrutiny after it facilitated customs duty exemption for Arjuna awardee Major General Deep Ahlawat to import a competition horse, despite his status as a pension-drawing former athlete who is no longer active in the sport.

Under the Arjuna Award pension scheme, recipients are required to submit an undertaking affirming that they are not active competitors. Major General Ahlawat, a retired equestrian rider and Arjuna awardee, is currently availing the pension.

Documents accessed by PTI show that on June 26, EFI wrote to the Directorate General of Foreign Trade seeking issuance of the necessary import licence with suitable duty concessions to facilitate the import of six horses from Germany, the U.K., France, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Denmark, Belgium and Hungary.

The federation stated in the letter that the move would help in the growth of equestrian sport in India and improve standards to win medals at international events.

On September 9, 2025, EFI again wrote to the Sports Ministry that Major General Ahlawat would import two horses for training and participation in various events and that a duty exemption was required for one.

The federation requested the ministry to issue a Customs Duty Exemption Certificate (CDEC) so that the consignment could be released at the earliest.

The horse imported is a warmblood named Lovely Miss Money Penny.

The sequence of communications has raised a larger question over EFI's decision-making process.

Facilitation of a competition horse import with duty concessions appears at variance with the pension undertaking that requires an awardee to step away from active sport. While applying for pension, the applicant has to give an undertaking that he/she has "retired from the active sports career".

Lt. Col. MM Rahman, who as EFI Joint Secretary recommended Ahlawat for import of horse, said they followed the EFI SOP while taking the decision.

"The import has been done in accordance with the provisions of the SOP issued by EFI on import of sporting horses," Rahman told PTI.

However, the SOP does not mention if a retired athlete can be recommended for importing a sports horse and that too with duty exemption.

When this was pointed out to Rahman, he replied, "He can also import for his son (Major Yashdeep Ahlawat) who is an active rider."

However, the SOP does not say that a retired athlete can import a horse for his family.

Also, the duty exemption is given to eminent sports persons. In this case the horse was imported for Euro 7000 and a 52 percent of the total import amount should have been paid as duty.

Major General Ahlawat was approached for a comment but he did not reply to the query.

EFI Secretary General Col. Jaiveer Singh admitted that such an event has happened.

"Such brazen misuse of position by EC members was rampant in the last one year. There are more serious incidents yet to come to light," Jaiveer told PTI.

The Delhi High Court had recently ordered fresh elections to the EFI and directed the Indian Olympic Association (IOA) to constitute an ad-hoc panel to run the affairs of the federation for three months.

"I welcome the honourable high court of Delhi's decision to appoint an Adhoc committee, which should have been done long time ago. I urge the Sports Ministry to please ensure that anyone with a conflict of interest is not appointed on the Adhoc committee particularly individuals owning clubs or whose kith and kin are active riders who aspire to represent India and coaches," said Jaiveer. (PTI)

Australia-backed para-swimming workshop launched in Delhi



NEW DELHI, Feb 24: A three-day para-swimming coaching workshop, supported by the Australian High Commission, was launched here on Monday.

To be held at the Dr Shyama Prasad Mukherjee Swimming Complex, experts and coaches will exchange ideas on how Indian para-swimming can be improved and taken to the next level during the workshop. The three-day workshop will also be held at the Lakshmbhai National Institute of Physical Education (LNPIE) in Gwalior.

Paralympic Committee of India president Devendra Jhajharia presented Australian High Commissioner Philip Green with a shawl during the inauguration ceremony.

Describing the initiative as his brainchild, Green said Australia was keen to share its expertise in para sports with India.

"We are delighted to bring the expertise to India for the advancement of para swimming. Australia and India's association has mostly been about cricket, but as India takes a natural leap towards hosting global sporting events, Australia wants to remain a partner," Green said.

Manjushree Dayanand, Deputy Director General of the Sports Authority of India, welcomed the initiative. Former Olympian and coach Martin Roberts highlighted the technical complexity of para-swimming. (PTI)

Control Form (DCF) at the time of notification," the AIU said in its detailed judgement.

"Following the verbal notification, the Athlete was accompanied by a Chaperone from the finish line heading towards the Doping Control Station (DCS). During this time the Athlete ran away from the Chaperone and into a crowd.

"The Chaperone tried to locate the Athlete and immediately reported that the Athlete had run away and disappeared into the crowd after verbal notification of her selection for Testing to the DCO, who subsequently informed the Race Director," it added.

The Race Director then attempted to contact her over phone but the AIU said she did not respond to any of those calls.

