

6 NATION US trade deal proof of 'Abki baar Trump se haar': Cong's swipe at govt Two JeM terrorists killed in Kishtwar encounter 7 NORTHEAST 3 northeastern women allege racial abuse by neighbours in South Delhi Manipur Cabinet expansion likely next week

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'Artefact to be loaned by British Museum for 18 months'

Base of museum to house historic Vrindavani Vastra laid

STAFF REPORTER GUWAHATI, Feb 22: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday laid the foundation stone for a world-class museum in Guwahati that will house the historic Vrindavani Vastra, describing the initiative as a major step in reclaiming Assam's cultural heritage.



Addressing the ceremony, Sarma said the project marks a significant milestone in the state's long-standing efforts to bring back the sacred 16th-century textile created under the guidance of Vaishnavite saint-scholar Srimanta Sankardeva.

National Lok Adalat to be held in Diphu, Bokajan

HT Bureau DIPHU, Feb 22: The District Legal Services Authority (DLSA), Diphu, has announced that a National Lok Adalat will be held on March 14 to facilitate speedy and amicable settlement of pending and pre-litigation cases in Karbi Anglong.

New Guwahati airport terminal begins operations CM unveils expansion, aero-hub plans

STAFF REPORTER GUWAHATI, Feb 22: Commercial operations began on Sunday at the newly constructed integrated terminal of Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport, with Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma describing the development as a major milestone in Assam's aviation infrastructure and growth journey.

turnaround processes. Sarma said the project reflects Assam's broader development aspirations and has been executed with a focus on modern design, sustainability and passenger-friendly amenities, including advanced security systems, expanded check-in facilities, improved baggage handling and better parking and transport connectivity.

Several other Congmen join BJP I joined BJP with renewed purpose 'after reflection': Ex-Assam Cong chief

Bhupen Borah formally wears saffron cap

GUWAHATI, Feb 22: Former Assam Congress chief Bhupen Kumar Borah on Sunday joined the ruling BJP in the presence of its state unit president Dilip Saikia here.



He had asked for time to reconsider his decision, but the next day, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma went to his residence and announced that he would join the BJP on February 22.

Later, in an X post, the former Congress leader said he has joined the ruling party with renewed purpose "after reflection". "Assam's legacy deserves development with dignity and inclusion. I step forward with humility and resolve to serve the state and the people," he added.

Veteran scribe DN Chakraborty no more

MORIGANON/DEMOW, Feb 22: Veteran journalist and writer Dharendra Nath Chakraborty passed away in Guwahati on Sunday, prompting widespread condolences from the media fraternity and public representatives across Assam.

NDA seat-sharing plan 'done deal': CM

GUWAHATI, Feb 22: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday said the seat-sharing arrangement within the NDA for the Assam assembly elections was a "done deal".

On January 7, Sarma had said the BJP was likely to formalise its seat-sharing agreement with its allies by February 15.

Vote for BJP to get good governance, Assam voters urged

ITANAGAR, Feb 22: Arunachal BJP chief Kaling Moyong on Sunday appealed to the people of Assam to vote for good governance, development-oriented policies, and democratic values for nation-building, rather than supporting family-based politics.

8 LeT operatives with Bangladesh links held; pan-India module busted: Police

NEW DELHI, Feb 22: In a major counter-terror operation spanning three states, the Delhi Police has dismantled a Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) module comprising eight operatives, including seven Bangladeshi nationals who had illegally entered India and procured forged identity documents, an official said on Sunday.

The arrests followed coordinated raids in West Bengal and Tamil Nadu, after investigators traced the group's involvement in putting up pro-Pakistan and pro-terror posters, featuring photographs of terrorist Burhan Wani, at multiple locations in Delhi.

Metro police station regarding pro-Pakistan and pro-terror posters pasted at the Janpath metro station. Similar posters were later found at other locations in Delhi," Kushwah said.

IndiGo flight diverted to Imphal after dust storm disrupts operations at Dibrugarh airport

HT Correspondent DIBRUGARH, Feb 22: An IndiGo flight carrying 144 passengers was diverted to Imphal on Sunday morning after a severe dust storm reduced visibility at Dibrugarh Airport to below safe landing limits, officials said.



decided to divert the aircraft to Bir Tikendrajit International Airport in Imphal, the nearest viable alternative.

India's breakthroughs impress global leaders: Modi

NEW DELHI, Feb 22: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said the India AI Impact Summit proved to be a turning point in the trajectory of how the world will utilise the power of artificial intelligence in the future, and asserted that global leaders were impressed with the breakthroughs achieved by India in the domain.



countries, industry leaders, innovators, and people associated with the start-up sector came together.

At the summit, Modi said, he showed myriad things to world leaders, especially two things which impressed them a lot.

Amul's booth where it was explained how Artificial Intelligence (AI) is helping people in the treatment of animals, and how farmers keep track of their livestock with the help of 24x7 AI assistance.

# India, US reschedule chief negotiators meeting on interim trade deal: Sources

**NEW DELHI, Feb 22:** India and the US have decided to reschedule the proposed meeting of their chief negotiators, supposed to be held in Washington from Monday, to finalise the text for the interim trade pact, sources said on Sunday.

The Indian team was scheduled to start the three-day meeting on February 23 in the US. Joint Secretary in the Commerce Ministry, Darpan Jain, is the chief negotiator of India for this agreement.

"With regards to the visit of the Indian team of negotiators to the US for the India-US trade deal, the two sides are of the view that the proposed visit of the Indian Chief Negotiator and the team be scheduled after each side has had the time to evaluate the latest developments and their implications. The meeting will be rescheduled at a mutually convenient date," the Commerce Ministry sources said.

The development is important following the US Supreme Court's verdict against sweeping import tariffs imposed by the Trump administration on trade partners. Trump on Friday imposed a 10 per cent tariff on all countries, including India, from February 24 for 150 days after the court verdict.

US President Donald Trump on



Saturday announced raising tariffs on all countries to 15 per cent from 10 per cent announced a day earlier. In a major setback to Trump's pivotal economic agenda in his second term, the US Supreme Court ruled that the tariffs imposed by Trump on nations around the world were illegal and that the president had exceeded his authority when he imposed the sweeping levies by using the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) of 1977.

The US had imposed a 25 per cent reciprocal tariff on India in

August 2025. Later, an additional 25 per cent duty was imposed for buying Russian crude oil, taking the total tariffs on India to 50 per cent.

India and the US, earlier this month, agreed on a framework to finalise an interim trade deal, under which Washington will cut down the tariffs to 18 per cent. So far, the punitive 25 per cent has been removed. The remaining 25 per cent exists.

Following the Supreme Court ruling, Trump has again announced hiking these tariffs to 15 per cent.

This levy, if notified, will be over and above the existing MFN or import duties in the US.

For instance, if a product faces a 5 per cent MFN duty, an additional 15 per cent will be imposed, taking the effective duty to 20 per cent. Earlier, this was 5 plus 25 per cent.

There is, however, no clarity about what the US tariff will be on countries such as India after the 150-day period.

To sign and implement the first phase of the bilateral trade agreement, the framework has to be converted into a legal document.

To finalise the legal text for the first phase of the bilateral trade agreement, the Indian team is scheduled to meet its counterparts in Washington from February 23-26, 2026. Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal had said the deal may be signed in March and implemented in April.

During 2021-25, the US was India's largest trading partner in goods. The US accounts for about 18 per cent of India's total exports, 6.22 per cent of its imports, and 10.73 per cent of its bilateral trade.

In 2024-25, bilateral trade totalled USD 186 billion (USD 86.5 billion in exports and USD 45.3 billion in imports). (PTI)

## EU-India FTA opens doors to trade, AI, resilient supply chains: Austrian official

**NEW DELHI, Feb 22:** The landmark EU-India Free Trade Agreement (FTA) is a transformative win-win pact that offers immense opportunities in trade, artificial intelligence (AI) and resilient supply chains, Austria's State Secretary in the Federal Chancellery Alexander Proll has said.

In an interview with PTI Videos, Proll has described the EU-India FTA as the "mother of all deals" that stands to benefit nearly 200 crore people and create one of the world's largest free trade zones.

"Prime Minister (Narendra) Modi visited Austria in 2024 because of 75 years of the diplomatic relationship and now, we have the free-trade agreement. It is the mother of all deals. I think it is a win-win situation for the whole European Union and India," Proll said.

The FTA, finalised after years of negotiations re-launched in 2022, eliminates or reduces tariffs on 96.6 per cent of EU exports to India by value and 99.5 per cent of Indian exports to the EU by trade value.

Proll highlighted AI as a key future area of collaboration, calling it "the next step after digitalisation". "Our principle is that AI should serve for people... a human-centred AI. We build human-centred AI around people to save democracy and make innovation happen. I think that is the way we can learn from each other," Proll noted.

