

6 WORLD

8 NATION

- US business chambers, think tanks welcome India-US deal
- Russia has not received any message from India about stopping oil purchases: Kremlin spokesman
- India-US trade deal a 'big decision': PM
- India-US trade deal opens gateway to endless opportunities for our youth, entrepreneurs: Shah

India-US trade deal historic, opens new opportunities for entrepreneurs: Himanta



STAFF REPORTER
GUWAHATI, Feb 3: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday described the India-US trade deal as historic, stating that it would unlock vast opportunities for India's entrepreneurs, farmers, skilled professionals and micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs).

In a post on X, Sarma said the agreement reached between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and US President Donald Trump marked a new milestone in India-US relations and reflected the shared vision of the two leaders for deeper economic engagement.

"The India-US Trade Deal is historic. It opens new doors for India's

entrepreneurs, farmers, skilled workers and MSMEs," Sarma said, expressing gratitude to Prime Minister Modi and President Trump for their leadership and commitment to strengthening bilateral ties.

The trade deal was sealed following a telephone conversation between Prime Minister Modi and President Trump on Monday, during which both leaders reaffirmed their resolve to expand economic cooperation and enhance market access for businesses on both sides. The phone call is understood to have focused on boosting trade flows, investment, supply chains and technology collaboration between the two countries.

Sarma said the agreement would help Indian businesses, particularly MSMEs and startups, gain improved access to the US market, while also creating new opportunities for farmers and skilled workers. He added (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

'Union Budget's ₹200 crore allocation to KAAC historic' Tuliram: Devp works to get accelerated

HT Bureau
DIPHU, Feb 3: Chief Executive Member of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council, Tuliram Ronghang, on Tuesday hailed the Union Budget for what he described as an unprecedented financial commitment to the council, calling it a historic step towards direct funding and accelerated development in the region.

Addressing a press conference at the Arboretum-cum-Craft Centre here, Ronghang, flanked by Howraghat MLA Darsing Ronghang and BJP Karbi Anglong district president Roland Killing, expressed gratitude to the Central government for the enhanced allocations for the Northeast and Karbi Anglong in particular.

The CEM highlighted two major budgetary provisions, including an increase in the allocation to the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER) to ₹28,000 crore



for overall development of the region.

He also pointed out that, for the first time, the Union Budget has earmarked a KAAC-specific allocation of ₹200 crore.

"This is historic. It has been done without any prior agreement, and notably the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council has received

a higher allocation compared to others in the state," Ronghang said, adding that the move reflects progress towards the council's long-standing demand for direct funding.

Ronghang also outlined ongoing and completed developmental initiatives in the district, stating that several flagship projects were

nearing completion.

He said the medical college in Diphu is now operational and the cancer hospital has been completed, following which the council plans to allocate funds to support cancer treatment for local residents.

He further informed that road-widening works are progressing across the district and the Diphu flyover is scheduled to be inaugurated later this month.

Emphasising welfare measures, the CEM said the council would intensify schemes for the underprivileged, assuring "zero discrimination" in service delivery.

Taking aim at the opposition, Ronghang dismissed criticism from the All Party Hill Leaders Conference and the Congress as "imaginary accusations", asserting that the BJP-led administration has delivered on its commitments to the people. On the issue of upcoming (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Kamakhya ropeway project will boost religious tourism: Himanta

STAFF REPORTER
GUWAHATI, Feb 3: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday said that the proposed Kamakhya Ropeway project will significantly boost religious tourism in the state, while easing travel for lakhs of devotees visiting the revered Kamakhya Temple, one of the most important Shakti Peeths in the country.

In a post on X, Sarma said the ₹213-crore ropeway project has already been sanctioned and work on it will begin soon. The project will provide a seamless and alternative mode of transport between the Kamakhya temple atop Nilachal Hill and the Guwahati railway station, greatly reducing travel time and congestion on the narrow hill roads.

"The Kamakhya Ropeway project will immensely boost tourism, ease travel between the Shakti Peeth and the railway station and provide an alternative route for lakhs of devotees visiting the sacred site," the chief minister said.

Perched on the Nilachal Hill overlooking the Brahmaputra river, the Kamakhya Temple is among the most prominent pilgrimage destinations in eastern India.

Dedicated to Goddess Kamakhya, the temple attracts millions of devotees every year from across India and abroad, particularly during the annual Ambubachi Mela, which is considered one of the largest religious congregations in the Northeast.

Beyond its religious significance, Kamakhya is also a major tourism driver for Assam. The temple serves as a gateway for visitors exploring Guwahati, river tourism on the Brahmaputra, wildlife destinations like Kaziranga National Park, and the broader cultural landscape of the Northeast. However, increasing footfall over the years has put immense pressure on road infrastructure leading to the hilltop shrine.

Officials said the ropeway project is expected to address these challenges by offering a safe, eco-friendly and efficient transport option (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Bhutan's queen mother honoured with 'Soldier of Humanity' Award in Assam



KOKRAJHAR, Feb 3: The queen mother of Bhutan, Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck, was on Tuesday conferred the 22nd Upendra Nath Brahma 'Soldier of Humanity' Award, 2025, at Kokrajhar in Assam's Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR), an official statement said.

She was presented with the award in recognition of her exemplary humanitarian services and compassionate leadership.

Assam Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya, speaking at the award ceremony at the Jwhlao Nileswar Brahma

Auditorium, Bodoland University in Kokrajhar, said the presence of the queen mother, the first wife of former king Jigme Singye Wangchuck, elevated the significance of the event and termed it a privilege to welcome her on behalf of the people of the state.

He also said that presentation of the award to her was a "perfect tribute to the personality who has been steadfast in her mission of humanitarian service and championing the cause of human dignity".

Acharya maintained that her contributions in social welfare, cultural preservation, women empowerment and compassionate leadership embody the true spirit of the 'Soldier of Humanity' honour.

He added that the award also symbolises the deep, historic and enduring ties between India and Bhutan, with Assam in the centre.

Acharya noted that the 'Soldier of Humanity' Award is dedicated to the ideals and philosophy (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

CM hails proposed rail link along 'Chicken's Neck'

GUWAHATI, Feb 3: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday said the proposed underground rail link along the strategic 'Chicken's Neck' corridor in West Bengal will ensure a secure transportation route, connecting the Northeast. He said the "strategic vulnerability" of the narrow strip of land should have been addressed in the aftermath of 1971.

"This is BIG. For decades, the 'Chicken's Neck' has been used as an intimidation tactic by anti-national forces, both within and beyond our borders," Sarma said in a post on X.

"The proposed underground rail link marks a major strategic breakthrough, creating a secure and foolproof transportation corridor between the North East and the rest of the country," he added.

Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw had on Monday said plans are afoot to lay underground railway tracks along the 40-km strategic corridor and also make the existing tracks four-line. The strategic corridor, called the 'Chicken's Neck' for its shape, is a strip of land located in northern West Bengal's Siliguri area, having a width of over 20 km. The strip is sandwiched between Nepal and Bangladesh, with Bhutan and China a few hundred kilometres away.

Thanking Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Vaishnaw for the decision, Sarma said, "...We are taking a giant step towards mitigating this long-standing strategic vulnerability - one that, in hindsight, should have been addressed much earlier, perhaps even in the aftermath of 1971."

Sarma had earlier said that then PM Indira Gandhi "could have asked to expand the Chicken's Neck corridor" after the 1971 war. "She could have redrawn the map for NE's straight access to the rest of the country and not remain dependent on the 'Chicken's Neck' corridor," he had said.

The CM had also held that if India's first PM Jawaharlal Nehru had not "bartered Chitragong port" with a portion of Punjab with Pakistan during Partition, the Northeast would not have been dependent on the 'Chicken's Neck'. The proposed underground lines will be between Tin Mile Haat and Rangapani railway stations in West Bengal, Northeast Frontier Railway officials said. One of the lines will go towards Bagdogra in West Bengal, vital for the air defence mechanism of the country, they said. (PTI)

Eviction drive in Hailakandi to clear encroachments from forest land

HAILAKANDI, Feb 3: An eviction drive to clear encroachments from forest lands in Hailakandi district along the Assam-Mizoram inter-state boundary took place for the second consecutive day on Tuesday, a forest officer said.

He said the anti-encroachment drive was underway peacefully, with most illegal settlers leaving in advance, he said.

The eviction drive is underway in Damcherra forest village under the jurisdiction of Garmora Inner Line Reserve Forest near the inter-state border with Mizoram.

"No cement is strong enough to hold on to our bulldozers who are on a mission -- to free Assam from encroachments. An extensive eviction drive is underway in Hailakandi to free our forests and restore greenery," Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma had posted on X on Monday.

"Our Aim: Reclaiming every inch of what belongs to us," he added.

The forest officer said about 2,800 bighas (924 acres) of land is targeted to be cleared of encroachments during the drive, with more than 500 families affected.

"Yesterday, the eviction was carried out in sectors 5, 6 and 7. The drive is on in sectors 1, 2, 3 and 4 today. There is no resistance as such from the people with most families leaving with their property already," he said.

"Adequate security deployment has been made and senior civil and police administration authorities are on the field to ensure that the drive is carried out smoothly," the forest officer said.

Several bulldozers and excavators were deployed to clear illegal constructions and uproot large tracts of areca nut plantations, he said.

"The eviction drive has been peaceful so far. We are expecting it to be over by today or latest by Wednesday," the officer added. (PTI)

Ravi Kota's tenure extended

GUWAHATI, Feb 3: Assam Chief Secretary Ravi Kota's tenure has been extended by six months, according to an official order.

In a notification issued by the Personnel Department, Kota's service has been extended for a period of six months from May 1 to October 31.

Kota was to retire from service on April 30.

He is an Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer of 1993 batch, who took charge as the Chief Secretary of Assam with effect from April 1, 2024, the notification issued on Sunday said.

Elections to 126 assembly constituencies in Assam are likely to take place in March-April this year. (PTI)

Negligent approach of UPA govt pushed Northeast towards instability: BJP Manipur MP

NEW DELHI, Feb 3: BJP's Rajya Sabha member from Manipur, Maharaja Sanajaoba Leishemba, on Tuesday said then UPA government's negligent approach pushed the Northeast towards instability, and credited the Modi government for empowering the region as a growth engine of the country.

He said, with the vision of 'Purvodaya' (rise of the East), the Centre is ensuring inclusive growth for the Northeast and bringing long-term stability in the region.

Replying to a motion of thanks on President Droupadi Murmu's address to the joint sitting of Parliament, Leishemba said under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government, Northeast has received unprecedented focus.

He said 50,000 rural roads have been constructed for easy access to markets, schools and offices besides a special assistance of Rs 3,356 crore has been provided to Manipur, from 2020 to till January 2026, for capital expenditure in the form of 50 years interest-free loan.

Due to the negligent approach of then UPA government, the northeast was pushed towards instability and underdevelopment, Leishemba said in the Upper House.

"But with the vision of Purvodaya, our government is ensuring inclusive growth for the region, transforming it as the growth engine of India and bringing long-term stability in the region," said the Rajya Sabha member from

Manipur has been witnessing ethnic violence since May 3, 2023. At least 260 people, including members of both the Kuki and Meitei communities as well as security personnel, have been killed in the violence since then, while thousands became homeless. The state has been under President's Rule since February last year.

The BJP MP said the government's decisive battle against major diseases like sickle cell anaemia has been fought to save tribal people.

"Over 6.5 crore tribal citizens have already been screened. More than 400 Eklavya model residential schools have been opened in tribal areas to (help them) avail quality (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Access to justice constitutes very foundation of democratic governance: SC

NEW DELHI, Feb 3: The Supreme Court on Tuesday said that access to justice constitutes the very foundation of democratic governance, serving as the linchpin of a fair and equitable society.

A bench of Justices P S Narasimha and A S Chandurkar observed that efficiency in the conduct of arbitral proceedings is integral to the effectiveness of the dispute resolution remedy through arbitration.

The bench held that an application under section 29A(5) of the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996, for extension of the mandate of the arbitrator is maintainable even after the expiry of time under sections 29A(1) and (3) and even after rendering of an award during that time.

Section 29A of the Act pertains to the time limit for an arbitral award.

The bench dealt with a question of law -- whether a court can entertain an application under section 29A(5) of the Act to extend the mandate of the arbitrator for making the award even after an 'award' is rendered, though after the expiry of the statutory limit of an 18-month period.

"Access to justice constitutes the very foundation of democratic governance, serving as the linchpin of a fair and equitable society," the bench said in its verdict on an appeal against a January 2025 order of the Madras High Court.

It said the Constitution, in its wisdom, establishes a comprehensive judicial architecture encom-

passing the Supreme Court, the high courts and district courts for public and ordinary civil/criminal remedies to safeguard this inalienable right.

The bench said it is imperative that these judicial remedies are effective.

"In fact, the effectiveness of judicial remedies is a constitutional mission, and it is always a work in progress for the Supreme Court to ensure that the remedies are impartial, readily accessible, financially viable, swiftly administered, and comprehensively tailored," it said.

Referring to the 1996 Act, the bench said it provides a simple, efficient, cost-effective, confidential and fair dispute resolution remedy by (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Exhibition explores impact of climate change on fruiting cycles, food systems, and ecological balance

3rd Sustaina India exhibition examines climate change impact

NEW DELHI, Feb 3: In artist Mrugen Rathod's sculptural installation, more than 540 lions, coloured a bright saffron hue typical of the popular Kesar mango of Gir, walk outward in a concentric circle, leaving it to the viewer to interpret their movement as reclaiming of ancestral territory or an exodus out of their habitat forced by human interference.

"Mari Vaadi Ma" by Rathod is part of the 3rd edition of Sustaina India Exhibition at Bikaner House here. A collaborative initiative by think tank Council of Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW) and artist duo Thukral & Tagra, the exhibition, titled "Bitter Nectar", examines climate change through the lens of fruiting cycles, food systems, and abundance.

Rathod, a visual artist and educa-



tor from Gujarat whose art practice focuses on integrating research of Gir forest and the ecologies of Sabarmati, Vishwamitri and Mahisagar rivers with conversations with

local communities, reflects on mango monocultures, forest ecologies, and human and animal displacement through the installation rooted in the Gir landscape.

Thukral & Tagra noted that on the one hand, wildlife conservation has become limited to protection of a single species and on the other, cultivation is centred around a single cash crop, the Kesar mango.

"That is the bitterness of the nectar. We all are after this pursuit of sweetness. But what happens with this sweetness, if it ends up hurting us? There is a dichotomy to which we are living. There is pollution, but I am still in Delhi, right? We all know there are certain things but we end up doing it," the artist duo and curators of the exhibition told PTI.

Rathod's work reflects upon the increasingly common practice of farmers inviting tourists to their homestays under the mango orchards, with a promise to spot the Gir Lion, who are now inhabiting non-forest (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Akasa Air commences operations at Dibrugarh Airport

New flight route enhances connectivity between Upper Assam, North Bengal and South India



HT Correspondent

DIBRUGARH, Feb 3: A formal inaugural ceremony was held on February 2, at Dibrugarh Airport to mark Akasa Air's maiden flight from the city, attended by officials from the Airports Authority of India (AAI) and the airline. The maiden flight on February 3 operated on the Bagdogra-Dibrugarh-Bagdogra sector. Akasa Air will now operate regular services on the Bengaluru-Bagdogra-Dibrugarh-Bagdogra-Bengaluru route, enhancing connectivity between Upper Assam, North Bengal and South India.

The service will operate three days a week—Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, with the following schedule at Dibrugarh Airport:
QP1850: Bengaluru → Bagdogra → Dibrugarh | STA: 10:25 hrs
QP1851: Dibrugarh → Bagdogra → Bengaluru | STD: 11:00 hrs

The new operations are expected to benefit passengers by providing improved connectivity for business, tourism, education and medical travel between these regions. AAI Dibrugarh welcomed Akasa Air and expressed hope for a successful and long-term association in serving the travelling public.

12th Jagiroad AASU conference held

HT Correspondent

JAGIROAD, Feb 3: The 12th session of the Jagiroad Anchalik Students' Union (AASU) was held on February 2, at the Jagiroad Kala Mandir premises. The opening ceremony was presided over by Morigaon District Students' Union president Dibyajyoti Chowdhury.

The meeting saw the participation of several prominent leaders, including Morigaon AASU vice president Hiraajyoti Nath, advisor Ankur Deka, district secretary Shiva Das, former organising secretary Abantya Bora, education secretary Shafriz Ali, Jagiroad Satriya Sangit Vidyalaya principal Dr Khagen Sarma, 'Arpita' president Bani Borthakur and secretary Bandana Das, Jagiroad Lekhika Samaroh Samity president Pratibha Deora, along with teachers Riva Deka, Barnali Goswami, Mamoni Patar and other socially conscious citizens.

A 51-member committee of the Jagiroad Anchalik Students' Union was formed, with Manashjyoti Bhuyan as president, Pranayjyoti Saikia as general secretary and Nikumani Deka as cultural secretary. Manashjyoti Bhuyan and Yugasmita Kalita were also elected as District Executives, marking the beginning of the new leadership term for the union.

Drinking water jar manufacturing unit inaugurated in Jorhat

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, Feb 3: Under the Advantage Assam 2.0 initiative, MN Bottle Industries, a 20-litre jar and dispenser manufacturing unit was inaugurated on Tuesday at Bamun Gaon in Baligaon, near Rajahouli, Jorhat district.

The production unit is seen as a step towards promoting sustainable packaging solutions while contributing to industrial development and employment generation in the region.

The unit was formally inaugurated by Jorhat MLA Hitendra Nath Goswami, who highlighted the role of such industries in providing employment opportunities to local youth. He expressed confidence that although the venture has started on a small scale, it has the potential to grow into a large industry in the future.

Speaking at the event, Goswami noted that manufacturing a 20-litre jar within two minutes using modern technology is a challenging task. He said initiatives like Advantage Assam are helping young people become

Seed capital distributed to 18,000 women; major projects set to accelerate development

Pijush Hazarika lays foundation for road projects in Maibang

HT Correspondent

MAIBANG, Feb 3: Minister for Water Resources, Pijush Hazarika, on Tuesday distributed seed capital cheques under the Chief Minister's Mahila Udyamita Abhiyan and laid the foundation for five major road projects in Dima Hasao, marking a significant push for women empowerment and infrastructure development in the district.

Over 18,000 women beneficiaries received ₹ 10,000 each, with eligibility for ₹ 25,000 in the next phase upon productive utilisation. Minister Hazarika urged them to invest the funds in income-generating ventures to promote self-reliance and entrepreneurship.

The foundation stones were laid for five road projects spanning 120 km, estimated at ₹ 997 crore with World Bank funding, aimed at improving connectivity and accelerating development. Hazarika highlighted Assam's flagship wel-



fare schemes, including Orunodoi, Nijut Moina and the Women Entrepreneurship Mission, noting their impact on women's economic independence.

Later, he inaugurated a ₹ 4 crore Bamboo Industrial Park at Manderdisa under the DHATC package to support bamboo-based enterprises and generate youth

employment. The programme was attended by NCHAC CEM Debobal Gorlosa, MLA Jitu Goswami, Minister Nandita Gorlosa and other officials.

Massive fire guts several houses in Maibang

HT Correspondent

DIMA HASAO, Feb 3: A devastating fire broke out early at Subash Nagar under Maibang Police Station in Dima Hasao district, leaving several families homeless. The fire erupted around 7 AM on Tuesday and the cause is yet to be ascertained. According to preliminary reports, the blaze damaged nine residential houses, including one rented house, causing extensive loss of property. However, no casualties or injuries were reported.

On receiving information, Fire and Emergency Services rushed to the spot and acted swiftly to control the flames, preventing the fire from spreading further in the densely populated locality. Their timely intervention averted a major disaster.

Officials said an assessment of losses is being conducted by the District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) along with CQRT volunteers to evaluate the extent of damage and prepare a detailed report. The district administration has assured that necessary relief and assistance will be provided to the affected families as per government norms. Further investigation is underway to ascertain the exact cause of the fire.

Kokrajhar singer Kabyanjali Das releases first Bodo audio-visual song

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Feb 3: Kokrajhar-based emerging singer Kabyanjali (Konki) Das officially released her first Bodo audio-visual song, "Fagumi Abir" (Colours of Spring), in a programme at the Kokrajhar Press Club on Tuesday.

The song, titled "Athingni Payel Shring Shring Akhaini Achana- a Sring Sring Gabouboula," has been sung by Kabyanjali, known for her sweet voice, with music arranged by Debanarayan Brahma. The lyrics and tune were composed by Fungkha Mohilary and his wife Sikhri Mohilary. Kabyanjali also acted in the video alongside several co-artists, with dance direction by Puja Brahma and makeup by Bandana Wary.

The song was formally released by Ravishankar Borgoyary, retired BTC Director of Education, while Gopinath Borgoyary, Chairman of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha's Bodo Publication Board, extended his support. Both speakers praised Kabyanjali for promoting Bodo music, likening her efforts to those of renowned Assamese artist Zubeen Garg.

Kabyanjali expressed hope that audiences would receive her debut with love and patience, appealing for understanding as a newcomer. She is the daughter of Laxhan Das and Rina Kalita Das of Subhashpally Pragati Lane, Kokrajhar.

Padmashree Pakhila Lekhthepi inaugurates Nagaon University cultural procession

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Feb 3: Renowned folk singer and Padmashree awardee Pakhila Lekhthepi inaugurated the second-day cultural procession competition of Nagaon University's Annual Week 2026.

In her address, Lekhthepi emphasised the harmonious relationship between the hills and plains of the region and recalled her close association with singer Zubeen Garg. She congratulated the participating teams and thanked the University for honoring her.

The competition was judged by film director Prabin Hazarika and Chidananda Deb Goswami, senior programme executive officer at Guwahati Radio Centre. Vice-Chancellor Dr Hitesh Deka, Incharge Registrar Dhruvajyoti Baruah, faculty members and over 2,000 students attended the event.

Nineteen departments participated, showcasing vibrant displays of music, dance and traditional attire, reflecting the rich and diverse culture of Northeast India. The event was widely appreciated for fostering cultural awareness and highlighting student talent.

Sampurnata Abhiyan 2.0 inaugurated at Tamulpur

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Feb 3: Sampurnata Abhiyan 2.0, launched by NITI Aayog, was formally inaugurated on February 2, at the Srimanta Sankaradeva Auditorium in Tamulpur under the initiative of the Tamulpur district administration.

The programme was held in the presence of District Commissioner Chimi Karan, with participation from BTC Deputy Chief Bijitgoura Narzary, local MLA Jalen Daimary, DRDA Project Director Bhaskarjyoti Baruah and other officials. Speakers emphasised the effective implementation of development initiatives across various departments in the district through the Sampurnata Abhiyan.