"The Lead DCO also attempted to reach the Athlete by telephone, without success. No Sample was ultimately collected from the Athlete." (PTI)

VAIL, Feb 24: American skier Lindsey Vonn says she nearly lost her left leg following a frightening crash in the women's downhill at the Milan Cortina Olympics.

Vonn shared in an Instagram post on Monday that her injuries went far beyond the complex tibia fracture in the leg she initially revealed after clipping a gate and sailing off course just 13 seconds into her run on Feb. 8.

The 41-year-old Vonn said the trauma from the crash led to compartment syndrome in the leg. Compartment syndrome involves excessive pressure building up inside a muscle, either from bleeding or swelling. High pressure restricts blood flow and can lead to permanent injury if not treated quickly.

"When you have so much trauma to one area of your body so that there's too much blood and it gets stuck and it basically crushes everything," Vonn said.

Vonn credited Dr. Tom Hackett,

an orthopedic surgeon who works for Vonn and Team USA, for conducting a fasciotomy to salvage her leg.

"He filleted it open (and) let it breathe, and he saved me," she said.

Vonn noted that Hackett was only in Cortina because she was competing after tearing the ACL in her left knee shortly before the Olympics.

"If I hadn't had done that, Tom wouldn't have been there (and he) wouldn't have been able to save my leg," she said.

Vonn, who said she has been discharged from the hospital, also broke her right ankle in the crash.

"It has been quite the journey and by far the most extreme and painful and challenging injury I've ever faced in my entire life times 100," she said.

Vonn underwent multiple surgeries during a week-long stay at a hospital in Treviso, Italy, following the accident. She credited both Hackett and Italian doctors for their efforts



to repair her leg, which she said was "in pieces" following the accident.

She says she struggled with pain and blood loss in the immediate aftermath and had to receive a transfusion to help raise her hemoglobin levels.

Vonn, who said she is "very much immobile," is confined to a wheelchair at the moment, but has turned her attention to her rehab and

is working her way toward being able to use crutches. She estimated it will take about a year for the bones in her left leg to heal. Only after that will doctors be able to go in and repair the torn ACL, which played no role in the crash.

"It's going to be a long road," she said. "I always fight and we keep going."

Vonn stressed she had "no regrets" about her comeback following a six-year retirement or her decision to ski at the Olympics despite the knee injury.

"I wish it had ended differently, but I'd rather go down swinging than not try at all," said Vonn, who was atop the World Cup series rankings in the downhill when she arrived in Cortina. "I think what I was able to achieve was more than anyone expected to begin with. ... This year was incredible and so worth everything."

She likened her injuries to "one blip on the radar." She did not go into any sort of detail about her competitive career, though her father, Alan Hackett, told The Associated Press shortly after the accident he would like her to retire.

"Life is life and we have to take the punches that come," Vonn said. "Going to do the best I can with this one. It really knocked me down. But I'm like Rocky. I'll just keep getting back up." (AP)

Ton-up Pundir, Yawer shine as J&K dominate fancied Karnataka on Day 1

HUBBALLI, Feb 24: A masterful unbeaten century from Shubham Pundir and a tenacious 88 from young Yawer Hassan saw Jammu & Kashmir seize control of the Ranji Trophy final, ending the opening day at a solid 284 for two and leaving Karnataka's bowlers searching for answers here on Tuesday.

Pundir, the 27-year-old left-handed batter, was 117 not out at stumps and giving him company was Abdul Samad on 52, the duo having added 105 runs for the third wicket after skipper Paras Dogra retired hurt.

This was after Pundir and Yawer stitched together a stand of 139 runs to lay the foundation for a big total against the eight-time champions, whose batters have a great record at this venue.

Pundir reached his hundred in style, smashing Shikhar Shetty for a six over deep mid-wicket. He marked reaching the landmark by removing his helmet and raising his arms in the direction of the dressing room.

Earlier, on a pitch that is likely to break up as the game progresses, Jammu and Kashmir won a good toss, and Dogra's decision to bat first was on expected lines.

Playing in their maiden Ranji final after an inspired run that saw them claim away victories against established teams such as Madhya Pradesh and Bengal in the knockouts, J&K lost Qamran Iqbal (6) early.

The opener poked at a Prasidh Krishna delivery that straightened a bit to induce an outside edge for KL Rahul to complete a comfortable catch in the slip cordon.

The lack of foot movement from Qamran played a part in the day's first wicket, but J&K's decision to bat first was vindicated by Yawer and Pundir, the duo carrying the team to 104 for one at lunch.