On global supply chains, he emphasised building mutual dependencies rather than isolation to enhance sovereignty.

"It is not about being isolated, it is about creating dependencies on both sides. So it is all about getting closer to each other and the FTA is one part of putting the countries more together," he underlined.

The EU-India FTA awaits final legal vetting, ratification by EU institutions (including European Parliament consent) and Indian processes, with implementation expected in the coming months to a year. (PTI)

## IDFC First Bank discloses ₹ 590 cr fraud by employees in Haryana govt accounts

**MUMBAI, Feb 22:** IDFC First Bank on Sunday disclosed a ₹ 590-crore fraud committed by its employees and others in accounts held by the Haryana government with the private sector lender.

In a regulatory filing made in the wee hours, IDFC First Bank said it has disclosed the matter to the banking regulator and also filed a police complaint.

"Prima facie, unauthorised and fraudulent activities have been carried out by certain employees at a particular branch in Chandigarh in a specific set of Haryana state government accounts and potentially involving other individuals/entities/counterparties," the IDFC First Bank filing said.

At present, it estimated the fraud size at ₹ 590 crore and added that a "reconciliation exercise" will determine the final amount based on receipt of further information, validation of claims, and recoveries of any nature.

Providing details of the fraud, it said a Haryana government department had been banking with IDFC First Bank, and the lender received a request for a closure and balance transfer to another bank on an undisclosed date.

"In the process, certain discrepancies were observed in the amount mentioned vis-a-vis the balance in the account," it said, adding that similar issues were observed in other accounts of Haryana government entities, who engaged with the bank from February 18 onwards.

IDFC First Bank said that a preliminary internal review was conducted, and the matter is "confined to a specific group of government-linked accounts within

Haryana Government" operated through the said branch in Chandigarh" and stressed that it does not extend to other customers of the Chandigarh branch.

"The aggregate amount under reconciliation across the identified accounts at the abovementioned Branch is approximately ₹ 590 crore," it disclosed.

Four officials working for the IDFC First Bank have been placed under suspension pending investigation, the bank said, assuring strict disciplinary, civil and criminal action against the employees and other external individuals responsible.

As a recovery measure, IDFC First Bank has sent "recall request" to certain beneficiary banks to "lien mark balance" in suspicious accounts held in these banks, the exchange filing said.

Statutory auditors have been informed, and the bank will also be conducting an independent forensic audit by appointing an independent external agency.

Following the discovery of the issue, IDFC First Bank placed the matter before a "Special Committee of the Board for Monitoring and Follow-up of Cases of Frauds" on February 20, and apprised the audit committee and the board a day later.

The IDFC First Bank scrip had gained 0.72 per cent close at ₹ 83.56 apiece on the BSE on Friday, as against gains of 0.38 per cent on the benchmark.

In the three months ended December 31, 2025, the bank had reported a 24 per cent jump in deposits, including a 33 per cent rise in the share of the low-cost current and savings account deposits. Its net profit had zoomed 48 per cent to ₹ 503 crore for the October-December period. (PTI)

## Beer industry to invest ₹ 5,500 cr in UP in next 3 years: BAI

**NEW DELHI, Feb 22:** The brewing industry will invest around ₹ 5,500 crore in Uttar Pradesh in the next three years on setting up of greenfield units and its ancillaries, industry body BAI said.

The beer industry is "betting big" on Uttar Pradesh, said the Brewers' Association of India (BAI), while welcoming the new excise policy announced by the state government, termed it "progressive" and has a "well-balanced approach" for the growth of the industry.

"The beer industry and its ancillary industries will be investing ₹ 5,500 crore in the next three years," said BAI Director General Vinod Giri.

Elaborating the projects, he said work on two greenfield breweries costing around ₹ 1500 crore is already underway. "Similarly, two major aluminium can production plants, which entail investment of ₹ 2,000 crore, are also in the pipeline, while a few glass production units worth ₹ 2,000 crore will also come up soon," Giri told PTI.

In addition, plans are underway for the malting unit and paper box makers, which are yet to be announced. All these investments will give a major boost to the in-

dustry and create jobs in the state, he added.

BAI represents three leading companies -- United Breweries Ltd (UBL), ABInBev and Carlsberg -- which together operate over 55 breweries and account for over 85 per cent of the beer sold in India.

Recently, the UP government has come up with its excise policy for 2026-27. According to BAI, this policy brings more transparency in the licensing and approvals process, and adds clarity across licensing, distribution and taxation while reinforcing a stable and growth-oriented environment for the beer industry.

This recently announced excise policy has maintained taxes on beer, while increasing it marginally on spirits. The overall impact on IMFL prices is going to be around ₹ 10 per 180 ml bottle. However, beer prices would remain the same.

"This calibrated approach is expected to encourage consumption of high-quality products with lower alcohol content like beer without jeopardising the state government's tax revenues. While there has been a marginal hike in the consumer prices of hard liquor, beverages with low alcohol content like beer have been spared," said Giri. (PTI)

## Indians in global tech roles a 'net positive' for India; China a 'force', says Cisco's Jeetu Patel

**NEW DELHI, Feb 22:** The growing number of Indian-origin leaders at the helm of major global technology companies should not be viewed through the prism of brain drain, but as a "net positive" for both India and the world, said Jeetu Patel, President and Chief Product Officer of Cisco. Addressing the debate on whether India loses out

when its top talent rises to leadership roles in the United States and other advanced economies, Patel rejected the zero-sum framing.

"I think of India as a net exporter of talent," he told PTI in an interview, adding, "I haven't thought about this as a zero-sum equation."

He argued that Indian professionals thriving globally often do so because of the cultural grounding they receive at home.

"Indians that have been born and raised here and have actually had the benefit of the cultural values that have been instilled in us - of hard work and education and ethics and all of that - and then we go to different parts of the world and we end up thriving there largely because of some of those values that were instilled in us in the first place is a net positive for the world but it's also a net positive for India."

"I don't think of it as a zero-sum," he reiterated. His remarks come at a time when several Indian-origin executives occupy top roles in leading US technology firms, fu-



elling discussions on whether India's global talent footprint reflects opportunity or loss.

Indians and Indian-origin leaders now occupy some of the most influential tech roles in the United States and beyond, illustrating the global impact of the country's talent pipeline. In the US, Satya Nadella heads Microsoft and Sundar Pichai leads Alphabet (Google's parent), while Arvind Krishna is CEO of IBM and Shantanu Narayen chairs Adobe, one of the world's largest software companies. Nikesh Arora serves as CEO of cybersecurity firm Palo Alto Networks, and Vijay Raji is Chief Technology Officer of Ap-

pllications at OpenAI, overseeing

engineering for key AI platforms. Asked about India's technological rivalry with China, particularly in artificial intelligence and advanced infrastructure, Patel acknowledged Beijing's strengths but cautioned against simplistic comparisons.

"I think China... is a force in the sense that they've got the benefit of (a different system). It's a very different thing (than) running a democracy with 1.4 billion people and having a system that is completely a command and control system," he said. "What China has done over the course of the past few years is actually very commendable," Patel added.

At the same time, he pointed to India's structural advantages, including demographics, scale and global partnerships.

"I would think of the opportunity that India has ahead of them with the scale and the demographics advantage and the ability to have allies with countries all around the world," he said. (PTI)

## ICAI Guwahati Branch elects new office bearers for 2026-27

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Feb 22:** The Guwahati Branch of the Eastern India Regional Council (EIRC) of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) has elected its new office bearers for the 2026-27 term at a ceremony held at ICAI Bhawan here.

CA Anjali Kumar Mundhra was elected as Branch Chairman, while CA Jay Prakash Gupta assumed charge as Vice Chairman.

CA Piyush Birmiwal took over as Branch Secretary and CA Kumar Victor Saha was elected Treasurer.

In addition, CA Vikash Kumar Choudhary was appointed Chairman of the Continuing Professional Education (CPE) Committee, and CA Nitika Bagaria assumed charge as Chairperson of the student body,

EICASA.

Outgoing Chairperson CA Raginee Goyal formally handed over charge after presenting a review of the branch's activities during her tenure.

Under her leadership, the Guwahati Branch received several recognitions, including the National Award for Second Best Branch (Medium Category) and three awards from the Eastern India Regional Council for overall performance, student association activities and corporate social responsibility initiatives.

In his acceptance address, Mundhra outlined his vision for the upcoming year, focusing on professional development and strengthening member engagement.

ICAI Central Council Member CA Ravi Kumar Patwa attended the installation ceremony.

*Contd. from Page 1...*

## Bhupen Borah formally

Congress after serving the party for more than 32 years with a lot of contribution. "From today, a new life starts in the BJP. He is a proud member of the party now. The BJP family will also take care of him, and give him love and respect," he said.