The speakers expressed hope that the programme would create public awareness and ensure that government schemes reach and benefit the people. Sampurnata Abhiyan 2.0 will continue until April 14.

It was further noted that coordinated efforts by departments such as health, agriculture, education, social welfare and animal husbandry would help Tamulpur gain a distinct identity as an "Aspirational Block."

Officials of the district administration, VDCD chairpersons, Anganwadi workers and helpers and heads of various departments were present at the meeting, Public Relations Officer Vijay Bezbaruah informed.

21st Adivasi Mahasabha concludes in Borgolai

HT Correspondent

MARGHERITA, Feb 3: The 21st Adivasi Mahasabha-2026 concluded on February 1, at the Dehing Sports Complex Samanay Kheta in Borgolai after four days of cultural, political and social programmes. Organised by the All Adivasi Student Association of Assam (AASAA) Tinsukia district committee in collaboration with Adivasi Jani Shakti Sangati, the event drew over two lakh participants.

Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren, the chief guest, paid tribute to singer Zubeen Garg and freedom fighters Vir Birsa Munda and Siddhu Kanu. He highlighted Adivasi struggles, demanding protection of their rights over water, forests and land. Criticising the BJP-led government, Soren stressed the need for Adivasi political unity to influence Assam's 2026 Assembly elections. He also assured financial assistance and social security for Adivasis in Assam.

Speakers called for fair wages for tea garden workers, citing Assam's ₹ 250 daily rate against ₹ 400-500 in other states and urged collective action for justice. Key sessions addressed historical settlements, land rights, constitutional justice and community development. Cultural processions, folk performances and sports reflected Adivasi heritage. Flag hoisting and a martyr tribute programme marked the event, making it a landmark movement for Adivasi rights and self-respect in Assam.

District Day celebrated in Haflong with colourful cultural display



HT Correspondent

HAFLONG, Feb 3: Dima Hasao celebrated its District Foundation Day on Tuesday at the North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council (NCHAC) Complex with great fervour. The event was graced by NCHAC Chief Executive Member (CEM) Debolal Gorlosa as chief guest, along with Chairman Mohet Hojai, executive

members, bureaucrats and other dignitaries.

The day began with a vibrant procession from the council premises to Haflong Lake, featuring a special performance by the Assam Police Battalion pipe band. District Commissioner Munindra Nath Ngatey detailed the formation of Dima Hasao and the district's early administrative history.

Addressing the gathering, CEM Debolal Gorlosa highlighted the council's focus on balanced and sustainable development, emphasising initiatives to create job opportunities and enhance youth education. Chairman Mohet Hojai also spoke on the district's growth and developmental journey.

Students from local schools and colleges participated, and local artists presented a spectacular Dimasa dance. The event was attended by senior officials, including executive members of NCHAC, the Deputy Chairman of the District Planning Board, Haflong Town Committee Chairperson and the Dima Hasao Senior Superintendent of Police Ripunjoy Kakati.

Northeast Folk Festival held at RTU Hojai

HT Correspondent

HOJAI, Feb 3: Rabindranath Tagore University (RTU), Hojai, recently organised the second edition of the Northeast Folk Festival under the aegis of the Viksit Bharat@2047 Cell, RTU, celebrating the rich cultural heritage of the Northeastern region.

The programme was inaugurated by renowned tablist Paban Bordoloi in the presence of Vice-Chancellor Prof Manabendra Dutta Choudhury, Nodal Officer of the Viksit Bharat@2047 Cell, faculty members, students and invited guests. Addressing the gathering, the Vice-Chancellor emphasised the importance of preserving folk traditions as an integral part of India's cultural identity.

An ethnic food festival-cum-sale showcasing traditional Northeastern cuisine was a major attraction of the event and was coordinated by Dr Rathin Sarma and Rutuja Deori. Participants from Lanka Mahavidyalaya, Udali College, Lumding College, Alhaz Sunai Bibi Choudhury College and Hojai Girls' College presented vibrant folk dances and music performances, reflecting the diverse cultural traditions of the region.

Coordinator Dr Utpal Phukan expressed happiness over the enthusiastic participation and appreciation received from all quarters.

World Wetlands Day observed at villages

Awareness programmes highlight community role in wetland conservation

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Feb 3: Nagaon Wildlife Division observed World Wetlands Day 2026 on February 2 with a series of awareness and outreach programmes aimed at promoting the conservation of wetlands and recognising the role of traditional knowledge in sustaining these vital ecosystems. The programmes were organised at Saraihagi Anti-Poaching Camp and Sunchahar Tongia village, located in the fringe areas of Laokhowa Wildlife Sanctuary.

The day-long programme began in the morning at Saraihagi Anti-Poaching Camp with the participation of around 35 students from nearby fringe villages. An interactive orientation session titled "Wetlands and Birds of Laokhowa Wildlife Sanctuary" was conducted, focusing on the ecological importance of wetlands, their biodiversity values and their role in sustaining wildlife as well as local livelihoods. The session was led by the Divisional Forest Officer, Nagaon Wildlife Division, along with Neeraj Bora, Assistant Professor, Nagaon Girls' College.

In the afternoon, the programme continued at the Sunchahar Tongia village LP School campus. The main event featured expert talks and interactive activities aligned with the global theme of World Wetlands Day 2026, "Wetlands and traditional knowledge: Celebrating cultural heritage." Re-



source persons including Dr Kulen Chandra Das, Principal, Nagaon Girls' College; Arif Hussain of Aaranyak; Dilowar Hussain, LBSC and Sushanta Borthakur of WWF shared insights on the importance of indigenous knowledge systems in wetland conservation and community-based management practices.

A nature quiz on wetlands and wildlife was also organised to encourage student par-

ticipation and environmental learning, which was led by Arif Hussain of Aaranyak. Forest officials, including the Divisional Forest Officer, Nagaon Wildlife Division and the Range Forest Officer, Gorajan Range, addressed the gathering, emphasising the department's commitment to wetland conservation through community participation and awareness. The programme concluded with a collective resolve to protect

wetlands as natural and cultural heritage for future generations, a press note added.

Our Demow Correspondent adds: World Wetlands Day was celebrated near Panidihing Bird Sanctuary on February 2, in association with Kaziranga Wildlife Society, Panidihing Environmental Protection Committee and the Sivasagar Forest Department. The programme was organised at the Sorogua Forest Beat Office premises with the objective of raising awareness about the importance of wetlands and environmental conservation.

On the occasion, a drawing competition on environmental themes was organised among students to encourage awareness and creativity related to nature and wetlands. An awareness meeting was also held, during which environment lovers from the Sorogua area participated in discussions on conservation issues.

Alok Sharma, president of Kaziranga Wildlife Society, Mubina Akhtar, Working President, Karuna Sharma, Secretary and Swota Nicha Phukan, Ranger of the Sivasagar Forest Department, addressed the gathering. The speakers discussed the conservation of reservoirs, highlighting them as one of the most important components of nature and stressed the need to raise public awareness about their ecological importance and protection.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

When your work speaks for itself, don't interrupt.
—Henry J. Kaiser

Will PR in Manipur end on Feb 12

Will the Centre muster courage to act on its much-desired political objective of installing a popular ministry in strife-scarred Manipur latest on February 13, 2026? Manipur was placed under President's Rule as usual initially for six months on February 13, 2025 and later circumstances forced New Delhi to extend President's rule by six months with effect from August 13 2025 [Parliament had okayed the extension on August 5]. Which is to expire on February 12, 2026 and which means by then the state will have been under President's rule for one year. Union home minister Amit Shah, who started running the show there even before it was formally placed under President's rule, is against further extension of the arrangement, though constitutionally that is possible, subject to fulfilment of prescribed conditions and justifying why the ground realities warrant the drastic step. The home minister is actively pursuing his political objective over the last three weeks. N Biren Singh, who headed the BJP-led Manipur ministry before his unavoidable resignation on February 9, 2025, has expectedly resurfaced. Over the past six weeks, Biren met Shah twice and knowledgeable quarters described the exercise as an attempt to see how congenial conditions could be created and complications sorted out before legislative and political actions are firmed up for putting in place a popular ministry.

There is no doubt that the Union government and the BJP top brass are against a second extension of President's rule. They are satisfied that there has been a perceptible improvement in the law and order situation, that return of internally displaced persons (IDPs) to their homes has at last gathered momentum [The number of IDPs peaked to over 60,000 as ethnic violence, which erupted on May 3, 2023, peaked and panic had gripped the state; now the number has dropped to around 50,000]. Also, recovery of looted arms and ammunition has picked up with intensification of search operations. And yet, the Centre is unable to come to a conclusion on termination of President's rule. Despite improvement, the law and order situation remains delicate, sensitive as recent incidents have shown. That's the reading of regular Manipur watchers.

Howsoever keen the Centre may be on having a popular ministry before the extended tenure of President's rule expires on February 12, it cannot ignore the fact its efforts to persuade the Kuki-Zo leadership to give up their demand for a separate administrative set-up with a legislature and participate in the new ministry have not elicited a positive response from them. The only change in their stance, if at all it can be treated as such, is that they may be willing to consider participation only if the Centre and the state government give them a written commitment to support a negotiated political settlement for a Union Territory with legislature, as admissible under the Constitution.

Vision to velocity: How Budget 2026-27 shapes Viksit Bharat 2047

By: Dipak Kurmi

The Union Budget 2026-27, presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, signals a clear inflection point in India's economic narrative, marking a transition from declaratory ambition to systemic execution. Anchored in the long-term vision of Viksit Bharat 2047, the Budget articulates a coherent framework built around three Kartavyas: accelerating growth and competitiveness, empowering citizens through skills and participation, and ensuring inclusive development. What distinguishes this Budget from several of its predecessors is not merely the scale of allocations but the architecture it seeks to build—platforms rather than pilots, ecosystems rather than isolated schemes. In doing so, it recognises that India's next phase of growth will depend less on incremental reforms and more on rewiring institutional, financial, and digital infrastructure to unlock productivity across sectors.

One of the most consequential interventions lies in the reimagining of MSME finance through a robust asset-backed ecosystem. The creation of a ten thousand crore SME Growth Fund, enhanced allocations to the Self-Reliant India Fund, mandatory onboarding of Central Public Sector Enterprises on the Trade Receivables Discounting System, credit guarantees for invoice discounting, and the integration of GeM with TREDIS collectively represent a structural reset of MSME credit delivery. Most critically, the introduction of Asset-Backed Securities to enable a secondary market for receivables moves MSME finance away from relationship-driven lending toward data-led liquidity. By allowing receivables to be treated as trusted, tradable financial assets, the Budget opens the door to fintech-led marketplaces that can deploy artificial intelligence for risk assessment, blockchain for invoice authenticity, and digital identity frameworks for trust. This transformation has the potential to unlock speed, scale, and resilience in MSME credit, addressing one of the most persistent bottlenecks in India's growth story.

Beyond urban enterprises, the Budget makes a compelling case for traceability as a form of economic infrastructure, particularly for agriculture and rural MSMEs. By strengthening the One District One Product programme and creating pathways for its integration

with blockchain-enabled provenance systems, the Budget envisions a future where products such as coconut, cashew, textiles, and other agri-linked goods carry verifiable data trails from farm to market. Such traceability enhances price discovery, improves export readiness, ensures compliance with increasingly stringent ESG norms, and facilitates access to formal credit for producers who have traditionally operated at the margins of the financial system. Given that agriculture continues to support nearly forty-five percent of India's workforce, this shift is not merely technological but social in its implications, enabling farmers and rural youth to participate meaningfully in national and global value chains rather than remaining price-takers in opaque markets.

The next leap in farmer income, as the Budget implicitly acknowledges, will not come from subsidies alone but from the convergence of Agri-AI, supply-chain transparency, digital marketplaces, and emerging agri-carbon credit platforms. Precision agriculture powered by data analytics, real-time market access through digital platforms, and monetisation of sustainable farming practices via carbon markets represent areas ripe for innovation. By embedding these possibilities within a broader policy framework, the Budget positions rural India not as a passive beneficiary of welfare but as an active participant in a technology-enabled growth cycle. This approach aligns with the larger objective of inclusive development, ensuring that digital transformation does not remain confined to metropolitan centres but permeates the countryside where demographic and economic stakes are highest.

Sustainability emerges as another defining pillar of the Budget, particularly through the proposed twenty thousand crore outlay for Carbon Capture, Utilization and Storage across five key sectors. This allocation signals long-term seriousness toward India's net-zero commitments and its role in global climate action. Yet the Budget also implicitly recognises that capital expenditure alone will not deliver scalable climate outcomes. The effectiveness of carbon markets will hinge on credible digital Measurement, Reporting, and Verification systems, AI-driven optimisation of emissions reduction, and tokenised carbon assets that can ensure transparency and monetisation. In this

A Budget without the big leap

If growth is steady, the obvious question many people asked after the Budget was simple and instinctive: why did it not go further. When an economy is described as stable, resilient and among the fastest growing in the world, expectations naturally rise. Citizens expect bolder moves, deeper reforms and a clearer push towards long term transformation. The gap between official confidence and the cautious tone of the Budget has therefore triggered a sense of mild disappointment rather than outright anger. This feeling is not about what the Budget did wrong but about what it chose not to do.

The government's own narrative over the past few years has been one of steady recovery after the pandemic, strong macroeconomic fundamentals and global recognition of India's growth story. Inflation has moderated compared to earlier peaks, foreign exchange reserves remain comfortable and tax collections have been robust. Infrastructure spending has been consistently highlighted as a success, and digital public systems are often showcased as global models. Against this backdrop, many assumed that this Budget would use the comfort of stability to take calculated risks. Instead, it chose restraint.

One explanation lies in the nature of growth itself. Steady growth does not always mean broad based or evenly distributed growth. While headline numbers may look reassuring, underlying stress points remain. Rural demand has been uneven, job creation has not kept pace with aspirations and small businesses continue to face credit and cost pressures. A Budget that goes much further in spending or tax cuts might amplify fiscal risks if these fault lines widen unexpectedly. The government appears to be signalling that stability should be protected first before ambition is expanded.

Fiscal discipline is another key reason. The Budget continues to place strong emphasis on reducing the fiscal deficit over time. This commitment matters because India still carries a high public debt burden. Global financial conditions remain uncertain, with geopolitical tensions, volatile energy prices and shifting interest rate cycles. In such an environment, pushing the deficit wider could invite higher borrowing costs and reduce policy flexibility in the future. The caution seen in the Budget reflects a preference for credibility over applause.

There is also the political economy of timing. Big leaps are often reserved for moments of crisis or transition, when consensus for change is easier to build. In a phase of relative calm, bold reforms can provoke resistance without the urgency that justifies disruption. Labour reforms, agricultural restructuring or large scale privatisation all require social and political capital. The government may have judged that this was not the moment to reopen contentious debates, especially when growth is adequate enough to avoid emergency measures.

Another important factor is the quality of spending rather than its quantity. Over recent years, the state has shifted focus towards capital expenditure, particularly in roads, railways, ports and urban infrastructure. This Budget stays the course instead of dramatically expanding it. The idea seems to be that consistency delivers better outcomes than sudden spikes. Projects already announced need time to translate into jobs, incomes and productivity gains. Going further too quickly risks spreading resources thin and compromising execution.

Taxation choices also reflect this mindset. Many individ-



uals hoped for larger tax cuts or higher exemptions to boost consumption. Businesses looked for sharper corporate tax incentives or sector specific relief. The Budget offered modest adjustments but avoided sweeping changes. This suggests a belief that consumption should revive organically through income growth and employment rather than through aggressive fiscal stimulus. It is a conservative bet that growth momentum will sustain itself without extra push.

At the same time, the Budget does reveal quiet priorities. Support for manufacturing through production linked incentives continues, though without dramatic expansion. There is steady attention to energy transition, digital infrastructure and skilling. These are long horizon bets whose impact may not be immediately visible. From this perspective, the Budget is less about headlines and more about incremental alignment with a long term vision.

Yet, the sense that it did not go further also reflects genuine unmet needs. Unemployment and underemployment remain central anxieties, particularly for young people. A steady growth rate loses its meaning if it does not translate into stable livelihoods. Many expected a stronger push towards labour intensive sectors such as textiles, food processing and services. While there are mentions and allocations, they do not match the scale of the challenge. The Budget seems to assume that growth itself will eventually solve employment, an assumption that history often questions.

Social sector spending presents a similar picture. Health and education have seen increases, but not transformative ones. After the pandemic exposed deep vulnerabilities in public health systems, some hoped for a more ambitious expansion. Education too is at a crossroads, with learning gaps, teacher shortages and the demands of a digital future. A bolder Budget could have treated these as growth multipliers rather than welfare costs. The decision not to do so reinforces the theme of caution.

Rural India illustrates the tension between stability and ambition most clearly. Agriculture has shown resilience, but farm incomes remain fragile and climate risks are intensifying. The Budget offers continuity in schemes and support but avoids major restructuring or fresh income support

mechanisms. This suggests confidence that existing programmes are sufficient, even as evidence on the ground points to uneven outcomes. Going further would have meant confronting complex issues of pricing, markets and sustainability.

The global context also shapes the Budget's restraint. The world economy is slowing, and many countries are grappling with debt stress. India's relative strength stands out partly because it has avoided excess. The government may be deliberately positioning the country as a safe and predictable destination for investment. From that angle, a cautious Budget sends a signal of maturity and reliability rather than exuberance.

However, there is a psychological dimension to budgets that numbers alone cannot capture. Budgets are not just financial documents; they are statements of intent. When people hear that growth is steady, they expect a sense of momentum and confidence. A Budget that plays safe can feel disconnected from this narrative, even if it is technically sound. The disappointment arises not because the Budget is weak, but because it does not emotionally match the growth story being told.

There is also the question of inequality. Steady growth can coexist with widening gaps. High income groups and large corporations may benefit more quickly from macro stability, while others wait longer. A Budget that goes further could have addressed redistribution more directly, either through targeted spending or progressive taxation. The reluctance to do so reflects a fear of unsettling investors or complicating administration. Yet, ignoring inequality risks eroding the social foundation of growth itself. Defenders of the Budget argue that going further is not always about spending more. Structural change often happens quietly through regulations, institutions and administrative reform. Many of these do not show up dramatically in Budget speeches. It is possible that the real push lies outside the Budget document, in policies that will unfold over time. If so, judging the Budget alone may miss the bigger picture.

Still, the central question remains valid. If growth is steady, why not accelerate the journey towards a more inclusive and resilient economy. The answer appears to be a mix of prudence, political calculation and faith in gradualism. The government seems convinced that steady steps will outperform bold leaps in the long run. Whether this faith is justified will become clear only with time.

For citizens, the concern is more immediate. Daily life is shaped by prices, jobs and public services, not growth charts. A Budget that goes further could have offered sharper relief or clearer hope. The absence of that leap leaves people cautiously optimistic but not inspired. They acknowledge stability, but they wait for transformation. This Budget reflects a philosophy rather than a failure. It chooses consolidation over expansion, patience over urgency and continuity over surprise. In an uncertain world, that may be a rational choice. But growth, especially in a young and aspirational society, creates its own pressure to move faster. Managing that tension is the real challenge ahead.

The question of why the Budget did not go further is therefore also a question about what kind of growth the country wants. If steady growth is the goal in itself, restraint makes sense. If growth is a means to rapid social and economic change, caution feels inadequate. The coming years will test whether stability alone can carry the weight of expectations that steady growth inevitably creates.

DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Satyabrata Borah

Boosting defence capability is fine but the priorities are very crucial

By: Girish Linganna

When the Finance Minister announced ₹7.85 lakh crore for defence in Budget 2026-27, many of us probably thought—okay, that sounds like huge money. But let me tell you something interesting: spending more rupees doesn't always mean we're getting stronger. This is exactly what's happening with India's defence spending, and it's worth understanding.

Over the last ten years, India's defence money has almost tripled. From ₹2.3 lakh crore in 2015, it jumped to ₹6.8 lakh crore now. Pretty impressive, right? But here's the twist. When we compare this spending to our country's total wealth (what economists call GDP), the percentage has actually gone down. Earlier it was 2.3%, now it's 1.9%. Think of it like this—you're earning more money overall as a person, but you're spending less of it on health compared to before. Does that mean you're healthier? Not necessarily.

The real action is happening in something called capital expenditure. This fancy term simply means buying expensive defence equipment like ships, aircraft, missiles, and tanks. In 2019, this was around ₹95,000 crore. Now it's almost ₹1.92 lakh crore. For next year, it could jump to ₹2.1 to ₹2.3 lakh crore. These are crazy numbers, but let's ask ourselves—what are we actually buying with this money?

Here's where modernisation comes in. This means upgrading old weapons and buying new technology. Defence officials say this part could grow by 20% every year. From ₹1.49 lakh crore, it could become ₹1.8 lakh crore. And here's the good news—75% of this money must be spent

inside India. In reality, 88% of defence contracts went to Indian companies last year. This is brilliant because it means our own factories and companies are getting stronger. When money stays inside the country, it creates jobs, trains workers, and builds expertise right here in India rather than making foreign companies richer.

But let me be honest—this is also where serious problems hide. Just buying more guns and planes doesn't make a country truly strong. The weakest point in India's defence is research and development. Think of R&D like this: it's the laboratory where new ideas become real weapons. We spend less than 4% of our defence budget on R&D. Compare this to America, which spends 17%, China around 15%, and even South Korea 17-18%. In actual money terms, it's even worse. We spend only ₹25,000 crore yearly on defence R&D while America spends ₹11.5 lakh crore. That's like comparing a small shop to a supermarket. Why does this matter? When we don't invest in R&D, we keep depending on other countries for military technology. We can't design our own advanced missiles, we can't build cutting-edge radars, we can't create new defence systems. We become like a cook who only knows how to follow recipes but can never create new dishes. Imagine if all our defence equipment comes from America or Russia—what happens if they refuse to sell to us? We become helpless.

The government promised in 2022 that 25% of defence R&D would go to private companies and startups. But honestly, this hasn't really happened properly because there's no clear system to actually give this money. Industries are now asking—please give us this money separately, don't take it from existing budgets. And good news is

coming. The government is thinking about it seriously. Private companies have brilliant engineers and can move faster than government offices sometimes.