Yawer was unbeaten on 57 at the lunch break, and Pundir was on 38 as the duo batted with confidence to keep the experienced Karnataka bowling attack at bay.

It was not easy out there in the middle



and there were numerous plays and misses, and a few streaky edges too, but both Yawer and Pundir saw off the difficult period against the new ball.

Yawer and Pundir may not have looked

the most fluent, but they were effective nonetheless, stitching together a big partnership for the second wicket while keeping the scoreboard ticking at around three runs an over.

The Karnataka bowlers -- the three pacers and leg-spinner Shreyas Gopal -- were disciplined with their line and length but didn't get any reward for their perseverance. Shreyas, the season's leading wicket-taker with 55 scalps heading into the title clash, too beat the bat on a few occasions but did not taste success, even as Yawer and Pundir looked to go after him with a determination to not allow him to settle into a nice rhythm.

The 22-year-old Yawer, who made his First Class debut in former India captain Rohit Sharma's last red-ball game in 2025 and had gone nine games without a fifty, chose the big occasion to show his wares and found the fence 13 times.

However, having done all the hard work in the company of Pundir while approaching his maiden hundred, Yawer fell to Prasidh, prodding at a delivery outside the off-stump to give a catch to Rahul at first slip. Both dismissals for the day were similar in nature.

Before making the breakthrough,

Prasidh had tested Yawer with a bouncer that hit the batter on the body and required medical attention.

Captain Dogra was hit on his neck by a sharp bouncer from Prasidh, after which the seamer appealed for a catch at forward short-leg thinking that the ball may have grazed the glove, but replays showed that it did not and the batter was safe.

However, Dogra, while attempting to fend off the bouncer, did get hurt and the physio was called in to apply ice pack.

The J&K physio was summoned again after some time with the ice pack to tend to Dogra, who had by then taken a few blows, and this time the skipper was on his way back to the dressing room after receiving a signal from coach Ajay Sharma, paving the way for Samad's entry into the middle.

Pundir and Samad then batted with ease to accumulate runs and consolidate J&K's position with their unbroken century partnership. (PTI)

We'll try to be smarter: Zimbabwe coach



MUMBAI, Feb 24: Zimbabwe head coach Justin Sammons is expecting India to come out all guns blazing in their Super Eight clash of the T20 World Cup on Thursday but he believes his underdog team would be ready after the hard lessons learnt from a heavy loss to the West Indies here.

Zimbabwe were thrashed by 107 runs by the Caribbean outfit, which posted the second highest total of the tournament history, 254/6, in their Super Eight match here on Monday.

Sammons is quite sure that India too will come hard at them in Chennai after being handed an 83-run defeat by South Africa.

"We know the way India is going to come out and it's going to be very similar to the way West Indies approached their innings. They're (India) not going to hold back," Sammons said after the match.

"There will be good learnings from that and how we deal with that, under pressure in the moment, how do we stay calm and just think on our feet and also just try and change things up a little bit, disrupt the rhythm of the batters," he added.

Acknowledging the mistakes made during the West Indies game, Sammons said his side, especially the bowling unit, was guilty of being "predictable". (PTI)

Australia outplay India in opening Women's ODI

BRISBANE, Feb 24: Australia outplayed reigning world champions India in all departments to pick up a comfortable six-wicket win in the first Women's ODI here on Tuesday.

India put up an ordinary performance with the bat to be bowled out for 214 despite solid fifties from Smriti Mandhana (58 off 68) and captain Harmanpreet Kaur (53 off 84).

Australia chased down the modest target with little difficulty following fifties from skipper Alyssa Healy (50 off 70), who is in the middle of her farewell series, and Beth Mooney (76 off 79).

Spinner Ashleigh Gardner was the standout bowler for the home team, returning figures of three for 33 in seven overs.

The multi-format series is now locked at 2-2 with India winning the preceding T20 series 2-1. Following the three-match ODI series, a one off Test will be played in Perth at the end of which Healy will call time on her career.

Despite a drought-ending ICC title in November, the Harmanpreet Kaur-led side still remains a work in progress and doesn't have the aura of the all-conquering Australian side.

"We started with the bat with two wickets down which is never easy. We did really well in terms of coming back. Wicket didn't play the way we thought it would. We've been playing good cricket so it's not like we'll change much after one loss," said Mandhana, acknowledging the overall batting failure in the game.

"We have to come together as a batting unit and post a good total. But we won't think about it a lot. We have two days, we will reflect on it and come back stronger," she asserted.