Saikia also welcomed Borah and the other Congress leaders who joined the ruling party. "The strength of the BJP workers has increased from today. The newcomers have come forward, being inspired by the work of PM Narendra Modi and CM Himanta Biswa Sarma," he asserted.

Borah's political experience and administrative efficiency will strengthen the BJP, Saikia added. Meanwhile, the BJP announced that Borah has been made a State Executive Member with immediate effect as per the instructions of Saikia. Sanju Bora was inducted into the team of media panelists, along with Sankar-jyoti Barua, who had joined the BJP a few days ago. (PTI)

## 'Artefact to be

reflects the state's broader commitment to safeguarding its identity and preserving its historical and spiritual heritage. The Vrindavani Vastra, woven at the request of Koch king Nara Narayan, depicts scenes from the life of Lord Krishna along with verses composed by Sankardeva. The textile was taken out of Assam more than a century ago, with fragments now housed in museums in London, Paris and the United States.

Officials said the proposed museum complex will provide a dedicated space to preserve and showcase the sacred textile while promoting awareness of Assam's rich cultural history.

## National Lok Adalat

Lok Adalats carry the same legal status as civil court decrees and are final, with no provision for appeal. The DLSA has urged individuals who have received summons or notices regarding their cases to attend the proceedings at their designated venue on the scheduled date. Officials said the platform offers an opportunity for citizens to resolve long-standing disputes quickly in a collaborative and legally binding manner.

## Veteran scribe DN

newspapers and his mentorship of younger journalists. Colleagues said his guidance and presence had long inspired media professionals in the region. The Morigaon District Journalists Association expressed deep sorrow over his demise, noting that his passing has left a significant void in the local journalistic community.

Former association presidents Upen Chandra Deka, Mahendra Nath Hazarika, Pratap Hazarika, Birinchi Kumar Sharma and Jagdish Nath, along with former secretary Bubumani Goswami and several senior and junior journalists, paid tribute to his legacy. The Demow Press Club also condoled his death, describing him as a dedicated and respected journalist whose contributions would be remembered. Demow MLA Shushanta Borgohain, in a message on social media, expressed grief over Chakraborty's passing, stating that his commitment to journalism, insightful guidance and service through his writing would continue to inspire many. He is survived by family members and admirers who remembered him as a committed journalist and mentor.

## Vote for BJP

the people of Assam will again vote for the BJP in the upcoming Assembly polls. The programme was also attended by Behali (Assam) MLA Digantha Ghatwal, Biswanath district BJP president Ashim Kumar Das, and party's office bearers from Arunachal Pradesh. (PTI)

## 8 LeT operatives

Cell. Kushwah said the Special Cell, already tracking activities of LeT operatives with Bangladeshi connections in the wake of recent developments in Bangladesh, intensified human intelligence and technical surveillance. Based on analysis, a team traced two suspects to Majherpara at Hatiara Gote in Kolkata.

On February 15, a raid was conducted and two accused -- Umar Faruk (31), a resident of West Bengal's Malda, and Robiul Islam (31), a native of Bangladesh -- were arrested.

"On February 21, simultaneous raids were carried out in Tiruppur in Tamil Nadu, leading to the arrests of six more operatives, identified as Mohammad Mizanur Rehman (32), Mohammad Sefayat Hossain (34), Mohammad Zahidul Islam (40), Mohammad Liton (40), Mohammad Uzzal (27) and Umar (32) -- all natives of Bangladesh's Bogura district," the officer said.

He said preliminary interrogations revealed that Faruk came in contact with Lone in March 2025 and was indoctrinated by him. Lone allegedly appointed Faruk to spearhead LeT operations in India, using Bangladeshi nationals who had assumed Indian identities.

In December 2025, Faruk was directed to conduct reconnaissance of vital installations in India and send videos to his handler. "After completing the reconnaissance, he was instructed to visit Bangladesh for further directions and recruiting more Bangladeshi nationals residing illegally in India," the Additional CP said.

Police said Faruk rented a hideout in Kolkata in accordance with Lone's instructions and shared its details with him. The premises were meant to serve as a base for terror activities. Lone also directed Faruk to arrange weapons, for which he began contacting local sources.

On February 6, Faruk and Robiul Islam boarded a plane from Kolkata to Delhi via Patna. On the night of February 7, they pasted the pro-Pakistan and pro-terror posters at 10 locations in Delhi, recorded videos of the act and sent those to Lone. They returned to Kolkata by train on February 8.

"Lone congratulated them and instructed them to replicate the act in Kolkata. The duo later pasted similar posters at multiple locations in the West Bengal capital and shared videos with him. Lone had another accomplice, Saidul Islam, a Bangladeshi national currently in a foreign country who facilitated his illegal entry into Bangladesh and arranged his hideout there. Saidul Islam also provided details of the Tamil Nadu-based group to Lone and Faruk," Kushwah said.

During searches, police seized pro-Pakistan and pro-terror posters from the rented accommodations of the accused, along with 10 mobile phones containing incriminating material. They also seized 25 credit and debit cards, five point-of-sale (POS) machines and Bangladeshi passports and identity cards.

Officials are probing the financial transactions and possible "hawala" links. Police said the accused had procured Indian identity documents to mask their Bangladeshi origin and entered the country illegally.

Kushwah said Lone, a resident of Srinagar, was arrested by the Special Cell in 2007 under the provisions of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) and Explosive Substances Act. At the time of his arrest, he was found to have direct links with Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD) chief Hafiz Saeed and his deputy, Zaki-ur-Rehman Lakhvi. He had undergone basic (Daura-e-Aam) and advanced (Daura-e-Khaas) terror training at an LeT camp in Muzaffarabad in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK).

Police said Lone was backed and funded by Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) to recruit Bangladeshi nationals residing illegally in India for planning terror plots. In addition to the 2007 case, Lone is also facing proceedings under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) and is named in another criminal case registered at Delhi's Hari Nagar police station in 2011.

Police said the timely arrests have potentially averted terror strikes in India. The module had conducted reconnaissance of important installations and was in the process of arranging weapons.

Further investigation is underway to identify other associates of the arrested accused. (PTI)

## IndiGo flight diverted

in Upper Assam, and after the dust storm subsided and visibility improved, air traffic control cleared the flight to resume its journey.

The aircraft later departed Imphal and landed safely at Dibrugarh Airport at around 1.20 pm, approximately two hours behind schedule.

Officials said all passengers remained safe and were kept informed throughout the diversion.

## India's breakthroughs impress

biggest AI summit ever. On the growing incidents of digital arrest and digital frauds, he said many senior citizens and innocent people have become victims of such financial crimes and hence it was very important to remain alert and vigilant.

"Sometimes, when you receive messages from your bank asking you to update KYC or re-KYC, the question arises in your mind: I have already done KYC, then why this? I urge you not to fret; this is just for the safety of your money," he said. The prime minister also referred to many Indian origin players playing for other nations in the T-20 World Cup, noting it gives joy to the people.

"The Canadian team has the highest number of players of Indian origin. Team captain Dilpreet Bajwa was born in Gurdaspur, Punjab. Navneet Dhalwal is from Chandigarh. This list includes many names like Harsh Thakur and Shreyas Mowla, who are raising the pride of not only Canada but India as well," he said.

He said this was the hallmark of Indianness and wherever Indians go, they remain connected to the roots of their motherland and contribute to the development of their "karambhoomi", the country they live and work in.

The prime minister said during the Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav, he spoke about attaining "freedom from the mentality of slavery" as part of it, the country is leaving behind the "symbols of slavery" and has begun to value symbols related to Indian culture. (PTI)

### AFFIDAVIT

By an Affidavit sworn before the Notary Public, Diphu Judicial Court I have declared and affirmed that my name is Jyoti Rekha Baruah which is recorded in Aadhaar Card vide no. 487807475957 and Pan Card no. BTPPB5907G. But by mistake in SBI Account 32463356317 it has been recorded as Jyoti Rekha Hazarika. The name of Jyoti Rekha Baruah and Jyoti Rekha Hazarika is the same and single person. Jyoti Rekha Baruah(O):- Shasanka HazarikaV-ill:- Sikaripather.P.O.+P.S:- Bakalia

'We may transfer it, but we will not be responsible for the consequences of the case then'

## Priyanka Gandhi visited Zubeen Garg's cremation ground for politics: Himanta

**GUWAHATI, Feb 22:** Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday accused Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra of doing politics over the death of Zubeen Garg, two days after her visit to the singer's cremation ground.

Speaking to reporters at BJP state headquarters here, Sarma announced that he will not visit Garg's cremation ground 'Zubeen Khetra' till the Assembly elections are over.

"Zubeen Khetra" should not be used for political purposes. Priyanka Gandhi came to Assam for political purposes and spent just two minutes at the cremation ground," he said.