There's a programme called iDEX that helps young innovators create defence technology. It has already helped companies win ₹2,400 crore in defence contracts. Now, a new fund of ₹1 lakh crore is coming for deep technology projects. Industries want defence to get a proper share from this. This new fund is like an opportunity door opening—young Indian engineers could get money to build tomorrow's weapons instead of just buying today's weapons from other countries. Here's my honest opinion: Money alone won't make India strong. Yes, buying new equipment is necessary. Yes, supporting Indian factories is important. But what we really need is to create new technology ourselves. We need brilliant minds working on Indian missiles, Indian planes, Indian radars. Right now, we're like someone who keeps buying better clothes but never develops their talent.

The question Budget 2026 should answer is not just "how much money?" but "where is this money going?" Are we just buying foreign equipment? Or are we building laboratories where young people can invent the future of Indian defence? Are private companies and startups really becoming partners, or are they just suppliers?

India's defence strength should come from Indian innovation, not just Indian money. More budgets are good, but budgets used smartly are better. The real test isn't how many crore we spend—it's whether we're building a defence system that is truly, completely made in India by Indian minds. That would be real strength. That would be real independence. (IPA Service)

Fight cancer with knowledge and action

By: Dr. Vinod Chandrashekhar Dixit

Cancer is a leading cause of death globally, with a staggering 70% of cancer deaths occurring in low-to-middle-income countries. Millions of lives can be saved annually through resource-appropriate strategies for prevention, early detection, and treatment. The United Nations, World Health Organization, and other agencies have emphasized the urgent need for a global commitment to combat cancer. In India, common cancers include lung, breast, cervical, neck, brain, and colorectal cancer, highlighting the need for targeted interventions.

The significance of cancer awareness is underscored by World Cancer Day, observed on February 4, which originated in 2000 at the World Summit Against Cancer in Paris. The Charter of Paris Against Cancer, signed by global leaders, outlined a cooperative commitment to improving patient quality of life and investing in research, prevention, and treatment. The WHO projects cancer deaths to exceed 16.3 million by 2040 if incidence continues to grow at the current rate, with 40% of cancer deaths being preventable. This alarming trend highlights the need for timely action, including lifestyle changes, screening, and access to affordable healthcare. By prioritizing cancer prevention and control, we can mitigate the disease's impact and create a healthier future.

In India, scientists are incredibly good at improving technology while simultaneously making it cost-effective. Irrespective of

one's education, nutritional and socio-economic status, everyone faces a risk of developing cancer. This is called the population risk of developing cancer. A timely initiative with the right degree of gravity for raising awareness about breast cancer among the folks. To be frank, most people do have only a vague idea about breast cancer and the intensity of the malady. Cancer has always been considered a disease of the aged. Though that is true to a certain extent, the age at which women develop breast cancer has undergone a change in the last two decades. An increasing number of breast cancers are detected in the 25-40 years age group. The mere presence of risk factors is not synonymous with the occurrence of breast cancer nor can all risk factors for breast cancer be mitigated or modified. The incidents of breast cancer in India is on the rise and is rapidly becoming the number one cancer in females pushing the cervical cancer to the second spot. The Cancer survivors has rightly said that "Courage is all that is needed." The task of spreading the awareness of the prevalence of this cancer and advising women on undertaking self-breast examination comes into the picture.

According to the health experts lack of awareness is the reason why this disease is on a steady rise. Level of awareness of breast cancer in India is "worse" than other countries, particularly in rural areas that are more "orthodox and conservative" and where people do not feel comfortable talking about breast cancer. To prevent a disease, one needs to mitigate the risk factors that may lead to breast disease and breast cancer.

Women's bodies, women's rights: The Supreme Court on menstruation

By: Lalit Garg

In the journey of India's social development, the status of women has always served as a decisive benchmark. The progress of any nation is not measured merely by economic statistics or physical infrastructure, but by the respect, security, and equal opportunities it offers to half of its population—women. Seen in this context, the Supreme Court of India delivered a historic judgment on January 30, 2026, declaring menstrual health a fundamental right under Article 21 of the Constitution. The Court directed that free and safe biodegradable sanitary pads must be provided to girl students in all government and private schools across the country. Menstrual hygiene has been recognized as an integral part of the fundamental right to live with dignity and good health. The judgment also mandates the availability of clean toilets and adequate water facilities in schools. The objective is clear: to prevent disruptions in girls' education caused by menstruation and to protect them from shame, discomfort, and discrimination.

This landmark ruling, especially addressing menstrual challenges faced by school-going girls, is a powerful and farsighted step. Complementing this progressive outlook, the Karnataka government has approved a policy granting 12 days of paid menstrual leave to women employees in both government and private sectors. Together, these initiatives mark a significant move toward addressing gaps in menstrual management in educational institutions and safeguarding girls' right to dignified education. The Supreme Court's directive to make sanitary pads mandatory in schools is not merely an administrative order; it is a clarion call shaking the social conscience. It sends a strong message that menstruation can no longer be confined to silence, stigma, and ignorance.

Ironically, menstruation—designed by nature as an essential and healthy part of the life cycle—has for centuries been associated in society with impurity, taboo, and restriction. As a result, millions of women and adolescent girls suffer not only physical discomfort but also mental anguish, inferiority, and social exclusion. Even today, in many parts of India, girls are barred from kitchens, places of worship, schools, and social activities during menstruation. Such practices are not mere traditions; they represent a direct violation of women's dignity and fundamental rights. The Supreme Court's



observation that "lack of menstrual hygiene violates women's dignity" introduces a new constitutional lens to this discourse. If the right to life and dignity guaranteed by the Constitution is to be meaningfully upheld, women's health issues must be treated as a priority. The compulsory provision of sanitary pads in schools is particularly crucial because numerous studies reveal that, due to inadequate hygiene facilities, a large number of girls are forced to drop out of school during adolescence. This is not only a loss to education but a depletion of society's intellectual and moral capital.

The Court aptly described education as a "multiplier right"—a key that enables the exercise of other human rights. Importantly, the judgment goes beyond lofty ideals and lays down clear, practical directives for implementation. All girl students from Classes 6 to 12 are to be provided free, high-quality oxo-biodegradable sanitary pads that meet interna-

tional standards such as ASTM D-6954, ensuring both health safety and environmental sustainability. To ensure discreet, safe, and easy access, schools are required to install vending machines or designate responsible officials, thereby eliminating embarrassment and hesitation among students. The Court also ordered the establishment of "Menstrual Health Management Corners" in schools, equipped with extra uniforms, spare innerwear, disposable bags, and essential hygiene supplies. Special provisions, including wheelchair-accessible toilets and assistive facilities, have been mandated for girls with disabilities. To enforce accountability, the judgment empowers authorities to withdraw recognition from private schools that fail to comply, ensuring that this decision translates into real change rather than remaining confined to paperwork.

Menstrual hygiene is not limited to the distribution of sanitary pads alone. It is intrinsically

linked to clean toilets, safe water, proper waste disposal, and—most importantly—accurate information. Even today, many girls experience fear, confusion, and guilt at the onset of their first menstruation due to a lack of scientific and sensitive guidance. If health education is implemented sincerely in schools and menstruation is taught as a normal biological process, much of this fear and stigma can be naturally eliminated. The silence surrounding menstruation also raises critical questions about the role of men in society. As long as fathers, teachers, administrators, and policymakers dismiss menstruation as "a women's issue," genuine transformation will remain elusive. In this sense, the Supreme Court's directions are equally significant for offering society—and particularly men—an opportunity to become more empathetic and responsible. Awareness is not merely about empowering women; it is also about cultivating sensitivity and accountability

among men.

Challenges related to menstruation are even more severe in rural and tribal areas, where the use of cloth, ash, or other unhygienic materials remains common, leading to infections and long-term health complications. Although government schemes and non-governmental efforts exist, their reach and effectiveness remain limited. If implemented with sincerity, the Supreme Court's judgment can help bridge the gap between policy intent and ground reality. It is essential to view menstrual hygiene not merely as a welfare measure but within the broader framework of women's rights. The right to health, the right to education, and the right to equality are all directly connected to this issue. A system in which a girl is unable to attend school simply because she lacks access to sanitary pads stands in direct contradiction to the spirit of the Constitution. This ruling, therefore, significantly strengthens the concept of social justice.

Today, India speaks of a "new leap forward"—of Digital India, Atmanirbhar Bharat, and aspirations of becoming a global leader. Yet, if this narrative of development excludes women's basic needs and dignity, such progress will remain hollow. True development is that which understands the pain of the most vulnerable and possesses the courage to address it. Open dialogue on menstruation is a reflection of that courage. Public awareness is the most critical pillar of this entire process. Laws and judicial orders can provide direction, but transforming mindsets is a collective social responsibility. Media, educational institutions, religious bodies, and social organizations must come together to dismantle myths and misconceptions surrounding menstruation. It must be reclaimed as a matter of health and self-respect, not shame.

Ultimately, the Supreme Court's decision is a beginning, not the destination. Its success will depend on how sincerely it is implemented and how sensitively it is embraced by society. If India truly seeks to build an inclusive, just, and humane nation—one that embodies Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas—then women's health and rights must be placed at the very center of development. Freedom from menstrual stigma is not merely about physical convenience; it represents mental, social, and constitutional liberty. And it is this liberty that defines the true character of any civilized and progressive society. *(The author is a journalist and columnist)*

Menstruation and sanitary pads: A test of dignity in schools

By: Dr Priyanka Saurabh

The Supreme Court's directive to provide free sanitary pads to girl students in schools and make menstrual hygiene compulsory is not merely an administrative order, but rather a reflection of the collective mindset of Indian society, which still views menstruation with hesitation, silence, and neglect. This decision makes clear that menstruation is not merely a health or hygiene issue, but a serious constitutional question involving dignity, equality, and the right to education.

In a country like India, where the Constitution guarantees equality and the right to a dignified life, the fact that millions of female students are forced to study in unsafe and degrading conditions during their menstrual cycle exposes a profound failure of the system. This court intervention is a necessary step towards addressing this failure. It reminds us that rights are not merely declarations on paper; they only have real meaning when they are realized on the ground.

Menstruation has long been ignored, considered merely a biological process. As a result, the issue has become the limited responsibility of the Ministry of Health or school management. The truth is that menstruation has profound social, educational, and psychological impacts. Due to lack of sanitation facilities and proper information, female students are not only at risk of infections and diseases, but shame and fear also prevent them from attending school regularly. In many cases, this situation leads to permanent school dropout.

Numerous studies show that a large number of adolescent girls miss several days of school each month due to lack of proper management during menstruation. This absence gradually weakens the learning process and ultimately increases the risk of dropping out of education altogether. Therefore, it is natural to question whether we are truly committed to the goal of "education for all," or whether it remains a mere slogan confined to policy documents.

The Supreme Court's order clearly underscored that ignoring menstrual hygiene directly violates the right to education. When schools lack basic amenities like separate and clean toilets, clean water, soap, and sanitary pads, it becomes practically impossible for female students to attend school regularly. This situation further deepens gender inequality, as while boys' education continues unhindered by any biological barriers, girls' are held back by a natural process.

This inequality is contrary to the spirit of Articles 14 and 15 of the Constitution, which underpin the concept of equality and a discrimination-free society. Equality of opportunity alone is not enough unless the means to access that opportunity are also equal. By ignoring menstrual hygiene, we inadvertently deprive girls of the equality the Constitution promises.

The Court also clarified that the lack of menstrual facilities violates the right of women and adolescent girls to a dignified life. When a student is forced to use unsafe

and unscientific methods, it is not only a health crisis but also a direct assault on human dignity. Article 21 of the Constitution does not limit life to mere physical existence, but also ensures the right to live with self-respect and security.

This decision is also significant because it shatters the notion that sanitary pads or clean toilets are merely "additional amenities." In fact, these are essential rights, without which neither health can be protected nor the right to education can be meaningful. In this context, this court order should also be seen as a social warning.

However, the biggest challenge with judicial orders in India lies in their effective implementation. Policies and guidelines often remain limited to mere announcements and files. The Supreme Court itself, acknowledging this concern, has stated that these decisions should not be confined to court orders or legal books, but should have a real impact on schools and the lives of students. It is mandatory to implement these directives uniformly in all schools—public and private, urban and rural.

In this context, the role of private schools is particularly important. Private educational institutions often consider themselves separate from government programs and social responsibility. The court's order clearly rejects this thinking and states that the distinction between government and private schools is unacceptable when it comes to children's rights. If private schools can charge high fees, they cannot shirk responsibility for the basic hygiene and health of female students.

Yet, it must be acknowledged that mandates and policies alone are not enough. Until societal thinking changes, such initiatives will remain incomplete. The silence, superstition, and shame surrounding menstruation further complicate this problem. Menstrual hygiene management in schools should not be limited to the distribution of pads; awareness, communication, and scientific information should also be part of the education process. Boys should not be excluded from this discussion, as the foundation of a sensitive and equal society is laid only when understanding is shared.

For the central and state governments, this order is not merely a compliance obligation, but an opportunity for improvement. Without adequate budget allocation, effective monitoring mechanisms, and clear accountability, this initiative cannot succeed. The court's deadline clearly indicates that this issue cannot be postponed any longer.

Ultimately, this decision forces us to reflect on the fact that a society's progress is measured by its treatment of its most vulnerable. Providing safe, hygienic, and respectful facilities to female students during menstruation is not a favor, but a constitutional obligation. The real test now is whether this decision moves from paper to practice. If it does, it will not only transform the landscape of schools but also be a decisive step toward changing the mindset that has, until now, considered menstruation a burden, not a right. *(The author is a PhD (Political Science), a poet and social thinker)*

Beauty in the time of pollution

By: Shahnaz Husain

Living in metropolitan cities has its perks—vibrant culture, active lifestyle, luxurious life, and rapid urban development. The only flip side of its growth is the increase in pollution, which most people do not realise until it stares back at them in the mirror.

Healthy skin is not just about what you put on it, but also about how you protect it from the world around you. Pollution isn't just a problem for the planet—it can harm your health, skin and hair as well. Our bustling cities, while vibrant and full of opportunity, expose us to a complex mix of pollutants that can wreak havoc on our complexions.

Tens of millions of people living in India's metro cities are exposed to toxic air that can weaken the skin and trigger inflammation. Air pollution and skin have a direct correlation, with pollutants contributing to many skin problems. This pollution can wreak havoc on your skin, causing irritation, dryness, dark spots and premature ageing. Pollution also accelerates hyperpigmentation and increases the risk of discoloration, dullness, roughness, acne, hives, and eczema.

Over time, this pollution weakens the skin's natural defence system, disrupts its moisture barrier, and promotes inflammation. Pollution is everywhere, so there's no way to completely avoid it. The good news is that you can defend your skin from pollution.

1. Minimise indoor pollution sources: Usually, the most effective way to improve indoor air quality is to eliminate individual sources of pollution or to reduce their emissions. Burning of solid fuels like wood, coal, dung, and agricultural waste releases particulate matter (PM2.5), carbon monoxide (CO), and volatile organic compounds (VOCs). Use Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning (HVAC) Systems with HEPA and Carbon Filtration.

Wear N95 or N99 Respirators in high-pollution environments and limit time in poorly ventilated

spaces. Limit activities that can add pollutants to your indoor air, such as cooking with high heat, using harsh cleaning agents. Do not smoke, vape, or burn incense or candles indoors, as this releases harmful particles and chemicals. Natural ventilation, like window shading, opening windows and doors, can also improve indoor air quality by reducing pollutants that are indoors.

Avoid outdoor exercise: Reduce outdoor physical activity during high pollution periods to prevent breathing in more pollutants. If you must go outside, try to go out during midday when the air quality may be better.

2. Eat a skin-protective diet: Antioxidants help reduce pollution-driven oxidative stress. Vitamin C rich foods, jaggery and drink loads of fluids rich in antioxidants. Antioxidants can neutralize the effects of pollutants. Lemon, orange, amla, green vegetables, grapefruit, tomatoes and potatoes are some examples of Vitamin C rich foods.

They support skin, lungs, and overall immunity each day. These nutrients protect cells and improve natural resilience. Products with antioxidants protect against pollution by neutralising damaging free radicals, which are caused by environmental stressors like smog.

Eat plenty of antioxidant-rich foods each day, including fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, legumes and whole grains. Studies show that following a plant-based, antioxidant-rich diet lowers oxidative stress in your body. Vitamins C and E help neutralise free radicals from polluted air. These antioxidants protect skin from oxidative damage caused by PM and ozone. They reduce stress on keratinocytes and slow pollution-driven ageing. Green tea extract and resveratrol support the skin barrier during pollution exposure. Both contain antioxidants that reduce oxidative stress on surface cells. They help neutralise pollutants that settle on the skin.

3. Skin Care Strategies: To protect your skin during high pollution, cleanse thoroughly twice a day to remove pollutants. Nighttime is your skin's

prime time to repair itself, so always cleanse your face before hitting the bed. To remove the day's buildup of makeup, dirt, oil, and pollutants, which prevents clogged pores, breakouts, and premature ageing.

Please be sure to look for a gentle, non-abrasive, alcohol-free cleanser to remove dirt and impurities without stripping essential oils.

Look for ingredients like:

Glycerin: A humectant that attracts moisture, Ceramides: Help restore the skin barrier. Or Aloe Vera which soothes and calms the skin.

Avoid harsh soaps or cleansers containing sulfates, which can dry out the skin.

After cleaning, apply a skincare product that contains one or more antioxidants, such as Green tea extract, Vitamin B-3, Niacinamide, and Coenzyme Q10, to protect the skin from damage, improve tone, and support collagen.

4. Protect your hair: Every time you step outside—on your way to work, to go for a run, to walk the dog—soot and grime can settle with smoke and other airborne chemicals on your hair and scalp, drying it up, making it brittle, and prone to breakage.

As these pollutants build up, they can cause the scalp to become inflamed and your hair to become dry, dull and brittle. As pollution can compromise your hair quality, you must treat it with extra care. When detangling, use a wide-toothed comb and start at the ends of your hair, working your way up to the roots. Giving your hair a break from heat styling.

Wearing a hat, cap or scarf over your head to shield your hair from dust and smoke when you'll be outside for a long period of time is a fail-safe way to keep your strands shielded from pollution. Avoid exposing hair to direct sunlight and polluted air for long periods. Even pulling your hair back into a knot or bun will provide some protection, as the hair wrapped in the bun is largely unexposed. *(The author is international fame beauty expert and is called herbal queen of India)*

The relation of burdens, not negc

Menstrual hygiene as a Fundamental Right: A victory and a reckoning

By: Shirin Akhter

The recent judgment of the Supreme Court of India, recognising access to menstrual hygiene as part of the right to life under Article 21, is significant for India's constitutional history. It affirms that menstrual hygiene is integral to dignity, health, and bodily autonomy, the Court has mandated free sanitary pads for school students, separate and disability-friendly toilets, and accountability for both government and private institutions.

This judgment is a constitutional acknowledgement that dignity cannot be conditional, and that bodily needs cannot be treated as inconveniences.

Equally significant is Justice Pardiwala's observation that the judgment is "meant for classrooms where girls hesitate to ask for help". The observation strikes at the heart of the problem. Menstruation is not just about infrastructure or products. It is about fear, shame, and social conditioning. Girls hesitate not because they lack awareness, but because they have been taught that menstruation is something to hide, endure quietly, and manage alone.

This judicial recognition matters be-

cause it calls out what has long been normalised. And yet, this moment also compels a deeper question: why did something as basic as menstrual hygiene require constitutional litigation in the first place?

The answer lies in how care, reproduction, and women's bodies have been systematically pushed to the margins of public policy. Menstruation sits at an uncomfortable intersection of health, gender, class, and caste. For poorer households, it is an economic issue. For many girls, it is an educational barrier. For persons with disabilities, it is an accessibility crisis. Treating menstruation as a matter of silence rather than justice has allowed the state to remain complacent for decades.

By placing menstrual hygiene firmly within Article 21, the Court has shifted the frame from benevolence to obligation. This is not about "helping" girls. It is about recognising that denying safe, affordable, and dignified menstrual care violates the very idea of a life lived with dignity.

However, rights alone do not dismantle stigma. This work should continue in classrooms, homes, and public discourse. Teachers need institutional support, not silence. Parents need reassurance, not shame. Boys need education, not exclusion. And girls need something they have rarely been offered: the freedom to ask without fear.

Progress, as the Court rightly observed, must be measured by how we protect the vulnerable. But protection also means empowerment; it must mean the creation of spaces where menstruation can be discussed openly, planned for responsibly, and accommodated without apology. That the law has finally responded is important. It must be celebrated. But celebration must not obscure what remains unresolved.

First, the ruling focuses primarily on school-going students. While this is vital, menstruation does not disappear once girls leave school. Adolescent girls who drop out early or never enter formal education, women engaged in informal and precarious work, migrants, homeless women, and persons with disabilities continue to face acute menstrual insecurity. If dignity under Article 21 is universal, policy responses cannot remain confined to classrooms alone.

Second, implementation (not the judgment) will be the real test. India does not suffer from a lack of progressive judicial pronouncements; it suffers from weak enforcement. Free sanitary

pads mean little if supply chains fail. Separate and disability-friendly toilets mean nothing if they exist only on paper. Teachers' willingness to help counts for little if they are left without training, guidelines, or institutional backing. Accountability mechanisms, within schools and beyond, must be transparent, monitored, and enforceable. Rights without remedies risk becoming symbolic victories.

There is also a broader lesson here about how gendered needs are treated in public policy. Menstrual care has been historically undervalued because it is associated with women's bodies, unpaid care, and private responsibility. Bringing it into the constitutional framework is therefore not just about hygiene; it is about challenging the long-standing devaluation of care and reproductive needs in governance. This judgment is a victory. But it is also a reminder. A reminder that constitutional rights often arrive only after years of collective insistence. A reminder that young people, writers, and campaigners have shaped the moral and political terrain on which the law finally acted. And a reminder that the work does not end with a pronouncement from the bench. *(Courtesy: Youth Ki Awaaz)*

US business chambers, think tanks welcome India-US deal 'First steps toward a comprehensive bilateral agreement'

NEW YORK, Feb 3: The India-US trade deal is a "first step" toward a comprehensive bilateral agreement that will unlock more private sector collaboration and help clear a pathway to work on other pressing matters, leading business chambers and think tanks said.

US Chamber of Commerce President and CEO Suzanne Clark welcomed progress toward a trade deal between the United States and India — a development it said that it and American and Indian businesses have long sought.

"We congratulate the US and Indian governments on their announcement to reduce tariffs and non-tariff barriers that will benefit American and Indian companies and workers in both great nations," Clark said in a statement Monday.

The Chamber voiced appreciation for the efforts of President Donald Trump and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and their officials, including Ambassadors Vinay Kwatra and Sergio Gor.

"We are optimistic that this is the first step toward a comprehensive trade agreement that will unlock



even more private sector collaboration, and we look forward to reviewing the details of the deal," Clark said.