The positive for India with the ball was the performance of left-arm spinner Shree Charani, who was rewarded with wickets of Phoebe Litchfield and Georgia Voll in successive balls in the 11th over.

India had won the toss and opted to bat at the Allan Border Field.

With Kim Garth and Ellyse Perry out of the three-match series due to injuries, pacers Megan Schutt and Lucy Hamilton were called up to the Australian side at the 11th hour.

Megan took just two balls to strike, trapping Pratika Rawal in front with a sharp inswinger in the first over of the match.

It was Rawal's national comeback from the ankle injury she suffered during India's triumphant cam-



paigned at the ODI World Cup at home last year.

Batting at number three for the first time, Shafali Verma did not get any rhythm in her short stay in the middle. She eventually offered a straight catch back to Darcie Brown.

Mandhana began with a string of streaky boundaries past the slip cordon before producing a series of exquisite drives off the pace bowlers.

The Australian spinners, however, maintained the pressure in the middle overs as Gardner had Jemimah Rodrigues caught behind with a full ball that straightened a fraction to take the outside edge.

After Mandhana and Deepti Sharma fell to the sweep shot, Harmanpreet took time to stabilise the innings. She too, however, fell to the sweep shot in the deep off Gardner.

Kashvee Gautam (43 off 44) took the total past 200 and impressed with her six-hitting ability in an otherwise disappointing batting performance from the visitors.

She hit three sixes in total, including a straight one over long-on off Megan. (PTI)

Shimron Hetmyer an asset at No 3, was being wasted down the order: Shai Hope

MUMBAI, Feb 24: Shimron Hetmyer has been an "asset" for the West Indies at No.3 in the ongoing T20 World Cup, said skipper Shai Hope as he regretted the big-hitter getting "wasted" down the batting order previously.

Hetmyer's 34-ball 85 was instrumental in the Caribbean side's massive 107-run win over Zimbabwe in a Super Eight match here on Monday, which Hope described as a great "confidence booster" ahead of clashes against South Africa and India.

Hetmyer struck seven sixes and as many fours to help the West Indies post 254/6 -- the second highest total in T20 World Cup history.

"The way he is batting, I think sometimes, he was kind of wasted down the bottom in the innings. He's such a good player, he can bat in all situations... (against) spin (and) pace," Hope told reporters after the match.

"To utilise him in that phase, he comes out and plays with that freedom that we wanted him to play with. He's been an asset for us, especially in this tournament. We gave him the role from South Africa (series and) he has embraced it," he added.

Hetmyer has been a lower order floater for a major part of his career taking a position anywhere between numbers 5 to 7 for his proven credentials of being a finisher. He has shown himself to be equally effective higher up the order in the ongoing tournament.

Hope lauded the West Indies' all-



round show against Zimbabwe, in which spinners Gudakesh Motie (4/28) and Akeal Hosein (3/28) also had a big role to play.

"The way we've been playing, it certainly gives us a lot of confidence," Hope said after the West Indies notched up their fifth consecutive win in the tournament.

"(It was a) great, great start, great confidence booster. But those games are gone. We've got to look ahead now. We've got South Africa next, and then India after that," he said.

Hope singled out Motie for praise, saying he put in the hard yards away from the game.

"He got a little period before, it was the New Zealand series (that) he went home, worked on some skills. You can see he's back to where he was before," Hope said.

"He even added something to his game as well, that wrist spinner has been very, very crucial for us, especially against the lefties."

Hope admitted South Africa will

have some advantage in their next game on Thursday, having played most of their matches in Ahmedabad.

"It's certainly a factor, but you've still got to play the (best) cricket on the day. Most of the guys in our team have played in Ahmedabad several times, most of them are in the IPL and (even) against India on some occasions, so it wouldn't be alien to us," he said.

"But still, when you play at a venue for so many games in a particular tournament in a short span of time, you would have an advantage. That is reality. But I don't think that would deter us from what we're trying to do, we're still going to play the same cricket that we're playing."

After the game against South Africa, the West Indies will play defending champions India in Kolkata on Sunday. Akeal Hosein said the ball grips more in Kolkata than Ahmedabad but warned against the shorter boundaries at the Eden Gardens. (PTI)

Everyone has to fight for place in team: Women's hockey coach Marijne

NEW DELHI, Feb 24: Past laurels will not guarantee selection and players, irrespective of their stature, will have to fight for their spot in a potentially make or break year for the Indian women's hockey team, its new coach Sjoerd Marijne has asserted.