Stating that no one should visit 'Zubeen Khetra' when they come for political purposes, Sarma said that is why Prime Minister Narendra Modi or Union Home Minister Amit Shah have not been there despite visiting the state multiple times over the last three months.

"Why didn't Priyanka Gandhi visit Swahid Smarak or Dr Bhupen Hazarika's memorial? The Congress is openly doing politics over Zubeen Garg. They made people emotional and sought votes," he alleged.

On Friday, Vadra visited Garg's cremation ground and said the iconic musician was the "voice of Assam's soul" and he is "above politics".

The Congress leader, who was on a two-day trip to the state to shortlist party candidates for the upcoming Assembly polls, made an unscheduled visit to 'Zubeen Khetra' at Sonapur on the outskirts



of Guwahati without any media presence.

The celebrated singer died under mysterious circumstances in Singapore on September 19 last year while swimming in the sea. He had gone to the island nation to attend the 4th edition of the North East India Festival (NEIF).

The CM further claimed that around 12,000 BJP workers donated blood on Zubeen Garg's birthday in November last year.

"Whose value is more -- Priyanka Gandhi who spent two minutes or me who arranged 12,000 blood donors? People are using Garg's name and doing politics," he added.

Sarma pointed out that it was he who had selected the location to make 'Zubeen Khetra' and arranged everything.

"If Priyanka Gandhi and Rahul

Gandhi have courage, let them go to Swahid Smarak and confess that their grandmother and father had committed sins during Assam Agitation," he added.

A 'Swahid Smarak', the martyrs memorial, was inaugurated in December last year in the state capital in memory of more than 850 people from the Assamese community who had died during the six-year long Assam Agitation.

"I will not go to Zubeen Khetra till the elections are over. I feel no candidate should visit it if they are contesting elections," Sarma said.

Talking about public demand to set up a fast-track court for speedy trial of Garg's death, the CM claimed that a "conspiracy" is happening in that aspect.

"The judge, in whose court the case is going on at present, has rejected three bail petitions of the ac-

cused. Seeing this, two others withdrew their bail applications," he added.

Sarma claimed that a preparation is going on to take away the case from this judge to help the accused.

"This is a design of a particular news channel, a particular newspaper and Congress to change the judge, give bails to the accused before election and blame the BJP," he added.

"It is just politics. There is a conspiracy to give bail and put BJP in awkward position," he said.

Sarma said the Assam Cabinet on February 26 will take a decision whether the case should be handed over to a fast-track court.

"We may transfer it, but we will not be responsible for the consequences of the case then," he added.

Garima Saikia Garg, wife of Zubeen Garg, and Public Prosecutor Ziaul Kamar on February 16 had expressed dissatisfaction over the slow pace of the case being heard by the Kamrup Metropolitan District and Sessions Court.

With several petitions filed before the court on different aspects by the accused, the entire process has been delayed as the trial is yet to begin, Kamar had said.

NEIF chief organiser Shyamkanu Mahanta, the singer's manager Siddharth Sharma, his two band members Shekhar Jyoti Goswami and Amrit Prabha Mahanta, his cousin and Assam Police DSP Sandipan Garg, and his PSOs Nandeswar Bora and Prabin Baishya are in jail as accused in the case. (PTI)

## Guv inaugurates Blood Donation Camp at Lok Bhavan under Sewa Sankalp Saptah

Lakshman Prasad Acharya lauds voluntary donation as supreme act of humanity



**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Feb 22:** As part of 'Sewa Sankalp Saptah', Lok Bhavan, Assam under the leadership of Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya in association with the Indian Red Cross Society, Assam State Branch, organised a blood donation camp at the IRCS at Chandmari here on Sunday.

Speaking on the occasion, Governor Acharya said that blood donation is a noble activity of humanitarian services. He said that the camp organised by Lok Bhavan in association with the Indian Red Cross Society, Assam State Branch is a noble initiative of human service. He said that the camp symbolises compassion, empathy and selfless service, values that the Red Cross has consistently upheld through its humanitarian efforts.

The Governor observed that the blood donation camp reflects Assam's collective spirit of service, social responsibility and shared commitment to humanity. He remarked that in Indian culture, service has always been regarded as the highest duty, forming the foundation of the nation's civilisational ethos. Referring to the rich tradition of sacrifice and dedication, he cited examples from history and mythology that continue to inspire generations.

Highlighting Assam's cultural legacy, the Governor said that the teachings of Srimanta Sankardev

continue to inspire society to embrace service as the true purpose of life. He also recalled the immortal words "Manuhe Manuhor Babe" by Assam's legendary artist and Bharat Ratna Bhupen Hazarika, stating that the message of human unity and compassion resonates strongly in initiatives like blood donation camps.

Describing blood donation as one of the greatest forms of charity, the Governor said that it gives a new lease of life to patients in need. He noted that voluntary blood donation also carries health benefits for donors, including stimulation of new blood cell production and reduction of certain heart-related risks, besides providing a profound sense of satisfaction.

A particularly inspiring feature of the camp was the presence of regular donors who have donated blood multiple times. Hariman Deka (96 times), Prakash D Atreya (62 times) and Prabin Barua (25 times) were specially acknowledged for their exemplary commitment to humanitarian service. The Governor lauded them as role models for the youth, stating that each act of donation represents a silent yet powerful effort to save an unknown life. Calling upon citizens, especially the youth, to adopt voluntary blood donation as a social responsibility, the Governor urged them to donate blood at least once a year and motivate others to

do the same. He appreciated the significant contributions of the Indian Red Cross Society, Assam State Branch, which, with more than 5,000 trained volunteers and an extensive branch network has established a strong identity in disaster management, health services, first aid training and community welfare across the state. He expressed confidence that the organisation would continue to expand its humanitarian outreach to every corner of Assam.

The Governor also conveyed his heartfelt gratitude to the doctors, nurses, technicians, volunteers and generous donors whose dedicated efforts made the camp meaningful and successful. He called upon all to move forward together in strengthening the ideals of humanity, compassion and service to build a healthy, safe and strong Assam.

Vice Chairman, the Indian Red Cross Society, Assam State Branch, Dr P Ashok Babu; Commissioner and Secretary to the Governor SS Meenakshi Sundaram; Chairman the Indian Red Cross Society, Assam State Branch AK Absar Hazarika, former Vice Chairman and Padma Shri awardee Ajay Dutta, office bearers and staff members of the organisation; officers of the Health Department, doctors, nurses, volunteers and several other dignitaries were present on the occasion.

## Dumpers must use proper covering: DC directives

**HT Correspondent**

**MORIGAON, Feb 22:** A meeting of the District Road Safety Committee was held on Saturday at the conference hall of the District Commissioner's Office, Morigaon, under the chairmanship of Anamika Tewari, District Commissioner.

At the outset, the Member Secretary of the Committee and Superintending Engineer, PWD (Roads), Jinnat Ahmed, apprised the members of the status of implementation of decisions taken in the previous meeting.

Expressing concern over damage to roads caused by dumpers carrying earth without proper covering, the District Commissioner directed that clear instructions be issued to ensure that such vehicles ply only with adequate covering. She stressed that the use of proper covering would be mandatory and that dumpers should neither damage public roads nor contribute to road accidents.

The District Commissioner also instructed the District Transport Officer to ensure registration of e-rickshaws and auto-rickshaws operating in the district. She directed the police department to identify accident-prone locations and discussed the possibility of installing radar systems in such areas to curb overspeeding.

Further, she instructed that road safety awareness among students be strengthened through videos and other e-learning materials in schools. She also directed that special camps be organised in colleges for issuance of driving licences to eligible students.

During the meeting, Additional District Commissioner Nitisha Bora directed that petrol pumps strictly ensure that fuel is not provided to two-wheeler riders without helmets.

## Cooking gas connections, assistive items distributed in Demow

**HT Correspondent**

**DEMOW, Feb 22:** A programme for distributing cooking gas connections and essential assistive items to specially-abled individuals was organised at the Demow Jyoti Bishnu Cultural Building on Saturday. Sushanta Borgohain, MLA of 95 No Demow Constituency was present on the occasion.

Sushanta Borgohain provided

cooking gas connections to the women beneficiaries and distributed essential assistive items to the specially-abled individuals during the programme.

Talking to the media, Sushanta Borgohain said that for the last one year, they have been working hard for the election. He said the Bharatiya Janata Party since last year on how the election can be

won for which from the grassroots level, the works has been almost completed and now they are waiting when the Election Commission declared the Election. He said I have applied for the ticket and at present, as MLA doing the works. He believes that this time in the Election the Bharatiya Janata Party will get the first lead from Upper Assam to form the government.