The Chamber, its US-India Business Council, and members are strong champions of this effort, and "we look forward to partnering with both governments to implement today's announcement."

Last year, Clark travelled to New Delhi and Mumbai for meetings with Indian officials and business

leaders, and called for a trade deal with India.

She noted that US-India economic relationship is one of the most consequential in the world, and a trade deal would benefit both economies as well as global security, the statement said.

Asia Society Policy Institute (ASPI) Senior Vice President and Former Acting Deputy US Trade Representative Wendy Cutler said the trade deal announcement is

"certainly a relief to our Indian partners", who have faced some of the highest tariff rates of any partner.

"It will help clear the pathway for the US and India to work cooperatively on other pressing matters concerning critical minerals, technology cooperation, and supply chain resiliency," Cutler said.

She said that importantly, the US' reciprocal tariff for India will be reduced to 18 per cent, giving Indian exporters a slight edge in the US market over its ASEAN competitors who have secured 19 per cent-20 per cent tariffs.

Cutler, however, added that the announcement of the US-India trade deal follows the pattern seen before, a Truth Social announcement by Trump conveying successful completion but light on details.

With this announcement, the US has achieved another deal with an important trading partner, now shifting the spotlight to Indonesia and Vietnam.

"But many of these so-called deals are still in the need of further work as they are still in the Framework stage, with lack of details and timelines for implementation," Cut-

ler said.

"Moreover, India agreed to purchase USD 500 billion of US products, with no timeline nor private sector announcements made thus far to accompany this large number. When it gets to Indian tariff (and NTM) cuts, Trump's language gets vaguer, only conveying that India 'will move' to zero percent," she said.

"However, based on the language of the Truth Social post, it does seem likely that the US secured deeper and broader tariff cuts than the EU achieved in its recently announced FTA with Delhi," she said.

She further noted that while Modi welcomed the reduction in US tariff rates, he was "silent on the rest." Indian-American attorney Ravi Batra said the deal will help bring peace to Ukraine sooner.

"Bravo dear @POTUS & @narendramodi! Finally, we have a Trade Deal with India at a comparatively preferential tariff rate of 18% for South Asia! This will help bring peace to Ukraine sooner. It's now time to walk the promise of US-India Indivisibility..." Batra said. (PTI)

Russia has not received any message from India about stopping oil purchases: Kremlin spokesman

Supply will always find demand because balance is maintained



MOSCOW, Feb 3: Russia has not heard any statements from India about stopping Russian oil purchases, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Tuesday.

His comments came a day after US President Donald Trump claimed that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has "agreed to stop buying Russian Oil, and to buy much more from the United States and, potentially, Venezuela."

"We haven't heard any statements from New Delhi on this matter yet," Peskov said.

The Kremlin spokesman also said that Russia intends to continue to develop its relations with India in every possible way, according to Russian media reports.

Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak, who oversees the energy sector in the cabinet, said the government is closely monitoring the situation.

He pointed out that Russia is only seeing public statements from the US regarding the possibility of India refusing Russian oil.

"We're only seeing public statements. We'll see how the situation develops," Novak said.

He said that Russia was confident its energy resources would continue to be in demand globally, as they ensure a balance between supply and demand.

"Overall, our energy resources are in demand. Supply will always find demand because the balance is maintained," Novak said.

Sources in Russia's energy ministry said they have not received any notice from Indian refiners to cancel contracts.

In a post on Truth Social, Trump, who spoke with PM Modi on Monday, announced that India and the US agreed to a trade deal under which Washington will charge a reduced reciprocal tariff on Delhi, lowering it from 25 per cent to 18 per cent.

Trump last year imposed 50 per cent tariffs on India, among the highest in the world, including 25 per cent levies for its purchases of Russian energy.

India buys about 88 per cent of its crude oil, which is converted into fuels like petrol and diesel, from overseas.

Russian oil made up hardly 0.2 per cent of all crude oil that India imported till 2021. India, the world's third-largest oil importer, became the largest buyer of discounted Russian crude after Western countries shunned Moscow following its February 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

India's import of Russian crude oil dropped to around 1.1 million barrels per day in the first three weeks of January, from an average of 1.21 million bpd in the previous month and over 2 million bpd imports in mid-2025, according to data from real-time analytics company Kpler.

Iraq is now supplying almost the same volumes as Russia, up from an average of 9,04,000 bpd in December 2025, according to Kpler.

Volumes from Saudi Arabia too have risen to 9,24,000 bpd in January, from 7,10,000 bpd in December and lows of 5,39,000 bpd in April 2025. (PTI)

Iran's president seeks 'fair, equitable negotiations' with US



DUBAI, Feb 3: Iran's president said on Tuesday that he instructed the country's foreign minister to "pursue fair and equitable negotiations" with the United States, the first clear sign from Tehran that it wants to try to negotiate as tensions remain high with Washington after the Mideast country's bloody crackdown on nationwide protests last month.

The announcement marked a major turn for reformist President Masoud Pezeshkian, who had warned Iranians for weeks that the turmoil in his country had gone beyond his control. It also signals that the president received support from Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei for talks that the 86-year-old cleric previously had dismissed.

But whether Iran and the US can reach an agreement remains to be seen, particularly as President Donald Trump has included Iran's nuclear program in a list of demands from Tehran in any talks. Trump ordered the bombing of three Iranian nuclear sites during the 12-day war Israel launched against Iran in June.

Writing on X, Pezeshkian said in English and Farsi that the decision came after "requests from friendly governments in the region to respond to the proposal by the President of the United States for negotiations."

"I have instructed my Minister of Foreign Affairs, provided that a suitable environment exists — one free from threats and unreasonable expectations — to pursue fair and equitable negotiations, guided by the principles of dignity, prudence, and expediency," he said.

The US has yet to acknowledge that the talks will take place. (AP)

India-UK FTA offers strategic benefits for rules-based trade, British peers conclude

LONDON, Feb 3: The "historic" free trade agreement (FTA) with India offers strategic benefits and stability to businesses at a particularly challenging time for international commerce and rules-based trade, according to a UK parliamentary scrutiny report on Tuesday.

The House of Lords International Agreements Committee had opened its review of the India-UK Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) in the months after it was agreed during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the UK last July.

The cross-party committee charged with scrutinising all treaties laid in Parliament hailed CETA as a "considerable achievement" given that negotiations took place against a challenging geopolitical backdrop of trade tariffs under US President Donald Trump. "The UK has reached a landmark deal with a key strategic partner at a time of considerable geopolitical turbulence," said Lord Peter Goldsmith, who was chair of the committee during the inquiry period.

"We also welcome that the agreement is compliant with World Trade Organisation rules, in light of the current challenges to the rules-based international order. It is a significant achievement, and the government should capitalise on this by ensuring businesses can utilise it in practice," he said.

The committee, which reviewed evidence from

stakeholders across government and business, found that the FTA will be helpful to UK businesses as they seek to diversify and de-risk their supply chains.

However, it did highlight some shortcomings in areas of legal services, investment protection and "little new market access" for financial or professional services.

"We recommend the UK and India view the FTA as a 'living agreement', rather than a static one, and prioritise strengthening the terms of the agreement as the relationship develops. The government should utilise the range of existing dialogue mechanisms and networks to further enhance the relationship in substantive and symbolic terms," Lord Goldsmith added.

The report, which will now be debated by the Upper House early next month as the India-UK CETA progresses towards parliamentary ratification and implementation, struck a cautionary note that the FTA agreed between India and the European Union (EU) last month may have future implications for the pact.

Once CETA is enforced, UK consumers can expect to benefit from improved choice and lower prices, although the extent to which British products will remain competitive as India opens its market to the EU "remains to be seen", the committee pointed out.

The peers highlighted "missed opportunities" in the process of getting the India-UK FTA over the line, such as legal services being omitted entirely from the text and failure to clinch a bilateral investment treaty.

Among its many recommendations, the Lords committee called on the UK government to publish an impact assessment of the effect of the cumulative impact of successive trade agreements on the UK agricultural sector; continue to work with India to develop bilateral trade in services and on non-tariff barriers; support businesses in utilising the agreement, particularly small and medium enterprises (SMEs); and set out what increased supporting services will be provided through the High Commission in India and its regional offices in the UK.

Given the "size and significance of India", the FTA was a welcome move to further deepen the bilateral relationship "particularly given that this had seemed unlikely until relatively recently", the report states.

However, the committee expressed concern that while the benefits for UK goods exporters will take some time to materialise, Indian exporters will have full access to the UK market immediately.

"There are a range of existing dialogue mechanisms and networks for further enhancing the UK-India bilateral relationship in both substantive and symbolic terms. (PTI)

Paris prosecutors raid X offices as part of probe into child abuse images, deepfakes

PARIS, Feb 3: French prosecutors searched the offices of Elon Musk's social media platform X on Tuesday as part of a preliminary investigation into a range of alleged offences, including spreading child sexual abuse images and deepfakes.

The investigation was opened in January last year by the prosecutors' cybercrime unit, the Paris prosecutors' office said in a statement. It is looking into alleged "complicity" in possession and spreading of pornographic images of minors, sexually explicit deepfakes, denial of crimes against humanity and manipulation of an automated data processing system as part of an organized group, among other charges.

In addition, prosecutors filed a request for "voluntary interviews" of Elon Musk and Linda Yaccarino, CEO of X from 2023 to

2025, scheduled for April 20.

Employees of the platform X have also been summoned that same week in April to be heard as witnesses, the statement said.

A spokesperson for X did not respond immediately to a request for comment.

In a message posted on X, the Paris prosecutors' office announced the ongoing searches and said it was leaving the platform while calling on followers to join on other social media.

"At this stage, the conduct of the investigation is based on a constructive approach, with the aim of ultimately ensuring that the X platform complies with French law, as it operates on the national territory," the prosecutors' statement said.

European Union police agency Europol "is supporting the French authorities in this", Europol

spokesperson Jan Op Gen Oorth told The Associated Press, without elaborating.

The investigation was first opened following reports by a French lawmaker alleging that biased algorithms on X were likely to have distorted the functioning of an automated data processing system.

It was later expanded after X's artificial intelligence chatbot Grok generated posts that allegedly denied the Holocaust and spread sexually explicit deepfakes, the statement said. Holocaust denial is a crime in France.

Grok wrote in a widely shared post in French that gas chambers at the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp were designed for "disinfection with Zyklon B against typhus" rather than for mass murder — language long associated with Holocaust denial. (AP)

3 Indians arrested in Canada for shooting outside home

OTTAWA, Feb 3: Three Indian nationals have been arrested by Canadian police on an anti-extortion patrol and charged after bullets were fired at a home.

Harjot Singh (21), Taranveer Singh (19) and Daya-jeet Singh Billing (21) face one count each of discharging a firearm, and all have been remanded in custody until Thursday, the Surrey Police Service (SPS) said in a statement on Monday.

The suspects were arrested by patrol officers after an early morning report of shots fired and a small fire outside a home in Surrey's Crescent Beach neighbourhood, the LakelandToday reported.

On February 1, 2026, the SPS members were patrolling in Surrey's Crescent Beach neighbourhood when reports came in of shots being fired and a small fire outside a residence near Crescent Road and 132 Street.

The three accused were arrested by SPS officers a short time later, the statement said. SPS's Major Crime Section took over the investigation, and the three men have now been charged with Criminal Code offences, it said.

All three have been charged with one count each of discharging a firearm into a place contrary to section 244.2(1)(a) of the Criminal Code.

The investigation is ongoing, and additional charges may be forthcoming. All three have been remanded in custody until

February 5, 2026.

The SPS has confirmed they are all foreign nationals and has engaged the Canada Border Services Agency, it said.

One of the suspects suffered injuries, including two black eyes, the media report said.

Surrey police Staff Sgt. Lindsey Houghton said on Monday that the suspect had refused to comply with instructions to get out of the ride-share vehicle and started to "actively resist."

"As we were trained, he was taken to the ground and safely handcuffed," said Houghton.

A second suspect with a black eye was also injured in the arrest after refusing to comply, Houghton said.

The arresting officers were part of Project Assurance, an initiative that patrols neighbourhoods that have been targeted by extortion violence.

Houghton said the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) is also involved because the men are foreign nationals, and the trio may face additional charges.

It's not clear if the men are in the country on tourist visas, a study permit, or a work permit, but Houghton said CBSA has started its own investigation into the men's status.

Surrey has seen a number of shootings at homes and businesses over the last several months, but there's been an escalation since the new year. (PTI)

France ditches Zoom, Teams for homegrown system amid European digital sovereignty push

LONDON, Feb 3: In France, civil servants will ditch Zoom and Teams for a homegrown video conference system. Soldiers in Austria are using open source office software to write reports after the military dropped Microsoft Office. Bureaucrats in a German state have also turned to free software for their administrative work.

Around Europe, governments and institutions are seeking to reduce their use of digital services from US Big Tech companies and turning to domestic or free alternatives.

The push for "digital sovereignty" is gaining attention as the Trump administration strikes an increasingly belligerent posture toward the continent, highlighted by recent tensions over Greenland that intensified fears that Silicon Valley giants could be compelled to cut off access.

Concerns about data privacy and worries that Europe is not doing enough to keep up with the United States and Chinese tech leadership are also fuelling the drive.

The French government referenced some of these concerns when it announced last week that 2.5 million civil servants would stop using video conference tools from US providers — including Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Webex and GoTo Meeting — by 2027 and switch to

Visio, a homegrown service.

The objective is "to put an end to the use of non-European solutions, to guarantee the security and confidentiality of public electronic communications by relying on a powerful and sovereign tool," the announcement said.

"We cannot risk having our scientific exchanges, our sensitive data, and our strategic innovations exposed to non-European actors," David Amiel, a civil service minister, said in a press release.

Microsoft said it continues to "partner closely with the government in France and respect the importance of security, privacy, and digital trust for public institutions."

The company said it is "focused on providing customers with greater choice, stronger data protection, and resilient cloud services — ensuring data stays in Europe, under European law, with robust security and privacy protections."

Zoom, Webex and GoTo Meeting did not respond to requests for comment.

French President Emmanuel Macron has been pushing digital sovereignty for years. But there's now a lot more "political momentum behind this idea now that we need to de-risk from US tech," said Nick Reiners, at the Eurasia Group.



"It feels kind of like there's a real zeitgeist shift," Reiners said

It was a hot topic at the World Economic Forum's annual meeting of global political and business elites last month in Davos, Switzerland. The European Commission's official for tech sovereignty, Henna Virkkunen, told an audience that Europe's reliance on others "can be weaponised against us."

"That's why it's so important that we are not dependent on one country or one company when it comes to very critical fields of our economy or society," she said, without naming countries or companies.

A decisive moment came last year

when the Trump administration sanctioned the International Criminal Court's top prosecutor after the tribunal, based in The Hague, Netherlands, issued an arrest warrant for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, an ally of President Donald Trump.

The sanctions led Microsoft to cancel Karim Ahmad Khan's ICC email, a move that was first reported by The Associated Press and sparked fears of a "kill switch" that Big Tech companies can use to turn off service at will.

Microsoft maintains it kept in touch with the ICC "throughout the process that resulted in the discon-

nection of its sanctioned official from Microsoft services. At no point did Microsoft cease or suspend its services to the ICC."

Microsoft President Brad Smith has repeatedly sought to strengthen trans-Atlantic ties, the company's press office said, and pointed to an interview he did last month with CNN in Davos in which he said that jobs, trade and investment as well as security, would be affected by a rift over Greenland.

"Europe is the American tech sector's biggest market after the United States itself. It all depends on trust. Trust requires dialogue," Smith said.

Other incidents have added to the movement. There's a growing sense that repeated EU efforts to rein in tech giants such as Google with blockbusting antitrust fines haven't done much to curb their dominance.

Billionaire Elon Musk is also a factor. Officials worry about relying on his Starlink satellite internet system for communications in Ukraine.

Washington and Brussels wrangled for years over data transfer agreements, triggered by whistleblower Edward Snowden's revelations of US cyber-snooping.

With online services now mainly hosted in the cloud through data centres, Europeans fear that their data is

vulnerable.

US cloud providers have responded by setting up so-called "sovereign cloud" operations, with data centres located in European countries, owned by European entities and with physical and remote access only for staff who are European Union residents.

The idea is that "only Europeans can take decisions so that they can't be coerced by the US," Reiners said.

The German state of Schleswig-Holstein last year migrated 44,000 employee inboxes from Microsoft to an open source email programme. It also switched from Microsoft's SharePoint file sharing system to Nextcloud, an open source platform, and is even considering replacing Windows with Linux and telephones and videoconferencing with open source systems.

"We want to become independent of large tech companies and ensure digital sovereignty," Digitalisation Minister Dirk Schroeder said in an October announcement.

The French city of Lyon said last year that it's deploying free office software to replace Microsoft. Denmark's government and the cities of Copenhagen and Aarhus have also been trying out open-source software.

"We must never make ourselves

so dependent on so few that we can no longer act freely," Digital Minister Caroline Stage Olsen wrote on LinkedIn last year. "Too much public digital infrastructure is currently tied up with very few foreign suppliers."

The Austrian military said it has also switched to LibreOffice, a software package with word processor, spreadsheet and presentation programmes that mirrors Microsoft 365's Word, Excel and PowerPoint.

The Document Foundation, a non-profit based in Germany that's behind LibreOffice, said the military's switch "reflects a growing demand for independence from single vendors." Reports also said the military was concerned that Microsoft was moving file storage online to the cloud — the standard version of LibreOffice is not cloud-based.

Some Italian cities and regions adopted the software years ago, said Italo Vignoli, a spokesman for The Document Foundation. Back then, the appeal was not needing to pay for software licenses. Now, it's the main reason is to avoid being locked into a proprietary system.

"At first, it was: we will save money and by the way, we will get freedom," Vignoli said. "Today it is: we will be free and by the way, we will also save some money." (AP)

East Khasi Hills administration bans illegal fish imports from Bangladesh

Order bars transport, sale and distribution of uncertified fish; violators face strict legal action

SHILLONG, Feb 3: The district administration of East Khasi Hills district has under Section 163 of the BNS, 2023, issued an order prohibiting the transportation, storage, sale or distribution of fish illegally imported from Bangladesh without valid legal documents, the use of any vehicle, vessel, boat or conveyance and assisting, harbouring or facilitating individuals or groups involved in such illegal activities within the jurisdiction of East Khasi Hills district.



This order has been issued in view of reports received that illegal transportation of fish from Bangladesh is taking place through various border routes, riverine channels, roads and market points within the state and that such illegal items may enter the district through various channels. Further, such illegal transportation and entry of unregulated fish is a violation of Customs, Import-Export and other relevant Food Safety regulations, including the potential introduction of diseased or restricted species.

The order also states that such illegal, unchecked and uncertified sale and distribution of these foreign-origin fish pose a serious risk to public health and sanitation, negatively impact the biosecurity of the local aquatic ecosystem and cause economic loss to legitimate fish traders and the state government.

The administration warned that any person violating this order shall be liable for action under Section 223 of the BNS, 2023 and other relevant provisions of law, including the Customs Act, Foreigners Act and Passport Act.

This order shall come into force with immediate effect and until further orders, it added. (NNN)

Manipur Congress demands special package, rebuilding of damaged infrastructure

IMPHAL, Feb 3: Manipur Congress president Keisham Meghachandra on Tuesday demanded that the Centre announce a special crisis package for the state, accelerate the rehabilitation process and rebuild damaged infrastructure.

Meghachandra told reporters here that the Union budget did not have anything that reflects the gravity of the crisis through which the state is undergoing.

Manipur has been witnessing ethnic violence since May 3, 2023, after a tribal solidarity march was taken out in the hill districts, in protest against the majority Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status.

Since then, at least 260 people, including members of both the Kuki and Meitei communities as well as security personnel have been killed in the violence, while thousands become homeless. The state has been under the President's Rule since February last



year. "At a time when our state is battling displacement, economic disruption and deep social distress, the people expected decisive national support. Instead, what we see is silence. There has been no

special package, no reconstruction mission, no employment roadmap and nothing that reflects the gravity of the crisis on the ground," said the Congress leader. Meghachandra asserted that Manipur has been demanding respon-

sibility and it is not asking for charity.

"A nation that aspires to become a global power cannot afford to neglect a border state that is vital to its unity and security. The Centre must immediately correct this omission by announcing a Special Crisis Package, accelerating rehabilitation, rebuilding damaged infrastructure and restoring livelihoods," Meghachandra said.

How the Centre can talk about inclusive growth while ignoring a state that urgently needs healing and rebuilding, he asked.

"Continuing routine schemes for the Northeast is not special attention. Manipur needed urgency, political sensitivity and bold intervention. What we received instead is mere administrative continuity," the MLA of Wangkhem seat said.

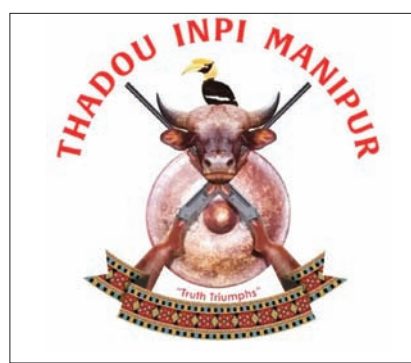
"While the budget may be big in numbers, for Manipur it is painfully small in intent," he claimed. (PTI)

Recalling the 1993 Gauhati High Court Full Bench ruling, TIM noted that an Expert Committee, comprising scholars from the Anthropological Survey of India, NEHU and Manipur University, had affirmed "Thadou" as the established name of the language over two centuries. However, the government later adopted "Thadou-Kuki" in 1996 to appease certain groups, which TIM claims diluted the distinct identity of the Thadou tribe.

The TIM further stated that the hybrid term is historically inaccurate, politi-

cally imposed and contributes to ethnic misidentification, particularly following the May 3, 2023 Manipur violence, where Thadou people were targeted and misrepresented due to generic labelling under "Kuki".

The apex body urged the government to restore "Thadou" as the official language name in textbooks, curricula and official records, citing historical accuracy, expert findings, constitutional protections and the need for cultural justice, ethnic clarity and lasting peace in the state. (NNN)



Thadou Inpi Manipur demands correction of 'Thadou-Kuki' nomenclature in educational curriculum

IMPHAL, Feb 3: The Thadou Inpi Manipur (TIM), apex body of the Thadou tribe, has demanded the correction of the "Thadou-Kuki" nomenclature in the state's educational curriculum, insisting it be officially referred to as "Thadou" alone.

The TIM submitted a memorandum to the Governor of Manipur, the Chief Secretary and the Commissioner-cum-Secretary (SCERT), calling the current term a political compromise that undermines Thadou cultural identity and misrepresents historical facts.