The Indian women's team is going through a difficult phase. It failed to qualify for the Paris Olympics in 2024, an unexpected low after having achieved a historic fourth-place finish in the Tokyo Games under Marijne's guidance.

The side also failed to qualify for the FIH Pro League last year and could not find a place in the World Cup through the Asia Cup route. Marijne, who quit due to personal reasons after the 2021 Olympics, was brought back early this year following the removal of Harendra Singh due to poor results.

The team is now looking to revive itself at the World Cup qualifiers in Hyderabad from March 8-14 under Marijne.

"We have brought in six junior players and I got to know them really fast. The moment I was appointed, I started watching junior women players' performance in the HILL...I was curious to know how they respond to training sessions with the seniors and that is going really well," Marijne told 'PTI Bhasha' in an interview.

"Seniors understand that past achievements don't count, and everyone has to fight for the spot. It's normal in team sport," he said when asked about how Tokyo



Olympians are reacting to this approach.

He also reiterated that things won't change overnight but assured that the team is gradually getting back to its best in terms of fitness after the re-appointment of renowned strength and conditioning coach Wayne Lombard.

"We are getting there with small steps at a time. When Wayne (Lombard) and I arrived, there were a lot of small injuries in the team. That obviously won't go overnight."

"We have to be very careful and take an individual approach. Some players need more time and some less and it is very important to get the freshness back," said the Dutch coach.

He also has a long-term vision for the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics but that road, in his opinion, would be a tough one to negotiate.

these girls have learnt in the last few years, what worked and what didn't.

"Fitness levels cannot go up in four-five weeks and if we do too much, there would be a risk of injuries. Workload management is very important and luckily we have a very good support staff. I am happy that Wayne is back and guiding the process," he said.

Marijne said mental conditioning is important because sometimes inner thoughts become the players' biggest enemy.

"Avoiding negative thoughts is important and it can't be done in one session, it's a process. We are working on it and hired someone for that. We do it with profiling so that players get to know themselves and their teammates much better. It also creates better unity," said the coach.

When asked whether there were any specific reasons behind the emphasis on team unity, he said that it was because of the feedback he received upon joining.

"I have not been part of the process for the last few years and I cannot comment on what the previous coaches have done. One of the things I have noticed and the feedback I received is that this (team unity) is the thing which needs to be improved," said Marijne without divulging any further.

His immediate focus is on the World Cup qualifiers, but Marijne is also targeting Pro League qualification, and an Asian Games medal this year for the team. (PTI)



NEW DELHI, Feb 24: More than two decades after making what was then widely seen as a "dreadful" decision against Indian cricket icon Sachin Tendulkar, legendary umpire Steve Bucknor has finally expressed regrets and accepted that "it was a mistake." Bucknor, who retired in 2009, was one of the most respected umpires in world cricket for over two decades.

However, he did make a few contentious calls involving Tendulkar, the most shocking being an LBW dismissal during an India-Australia Test match at Brisbane's Gabba 22 years ago.

In an interview with the West Indies Cricket Umpires' Association, when Bucknor was asked about one of the most difficult decisions he had to live with as an umpire, he said, "Giving Sachin Tendulkar out leg before wicket, and it's a matter of knowing that it was a mistake, but until this day, every day, people talk about it."

"Why did I give him out? Was he out and so on? But then in life, mistakes happen. I have accepted that it was a mistake, and life goes on." In that match at Gabba in the 2003-04 series, Tendulkar was given out LBW by Bucknor following a loud appeal from Australian fast bowler Jason Gillespie and his teammates.

Batting on 3, Tendulkar had attempted to leave the ball, which struck him high on the pads, but Bucknor was convinced by the Australian appeal. Television replays later confirmed the ball was clearly going over the stumps. In the commentary box, the late Tony Greig had referred to it as "a dreadful" decision and he was not the only one who thought that way at the time. The match, the first of a four-match series and in which India skipper Sourav Ganguly struck a fluent 144, ended in a draw.

That was not the only instance when Bucknor gave Tendulkar out wrongly. In a match against Pakistan at Eden Gardens in 2005, the Jamaican adjudged Tendulkar caught behind off Abdul Razaq despite a half-hearted appeal.

Replays, however, showed a wide gap between the bat and the ball. During an interactive session with fans in 2024, Tendulkar was asked about his relationship with Bucknor, and in lighter vein, he had said, "When I am batting, give him boxing gloves to wear (so he can't raise his finger)." (PTI)