## FSSAI recognises NFR for food safety and hygiene standards

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, Feb 22:** In a significant achievement towards ensuring safe and hygienic food for passengers, Dimapur Railway Station under Lumding Division of Northeast Frontier Railway has been awarded the prestigious "Eat Right Station" certification by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI). The station has qualified as per the guidelines established by FSSAI and has been granted this certification for the period from 24th October 2025 to 23rd October 2027.

This recognition has been conferred after a comprehensive audit of food stalls, catering units and food handlers at the station to ensure compliance with stringent food safety standards, hygienic food preparation, safe storage practices, proper waste management and availability of nutritious food options for passengers.

In another proud achievement, four stations under Alipurduar (APDJ) Division of Northeast

Frontier Railway have also been awarded the "Eat Right Station" certification by FSSAI for meeting the prescribed food safety and hygiene benchmarks. These stations are Alipurduar Railway Station, Kokrajhar Railway Station, Golakganj Railway Station and New Mal Junction Railway Station.

The certification reflects the dedicated efforts of railway officials, health inspectors, catering units, authorised vendors and station management teams who have worked in close coordination to maintain high standards of cleanliness and food safety.

The "Eat Right Station" initiative is part of FSSAI's nationwide movement to promote safe, healthy and sustainable food practices under the "Eat Right India" campaign. Northeast Frontier Railway remains committed to continuously improving passenger amenities and ensuring that quality, safe and hygienic food is made available across all its stations.

## First Rajanikanta Hazarika Memorial Award presented to writer Jibokanta Bora

**HT Correspondent**

**DIBRUGARH, Feb 22:** The first-ever Rajanikanta Hazarika Memorial Award, instituted in memory of noted historian, thinker and author Rajanikanta Hazarika of the Sonowal Kachari community was conferred upon eminent novelist, writer and social worker Jibokanta Bora of Kumari Kachari village, Namsai, Arunachal Pradesh.

The award was presented during the Rajanikanta Hazarika Memorial Day programme organised by the Sonowal Kachari Sahitya Sabha at the auditorium of Milan Jyoti Yuwak Sangha, Kumari Kachari village in collaboration with the Namsai District Committee of Arunachal Pradesh on Thursday.

Jibokanta Bora, author of several acclaimed works including "Dalai Valley'r Dhou" and "Kumari Kacharir Itihas" was honoured for his significant literary contributions and dedication to documenting the history and heritage of the Sonowal Kachari com-

munity. The memorial meeting, titled "Life and Works of Rajanikanta Hazarika" was presided over by Sabha president Mohan Sonowal. Speaking as the chief guest, researcher, writer and social worker Dr Jiten Bora highlighted Hazarika's immense contribution to literature and historiography, particularly his seminal work "Mongol Kacharir Gupt Itihas", describing it as a priceless asset to Sonowal Kachari and Assamese literature.

He emphasised the need for further research on the book and lauded the Sabha for initiating commemorative programmes to keep Hazarika's legacy alive among the younger generation.

The programme was conducted by Sabha's magazine editor Kalpa Jit Sonowal, while Namsai District Committee secretary Ratan Sonowal delivered the welcome address. Participating as an invited guest, editor of Sonowal Barta, Ratan Hazarika remarked that instituting an award in Hazarika's

name is a fitting tribute to a distinguished personality and reflects the community's commitment to honouring its intellectual heritage.

Executive Member of the Sonowal Kachari Autonomous Council, Basanta Sonowal in his address, assured that necessary measures would be taken to allocate special funds in the upcoming financial year for the welfare of Sonowal people residing in Arunachal Pradesh.

Leaders of various community organisations, including All Arunachal Sonowal Kachari Students' Union president Bikram Sonowal, Arunachal Pradesh Kachari Jati Unnayan Parishad president Mohan Chandra Phatowali and All Arunachal Sonowal Kachari Women's Association president Ajanta Sonowal, highlighted the political, social and cultural issues faced by the community in Arunachal Pradesh and appealed for coordinated support from organisations based in Assam as well as the Autonomous Council.

## Cattle theft suspect beaten by locals in Kokrajhar

**HT Correspondent**

**KOKRAJHAR, Feb 22:** A suspected cattle thief was caught by locals at Ketengajhara near Nayekgaon in Kokrajhar district on Saturday night while attempting to steal cattle. The accused is currently undergoing treatment after being beaten by villagers.

According to police sources, the thief has been identified as Kajimuddin Sheikh, son of Moinal Haque, a resident of Tilapara in Chapar, Dhubri district.

As per reports, around midnight last night, a three-member gang entered the house of Joyndan Oraon of Ketengajhara to steal cattle. The gang had arrived in an Alto vehicle. However, villagers noticed their movement and managed to catch one of them, while the other two fled with the vehicle.

The locals then detained and beat the thief before handing him over to the police. On receiving information, a police team reached the spot, rescued the injured accused from the mob and admitted him to Kokrajhar Medical College and Hospital for treatment.

## Meghalaya artist Raphael Warjri honoured with Pranab Baruah Artist Award

Ceremony at Nagaon Kalakshetra strengthens cultural ties between Meghalaya and Assam



**HT Correspondent**

**NAGAON, Feb 22:** Prominent Meghalaya artist Raphael Warjri was conferred with the Pranab Baruah Artist Award at a function held at Nagaon Pranab Baruah Kalakshetra on Sunday here.

Receiving the award, Warjri said it would inspire him and

strengthen the bond between Meghalaya and Assam.

The function was attended by Pranab Baruah's family members, including his grandson. Noted poet Dr Prayag Saikia recited a poem in memory of the late artist Pranab Baruah. Noted artist Gokul Chetri praised Pranab Baruah's contributions to art, saying he had created works that would be remembered globally.

Local MLA Rupak Sarma, attended the event as the chief guest, said Baruah's art had brought glory to Nagaon and Assam. He praised the decision to confer the award on Warjri, saying it was a fitting tribute to the late artist.

The award comprised a citation, a memento and a cash prize of ₹ 25,000.

## Four injured in land dispute clash in Kokrajhar

**HT Correspondent**

**KOKRAJHAR, Feb 22:** A violent clash broke out between two groups over a land-related dispute in Kokrajhar.

Four people were seriously injured in the incident — Matiu Rahman (35), Harmuj Ali Sheikh (45), Jahanur Islam (27) and Abdur Rahman (28).

The violence reportedly erupted over a dispute related to channeling water from a nearby spring or waterfall.

The incident took place this afternoon at Shalbari under Kokrajhar Police Station. The victims have lodged a case at the sadar police station seeking justice.

In the FIR filed by victim Chorab Ali at Kokrajhar Sadar Police Station, the accused have been named as: Kamal Sheikh, Saheer Ali Sheikh, Bahar Ali Sheikh, Taher Ali Sheikh and Kamand

Sheikh.

Police have already detained Saheer Ali Sheikh, Taher Ali Sheikh and Kamand Sheikh in connection with the incident.

There are allegations that the Miya community has been harassing indigenous local communities for a long time.

The victims have demanded the immediate arrest and legal punishment of the main accused, Kamal Sheikh.

Victims and locals also staged a protest at Kokrajhar Sadar Police Station demanding justice.

They further demanded strict action against those responsible for atrocities against indigenous people and appealed to Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma to intervene.

The victims also expressed anger at the police for allegedly delaying the registration of the cases.

## Historic event draws 2,000+ runners, promotes peace and active living

### NCC marathon in Kokrajhar: 78-year-old from Shillong finishes 42 km

**HT Correspondent**

**KOKRAJHAR, Feb 22:** Under a starlit sky, the town of Kokrajhar witnessed a historic event as the NCC North Eastern Region (NER) Directorate and the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) Government organised the Kokrajhar NCC Marathon.

The event, featuring the 42 KM Full Marathon, half Marathon, 10 KM and 5 KM categories, drew over 2,000 participants and showcased the pinnacle of endurance and discipline.

A 78-year-old woman from Shillong, Meghalaya, celebrated her birthday by participating in and successfully completing the 42 km full marathon held in Kokrajhar on Sunday.

The elderly runner took part in the marathon, drawing applause from participants and spectators alike. Her achievement was hailed as a powerful message promoting healthy living, active ageing and the spirit of "Run for Peace".

The early morning flag-off ceremony was led by Maj Gen Anurag Vij, ADG, NCC NER, alongside Nayan K Barua, ED & Refinery Head IOCL Bogaigaon, Brig N C Khuman, Commander NCC GP HQ Guwahati, Brig KJ Singh, DDG, NCC NER Di-



rectorate senior officials. Their presence underscored the commitment to nation building and youth empowerment. The event was elevated by the presence of star runner Ringky Brahma, who inspired local youth and cultural performances by Anaya Brahma. Emcee Yankee Parasar kept the crowd energised throughout.