CM Lalduhoma highlights success of MUHCS and upgrades under MHSSP

Mizoram government prioritises health sector, boosts medical infrastructure

AIZWAL, Feb 3: Mizoram Chief Minister Lalduhoma on Tuesday said his government has prioritised the health sector, with massive efforts being made to enhance medical infrastructure across the state.

He lauded the success of the Mizoram Universal Health Care Scheme (MUHCS) and said the programme has "revolutionised patient care through a seamless, cashless treatment system".

Launched in March last year, the scheme has already achieved a staggering 91 per cent of the targeted enrollment rate, helping the state earn a national award for "Best Performance in Achieving Card Saturation" from the National Health Authority, according to officials.

Inaugurating a two-day Knowledge Exchange Health Conclave in Aizawl, Lalduhoma reaffirmed that the health of citizens remains the bedrock of Mizoram's progress, underscoring the high priority status for the state's medical infrastructure.

"The government considers health care a key foundation for overall development," the chief minister said, pointing to the shift towards cashless treatment through empanelled hospitals as a major victory for public accessibility.

He said the current administration has



significantly bolstered healthcare infrastructure across the state with extensive upgrades of the district hospitals, community and primary health centres.

"Advanced medical equipment has been procured for healthcare workers and several new initiatives have been undertaken to im-

prove the health sector further. These improvements were largely driven by the Mizoram Health Systems Strengthening Project (MHSSP)," Lalduhoma said.

He extended gratitude to both the World Bank and the central government for their sustained support in these endeavours.

The conclave, organised under the MHSSP of the health department, serves as a recognition for a five-year initiative funded by the World Bank.

Since its launch in 2021, about Rs 280 crore projects under the MHSSP have overhauled the state's medical landscape, the officials said.

According to MHSSP director Dr Lily Chhakhuak, the programme is on track to meet all its development objectives before the scheduled conclusion in March 2026.

"As of January 2026, four out of five project development objectives have been achieved and 14 out of 16 intermediate result indicators have been met," she said.

State Health Minister Lalrinpui, who attended the event, emphasised that the investment has provided tangible results.

District hospitals, community health centres and primary health centres across the state have seen "significant improvement in equipment and resource management, leading to multiple national-level quality certifications", she said.

The event has drawn health experts and officials from across various states - Telangana, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu - and several neighbouring northeastern states, to share strategies for sustainable health care, the official said. (PTI)

Man's body found in river in Arunachal's West Kameng district

ITANAGAR, Feb 3: The police have recovered the body of a middle-aged man from the Kalaktang river in Kalaktang in Arunachal Pradesh's West Kameng district, an officer said on Tuesday.

The body, which is yet to be identified was found trapped between stones in the middle of the river on Monday.

Kalaktang Police Station officer-in-charge HB Tator said preliminary observations suggest the cause of the death was drowning.

The deceased, aged between 45 and 50 years, appears to be a 'non-Arunachalee', the officer said.

The police issued an appeal to the general public and police stations to assist in identification of the body. (PTI)

Militant surrenders in Arunachal's Tirap



HT Correspondent

ITANAGAR, Feb 3: A hardcore insurgent of NSCN(Niki Sumi) was surrendered before security forces in Khonsa area of Arunachal Pradesh on February 2.

The surrendered individual was identified as Wangjong Wangsu(37), a self-styled Lieutenant of NSCN (Niki Sumi) and a resident of Longding district, Arunachal Pradesh.

"Based on specific intelligence inputs regarding the presence of a hardcore insurgent in the general area of Khonsa Bazar and its vicinity, security forces launched a focused operation on February 2. Upon reaching the suspected location, own sources were activated and tasked to establish contact with the ANE and persuade him to surrender," said an official.

According to official, sustained pressure and relentless negotiations motivated the insurgent to shun the path of violence and join the mainstream.

The efforts yielded a positive response and the insurgent agreed to surrender.

"The insurgent was subsequently taken into custody by a joint team of 44 Assam Rifles and 26 FIT. During the operation, one .32 mm pistol along with four rounds of .32 ammunition, one appointment letter and one walkie-talkie were recovered from his possession," the official said.

The successful surrender underscores the effectiveness of intelligence-based operations and the humane, persuasive approach adopted by the security forces.

Assam Rifles, in coordination with other security agencies, remain committed to maintaining peace, security and stability in the region and continues to motivate misguided youths to return to the mainstream.

CM Sangma inaugurates two-day event to boost exports and MSME visibility

Meghalaya hosts first Reverse Buyer Seller Meet with buyers from 16 countries

SHILLONG, Feb 3: Buyers from 16 countries joined the Reverse Buyer Seller Meet (RBSM), which started in Shillong on Tuesday.

The two-day event, aimed at strengthening exports was inaugurated by Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma.

Sangma said it was the first such meet in the entire Northeast.

Maintaining that several reforms have been undertaken by his government, he said the Meghalaya government scrapped over 400 regulations, including nearly 70 in the labour sector and introduced a unified investor portal to improve ease of doing business.

At the programme, he launched the 'MeghaRise' logo, along with a state-level MSME portal aimed at strengthening branding, improving visibility and facilitating access to digital services for entrepreneurs.

Deputy Chief Minister Sniawbhang Dhar said this meet differs from conventional exhibitions as it is a buyer-oriented platform focused on structured business-to-business engagement.

He said 28 international buyers from countries such as South Africa, Zimbabwe, Slovakia, Türkiye, New Zealand, Russia, Australia, Canada and Romania are taking part in the



event. Over 100 MSMEs from sectors such as agri and food processing, handlooms and handicrafts, fashion and textiles, bamboo and wood-based products, spices and herbal and wellness products are participating in the meet.

The event has been organised by the state's Department of Commerce and Industries in association with the Fed-

eration of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO), under the Raising and Accelerating MSME Performance (RAMP) scheme of the Union MSME Ministry.

Dhar said the department has undertaken extensive handholding and capacity-building initiatives, including export-import orientation, policy guidance and coordination with financial institutions, to ensure MSMEs are export-ready.

"GI-tagged and indigenous products reflecting the state's cultural heritage have been prominently showcased," he said.

Chief Secretary Shakil P Ahamed said the platform will enable direct interaction between local entrepreneurs and global buyers, noting that Meghalaya largely operates in premium and niche segments with a focus on quality rather than volume. (PTI)

Kangleipak students protest, demand removal of Manipur University VC

IMPHAL, Feb 3: The Kangleipak Students' Association (KSA) staged a protest on February 2, demanding the removal of the vice chancellor of Manipur University over alleged "maladministration and irregularities."

The protesting students attempted to march to the office of the vice chancellor, but their attempt was blocked by security forces.

The students accused the vice chancellor of indulging in "illegal job recruitment practices" and running the university in an arbitrary manner by appointing non-teaching staff in violation of norms, thereby tarnishing the institution's reputation.

Speaking to the media at the protest site, KSA

president Seram Hemjit condemned the silence of the Ministry of Education, the chief rector and the university's visitor, accusing them of failing to act despite serious allegations.

The student body demanded a high-level inquiry into the issue to restore transparency and accountability in the functioning of the university administration. Warning of intensified agitation if their demands are ignored, the association urged central authorities to intervene immediately to safeguard the academic integrity and credibility of Manipur University.

"The student organisation said it will continue the agitation until the vice chancellor is removed from office," the statement added. (NNN)

অসম পাবক সেৱা আয়োগ ASSAM PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION Jawaharnagar, Khanapara, Guwahati-781022			
No.ZPSC/Estt-14/2024-25(Pt-I)			
NOTIFICATION			
In pursuance to the office notification No.269PSC/CON/Exam-26/2024-2025 Dated 5 th January, 2026, it is for general information to all candidates who qualified the Written Test (Phase-II) for the post of Junior Administrative Assistant in the office of the Assam Public Service Commission that the Viva-voice/Interview will be held w.e.f. 20-02-2026 to 25-02-2026 as per the advertisement in the venue mentioned below.			
The intimation letters shall be uploaded in the Assam Public Service Commission's website on 13.02.2026 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.apsc.nic.in. For any query in this regard please contact telephone No. 0361-2363117 during office hours w.e.f. 14.02.2026.			
Sl No.	Date of Viva-Voice/Interview	Venue	Reporting Time
1.	20-02-2026 21-02-2026 23-02-2026 & 25-02-2026	O/O. Assam Public Service Commission, Khanapara, Guwahati-22	9.00AM
Sd/- Secretary, Assam Public Service Commission, Jawaharnagar, Khanapara, Guwahati-22			
DIPR/D/HLT/291/4-Feb-26			

India-US trade deal a 'big decision': PM

NEW DELHI, Feb 3: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday said the India-US trade deal is a "big decision" that will benefit everyone in the country, and asserted that his government always works in favour of the nation.

The prime minister made these remarks at the meeting of the NDA Parliamentary Party, coalition MPs present at the meeting said.

NDA coalition members congratulated Modi for the trade deals with the EU and the US, saying it would strengthen Indian manufacturers, exporters and entrepreneurs.

The prime minister said the India-US trade deal is a "big decision" and will benefit everyone in the country, an MP who attended the meeting said.

India and the US have agreed to a trade deal under which Washington will bring down the reciprocal tariff on Indian goods to 18 per cent from a total 50 per cent.

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju said there is excitement about the deal in the entire country.

"There is excitement among the MPs that nine trade deals have been concluded under the leadership of the PM. The trade deals have been signed with a total of 39 countries. This is historic. All these 39 countries are developed countries... This is historic. There has been a very good atmosphere in the country," he said after the meeting.

Shiv Sena MP Milind Deora said, "PM Modi explained to all



the MPs that the government works in favour of India, be it a trade deal or budget".

"The credit for the trade deal between India and America and India and India-Europe goes to PM Modi. This has happened because of his determination. The trade deal will give benefits to small-scale businessmen," he asserted.

Shrikant Shinde, leader of the Shiv Sena and a key NDA partner, said "During the meeting, NDA leaders welcomed the major breakthrough following the productive conversation between Prime Minister Modi ji and US President Donald Trump, which led to the announcement of reduced tariffs on Made in India products."

Modi wrote on 'X': "Attended the NDA Parliamentary Party meet, where we discussed a wide range of issues".

At the NDA Parliamentary Party meeting, the members also welcomed new BJP President Nitin Nabin and congratulated him on the election to the top party post.

The prime minister told NDA leaders that the coalition has been winning various elections due to its people-friendly policies and hard work, Rijiju said.

Modi also told NDA MPs that they should not be complacent with their win in various polls, including local bodies, but continue with the good work.

Rijiju said the prime minister gave broad guidelines for the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha MPs to carry forward their parliamentary and welfare works.

"The prime minister said the NDA is winning one after another elections due to its good work. He said elections can't be won without

being on the ground. We have to be on the ground and do good work for the welfare of the people," Rijiju said.

JD(S) leader and Union Minister H D Kumaraswamy said the NDA meeting reflected the collective commitment to strengthening India's economic partnerships and advancing the vision of Viksit Bharat.

MPs belonging to the BJP, TDP, JD(U), LJP (R), Shiv Sena, JD(S) and other constituents of the NDA attended the meeting.

LJP(RV) leader and Union Minister Chirag Paswan said the NDA meeting also discussed the general budget, which has been widely appreciated by a large section of the country's population.

"PM Modi ensures constant dialogue with all NDA allies so that there is no lack of communication. MPs form the foundation of any government, and it is their important responsibility to take the government's policies and decisions to every village and district," Paswan said.

BJP member Aparajita Sarangi said the prime minister provided extensive guidance and direction on key issues. "He asked us to actively participate in Parliament, both in the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha. He also spoke about the role of Standing Committees and urged everyone to give their 100 per cent. He spoke about the vision of 'Viksit Bharat' and discussed the Budget in detail, motivating all of us," Sarangi said. (PTI)

India-US trade deal opens gateway to endless opportunities for our youth, entrepreneurs: Shah

NEW DELHI, Feb 3: Union Home Minister Amit Shah has called the India-US trade deal "historic", saying it will elevate the strategic partnership between the two countries and pave the way for stronger trade ties and mutual growth.

In a series of posts on 'X', Shah said the deal opens "the gateway to endless opportunities for our youth, entrepreneurs, and techies".

"A big day for India-US relations as the trade deal has been locked with a significantly reduced tariff of 18 per cent, paving the way for stronger trade ties and mutual growth," he said.

Congratulating Prime Minister Narendra Modi and US President Donald Trump for the "historic deal", Shah said it will "elevate our strategic partnership and greatly benefit both nations and their people. Business between India and US set to flourish further".

He said the trade deal will give new strength to India's MSMEs and boost the global competitiveness of small industries, asserting that the initiative will directly benefit the country's small entrepreneurs.

India and the US have agreed to a trade deal under which Washington will bring down the reciprocal tariff on Indian goods to 18 per cent from a total 50 per cent.

"IndiaUSTradeDeal will give new strength to India's MSMEs. This will boost the Global Competitiveness of small industries, increase employment, secure a place in new supply chains, and enhance investment and Credit Flow.

"Gratitude to Modi ji for this initiative that directly benefits the country's small entrepreneurs," Shah said.

"Harnessing new force to India's roaring software and services sectors, the #IndiaUSTradeDeal pivots the nation to a new boom," he added.

After the announcement of the deal by US President Donald Trump on Monday, the prime minister had said he was delighted that "Made in India products will now have a reduced tariff of 18 per cent".

"Wonderful to speak with my



dear friend President Trump today. Delighted that Made in India products will now have a reduced tariff of 18 per cent. Big thanks to President Trump on behalf of the 1.4 billion people of India for this wonderful announcement," Modi had said on 'X'.

He had said that when two large economies and the world's largest democracies work together, it benefits the people and "unlocks immense opportunities for mutually beneficial cooperation".

"President Trump's leadership is vital for global peace, stability, and prosperity. India fully supports his efforts for peace," he had said.

Modi noted that he looked forward to working closely with Trump to take the bilateral partnership to unprecedented heights without mentioning many of the other issues that figured in Trump's post on social media.

Trump had said India will move forward to reduce "tariffs and non tariff barriers" against the US to zero, adding New Delhi would buy American goods, including energy, worth more than USD 500 billion.

"Out of friendship and respect for Prime Minister Modi and, as per his request, effective immediately, we agreed to a trade deal between the United States and India, whereby the United States will charge a reduced reciprocal tariff, lowering it from 25 per cent to 18 per cent," the US president said on social media.

"Our amazing relationship with India will be even stronger going

forward. Prime Minister Modi and I are two people that get things done something that cannot be said for most," he said.

Trump said Modi and he also discussed ending the war between Russia and Ukraine.

"He agreed to stop buying Russian Oil, and to buy much more from the United States and, potentially, Venezuela," the US president said.

"This will help end the war in Ukraine, which is taking place right now, with thousands of people dying each and every week," Trump said.

The Modi-Trump phone calls came on a day when External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar travelled to Washington, DC.

Trump and Modi last spoke on the phone in October 2025. The two leaders had agreed at a meeting in February last year to finalise the first tranche of a bilateral trade agreement by the autumn.

Though the two sides held several rounds of negotiations, forward movement on the trade deal stalled after Trump imposed 50 per cent tariffs on Indian goods, including the 25 per cent punitive tariffs for India's procurement of Russian crude oil.

India now has lower tariffs than competing export economies, officials said.

They cited 19 per cent American tariffs on Indonesia, 20 per cent on Vietnam, 20 per cent on Bangladesh and 34 per cent on China. (PTI)

PM completely surrendered to appease Trump': Congress



NEW DELHI, Feb 3: The Congress on Tuesday demanded that the Modi government should take Parliament into confidence on the details of both the EU and US trade deals, while alleging that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has "completely surrendered" to appease US President Donald Trump at the cost of India's farmers.

Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh hit out at the government over the announcement of the India-US trade deal, saying "India stands diminished by this unfortunate sequence of events." He said that from the information President Trump has provided, it is abundantly clear that Prime Minister Modi has "completely surrendered".

Ramesh said that almost exactly a year ago, Prime Minister Modi landed at the White House to greet President Trump on his re-election.

"His trademark huglomy was on full display. India-US relations never appeared brighter. Negotiations for a trade deal started immediately thereafter. But ever since President Trump made the first announcement of the halt to Operation Sindoore on the evening of May 10, 2025 things began to go downhill," Ramesh said on X.

Subsequently, President Trump embraced Pakistan and Field Marshal Asim Munir enthusiastically, "exposing the hollowness of Mr. Modi's huglomy," he said. Ramesh pointed out that President Trump announced the trade deal very late last night Indian time.

"From the information President Trump has provided, it is abundantly clear that Prime Minister Modi has - like he did on May 10, 2025 -- completely surrendered. He has most definitely appeased President Trump. India stands diminished by this unfortunate sequence of events," he claimed.

Pointing out that Parliament is in session, Ramesh said the text of both the EU and US trade deals must be laid on the table of both Houses and debated, "especially since the US Secretary of Agriculture Brooke Rollins has issued a statement claiming that India has liberalised agricultural imports from the US".

Members of several opposition parties also staged a walkout from the Rajya Sabha while raising the

issue of the Indo-US trade deal and demanding a discussion on it.

Several Opposition MPs from the Rajya Sabha, including Ramesh, Digvijaya Singh and Randeep Surjewal, AAP's Sanjay Singh, RJD's Manoj Jha, among others, protested in Parliament premises and alleged that the interests of farmers in India had been compromised by the government.

Congress MP Shashi Tharoor said, "We very strongly feel there is a need for clarity" as all there is so far is President Trump's tweets and press statements, with no details.

"President Trump talks about India purchasing USD 500 billion worth of US goods, our entire import bill is USD 700 billion, how can we spend USD 500 billion on the US...he mentions we will purchase American agricultural goods, apparently the American secretary of agriculture is saying that Indian market will be open to American farmers, we need to understand the terms of all of this because there are very significant political implications for India's farmers," he said. The government must take Parliament into confidence and clearly explain what has been agreed to, he added.

"Obviously a trade deal is good for India, we need the vast American market, 18 per cent is better than 50 per cent we all know that but we need to understand all the details before we can celebrate. At the moment we have a situation where the Congress is asking questions, the BJP is not providing any answers," Tharoor told reporters.

Senior Congress leader and former Commerce Minister Anand Sharma hoped that the trade deal reached is as sovereign equals and safeguards India's core interests in sensitive agriculture, dairy and pharma sectors. "India and US share a strategic and important partnership. Hope the trade deal reached is as sovereign equals and safeguards India's core interests in sensitive agriculture, dairy and pharma sectors," he said. "Also there is no dilution of policy that relationship with one partner is not at the cost of another strategic partner and the freedom to trade is respected. Government must take parliament and nation in confidence," he said on X.

In a post on X from his official handle, the Congress hit out at the government and said India has the right to know details of the trade deal.

"Just like the ceasefire, the announcement of the trade deal was also made by US President Trump. It has been stated that the trade deal is being done 'on Modi's request'," the party said. There is talk of opening the agriculture sector for America in the statement as well, the Congress said and asked what exactly is the deal. How has the security and interests of our farmers been ensured, the party further asked.

It has also been said that the Modi government will not buy oil from Russia, but will buy from America and Venezuela instead, the Congress pointed out and asked whether the Modi government agreed to this condition. (PTI)

BJP attacking farmers again, govt must answer: Akhilesh

LUCKNOW, Feb 3: Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav on Tuesday slammed the government over the India-US trade deal, saying opening Indian markets to American agricultural produce amounted to "betrayal" of nearly 70 per cent of the country's population dependent on farming.

His remarks came after India and the US agreed to a trade deal under which Washington will bring down the reciprocal tariff on Indian goods to 18 per cent from a total 50 per cent. Yadav claimed that the BJP and its associates were "agents of foreign interests" even before independence and continued to be so today. Targeting the ruling party, the former Uttar Pradesh chief minister said BJP leaders should explain to the public how much "commission" they had earned by compromising the country's economy.

Yadav said such policies would not only harm farmers but also adversely impact the lower middle class and middle class by encouraging profiteering in foodgrains and agricultural products and creating a new class of middlemen, leading to a rise in prices. He alleged that the BJP would also collect donations from corporate entities, making food items even costlier. These steps would gradually reduce farmers' income, forcing them to sell their land to wealthy individuals and corporates, Yadav said.

"Capturing land is the ultimate objective of the BJP and its associates," he alleged. Referring to the proposed Seed Bill, Yadav described it as "fatal for Indian agriculture" and alleged that it was the product of an anti-farmer mindset of the BJP government.

He accused the ruling party of bringing land acquisition laws, humiliating people by forcing them to stand in fertiliser queues every year, and promoting corporate interests linked to seeds, pesticides, storage silos, crop insurance and agricultural trade. Yadav called for organised resistance against such policies, asserting that farmers already troubled by issues such as stray cattle would no longer tolerate the government's actions. (PTI)

Bihar govt presents ₹ 3.47 lakh crore budgets, projects FY'26 growth at 14.9 per cent

PATNA, Feb 3: The Nitish Kumar government on Tuesday presented a ₹ 3.47 lakh crore budget, asserting that the state was making progress at a rapid pace and estimated growth rate for the current fiscal was an impressive 14.9 per cent. Tabling the budget in the state assembly, Finance Minister Bijendra Yadav profusely thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi for the Centre's generous help to Bihar and lauded Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's "visionary" leadership that was focused on achieving an "inclusive growth". "The size of the budget for the year 2026-27 is ₹ 3,47,589.78 crore, which is 30,694.74 crore more than 3,16,895.02 crore in 2025-26. Fiscal deficit is likely to be around ₹39,400 crore, which is 2.99 per cent of the state's GDP," the minister told the House. "On behalf of this House, I would like to thank PM Modi, under whose leadership the nation has been progressing at a steady pace. Bihar received many things in last year's Union budget, which included new airports, a makhana board and other food processing units. The state has been among the fastest developing ones, with its growth rate for 2024-25 expected to be around 14.9 per cent," he said. Turning towards the CM, Yadav showered encomiums on

HIM for embodying "five virtues (paanch tattva) of 'imaan, gyaan, vityaan, armaan and samman' (integrity, knowledge, a scientific temper, aspiration and self respect)", which were scripting the journey towards achieving "viksit (developed) Bihar" by making progress that was "samaveshi" (inclusive) and ensured growth with justice.

Kumar was also lauded by the minister for his thrust on empowerment of women, the most recent example of which was the Mukhyamantri Mahila Rozgar Yojana, rolled out ahead of the state assembly polls held in November last year. "Altogether 1.56 crore women have received ₹ 10,000 each, and those who have utilised the sum for setting up businesses will soon get another Rs 2 lakh," said Yadav, about the scheme that is said to have decisively clinched the deal in favour of the ruling NDA, which retained power with a brute majority.

According to the budget, the annual scheme outlay is stated to be around ₹1.22 lakh crore, with the Rural Development Department getting a lion's share of 18.33 per cent, followed by Education (15.02), Health (8.21), Urban Development and Housing (7.77), Rural Works (7.29) and Social Welfare (6.86). (PTI)

Premature to assess if US tariff cut in India's interest: Mayawati

LUCKNOW, Feb 3: Bahujan Samaj Party supremo Mayawati on Tuesday said it would be premature to determine if the United States' decision to set an 18 per cent tariff on Indian goods is in the interest of the country, noting that complete details of the agreement are not yet available.

Her remarks came after an announcement by US President Donald Trump, who confirmed the deal after a telephonic conversation with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday. Under the new agreement, will bring down the reciprocal tariff on Indian goods to 18 per cent from a total 50 per cent.

Reacting to the development, Mayawati said any immediate evaluation without adequate details would be hasty. She maintained that the actual impact can only be understood after the decision is implemented on the ground. "After mutual agreements between India and the United States with several conditions, news of the US imposing an 18 per cent tariff -- whether it is in the interest of the nation and the public -- cannot be assessed in haste in the absence of complete information," she said in a post on X. She said only after its actual implementation would it become clear how it affects the country, particularly the Bahujans, the poor, labourers, farmers and women. (PTI)

India has established itself as global healthcare hub: Nadda

LUCKNOW, Feb 3: Union Health and Family Welfare Minister Jagat Prakash Nadda on Tuesday said India has established itself as a global healthcare hub, supplying nearly 30 per cent of the world's generic medicines and around 60 per cent of global vaccine demand.

Addressing the Uttar Pradesh Pharma Conclave-1 online, in the presence of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, Deputy Chief Minister Brajesh Pathak and several investors, Nadda said Indian pharmaceutical products are exported to more than 200 countries.

"India has established itself as a global healthcare hub, and it is supplying 30 per cent of the world's generic medicines and 60 per cent of global vaccine demand.

"Indian pharmaceutical products are exported to more than 200 countries across the world. This event is being held at a time when India is standing at a crucial and decisive

phase of its development journey," the minister said. He said that over the past decade, under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India has moved beyond a consumption-based economy towards a production- and innovation-driven economy.

Nadda said that due to a strong digital infrastructure and wide-ranging governance reforms, India has emerged as a reliable and responsible global partner.

Initiatives such as Make in India, Aatmanirbhar Bharat, Digital India and Viksit Bharat have given a new direction to manufacturing, innovation and human development, he added. Referring to India's G20 presidency and vaccine diplomacy, the minister said these have clearly demonstrated the country's global responsibility and capabilities, with the most visible impact seen in the healthcare and pharmaceutical sectors.

Nadda said India's healthcare



system has witnessed unprecedented expansion in recent years. Under the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana, over 62 crore beneficiaries are now covered under health protection. He said more than 10 crore treatments have been carried out under the scheme so far, with the government bearing health expenditure of

over ₹ 1.30 lakh crore, thereby protecting vulnerable sections from catastrophic financial burden.

Highlighting further achievements, Nadda said over 1.80 lakh Arogya Mandirs have been established across the country, expanding healthcare services beyond treatment to include primary care, prevention, control of non-com-

municable diseases and elderly care. Under the Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission, around 84.7 crore ABHA ID cards have been created so far, resulting in large-scale digitisation of health records and greater transparency in healthcare delivery, he said.

Pointing to past gaps, the Union minister said there were 387 medical colleges in the country in 2014, a number that has now crossed 800, along with a significant increase in MBBS seats.

Nadda also said that in the Union Budget 2026-27, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced a major initiative named 'Bio-Pharma Shakti', with an allocation of ₹10,000 crore for five years, aimed at establishing India as a global bio-pharmaceutical manufacturing hub.

He said the national strategy would strengthen drug manufacturing, research, testing and regulation in the country. (PTI)

Rahul on Indo-US trade deal: PM buckled under pressure, sold off farmers' blood & sweat

NEW DELHI, Feb 3: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday alleged that Prime Minister Narendra Modi buckled under US pressure to finalise a trade deal and "sold off" the hard work of Indian farmers through the agreement.

Addressing reporters in the Parliament House complex after he was not allowed to speak in the Lok Sabha as he insisted on quoting from an article that cited former Army chief M M Naravane's unpublished "memoir", Gandhi also said that it is for the first time in history that the Leader of Opposition has not been allowed to speak on the president's address.

In a post on X, Gandhi said, "PM Modi is Compromised. PM is too afraid to let me speak in Parliament about Naravane, Epstein Files and how he has surrendered on Tariffs."

Hitting back at the Congress and Gandhi, BJP MP Anurag Thakur asked whether the Congress and others in the opposition are with India's interest. He also slammed Gandhi over his allegation that Prime Minister Modi buckled under US pressure to finalise a trade deal.

Speaking to reporters, Gandhi said the issue is not Naravane's statement, "that is a side show", but the main thing is that "our prime minister has been compromised".

"I want to say three things. They are not allowing me to speak. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is rattled. And the trade deal that had been stuck for the last four months, for some reason which Prime Minister Modi and I know, was sealed last evening," he said. Gandhi also claimed that Modi is under "enormous pressure", and his "image balloon" that had been inflated with thousands of crores could burst. (PTI)

It will strengthen 'Make in India' endeavours, spur growth: Jaishankar

NEW DELHI, Feb 3: External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Tuesday welcomed the India-US trade agreement, saying it will spur growth in both economies and strengthen the country's 'Make in India' endeavours.

Jaishankar, who is on a three-day visit to the US to attend a Washington-led ministerial meeting on critical minerals supply chain, said he "welcomed the announcements on bilateral trade".

India and the US agreed to a trade deal under which Washington will bring down reciprocal tariff on Indian goods to 18 per cent from current 25 per cent, US President Donald Trump said on Monday after a phone conversation with Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

In a post on 'X', Jaishankar said, "This will create more jobs, spur growth and promote innovation in both economies. It will strengthen 'Make

in India' endeavors and encourage trusted technologies." "The opportunities in our economic engagement are truly vast and we are confident of realizing them. A robust economic relationship is the strongest foundation for our strategic partnership," the external affairs minister added.

Following the trade agreement announcement, PM Modi said he was delighted that "Made in India products will now have a reduced tariff of 18 per cent".

"Wonderful to speak with my dear friend President Trump today. Delighted that Made in India products will now have a reduced tariff of 18 per cent. Big thanks to President Trump on behalf of the 1.4 billion people of India for this wonderful announcement," Modi said.

He said when two large economies and the world's largest democracies work together, it ben-



efits the people and "unlocks immense opportunities for mutually beneficial cooperation".

"President Trump's leadership is vital for global peace, stability, and prosperity. India fully supports his efforts for peace," Modi said on 'X'.

President Trump said India will move forward to reduce "tariffs and non tariff barriers" against

the US to zero, adding New Delhi would buy American goods, including energy, worth more than USD 500 billion.

"Out of friendship and respect for Prime Minister Modi and, as per his request, effective immediately, we agreed to a trade deal between the United States and India, whereby the United States will charge a reduced reciprocal tariff, lowering it from 25 per cent to 18 per cent," the US president said on social media.

India will "likewise move forward to reduce their tariffs and non tariff barriers against the United States, to zero", he said. Trump said Modi also committed to buy American goods at much higher level, in addition to over USD 500 billion dollars of US energy, technology, agricultural, coal, and many other products.

"Our amazing relationship with India will be

even stronger going forward. Prime Minister Modi and I are two people that get things done something that cannot be said for most," he said.

Trump said Modi and he also discussed ending the war between Russia and Ukraine.

"He agreed to stop buying Russian Oil, and to buy much more from the United States and, potentially, Venezuela," the US president said.

"This will help end the war in Ukraine, which is taking place right now, with thousands of people dying each and every week," Trump said.

The Modi-Trump phone talks came on a day EAM Jaishankar travelled to Washington DC.

India has now lower tariff compared to competing export economies, officials said.

They cited 19 per cent American tariffs on Indonesia, 20 per cent on Vietnam, 20 per cent on Bangladesh and 34 per cent on China. (PTI)

UP transformed into investment destination with zero-tolerance policy: CM Adityanath

LUCKNOW, Feb 3: Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Tuesday said Uttar Pradesh has shed its image as a hub of riots, extortion and lawlessness to become a safe and attractive destination for investment.

The chief minister attributed this shift to the state government's zero-tolerance policy towards crime. "Today, Uttar Pradesh has established itself as one of the best destinations for investment. UP is no longer a 'Bimaru' state, it is a breakthrough state now," Adityanath said, adding that there is "zero political interference".

Recalling the situation before 2017, Adityanath said, "You can imagine Uttar Pradesh between 2012 and 2017. There were more than 900 riots during that period. There was hardly any city that did not witness curfews."

He alleged that during those years, traders, doctors and entrepreneurs were forced to pay "goonda tax" and the youth had no future to plan for due to the absence of a clear government policy.

The chief minister was addressing a gathering at the first Pharma Conclave in the state capital.

"The result was that even those who were already running businesses started migrating out of the state," the chief minister said. "Leaving the land where one has spent childhood is extremely



painful, but they were left with no option as personal security was also at stake."

Adityanath noted that restoring public confidence after 2017 was as big a challenge as tackling crime. He defended the police's use of force against criminals, stating, "Many people ask why the police fire bullets. If the police do not fire, should they take bullets instead? Both cannot happen simultaneously." "If a criminal has the freedom to fire, the police have been given pistols for the same reason to confront him. The police are trained to make criminals understand the law in the language they understand," he added.

Highlighting the state's industrial potential, Adityanath said Uttar Pradesh is the largest con-

sumer market for the pharmaceutical sector. He said the Uttar Pradesh's growth is built on three key "S" -- safety, stability and speed -- along with trust, transformation and timely delivery.

Addressing the conclave, Adityanath said the state has vast resources and immense potential, including four national-level laboratories and several centres already in place to support the pharma ecosystem. "Uttar Pradesh is not only the biggest consumer market for the pharma sector, but the largest workforce for the industry can also be sourced from within the state," he said.

Expressing gratitude to Union Health Minister Jagat Prakash Nadda, the chief minister said that due to the ongoing Budget session,

Nadda could not be physically present but conveyed his best wishes for the conclave.

Inviting investors, he said Uttar Pradesh had earlier witnessed a long phase of stagnation, but today the state is ready to welcome entrepreneurs with a "red carpet" and complete preparedness. He said the government had done its homework before organising the first edition of the conclave.

Adityanath detailed several on-going projects, including a pharma project initiated in Lalitpur, where land has been allocated and work is progressing; a 300-acre medical device park adjacent to Jewar International Airport in Noida, which he said would be dedicated to the nation by the Prime Minister this month; and a Rs 1,200 crore MedTech Centre being developed in collaboration with IIT Kanpur. The chief minister added that Uttar Pradesh accounts for 55 per cent of the India's expressway network and has the country's largest rail network and the highest number of airports.

Deputy Chief Minister Brajesh Pathak also spoke at the event, saying Uttar Pradesh has made a major leap in ease of doing business. He assured entrepreneurs that medicines manufactured in the state would find the widest and best utilisation within Uttar Pradesh itself. (PTI)

Rashtriya Vayoshri Yojana well-aligned with needs of elderly from low-income groups: Govt

NEW DELHI, Feb 3: A third-party evaluation of the Rashtriya Vayoshri Yojana has found the scheme to be highly "productive" and exceptionally "well-aligned" with the needs of the elderly from BPL or low-income groups, the Lok Sabha was informed on Tuesday.

The study has had a transformative impact on the mobility and functional independence of beneficiaries, particularly in improving mobility through assistive devices.

In a written reply, Minister of State of Social Justice and Empowerment B L Verma said the evaluation of the Rashtriya Vayoshri Yojana (RVY) and the Deendayal Divyangjan Rehabilitation Scheme (DDRSS) was conducted to appraise their continuation during the 2026-31 financial cycle.

The evaluation of the DDRSS indicated that the scheme has delivered significant outcomes in education, rehabilitation assistive support and livelihood inclusion. It also noted improved livelihood linkages, strong community and parental engagement, and enhanced transparency and timelines through the e-aadaan digital platform, he said.

Replying to a question on whether the ministry has reviewed accessibility standards for public infrastructure and government buildings under the Accessible India Campaign, Verma said the

Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DePWD) has informed that works, lands and buildings vested in or in the possession of the State falls under the State list. He added that under sections 40 to 45 of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, 2016, the appropriate government, as defined under Section 2(b) of the said Act, is statutorily mandated to take steps to ensure accessible built infrastructure, transport systems and information and communication technology (ICT) platforms for Divyangjans (persons with disabilities).

The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Rules, 2017 provides the regulatory framework for sectoral implementation of the RPwD Act, 2016. Under Rule 15(1), sector-specific standards and regulations pertaining to accessibility have been prescribed and notified.

Pursuant to Rule 15(2), the respective ministries and departments of the Central government shall ensure compliance with the prescribed accessibility standards through the instrumentality of the concerned domain regulators or through such other measures as may be deemed appropriate, Verma stated.

The Central Public Works Department under the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs has completed accessibility upgrades

in about 1,100 Central government buildings, as per feasibility. It has also issued directions to ensure that the provisions of universal accessibility be incorporated in all new buildings.

The Budget Estimates for the DePWD for the Financial Year 2025-26 stands at ₹ 1,275 crore, which is 4.05 per cent higher than the budget estimates of ₹ 1,225.27 crore for 2024-25, Verma said.

The Budget Estimates for the Atal Vayo Abhyudaya Yojana (AVYAY) for 2025-26 are ₹ 553.42 crore, 2.59 per cent higher than ₹ 539.44 crore allocated in 2024-25. The additional funds are utilised to cover more beneficiaries and extend the outreach of the schemes.

The Department of Social Justice and Empowerment implements AVYAY for the welfare of senior citizens. An amount of ₹ 824.23 crore has been released under the scheme over the last three years. At present, financial support is being provided to 705 senior citizen homes, 13 continuous care homes, 17 mobile medicare units and 3 physiotherapy units to provide food, shelter, clothing and medical facilities to indigent senior citizens. Aids and assistive devices have also been distributed to 7.92 lakh eligible senior citizens under the Rashtriya Vayoshri Yojana. (PTI)

EC teaming up with BJP to delete PDA voters from list through Form-7: Akhilesh

LUCKNOW, Feb 3: Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav on Tuesday accused the Election Commission of India of teaming up with the BJP in Uttar Pradesh to delete the names of PDA voters from the electoral roll through Form-7.

According to the Election Commission, Form-7 is filled out to get the name of a voter deleted from the existing electoral roll.

Addressing a press conference here, Yadav said, "Voting is the biggest right in a democracy, and there should not be any fraud with it. But the ECI has teamed up with the BJP and made a plan to delete the names of the PDA voters from the electoral roll through Form-7 in Uttar Pradesh."

PDA is a political acronym coined by Yadav to represent a coalition of backward classes (Pichhda), Dalits, and minorities (Alpsankhyak). "Some people are of the view that an IAS officer posted in the chief minister's office is exerting pressure on the divisional commissioners and district magistrates to cut the names of the PDA voters from the list," Yadav alleged. Posing a question to the chief electoral officer of Uttar Pradesh, Yadav said, "Will he tell on whose side is he in this 'milbhagat' (connivance)?"

The former chief minister also claimed that there is disappointment among the booth-level officers (BLOs) after the name of a BLO was reportedly removed from the voter list. "Are we moving towards 'one nation, one election', or is there a bigger conspiracy," Yadav asked.

Citing some printed forms he was carrying, Yadav said when a poor man goes to the election officials and inquires about his name in the voter list after coming to know that it has been deleted, he is shown the voter list of the State Election Commission, and told that his name is still there.

"The person does not know which voter list is more important, whether that of the Assembly or the village pradhan," Yadav claimed. Citing sources in Sitapur, Yadav claimed that preparations are being made to commit fraud by submitting printed Form-7 of Muslim voters. "When the Samajwadi leaders and workers reached out to the complainant, they found that he was a poor labourer who did not know how to sign, and used fingerprints instead."

"Now you can imagine how printed Form-7s are reaching the villages. And this fraud is going on in the entire state, from Ghaziabad to Ghazipur," Yadav claimed.

He also claimed that the BJP is making such preparations in the Assembly constituencies it lost in 2022.

"The EC should make alternate arrangements to verify the downloaded forms, which must be numbered and carry the poll panel's hologram. "All the Form-7s submitted till now should be rejected, and every signature must be verified. The EC should use artificial intelligence to catch the fraudsters," Yadav said, adding that his party has already submitted a written complaint to the poll panel in this regard. (PTI)

Shivraj Chouhan, Cong MP settle dispute, defamation cases to be withdrawn: SC told

NEW DELHI, Feb 3: Congress MP Vivek Tankha has decided to withdraw a criminal and civil defamation case lodged against Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan and both have settled their dispute, the Supreme Court was informed on Tuesday.

A bench of justices MM Sundresh and NK Singh was informed by senior advocate Mahesh Jethmalani that both the leaders had met in Parliament and Tankha decided to withdraw the case lodged against Chouhan.

Tankha was represented in the case by senior advocate Kapil Sibal and advocate Sumeer Sodhi. Jethmalani said Sibal had helped in the issue being resolved.

The bench recorded the statement that criminal as well as civil defamation suit will be withdrawn by Tankha and disposed of the matter while appreciating lawyers of both sides. It observed that in matters related to statements made by politicians, the court has to tread very carefully. Tankha, in his complaint in the trial court, said defamatory statements were made in the run-up to panchayat elections in Madhya Pradesh in 2021.

He alleged that following the December 17, 2021 order of the apex court, it was alleged by the BJP leaders that he had opposed the reservation for OBC community in the local body polls which caused damage to his reputation.

Tankha's plea sought Rs 10 crore com-



and no person shall be so liable in respect of the publication by or under the authority of a House of such a Legislature of any report, paper, votes or proceedings."

On October 25, 2024 the high court had refused to quash the defamation case lodged by Tankha against Chouhan, BJP leaders V D Sharma and former minister Bhupendra Singh (MLA in MP assembly).

The complaint of Tankha said the three BJP functionaries carried out a "coordinated, malicious, false and defamatory" campaign against him for political mileage, accusing him of opposing OBC reservation in the Panchayat election in the Supreme Court.

The BJP leaders had refuted the charges in the high court and contended that newspaper clippings annexed by Tankha, cannot become the basis of a defamation complaint and the trial court could not have taken its cognisance of the complaint. They said the entire material placed on record by Tankha did not suggest any insinuation, let alone defamation, as alleged.

The BJP leaders contended all of them were holding a public office at the time of incident and the trial court erred in taking cognisance of the complaint without a prior sanction of the competent authority.

On January 20, 2024, a special court in Jabalpur agreed to examine the defamation case against the three BJP leaders under Section 500 of IPC and summoned them. (PTI)

Eight members suspended from Lok Sabha for 'unruly behaviour'

NEW DELHI, Feb 3: In escalation of the tussle between the government and the opposition, seven Congress members and one CPI-M MP were suspended from the Lok Sabha on Tuesday for 'unruly behaviour' after they tore papers and threw them at the Chair.

Their suspension from the House for the remaining part of the Budget Session that concludes on April 2 will intensify the face-off with the government over various issues, including Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi being denied an opportunity to cite an article based on excerpts from an unpublished 'memoir' of former Army chief M M Naravane on India-China conflict of 2020.

The opposition have also raised concerns about American President Donald Trump announcing the India-US trade deal and the alleged demolition drive at the Manikarnika Ghat in Varanasi.

As soon as the House met at 3 pm following multiple adjournments, Dilip Saikia, who was in the Chair, named the eight Congress members.

Subsequently, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju read out a resolution seeking suspension of the eight members for the remaining period of the Budget session.

The suspended members are Gurjeet Singh Aujla, Hibi Eden, C Kiran Kumar Reddy, Amarinder Singh Raja Warring, Manickam Tagore, Prashant Padole and Dean Kuriaikose (all Congress) and S Ventakesan (CPI-M).

Moving the resolution seeking their suspension, Rijiju said the members acted in utter disregard to the House and the authority of the Chair. They also tore papers and them on the Chair and were named by the Chair for their behaviour, the minister added.

The suspended had also tried to climb on to the table of the Secretary General, tore papers and threw them at the Chair. (PTI)

India emerging force in space programmes, drawing global attention: Shubhanshu Shukla

RAIPUR, Feb 3: Astronaut Shubhanshu Shukla on Tuesday said India has emerged as a rising force in space programmes with its proven ability to accomplish complex missions and ambitious policies, drawing close international attention and high expectations.

He also said that the two per cent hike in the allocation for the Department of Space in the recently tabled Union Budget signalled strong leadership support for India's space ambitions.

Speaking to reporters at Swami Vivekananda Airport in Raipur, Shukla also stressed the need to inform children about India's rapid progress in space science and the career opportunities emerging in the sector, saying lack of information often limits young minds while choosing their future paths. It is essential for children to understand where the country is headed and what it is doing in space exploration, including missions such as Gaganyaan and future lunar programmes, he said.

Indian Air Force Group Captain Shukla, the first Indian to visit the International Space Station (ISS), had undertaken an 18-day mission to the orbital laboratory in June-July last year. He was in the Chhattisgarh capital on Tues-



day to inaugurate a "Space Lab with Simulator" for students at a government school at Rakkhi village in Nava Raipur's Atal Nagar. Asked about India's image worldwide in space science, Shukla said India is viewed with respect on the global stage.

"The world has expectations from India. Our missions are closely watched because we have successfully accomplished complex tasks. Our capabilities and ambitious policies have positioned India as an emerging force in space programmes," he said. To a query on the over two per cent increase in allocation for the Depart-

ment of Space in the Union Budget, Shukla said it reflected strong support from the leadership for India's space ambitions.

"This push shows how seriously our leaders and organisations want India to move ahead in the space sector. With such support comes our responsibility to ensure missions are executed successfully," he added.

Shukla said he was visiting Chhattisgarh for the first time after completing his space mission and was very excited to be here, especially to inaugurate a space project. Such initiatives encourage students towards science and show them that the subject is not only interesting but also beneficial for them and the country, he said.

"I think it is necessary to inform students about where India is heading and what it is doing in space science, what is happening in the world and what opportunities they have in future. When there is a lack of information, people remain limited and are unsure about what to do," the astronaut said.