NCC Cadets participated prominently in all categories, showcasing extraordinary stamina. Dabomiki Mulieh emerged as the Overall Marathon winner, completing the Full Marathon. The event concluded with medal presentations and felicitations, lauding the organisers for their flawless execution and commitment to promoting unity and discipline.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

The only time you fail is when you fall down and stay down. - Stephen Richards

Lack of human capital development

When the world seems to be on the rapid development trajectory, there has been a shocking lack of progress in human capital development across the world. Despite rising incomes and reductions in poverty, two-thirds of low- and middle-income countries have experienced a decline in health, learning, or on-the-job skill development over the past 15 years.

Learning outcomes show an equally troubling pattern. On average, children in low- and lower-middle-income countries show lower achievement levels today than they did 15 years ago. The largest declines have been observed in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Family background shapes human capital accumulation from the start. By the time they are 5 years old and before they have attended school, children in rural Peru whose mothers have primary educational attainment or less have roughly half the vocabulary relative to children whose mothers have completed at least secondary school.

Preparing for the AI revolution: India's moment and momentum

By: M R Lulu

India gave the world both a moment and a momentum. By hosting the AI Impact Summit, it once again made the world recognize the changing pattern in which it is taking the lead.

The G20 Summit was another defining moment in which India, under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, emphasized the need to move beyond selfish political strategizing. He introduced a perspective that was often unfamiliar to the Western world, the ethical vision of seeing the world as one family, where co-existence, not conflict, defines true progress.

India has been witnessing a significant shift in its global role as a responsible partner in policy making and as a major player that brings its cultural and ethical depth as an ancient civilization to the forefront. From being seen merely as a participant, India has emerged as a key contributor in shaping global discourse.

In this evolving landscape, the Prime Minister, who revived the prominence of All India Radio through his program Mann Ki Baat, restoring its respect and public connection, now stands alongside the global AI community to define a new momentum for the AI revolution under the powerful acronym "MANAV."

The acronym MANAV, like the earlier epigram "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam," is destined to define India's vision for Artificial Intelligence as a force for the global good. The acronym stands for: M - Moral and ethical systems, emphasizing the need for AI to be guided by ethical principles; A - Accountable governance, ensuring transparent rules and robust oversight; N - National sovereignty, highlighting the importance of data ownership and control; A - Acces-

sible and inclusive, promoting the use of AI as a multiplier rather than a monopoly; V - Valid and legitimate, ensuring that AI systems are lawful and verifiable. Together, it envisions a responsible and inclusive AI framework.

It seeks to define the participatory role of countries, irrespective of their size and power, through moral and ethical systems that enhance their impact. Not only India, but the West as well, recognizes the potential adversities that Artificial Intelligence may pose to human beings. A philosophical intervention, one might call it, came with a significant appeal for human-centric innovation in AI, primarily ensuring the well-being of the globe. From the Vatican, the global center of Christianity emerged a document titled "Rome Call for AI Ethics," which strongly advocates that AI should be researched and developed in accordance with criteria ensuring that it truly serves the entire "human family."

The vision in India, as elsewhere in the world, is clear: advancement at every level should ensure the sustainable and non-confrontational survival of both the planet and its people.

As is already evident among AI users, especially children, there is an impending erosion of critical thinking. Over Reliance on AI can significantly affect social interaction skills, reducing human relationships, while AI-generated content, particularly on social media or in gaming, may increase anxiety, depression, and loneliness.

The age of AI and the future of humanity are currently beyond precise prediction, but one thing is certain: the changes expected in the near future are unimaginable. Seeking predictions from AI on its future impacts will be truly fascinating and amusing.

India's search for AI sovereignty

When Prime Minister Narendra Modi speaks about artificial intelligence on global stages, he is not merely talking about technology. He is talking about power, sovereignty, trust, and the future shape of the world. In recent years, as AI has moved from laboratories into daily life, it has become clear that control over AI systems will shape economies and geopolitics much like oil did in the twentieth century.

The United States today dominates much of the AI stack. From advanced semiconductor design to cloud infrastructure, foundational models, operating platforms, and developer ecosystems, American companies sit at the core. Washington is actively encouraging allies and partners to build their AI capabilities on top of this American stack.

India is approaching this moment differently. Rather than rejecting American technology or blindly embracing it, New Delhi is trying to carve out a third path. Modi's message is subtle but firm. India wants partnership, not dependence. It wants openness, not dominance. And it wants AI to serve development, inclusion, and public good, not just corporate profit or strategic leverage.

This vision is rooted in India's own experience. Over the last decade, India has built some of the world's largest digital public infrastructures. Aadhaar created a unique digital identity system at scale. UPI transformed payments by making them instant, interoperable, and nearly free.

When applied to AI, this philosophy leads India to emphasize resilience and self reliance without isolation. The push to develop a domestic AI ecosystem is not limited to

software. It stretches from chip making and semiconductor fabrication to data centers, cloud services, foundational models, and sector specific applications. India knows it cannot replace the US or China overnight. But it also knows that total reliance on external AI stacks would leave it vulnerable, economically and politically.

The semiconductor challenge illustrates this clearly. Chips are the physical foundation of AI, and advanced manufacturing is currently dominated by a handful of players in the US, Taiwan, South Korea, and a few other regions. India has launched incentive schemes to attract chip manufacturing and assembly. Progress is slow and complex, but the intent is strategic.

At the same time, India is investing heavily in AI talent. Its universities, startups, and research institutions are producing engineers and data scientists at scale. Indian professionals already play key roles in global tech companies. The government wants more of that expertise to be anchored at home, working on problems relevant to India's population, languages, and development needs.

Modi's alternative AI vision also reflects India's position in the global order. India is not part of a formal military or technological bloc. It maintains strategic autonomy while engaging with multiple power centers. In AI, this translates into dialogue with the US, cooperation with Europe, engagement with the Global South, and cautious management of competition with China.

Many countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America worry that AI will deepen global inequality. They fear becoming mere data suppliers or markets for technologies developed elsewhere. Modi speaks directly to this anxiety. He frames India as a voice for inclusive AI, one that shares best practices, open platforms, and capacity building rather than locking countries into opaque systems.

The US approach to AI governance



often emphasizes innovation first, with regulation following later. Europe prioritizes regulation, ethics, and rights. China focuses on state control and strategic deployment. India positions itself somewhere in between. It talks about ethical AI, but also about affordability and access. Even partial domestic capacity can reduce exposure to supply shocks and geopolitical pressure.

DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Satyabrata Borah

This balancing act resonates with many nations that feel caught between powerful models that do not fully reflect their realities.

The AI push is tied to economic ambition. India wants to move up the value chain. For decades, it was seen primarily as an IT services hub. AI offers a chance to become a creator of core technologies rather than just an implementer. Startups working on healthcare diagnostics, agricultural forecasting, language translation, education tools, and governance solutions are central to this narrative. The government's role is to create enabling conditions, data access, compute infrastructure, and regulatory clarity.

Critics also argue that India's ambition may be overstated. Catching up with the US in foundational AI is a monumental task. American companies have decades of head start, deep

capital, and global influence. Even China, with its scale and state backing, struggles under export controls. India's path will likely be uneven, with successes in some areas and dependencies in others. But supporters counter that the goal is not dominance, but choice. Even partial independence changes the balance.

What makes Modi's positioning noteworthy is its tone. It avoids confrontation. India does not frame its AI vision as anti American. Instead, it emphasizes complementarity. India is willing to work with US companies, host their investments, and integrate their tools, but on terms that preserve domestic capacity and long term autonomy.

On global platforms, Modi often links AI to human values. He speaks about using AI to address climate change, healthcare gaps, education access, and disaster response. This moral framing is strategic. It contrasts with narratives that focus solely on competition and dominance. By presenting AI as a shared human challenge, India seeks moral leadership even if it lacks technological supremacy. This approach also aligns with India's broader diplomatic strategy. Whether in climate negotiations, vaccine diplomacy, or digital public goods, India often positions itself as a problem solver rather than a rule breaker.

For the United States, India's

stance is both an opportunity and a complication. India is a valuable partner in counterbalancing China and shaping global standards. At the same time, India's insistence on autonomy limits how tightly it can be integrated into a US led AI ecosystem. Washington must accept that partnership with India will not mean control. For New Delhi, this trade off is acceptable, even necessary.

As AI continues to reshape economies and societies, the question of who builds it, who controls it, and who benefits from it will only grow more urgent. Modi's alternative AI vision does not promise quick dominance or dramatic breakthroughs. Instead, it offers a slower, more deliberate path focused on resilience, inclusion, and choice. It reflects India's historical instincts and contemporary ambitions.

Whether this vision succeeds will depend on execution. Policies must translate into infrastructure. Rhetoric must be matched by results. Private sector innovation must align with public goals. And ethical commitments must withstand political and commercial pressure. If India can navigate these challenges, it may indeed emerge as a bridge, not just between the US and other countries, but between competing ideas of what AI should be.