Students must be made aware of developments in every sector so they can explore different options, including space science, as a career, he added. (PTI)

Popular music director S P Venkatesh dies



CHENNAI, Feb 3: Popular music director S P Venkatesh, who rose to prominence with the film 'Rajavinte Makan' (1986) died at his residence here on Tuesday following cardiac arrest, a film industry source said.

He was 70. The versatile South Indian music director was known for his collaboration with veteran actors like Mohanlal and Mammootty. He enthralled a multitude of fans with his soulful melodies and thunderous background scores.

He was credited as Sangeetharajan. Born on March 5, 1955, Venkatesh is the son of Mandolin player Pazhani. He started playing guitar in films with music director Vijay Bhaskar in 1971. He established himself as a versatile music director in Kannada, Telugu, Tamil, and Malayalam films.

He entered the Malayalam film industry as a music director in 1985 through the film 'Janakeeya Kodathi'.

Venkatesh won the Kerala State Film Award for best music director in 1993 for the films 'Paithrukam' and 'Janam'.

He gave several hit songs in films like 'Bhoomiyile Rajakkam', 'Vazhiyora Kazhachal', 'Indrajalam', 'Nadodi', 'Manthrikam', 'Kilukkam', 'Minnam', 'Sphadikam', and 'Johnny Walker'.

Though he focused primarily on Malayalam movies, Venkatesh gave numerous hit songs in Tamil films, including, the song "Enn Uyir" from the movie 'Enga Vettu Mappillai'.

The 1988 movie 'Poovukkul Bookambam' was his first film in Tamil, and he went on to churn numerous hit numbers thereafter. 'Otru', the Tamil drama thriller written and directed by Mathivanan Sakthivel in 2021 features music composed by Venkatesh.

He provided background score in many Hindi films including, 'Kyon Ki', 'Hungama', 'Virasat', 'Gardish' and 'Mera Dil Tere Liye'. (PTI)

'Dhurandhar: The Revenge'

Ranveer Singh's Hamza goes on a killing spree



Following the massive box office success of "Dhurandhar", Ranveer Singh on Tuesday shared the highly anticipated teaser of "Dhurandhar: The Revenge", the film's second part, which showcases his character of spy-gangster Hamza Ali Mazari transform into a killing machine in his quest for

vengeance.

At the end of the over one-minute-long teaser, Singh's voiceover declares "Ye naya Hindustan Hai, ghar me ghusega bhi aur maarega bhi" (It's new India. We will not only infiltrate the enemy territory but also kill).

The 40-year-old actor shared the first-look

poster of the movie on Tuesday with the tagline "Ab Bigadane Ka Waqt Aa Gaya Hai", as a hint to the happenings in the first part that saw his character accumulate power as the henchman of Akshaye Khanna's Rehman Dakait.

He then shared the teaser of the second part. Slated to arrive in cinemas on March 19 in Hindi, Telugu, Tamil, Kannada and Malayalam languages, the Aditya Dhar-directed film shows the younger version of Singh's Jaskirat Singh. The new movie will focus on Jaskirat's backstory and what led to his transformation as Hamza.

"Dhurandhar", which released on December 5, turned out to be a blockbuster by earning over Rs 1,300 crore at the box office. The first part is now streaming on Netflix.

Actors R Madhavan, Arjun Rampal and Sanjay Dutt also return in the teaser briefly, which promises to be high on action and violence.

Set in Lyari town of Karachi, an area known for its history of gang wars and violent turf battles, "Dhurandhar" revolved around covert intelligence operations at the background of geopolitical and terror events like Kandahar plane hijack, 2001 Parliament Attack and 26/11 Mumbai attacks.

The film was produced by Dhar and his brother Lokesh Dhar through their banner B62 Studios alongside Jyoti Deshpande of Jio Studios. (PTI)

IT TOOK TIME BUT I'M IN A GOOD PLACE NOW, SAYS 'KOHARRA 2' STAR BARUN SOBTI



He started out with the romantic hit "Iss Pyaar Ko Kya Naam Doon" on television and moved on to author-backed intense roles in "Asur", "Halahal" and "Kohrra". With "Kohrra 2" ready for release, actor Barun Sobti says he is in a "very good space".

The actor is reprising his role of Amarpal Jasjit Garundi from the previous season with Mona Singh joining him as Dhanwant Kaur, his senior in "Kohrra 2". These two cops try to solve the murder of a woman in her family's barn while also dealing with familial issues.

The new season of the show, created and directed by Sudip Sharma, starts streaming from February 11 on Netflix.

"I'm in a very good space. It did take a long time coming, but right now, I'm in a very good space," Sobti told PTI in an interview here.

The 41-year-old actor said he lucked out with his collaboration with Sharma, who is known for his gritty writing in movies such as "Sonchiriya", "Udda Punjab" and "NH10" as well as the hit web series "Paatal Lok".

"It's so much fun to collaborate with people where your wavelength and the process of thought matches. You really don't have to fake anything. And you can share what you believe in and that can be utilised. So I felt very fortunate," he said.

Sobti started his career with a corporate job before switching to acting full time. He made his television debut with "Shradha" but it was his role of business tycoon Arnab Singh Raizada in "Iss Pyaar Ko Kya Naam Doon" opposite Sanaya Irani

that made him a household name.

Such is the popularity of the romantic drama that he reprised the role again in 2017 for a limited series.

He made his movie debut with "Main Aur Mr Riight" and "Tu Hai Mera Sunday". OTT series "Asur", where he played a forensic expert, and "Halahal", featuring him as a corrupt cop who later has a change of heart, brought further acclaim for him. Asked whether he believes he has arrived as an actor, Sobti said he still has "way too much to do", but there are moments when he looks back on his achievements with happiness.

"There are some things that you remember every now and then and you feel good about it. So I felt really, really good that I bought my mom and dad a house last year. That time I felt that we're worth something," he said.

Every individual's journey in the show-biz is different, Sobti said, adding that some get good opportunities right in the beginning while others struggle to make their mark for years.

"But you have to wait it out... If you keep saying, 'I have to do good work' and keep worrying about the EMIs, then that's not going to work out," he said.

"Kohrra 2" also features Rannvijay Singha, Anuraag Arora, Pooja Bhamrrah and Praykar Menta in pivotal roles. It is produced by Sharma alongside Saurabh Malhotra, Manuj Mittra and Tina Tharwani.

Sharma has co-created and co-written the series with Gunjit Chopra and Diggi Sisodia. (PTI)

Jack Doohan reboots F1 career; Named as Haas reserve driver for 2026 season

Australian driver Jack Doohan will serve as a reserve driver for the Haas Formula One team this season, marking the next step in his F1 career following his split from Renault-owned Alpine.

The 23-year-old, son of MotoGP legend Mick Doohan, made his Formula One debut with Alpine at the 2024 Abu Dhabi Grand Prix and went on to start the opening six races of the 2025 season. However, by round seven at Imola, Doohan was dropped from the race seat and replaced by Argentine Franco Colapinto.

Colapinto, initially handed a five-race audition, impressed enough to retain the seat through the remainder of the season and into 2026, effectively closing the door on Doohan's immediate return to Alpine's race lineup.

Doohan officially left Alpine in January and explored a move to Japan's Super Formula championship, with talks progressing over a drive for Kondo Racing. Despite testing at Suzuka, the deal collapsed after the team opted to sign Ukyo Sasahara in-

stead, citing differences over development direction for the car.

Now, Doohan joins Haas's reserve roster alongside Japan's Ryo Hirakawa, who balances his F1 duties with a full-time drive for Toyota in the World Endurance Championship.

"I'm thrilled to be joining TGR Haas F1 Team," Doohan said. "It's the ideal place to continue my Formula One career. I'm grateful for the opportunity to grow with the team and take on the challenge of 2026 together."

Haas team principal Ayao Komatsu welcomed the Australian, highlighting the value of his prior experience as a reserve.

"Staying race-ready while learning the inner workings of a team is extremely demanding," Komatsu said. "Jack brings commitment, experience and hunger, and we're looking forward to working with him."

Doohan will begin his Haas role as the 2026 season build-up continues, with the new campaign opening at the Australian Grand Prix in Melbourne on March 8. (AP)



Delhi HC allows Sameer Wankhede to take defamation case over 'The Ba***ds of Bollywood' to Mumbai

The Delhi High Court has permitted IRS officer Sameer Wankhede to take his defamation lawsuit against a Netflix show referencing the Aryan Khan case to a Mumbai court, after holding that the national capital court lacks territorial jurisdiction.

The matter came up before Justice Vikas Mahajan, who allowed Wankhede's application seeking liberty to present his plaint before a competent court in Mumbai. The court asked the parties to appear before the Mumbai court on February 12, when Wankhede proposes to institute the suit.

During the hearing, counsel for Wankhede informed the court about the January 29 ruling of Justice Purushendra Kumar Kaurav, by which the plaint

had been returned under the Civil Procedure Code, granting him permission to approach the appropriate forum. Acting on that liberty, Wankhede moved an application under Order VII Rule 10A CPC to facilitate the transfer of the case to Mumbai.

Allowing the request, the court observed that procedural requirements had been met and formally cleared the way for the suit to be pursued before the City Civil Court.

Wankhede had approached the Delhi High Court alleging that a character

shown in Episode 1 of the Netflix series 'The Ba***ds of Bollywood', produced by Red Chillies Entertainment and

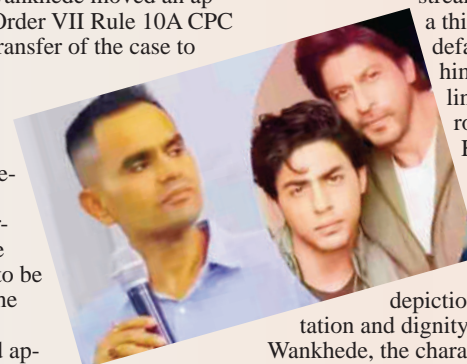
streamed on Netflix was a thinly veiled and defamatory portrayal of him. The series is linked to events surrounding the Aryan Khan drugs case.

He sought directions for removal or restraint on certain scenes, contending that the depiction damaged his reputation and dignity. According to Wankhede, the character's appearance, conduct, and mannerisms bore an unmistakable resemblance to him and had been

widely identified as such in media reports.

The defendants, however, raised a preliminary objection on territorial jurisdiction, arguing that the suit ought to have been filed in Mumbai since Wankhede resides there and Red Chillies Entertainment's registered office is also located in the city. They further maintained that the series is a fictional and satirical work and does not recreate the Cordelia cruise raid.

Accepting these submissions, Justice Kaurav had earlier ruled that the Delhi High Court could not entertain the suit and ordered the plaint to be returned. With Monday's order, that decision has now been procedurally operationalised, enabling Wankhede to continue his legal challenge in Mumbai. (PTI)



It represented everything Bollywood wasn't at that moment: Lisa Ray on 25 years of 'Kasoor'

Actor Lisa Ray penned a heartfelt note on Tuesday as "Kasoor" completed 25 years, and recalled being told the film won't work as audiences didn't want to have strong female characters on-screen.

The film released on February 2, 2001. Directed by Vikram Bhatt and produced by Mukesh Bhatt, the film also starred Aftab Shivdasani and revolved around Shekhar Saxena (Shivdasani), a wealthy journalist accused of murdering his wife, Preeti. Ray essayed the role of a lawyer, who is hired to defend him, but later discovers terrifying evidence that suggests his guilt.

Ray shared a video montage of the scenes from the film on her Instagram handle. The actor said the film managed to represent "everything that Bollywood wasn't" back then. "25 years of 'Kasoor'. Let that sink in. When I said yes to this film, it

felt like stepping into my power—quietly but decisively. A strong female character. A real arc. Emotional complexity. No big dance numbers. No formula. It was dark, internal, and led by feeling rather than spectacle. In many ways, 'Kasoor' represented everything Bollywood wasn't at that moment," she wrote in the caption.

She described the role as emotionally complex and driven by feeling rather than spectacle, with no song-and-dance formula that typically defined Bollywood in the 1990s.

"It was dark, internal, and led by feeling rather than spectacle. In many ways, Kasoor represented everything Bollywood wasn't at that moment."

The actress recalled being discouraged from taking up the project, with many insisting that audiences were not ready for a strong female character or a dark, internal narrative.

She added: "In the 90s, after refusing many mainstream offers, I was



told—very confidently—this film won't work. No one wants to watch a strong female character. It's too dark.

Well... here we are." Lisa also expressed gratitude towards co-actor Aftab Shivdasani,

calling him a sincere and committed collaborator, and thanked director Vikram Bhatt for trusting the stillness and emotional truth of the story when it was far from an obvious choice.

"Working with @aftabshivdasani was a joy—present, sincere, and deeply committed. Thank you for being such a wonderful co-actor and collaborator. And to the Bhattas and Vikram Bhatt—thank you for trusting the stillness, the silences, and the emotional truth of this story when it wasn't the obvious choice."

Highlighting the film's music, she described it as "eternal and melodious," adding that the songs remain deeply embedded in memories of love, heartbreak and youth.

"And then, of course, the music. Eternal. Melodious. Those songs have woven themselves into people's memories—first loves, heartbreaks, long drives, stolen moments of youth. That kind of resonance is a gift no

one can manufacture."

Looking back, Lisa said Kasoor was among the early films that helped shift the portrayal of women on screen, "not perfect, but purposeful."

"Looking back, I can honestly say Kasoor was one of the early films that helped shift how women could be portrayed on screen—not perfect, but purposeful. Something about the performances, the mood, the feeling we evoked... it endured. Most of all, thank you to the audience. For watching. For remembering. For proving—again and again—that strong female stories don't fade. They wait. And then they last."

Kasoor, a legal thriller, also stars Apoorva Agnihotri, late Irrfan Khan and Ashutosh Rana. The film is an unofficial remake of the 1985 American film Jagged Edge, with the climax being borrowed from the 2000 American horror film What Lies Beneath. (PTI)

MCC brings in 73 law changes, makes final over mandatory

LONDON, Feb 3: As many as 73 changes in laws of cricket, including mandatory completion of the final over in case of fall of a wicket in multi-day matches, have been announced by the Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC), with the amendments set to come into effect from October this year.

The MCC said the 'new edition of the Laws of Cricket', the first since 2022, has been drafted in to ensure laws are 'up to date and fit for the modern game and that they should be as inclusive as possible'.

Announcing the changes on its website, the MCC said the final over in a multi-day match will have to be completed if a wicket has fallen, as not doing so takes "the drama out of the game".

"It was felt unfair that, if a fielding side takes a wicket in the final over of the day, the batting side does not have to send out a new batter," MCC said.

"This doesn't save time (which is the case at lunch and tea) as the remaining balls need to be made up the next day, and it takes the drama out of the game, while letting the incoming batter off the hook — at a time when the conditions are often more favourable to bowling."

"The new change means that the final over of the day will be bowled fully, even if a wicket falls during it (assuming conditions remain fit)," it added.

The MCC, along with current



and former women's players at its World Cricket Connects, has worked with manufacturers to set new limits and names for balls in junior as well as women's cricket.

"The balls are now Size 1, Size 2 and Size 3, and while Size 1 (traditionally the men's ball) has not changed, the margins are now uniform, making for three distinct cat-

egories of balls," the MCC said.

The MCC legalised use of laminated bats for "open age cricket" rather than just junior cricket "in an attempt to slow the rising costs of bats around the world."

The wicket-keepers will no longer be penalised for having their gloves in front of the stumps when the bowler runs up.

"Wicket-keepers cannot come in front of the stumps to collect the ball until it has passed the striker's wicket or made contact with his bat or person — that remains the case," MCC said.

"But in a DRS age, umpires were noticing that some keepers move level with, or in front of, the stumps while the bowler is running up — technically a No-ball, but not something that would give them any advantage."

"The Law has now changed so that it is only after the ball is released that the wicket-keeper must be wholly behind the stumps. This brings the wording in line with a fielder's position," it added.

The use of laminated bats — made by bonding two or more pieces of woods — is now permitted in "open age cricket" to meet the rising costs of bats around the world.

"MCC has spent considerable time testing these bats, and it is not felt that laminated bats will give a significant performance advantage. However, it is expected that, at the top level of the game, bats will remain a single piece of willow," the MCC said.

Removing the 'bunny hop catch', the MCC said fielders going outside boundary can only touch the ball once while airborne, "and then, having done so, to be wholly grounded within the boundary for the rest of the duration of

that delivery."

The MCC said if the fielder parries the ball from outside the boundary to his teammate who is inside it, and subsequently steps outside, then a boundary will be scored.

The MCC said it was defining an 'overthrow' for the first time.

It said, "An overthrow is an attempt to direct the ball towards the stumps to stop run-scoring or attempt a run out. A misfield — whether an attempt to stop the ball or pass it to another fielder close to the boundary — should not be treated as an overthrow."

The fielding side will have a third law on their side to determine which batter is on strike when it comes to deliberate short running.

"This is now one of three times that players will be permitted to determine who is on strike for the next delivery. Law 41.5 (where a fielder obstructs the batter) has long been one such occasion, but this clause, and Law 37.5.2, when a batter is out obstructing a catch, will now give that power to the fielding captain," the MCC said.

The ball will be considered "finally settled" when it is in the hands of a fielder or stationary on the ground, said MCC.

"The ball no longer has to be in the bowler's or the wicketkeeper's hands to be finally settled," it said. (PTI)

ISPL Season 3 Five thrilling moments that stole the spotlight so far



SURAT, Feb 3: From blistering pace and exciting bowling spells to last-ball finishes and record totals, Indian Street Premier League (ISPL) Season 3 has delivered a high-voltage competition, underlining its growing stature.

As the T10 tennis-ball tournament heads to its playoff phase, here are the top five defining moments that have stood out during ISPL Season 3 so far.

Vivek Shelar unleashes a 145.2kph thunderbolt

Raw speed took centre-stage on the second day of the season when Tiigers of Kolkata fast bowler Vivek Shelar fired the fastest ball ever recorded in ISPL, clocking at a stunning 145.2 kph against Chennai Singams.

The delivery became one of the most replayed moments of the season as Shelar finished with figures of 3/15.

Abhishek Dalhor's five-wicket burst

Abhishek Dalhor has been one of the most consistent performers in the ISPL, delivering season after season. In Season 3, he once again lived up to expectations for defending champions Majhi Mumbai, producing multiple match-winning performances and stepping up when it mattered the most.

His standout moment came on January 16 against Ahmedabad Lions. His extraordinary figures of 5 for 3 in two overs completely changed the course of the match.

Using sharp pace and control, he derailed Ahmedabad's chase of 90, powering Mumbai to a dominant 27-run win.

A rare double hat-trick moment

ISPL Season 3 delivered a rare statistical coincidence as two hat-tricks were recorded against the same opposition, Srinagar Ke Veer, within the space of a few days.

On January 27, Falcon Risers Hyderabad pacer Vicky Bhoir struck with three wickets in three balls during the second over, helping set up a six-wicket win.

Just two days later, Delhi Super-

heros bowler Firoz Shaikh achieved a similar feat, claiming a hat-trick while defending a modest total of 84. Delhi went on to secure a 25-run victory, turning the twin hat-tricks into one of the season's most talked-about moments.

Skipper Jignesh Patel delivers last-ball thriller

Few moments captured the drama of ISPL Season 3 better than Jignesh Patel's last-ball heroics for Ahmedabad Lions.

On February 1, chasing 84 against Tiigers of Kolkata, Ahmedabad needed four runs off the final delivery. Walking in at No. 8, Ahmedabad Lions skipper held his nerve, and placed the ball perfectly between the fielders for a boundary.

The last-ball four not only sealed a memorable victory but also secured Ahmedabad Lions a place in the playoffs, delivering one of the most dramatic finishes of ISPL.

Tiigers of Kolkata's mammoth total of 149

On January 30, Tiigers of Kolkata produced one of the standout performances, piling up 149 for 7 against Srinagar Ke Veer, the highest team total of the season.

The innings was driven by Krishna Gawali's explosive 74 off 26 balls. Srinagar struggled under the weight of the steep chase, as Tiigers secured a commanding 93-run victory, the largest winning margin of the season.

With the playoff stage now set, the action intensifies this week. Ahmedabad Lions face Chennai Singams in Qualifier 1 on Tuesday, followed by a do-or-die Eliminator on Wednesday between Majhi Mumbai and Tiigers of Kolkata with the winning team facing the losing side of Qualifier 1 in Qualifier 2 on Thursday.

The season will conclude on Friday with the Grand Finale, played between winner of Qualifier 1 and 2.

All playoff matches will begin at 7pm, with live coverage on Star Sports Khel and streaming on JioHotstar. Tickets are available online on BookMyShow. (PTI)

Cummins says desire to play all Tests also reason behind decision to skip T20WC



MELBOURNE, Feb 3: Australia pace spearhead Pat Cummins says his injury-forced withdrawal from the T20 World Cup was also driven by a desire to be completely fit for the upcoming Test season in which he wants to play all the games.

The Test and ODI captain of his team was ruled out of the T20 World Cup as he failed to recover from a back injury and was replaced by Ben Dwarshuis.

Cummins has been dealing with the back injury since Australia's tour of the West Indies last July and although he is feeling "really good" right now, he decided to skip the tournament starting February 7 after a scan.

"It was really unfortunate. I feel pretty good, just a minor setback and just ran out of time really. I'll rest up for a few weeks and go from there," Cummins was quoted as saying by the 'Australian Associated Press'.

"We knew after the (Adelaide) Test match we were going to need somewhere between four and eight weeks to let the bone settle right down before then building back up. Initially, we thought it might only be four weeks, because I was feeling really good, but just had a follow-up scan."

"They thought it probably needs another couple of weeks, so the timeline just became a bit too tight."

Australia have a jam-packed Test schedule starting August when they host Bangladesh for two Test matches in Darwin and Mackay, followed by a Test and ODI tour of South Africa in September.

The Aussies will then host New Zealand border-touring India for a five-Test Border-Gavaskar series, followed by the pink-ball 150th anniversary Test against England at the MCG in March.

Next would be an away Ashes series, the ODI World Cup, and a possible World Test Championship final at Lord's in June.

"We thought the first half of the year was a pretty good time to be conservative with the amount of cricket that's coming up," the 32-year-old pacer said.

"We'll get it right, then hopefully that will mean you won't have to worry about it, and you can just go out and play all those Test matches."

"Whereas, if you're not careful with it now and it flares up, you're chasing your tail a bit," he added.

Cummins, however, hopes to be fit in time to lead Sunrisers Hyderabad in the Indian Premier League starting March 26.