In a world increasingly defined by technological power, India's message is quietly radical. It suggests that leadership does not always come from dominance. Sometimes it comes from offering an alternative that others find credible and humane. As AI races ahead, that alternative may prove to be one of India's most significant contributions to the global future.

Robodog: A moment of reckoning for India's AI ambitions

By: Dipak Kurmi

At the recent India AI Impact Summit 2026, what should have stood as a confident demonstration of national seriousness in artificial intelligence briefly dissolved into an uncomfortable national moment. The episode involving Galgotias University — whose exhibition stall was asked to vacate after a robotic dog presented as an in-house innovation was quickly identified as a commercially available model from the Chinese firm Unitree — has already travelled far beyond the confines of a single exhibition hall.

The university's representatives had publicly spoken of significant investment in AI and implied that the robotic platform, branded "Orion," emerged from its own Centre of Excellence. Observers, however, quickly recognised the device as an off-the-shelf Unitree quadruped, and the internet did what it does best: verify, amplify and expose in real time. The subsequent clarification — that the institution had not actually built the robodog and was merely exposing students to global technologies — arrived too late to prevent reputational damage.

It would be convenient to dismiss the episode as a minor embarrassment at a crowded global summit, a fleeting public relations misstep in the churn of a fast-moving technology sector. That interpretation misses the deeper signal. The robodog controversy is not the core story; it is the symptom of a widening structural gap between narrative and capability, between performative ambition and the slow, disciplined work of building technological power. India's desire to convene the world on AI governance, inclusion, responsible deployment and the voice of the Global South is both legitimate and strategically sound. Hosting high-visibility summits signals geopolitical intent and developmental aspiration. Yet aspiration without corresponding depth risks

creating an ecosystem increasingly fluent in projection but uneven in production.

Recent history offers a cautionary parallel. During India's presidency of the G20, the country delivered an impressive display of diplomatic choreography and event management. Yet the year also exposed how quickly optics can substitute for durable outcomes. Several host cities witnessed cosmetic clean-ups — vinyl cover-ups rather than lasting civic improvements — reminding observers that spectacle is not transformation. The AI moment now confronting India risks drifting into a similar pattern, where the language of technological leadership advances faster than the underlying infrastructure of innovation. Artificial intelligence is unforgiving in this regard. Unlike sectors where market size alone can create leverage, frontier AI power accumulates through hard prerequisites that cannot be improvised at conference speed.

The global leaders in this domain — concentrated largely in Western and Chinese corporate laboratories — dominate not because they host more summits, but because they have spent years assembling the essentials: hyperscale compute, world-class research ecosystems, semiconductor depth, proprietary model architectures, patient venture capital and a culture that treats technical credibility as non-negotiable. No amount of branding can compress that timeline.

In the coming weeks, the robodog episode will inevitably be absorbed into competing narratives. Some will downplay it as trivial; others will weaponise it for political point-scoring; officialdom may argue that it was simply an oversight. But a country serious about artificial intelligence cannot afford an ecosystem where perceived prowess is staged casually and verified lightly. The credibility economy of AI is brutally efficient. Claims are tested instantly, and reputations are recalibrated accordingly. The risks extend beyond embarrassment. If universities begin to function as theatres of performative innovation rather than engines of rigorous research, India may produce graduates highly skilled at demonstrations but insufficiently prepared for genuine breakthroughs. If corporate India treats AI primarily as a branding layer — an attractive suffix for investor presentations —

the country risks remaining a downstream consumer of intelligence produced elsewhere. Models will be trained abroad, hosted on foreign infrastructure and governed by standards written beyond India's strategic influence. That trajectory would quietly lock in technological dependency at precisely the moment when AI is becoming a core determinant of national power. The deeper vulnerability exposed by the incident is institutional. Mature innovation ecosystems enforce standards almost instinctively. In artificial intelligence, provenance matters, technical claims matter and research integrity matters. Nations that aspire to shape global norms on responsible AI must first demonstrate credibility within their own borders. Centres of Excellence cannot function as ornamental designations. Their legitimacy must rest on outputs that withstand scrutiny: peer-reviewed research, meaningful patents, indigenous model architectures, safety research contributions and talent pipelines capable of competing with the world's best laboratories. Without these anchors, the ecosystem becomes prone to hype cycles and the gradual erosion of trust.

There are, to be fair, encouraging signals within India's broader AI landscape. The country possesses one of the world's largest pools of software engineering talent, a vibrant startup ecosystem and growing public investment in digital infrastructure. Initiatives around public digital goods, multilingual AI and population-scale data systems provide a foundation that many emerging economies lack. Yet the transition from digital capability to frontier AI leadership requires a different order of commitment — one measured not in announcements but in sustained capital allocation, research autonomy and institutional patience.

The question confronting India is therefore stark. Is the country building AI sovereignty, or inadvertently hosting AI theatre? Genuine sovereignty demands sustained investment in upstream research rather than an exclusive focus on downstream applications. It requires treating compute infrastructure and semiconductor resilience as strategic assets, not merely commercial utilities. Without domestic depth in chips, cloud resilience and high-end training capacity, structural dependence

becomes embedded by design. Regulatory architecture will also matter. India must craft a framework that balances innovation with accountability, rewarding authentic technological contribution while penalising misleading claims and performative exaggeration. Credibility is cumulative but fragile; once eroded, it takes years to rebuild. Parallel to this, the country's STEM and skilling ecosystem requires a hard reset. An education model still heavily tilted toward rote credentialism and outdated syllabi cannot produce frontier AI builders. It risks producing a workforce adept at using tools but not at inventing them.

The stakes extend far beyond the technology sector. Artificial intelligence is rapidly reshaping productivity patterns, labour markets, military capability, administrative capacity and the broader distribution of global power. Nations that master the full AI stack — from chips to models to applications — will command disproportionate influence in the coming decades. Those that remain primarily consumers will find their strategic autonomy quietly constrained.

The robodog incident will fade from public memory soon enough. News cycles move quickly, and technology controversies are rapidly replaced by the next headline. Yet the structural weakness it briefly illuminated should not be normalised or dismissed. It serves as a mirror reflecting India's current AI moment — one marked by genuine ambition but also by the creeping emergence of what might be called FOMA: the fear of missing AI. This anxiety can be productive if it drives disciplined investment and institutional reform. It becomes dangerous when it encourages premature declarations of readiness.

In frontier technologies, credibility and supremacy are built slowly and earned repeatedly. The ultimate test of national AI prowess will not be the number of summits hosted or demonstrations staged. It will be whether India can produce systems the world chooses to pay for, rely on and trust. Until that threshold is crossed consistently, moments like the one at the summit will continue to surface — uncomfortable reminders that the distance between aspiration and capability, while bridgeable, remains significant. (The writer can be reached at dipakkurmi@rediffmail.com)

# How is the pancreas involved in diabetes?

By: Peter Morales-Brown

The pancreas is the organ that produces insulin. Insulin is an essential hormone for regulating blood glucose levels. Problems with the pancreas and insulin production can lead to diabetes.

The pancreas is an organ that plays an important role in helping to regulate blood sugar levels. The pancreas produces the hormone insulin, which helps cells to use glucose in the blood as energy.

Type 1 diabetes occurs when the pancreas does not make enough or any insulin. Conversely, type 2 diabetes develops when the body cannot use the insulin the pancreas produces correctly. As such, when there is not sufficient insulin, or the body cannot use it correctly, this can cause sugar to accumulate in the blood, which can result in health complications.

**What to know about the pancreas**

The pancreas is an organ that produces digestive enzymes and sits within the abdomen, behind the stomach.

This organ also produces insulin, a hormone that helps regulate blood glucose levels. The cells that produce insulin are called beta cells and sit in the islets of Langerhans, a set of structures within the pancreas.

Insulin helps the body use carbohydrates in food for energy and helps transport glucose from the blood into the body's cells. Glucose provides the cells with the energy they need to function.

If there is insufficient insulin in the body, cells can no longer take up glucose from the blood. As a result, levels of glucose in the blood rise. A doctor may refer to this as having high blood glucose, or hyperglycemia.

Hyperglycemia is responsible

for most of the symptoms and complications of diabetes.

**How is the pancreas linked with diabetes?**

The main feature of diabetes is high blood glucose. This results from insufficient insulin production or function, which can result from issues with the pancreas.

People with diabetes experience high or low blood glucose levels at different times, depending on what they eat, how much they exercise, and whether they take insulin or diabetes medication.

**Type 1 and type 2 diabetes both involve the pancreas.**

**Type 1 diabetes**

Type 1 diabetes occurs when the pancreas does not make enough, or any, insulin. Without this hormone, the cells cannot get enough energy from food.

This form of diabetes results from the body's immune system attacking the insulin-producing beta cells in the pancreas. The beta cells become damaged and, over time, the pancreas stops producing enough insulin to meet the body's needs.