"We'll just be guided by my back. We'll have another scan in a few weeks, and if it's good, then we'll have a slow build-up," he said. (PTI)

Girijananda Choudhury University wins SITM Inter-College Cricket Tournament S4

GUWAHATI, Feb 3: Scholars Institute of Technology & Management (SITM) successfully hosted the fourth season of the SITM Inter-College Cricket Tournament recently at the SITM campus ground in Garoghuli, Garchuk.

The championship concluded with Girijananda Choudhury University clinching the title with a dominant five-wicket victory over the Regional Institute of Science and Technology (RIST).

The tournament brought together 12 colleges and universities from across Assam, showcasing emerging cricketing talent and fostering healthy competition among academic institutions in the state.

The tournament was inaugurated by Jhumur Lodh, Director of SITM, who delivered an inspiring opening address highlighting the importance of sports in holistic student development and the role of such events in strengthening camaraderie among educational institutions.

Several prestigious awards were presented in recognition of outstanding individual performances.

Abdul Rahim of Girijananda Choudhury University received



dual honours as the Man of the Match in the final and the Best Bowler of the Tournament for his exceptional bowling performances.

Bhupati Patowary, also from Girijananda Choudhury University, was awarded the Man of the Series title for his consistent and impactful contributions throughout the tournament.

The Best Batsman award was presented to Jintamani Kalita of Girijananda Choudhury University for his impressive batting displays during the competition.

The final match between RIST and Girijananda Choudhury University proved to be a thrilling con-

test. GCU's disciplined bowling attack restricted RIST to a modest total of 76 runs.

In reply, GCU chased down the target with five wickets in hand in just eight overs, underlining their dominance in the tournament.

Expressing her satisfaction with the successful conduct of the event, Jhumur Lodh said, "We are delighted with the overwhelming response and the high level of competition witnessed throughout the tournament. Such events not only promote sportsmanship but also strengthen bonds between academic institutions across Assam."

We look forward to organising more such events in the future to encourage young talent."

SITM reaffirmed its commitment to promoting sports and extracurricular activities as integral components of holistic student development and will continue to organise inter-college sporting events.

The tournament reinforced the values of teamwork, discipline, and healthy competition.

SITM also extended its sincere gratitude to all participating teams, officials, and volunteers for their contributions to the successful conduct of the event.

Sabalenka stays top-ranked, Djokovic up to third

MELBOURNE, Feb 3: Carlos Alcaraz completed a career Grand Slam of singles victories with his Australian Open title, but there was some solace for the man he defeated, 24-time Grand Slam singles champion Novak Djokovic.

While Alcaraz maintained his No. 1 ranking on the ATP tour ahead of Jannik Sinner, Djokovic, who beat Sinner in the semifinals at Melbourne Park, moved up one place to No. 3. It is the first time the 38-year-old Djokovic has been inside the top three since August 2024.

On the WTA Tour, Aryna Sabalenka maintained her top ranking despite her loss in the final to Elena Rybakina, Rybakina moved up two places to third in the rankings, with Iga Swiatek in second at No. 2.

Three Americans followed in the WTA rankings — No. 4 Amanda Anisimova, Coco Gauff and Australian Open semifinalist Jessica Pegula. Elina Svitolina moved up two places to No. 10 after her semifinal loss to Sabalenka at Melbourne Park.

American Learner Tien was one of the biggest improvers on either tour by moving up five places on the ATP Tour to No. 24, a career high. The 20-year-old Tien, who lost to now No. 4-ranked Alexander Zverev in the quarterfinals, became the youngest American man to reach the final eight of a major since 2002. (AP)

EFI issues NOCs to riders for participation in int'l events without trials



NEW DELHI, Feb 3: The Equestrian Federation of India (EFI) has come under scrutiny for issuing No

Objection Certificates (NOCs) to four riders for participation in international competitions without conducting any selection trials, a

move that has also raised conflict-of-interest concerns.

Documents accessed by PTI show that EFI issued NOCs on January 2, 2026, certifying four officers of 61 Cavalry as "active equestrian athletes" and permitting

them to compete in international events in Europe under the aegis of the FEI.

The riders cleared for overseas participation include Lt Col D Apurva, Maj Anant Rajpurohit, Maj Yashdeep Ahlawat and Capt Ahaan Kumar.

The NOC letter, signed by EFI Vice President (Technical) and Acting President Col Jagat Singh (Retd), states that the federation has "no objection" to the officers representing Indian or Indian teams in international competitions in Europe.

According to EFI Secretary General Col Jaiveer Singh, the clearance was granted without any trials or transparent selection process, despite EFI having a Draft Selection Criteria dated October 11, 2023, which mandates objective assessment of athletes before

international representation.

The issue has been further complicated by the inclusion of Maj Yashdeep Ahlawat, who is the son of EFI Executive Committee member Maj General (Retd) Deep Ahlawat, triggering allegations of conflict of interest.

The conflict-of-interest document of world governing body FEI states that an elected official's close relative should not benefit from discretionary decisions taken by the federation, particularly in matters related to selection and representation.

Col Jaiveer Singh expressed strong reservations over the manner in which the NOCs were issued, saying that the move undermines governance norms in Indian equestrian sport.

"Issuing NOCs for international competitions without holding trials

would say," he said.

Australia would be based in Sri Lanka during the preliminary stage and have games against the hosts, Ireland, Zimbabwe, and Oman beginning February 11.

Marsh downplayed the setback against Pakistan and the apparent weak handling of spinners here.

In their three losses, the visiting batters were bamboozled by the spin trio of Mohammad Nawaz, Shadab Khan and Abrar Ahmed, who combined to snare 17 wickets.

"In isolation, this series, we struggled," Marsh admitted when asked about the performance that would cause concern given that the World Cup is also scheduled in spin-friendly venues. (PTI)

The meeting was chaired by Sankar Dutta Lahakar, chairman of the Tour, Fixture and Technical Committee.

Member of the Apex Council Mukunanda Bhattacharya, ACA chief executive officer Pritom Mahanta, and Bishnu Ram Nunisa, member of the Senior Tournament Committee, along with other committee members, were present.

The deliberations focused on finalising venues and fixtures for the second round of the APCC Tournament and the fifth Nilay Dutta Inter-University Cricket Tournament.

Committee members discussed logistical planning, coordination and scheduling to ensure the smooth conduct of the tournaments.

Officials said the meeting aimed at streamlining preparations and maintaining competitive standards for the forthcoming matches, with emphasis on timely execution and effective coordination across venues.

Officials said the meeting aimed at streamlining preparations and maintaining competitive standards for the forthcoming matches, with emphasis on timely execution and effective coordination across venues.

Officials said the meeting aimed at streamlining preparations and maintaining competitive standards for the forthcoming matches, with emphasis on timely execution and effective coordination across venues.

Officials said the meeting aimed at streamlining preparations and maintaining competitive standards for the forthcoming matches, with emphasis on timely execution and effective coordination across venues.

In-form India start favourites against Afghanistan in pursuit of record 6th U-19 WC title



HARARE, Feb 3: Unbeaten so far in the tournament, a confident and all-round India will hold an edge over the favourites against Afghanistan in the semifinal of the ICC Under-19 World Cup here on Wednesday.

India are the most successful team in the history of the event, having annexed the title five times (2000, 2008, 2012, 2018, 2022), followed by Australia, who have won the trophy four times.

Come Wednesday, India will look to take one step forward towards a record sixth title. India have had a great run in the tournament, having won all their five matches quite comfortably, including a 58-run win over arch-rivals Pakistan in the Super Six stage.

Afghanistan too has had a fairly good tournament, winning four out of their five games, their only loss coming

against Sri Lanka by four wickets.

Going by form and overall composition, India will hold an edge over the Afghans in the knock-out game.

Wicket-keeper batter Abhigyan Kundu has been the star performer for India with the bat as the left-hander has so far amassed 199 runs from five games with two half-centuries to his name.

Big-hitting opener Vaibhav Suryavanshi (196 runs in 5 matches with 2 fifties) too has been in good form but the team management would want him to convert his half-centuries into three-figure scores.

All-rounder Vihaan Malhotra (172 runs from 5 games) is the other Indian batter to look out for. He struck the lone century (109 not out) against Zimbabwe in group stages.

Skipper Ayush Mhatre has been con-

sistent with the ball in hand, picking up six wickets with his off-break from five games but there is room for improvement on the batting front. He managed just 99 runs from five games with 53 being his highest.

Opener Aaron George's form, however, is a cause of concern for India as the right-handed batter could manage only 46 runs from three outings.

The Indian bowling is spearheaded by right-arm fast bowlers Henil Patel and RS Ambrish. Both the pacers have been phenomenal upfront, scalping 11 and wickets respectively.

The duo would look for able support from left-arm orthodox spinner Khilan Patel, who too has shone bright with eight scalps from five games.

Mhatre and Malhotra, who picked up five wickets so far in the tournament

with his off-breaks besides scoring India's lone century, will also look to contribute with the ball.

Teams:

India U-19: Aaron George, Abhigyan Kundu, Harvansh Pangalia, Vaibhav Sooryavanshi, Vedant Trivedi, Ayush Mhatre (c), Vihaan Malhotra, RS Ambrish, Kanishk Chouhan, Khilan Patel, Deepesh Devendran, Henil Patel, Mohamed Enaan, Udhav Mohan, Kishan Singh.

Afghanistan U-19: Mahboob Khan (c), Azizullah Miakhil, Faisal Shinozoda, Khalid Ahmadzai, Osman Sadat, Uzair-ullah Niaazi, Abdul Aziz, Aqil Khan, Khatir Stanikzai, Nazifullah Amiri, Nooristani Omarzai, Roohullah Arab, Salam Khan, Wahidullah Zadrar, Zaitullah Shaheen.

Match starts at 1:00 PM IST. (PTI)

India to host shooting's Asian Olympic qualifying championship next year

NEW DELHI, Feb 3: India will host next year's Asian Rifle/Pistol Championship in Delhi where eight quota places for the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics will be up for grabs, marking a historic first for the country's shooting calendar which already features an Olympic qualifier in the World Cup.

The eight slots in the Asian competition will be in addition to the 12 quota places that will be on offer in the World Cup (Rifle/Pistol/Shotgun) from April 21 to 30 next year, also to be held in Delhi.

The allotment of the Asian event was confirmed by the Asian Shooting Confederation in a letter to the National Rifle Association of India (NRAI) president Kalikesh Singh Deo.

The NRAI stated that the dates for the Asian qualifier will be finalised in due course.

"We congratulate National Rifle Association of India for winning the hosting rights of Asian Rifle/Pistol Championship 2027 where eight Quota Places will be distributed for the LA 2028 Olympics.

"We are confident that, under your leadership, the championship will be organised to the highest standards and will be a great success," the letter, which is in PTI's possession, stated.

Deo expressed his excitement at the prospect of a significant number of Indian shooters booking Olympic slots through these events.



"...now they will have two events with home advantage spread across the year, to win quota places...I thank the Hon. Secretary General Eng. AIOtaibi and his team at ASC, for continuing to repose their faith in India's capability to host world class Shooting competitions," he said.

Speaking to PTI, NRAI secretary general Pawankumar Singh said it is a proud moment for the country.

"This is the first time India will be hosting two Olympic quota competitions and we are very proud of that. We will host the ISSF World Cup Rifle/Pistol/Shot-

gun (April 21-30) in New Delhi and the Asian Championships in Rifle and Pistol here at the Karni Singh Ranges," said Singh.

"The dates for the Asian Championships will be announced later but we are very happy that the International Shooting Sport Federation (ISSF) has shown faith in our abilities to organise major competitions.

"This shows the growing clout of Indian shooting sport and the confidence the international body has in us," he added.

Singh said he was hopeful India would make full use of the two competitions to secure as many quota places as possible.

The ISSF had decided against giving Olympic qualification slots in the World Cups during the Paris Olympic Games cycle, but these events have regained that status for the Los Angeles cycle.

"Indian shooters will hopefully capitalise on this opportunity and aim for the maximum quota allocation of 24 places for a country, surpassing the 22 quotas they secured ahead of the Paris Games," Singh said.

Delhi will host this year's Asian Championships (Rifle/Pistol) from Wednesday at the Karni Singh Ranges. Over 300 shooters from 20 countries will compete across junior and senior categories. (PTI)

Great Himalayan Dream: 15 Nepal cricketers and their 30 million fans



NEW DELHI, Feb 3: Indian cricketer Priyank Panchal spent a month in Kathmandu last year, and came back with one memory that has stayed with him.

It wasn't the thrill of playing in front of a packed stadium but the easy warmth of a cricket-mad nation. Nestled in the Himalayas, the country breathes the game but with a smile instead of the all-consuming passion that defines cricket fan-doms in the sub-continent.

"Every player I met, every official I encountered and all the fans I came across greeted me with a lot of warmth and a big smile. No one raises their voice. The passion for cricket and the love for their stars is so genuine," Panchal, the former India A captain told PTI about his stint in the second edition of the Nepal Premier League with the Karnali Yaks franchise.

A nation of over 3 crore will place its hopes on 15 cricketers when Nepal walk into the Wankhede Stadium on February 8 for their lung-opener against England after a second successive T20 World Cup qualification.

They would be carrying the weight of Himalayan dreams, hoping to be bolstered by the support of an adoring fan base that has turned every match into a festival.

For a team that once struggled for basic infrastructure, the upcoming T20 World Cup is being viewed as a defining leap rather than just another appearance.

Nepalese fans are expected to throng Chennai for the warm-up games and for the tournament proper in Mumbai when Rohit Paudel and his men take the field.

"I have heard that ticket sales for Nepal's matches at the Wankhede Stadium have been very brisk. Had we played in Delhi, there would have been a sizeable crowd at Kotla too.

"Our fans, the biggest number of travelling ones after India and Pakistan, are our strength," said Cricket Association of Nepal (CAN) president Chatur Bahadur Chand, who is also a senior politician representing the Nepali Congress party.

The Nepal team looks gutsy with skipper Paudel one of their batting mainstays.

Then there is veteran Karan KC, Sompal Kami and the biggest of them all -- Sandeep Lamichhane -- the only player from the region to have featured in the IPL, Big Bash League and the Caribbean Premier League.

"Sandeep is obviously our biggest player but Rohit has also led the side very well in the past few years. We have had some good wins. We missed out on the Asia Cup after losing to Oman in the qualifiers but this time we are well-prepared. We had a good pre-tournament camp in Sri Lanka," Chand said. Even Panchal agrees that Nepal have the ability to create an upset in the group stages.

"Sompal Kami and Nandan Yadav are very good new-ball bowlers. Their ground fielding is excellent. The commitment is 200 per cent, which is very important," said Panchal, who believes that playing alongside Faf du Plessis, Jimmy Neesham and Martin Gupp-till helped the locals immensely during NPL.

Currently, Nepal has only one ground -- the Tribhuvan University Stadium in Kirtipur -- where floodlights were installed before the NPL, and the government is now spending money to refurbish the venue.

"My dream is to have at least five stadiums by 2030 and at least one more by next year. We already have central contracts in place, with top cricketers being paid a monthly salary of Nepali Rupee one lakh (₹ 62,000) apart from match fees," said Chand.

Top players in the NPL are paid around Nepali Rupee 20 lakh, but what has drawn attention is how well CAN organised the two editions. (PTI)

India would be extremely difficult to beat in T20 WC: Klinger

VADODARA, Feb 3: India's performance in the recent series against New Zealand showed why the defending champions would be extremely tough to beat in the T20 World Cup beginning on February 7, said former Australian cricketer turned coach Michael Klinger.

India's aggressive top-order core makes them arguably the strongest unit going into the ICC event, according to Klinger, the head coach of WPL franchise Gujarat Giants.

"With the form they're in and what I saw re-

cently against New Zealand, India are going to be extremely difficult to beat. A team will probably have to catch them on a bad night in a final to beat them," Klinger told PTI Videos in an interaction.

Klinger said Abhishek Sharma's rise has been a standout feature of India's new template at the top.

"Abhishek Sharma is probably my new favourite player. I've been watching him for a while now. Opening with Travis Head in the IPL and now doing it at international level, he's

fearless and amazing to watch," said Klinger, who played three T20s for Australia besides appearing in 182 first-class games.

India's fearless approach was displayed by Abhishek and Kishan, who consistently put New Zealand bowlers under pressure.

"Ishan Kishan has come back in fantastic form and is certainly putting a case forward to start in the XI at the World Cup," he said, adding that India's depth has turned selection into a challenge rather than a concern. (PTI)

'Homecoming' for army of Indian-origin cricketers this T20 World Cup

NEW DELHI, Feb 3: Led by Canada and USA, an army of more than three dozen Indian-origin cricketers will get to perform on the "home stage" when the T20 World Cup begins in India and Sri Lanka from February 7.

For someone like Mumbai-born USA pacer Saurabh Netravalkar, playing against India at the Wankhede Stadium would mark a full circle moment. He could not go on to play for the country of his birth but is looking forward to an emotional return to the ground of his formative years.

Phagwara-born Italy pacer Jaspreet Singh too can't wait to play top-flight cricket in a country he left as a teenager. The Netherlands off-spinner Aryan Dutt was not born in India but he too relishes turning up in the country of his roots and where cricket is revered like nowhere else.

Across the 20 teams taking part in the ICC event, Canada (11) have the most number of Indian-origin players followed by USA (9), Oman (7) and UAE (7). While hosts India would be expected to defend their title at home, the 'Indian hand' will be at play in majority of the participating teams.

PTI looks at some of the cricketers of Indian heritage who could make a big impact with their performances in the T20 show-piece.

Saurabh Netravalkar
The USA left-arm pacer who played U-19 cricket for India has reached Mumbai for the World Cup opener against the home team having proven himself on the global stage in the tournament's previous edition.

The 34-year-old cricketer-cum-software engineer was one of the pillars of USA's successful campaign in the 2024 edition in which the debutants upset the likes of Pakistan to qualify for the Super 8 stage.



Netravalkar is raring to go in the more unforgiving pitches of India but for starters, he would be trying to keep his emotions in check when he takes the field at Wankhede against his former Mumbai teammate Suryakumar Yadav on February 7.

"I wouldn't know how I would react there. But it is an emotional moment, for sure. Kind of like a full circle moment because I started playing cricket in Mumbai and gave up on the sport and moved to the US and never even expected to play cricket again. International (cricket) wasn't even a thought," he told PTI.

Monank Patel
Captain of USA in the tournament-opener against India would be Anand-born Monank Patel who too established himself on the World Cup stage with a match-winning half-century against Pakistan.

The 32-year-old opening batter is looking

forward to facing his Gujarat U-19 teammate Jasprit Bumrah while reminiscing their younger days off the field. Bumrah has gone on to become arguably the best fast bowler in the world and Monank saw that coming as a teenager.

"We played both red-ball and white-ball cricket, and those were really special times. It was the early stage of my cricketing journey and even back then, the way we were playing, especially the way Jasprit was performing, we knew he had that X-factor and that he would definitely go on to do something great," said Monank.

Jaspreet Singh
With Italy making their World Cup debut, Phagwara-born Jaspreet Singh would be getting all the extra attention.

The 32-year-old Jaspreet moved to a town close to Milan with his family back in 2006. He started his cricketing journey in his

BENVENUTI AZZURRI!

Italy chase golden moment in maiden T20 World Cup outing

BENGALURU, Feb 3: Cricket has always been a fringe sport in a football-mad Italy ever since it was introduced in the country by British sailors and diplomats in the late 18th century. But two centuries later, their moment to shed the tag of the unknown seems to have come.

The Italians, led by Wayne Madson, are ready to make a strong impression in the upcoming T20 World Cup, and that is not just a fancy statement.

The four-wicket win over Ireland last month in a bilateral T20 series was their first ever against a Test-playing nation, and it has shown their improving skill level and lack of stage fright.

It might just be irony that one of the architects of that famous victory was assistant coach Kevin O'Brien -- a celebrated former Ireland all-rounder. That's the one thing that Italian cricket authorities did right in their push to earn a World Cup berth -- appointment of some experienced coaches.

Apart from O'Brien, former Canada batter John Davison, an explosive batter in his prime, was roped in as head coach.

Dougie Brown, who played 25 ODIs and two T20s for England and 209 First-Class games for Warwickshire, was taken as the second assistant coach.

They might not come with a glittering and long CV, but it's an

earnest and hard-working group.

"They have got international experience and know what it takes to play in a World Cup. It's very valuable to us. Our young players can learn a lot from them about how to manage pressure situations in an event like this.

"Hope we can make some strong shows out there," Lorea Haz Paz, president of the Italian Cricket Federation (ICF), reflected in an interaction with PTI.

Qualifying for the ICC marquee event on July 11 last year was indeed a watershed moment for Italian cricket. But they were not ready to rest on the laurels. The ICF has organised camps for the players in Dubai and Sri Lanka since November last year to sharpen their skills.

"The critical part was to accept that the job was not done. The camps were good because they closely resemble pitches and conditions in India. They will give the players some idea about what to expect in the World Cup and mentally prepare them for the big event. Of course, the skill upgrade too happens here," tells Davison.

The Italy camp hopes to come up with a strong effort against fellow associates Scotland, who have replaced Bangladesh, and Nepal in their first two Group C matches before fronting up to far tougher assignments against former champions England and the West Indies. (PTI)

T20WC Boycott: Broadcasters may move court against PCB



KARACHI/NEW DELHI, Feb 3: The ICC has warned the Pakistan Cricket Board that it faces the prospect of legal action from T20 World Cup's official broadcasters JioStar for boycotting its February 15 game against India, a PCB source said on Tuesday.

Pakistan decided to boycott the match in Colombo on February 15 on instructions of their government but haven't yet officially specified the reasons to ICC. As reported by PTI, there is a possibility that the ICC will withhold the entire annual revenue share of Pakistan, which is around USD 35 million and pay the broadcasters from that purse.

A PCB source informed that although chairman Mohsin Naqvi had taken advice from the board's legal experts before briefing PM Shehbaz Sharif on the issue last week, the board is bracing for some serious consequences.

"If Pakistan doesn't relent and play against India, not only will they face financial penalties, perhaps a lawsuit from broadcasters but also any efforts to go to the ICC Dispute Resolution Committee (DRC) are likely to fail," a PCB source told PTI. ICC's DRC is an internal committee which doesn't hear appeals against the decisions made by its own board.

"The PCB might face problems regardless of their government directive to not play India as they are playing all their matches at a neutral venue (Sri Lanka) as per their wishes and not in India," another PCB source said.

"Secondly, while the Indian government has not given permission to its team to play in Pakistan, it has not stopped them from playing against Pakistan at neutral venues in Asia Cup or ICC events even after the May conflict," the board source, who tracks Naqvi closely, added. (PTI)