People with type 1 diabetes can improve their blood glucose levels by receiving insulin injections or wearing an insulin pump every day.

Doctors once called this type "juvenile diabetes" because it often develops during the childhood or teenage years. However, it is now known that a person can receive a type 1 diabetes diagnosis at any age, including adulthood.

There is no clear cause of type 1 diabetes. Some evidence suggests that it results from genetic or environmental factors. Roughly 2 million people in the United States are living with type 1 diabetes.

**Type 2 diabetes**

This type of diabetes occurs when the body builds up a resist-

ance to insulin. While the pancreas may still produce the hormone, the body's cells cannot use it effectively.

As a result, the pancreas produces more insulin to meet the body's needs and is often unable to keep up with the increased demand. With too little insulin in the body, diabetes develops. Over time, the beta cells become damaged and may stop producing insulin altogether. As with type 1 diabetes, type 2 diabetes can cause high blood glucose levels and prevent the cells from getting enough energy.

Type 2 diabetes may result from genetics and family history. Lifestyle factors, such as obesity, lack of exercise, and dietary choices, also play a role. Treatment often involves becoming more active, making dietary changes, and taking some prescription medications.

A doctor may be able to detect type 2 diabetes early, in a stage called prediabetes. A person with prediabetes may be able to prevent or delay the onset of the condition by making changes to their dietary plan and exercise routines.

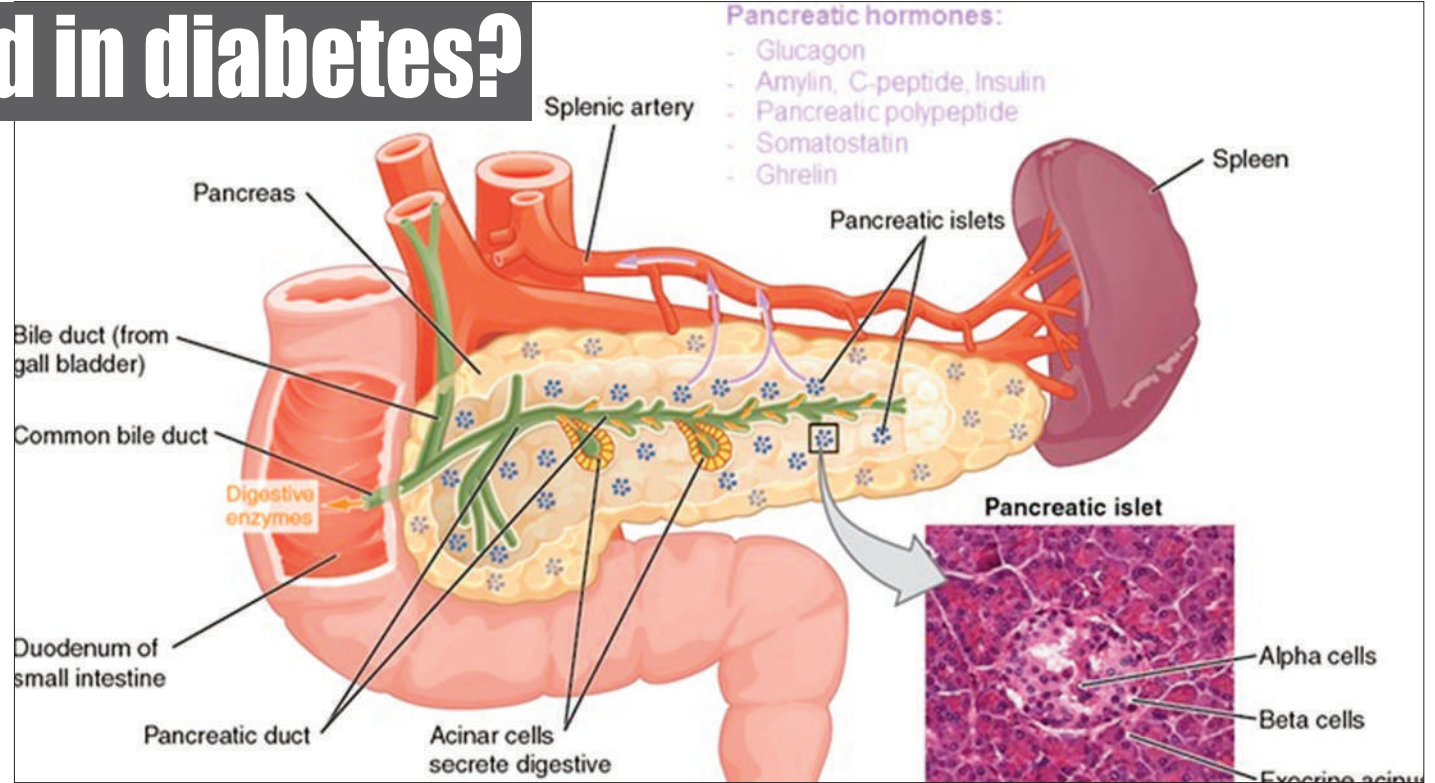
**Gestational diabetes**

Pregnancy can cause diabetes, known as gestational diabetes, which can result from complications during pregnancy and delivery.

After a person gives birth, gestational diabetes usually goes away, though it may increase the risk of developing type 2 diabetes later in life.

**Diabetes and pancreatitis**

Pancreatitis causes inflammation in the pancreas, and there are two types. The first is acute pancreatitis, where symptoms come on suddenly and last for a few days. The second is chronic pancreatitis, a long lasting condition where symptoms come



and go for several years. Chronic pancreatitis can damage the cells in the pancreas, potentially causing diabetes.

Pancreatitis is treatable, but severe cases can be life threatening and require hospitalization.

**Symptoms of pancreatitis include:**

- Nausea, vomiting, or both
- Pain in the upper abdomen that can radiate toward the back
- Pain that feels worse after eating
- Fever
- Abdominal tenderness
- A racing pulse

**Diabetes and pancreatic cancer**

According to the Pancreatic Cancer Action Network, people who have lived with diabetes for 5 or more years are between 1.5 and two times more likely to develop pancreatic cancer. This type of cancer can affect blood glucose levels.

The National Cancer Institute says the onset of type 2 diabetes

in people without risk factors for diabetes may sometimes indicate this disease.

For people with diabetes, having blood glucose levels that unexpectedly become harder to manage could also be a sign of pancreatic cancer. The link between diabetes and pancreatic cancer is complex. Diabetes increases the risk of developing this type of cancer, while pancreatic cancer can sometimes lead to diabetes.

In its early stages, this type of cancer can cause no symptoms. Doctors often diagnose it when it is more advanced.

Other risk factors for pancreatic cancer include:

- Having obesity
- Being over 55 years of age
- Having cirrhosis or a Helicobacter pylori infection
- Smoking
- Exposure to chemicals in certain environments, such as the drycleaning or metalwork industries

• Being male

• A family history of the disease

• Being African American

Research has shown that Black people are more likely to develop pancreatic cancer than white individuals and that the survival rate is also lower. One reason for this could be disparities in access to healthcare and socioeconomic status.

**Other disorders of the pancreas**

People with cystic fibrosis can develop a type of insulin-requiring diabetes known as cystic fibrosis-related diabetes (CFRD).

In a person with cystic fibrosis, sticky mucus causes scar tissue to form on the pancreas. This scarring can prevent the organ from producing enough insulin.

A person with CFRD may not have the typical signs and symptoms of diabetes. For example, they are less likely to experience increased thirst and urination. For this reason, screening for

CFRD is routine for people with cystic fibrosis.

**Summary**

Diabetes results from problems with the pancreas and insulin, as insufficient insulin can lead to high blood glucose.

Over time, persistently high glucose levels can cause serious complications. Monitoring and managing blood glucose levels can help reduce the risk of complications.

Diabetes can also occur with some chronic conditions, such as pancreatitis and cystic fibrosis.

A person could help prevent type 2 diabetes by not smoking if applicable, maintaining a moderate weight, following a nutritious dietary plan, and exercising regularly.

Both type 1 and type 2 diabetes are manageable health conditions, and lifestyle modifications and medications can help people manage their symptoms. (Courtesy: Medical News Today)

## Spine and nerve issues: When the body's communication network breaks down

By: Dr Biplab Das

The spine is vital to the health and function of the human body. It houses the spinal cord and protects it from injury, as well as provides structural support for the spleen. It is the main way that information travels between the brain and around the rest of your body through nerve signals. Whenever the spine or nervous system is even mildly disturbed, it can result in problems such as pain, limitation in movement, sensations of tingling or numbness, inability to properly coordinate your movements, etc. These types of problems at the spine and/or with the nerves are not just found in people over the age of 60; they are now becoming increasingly common in younger adults due to so many of the lifestyle choices we make today.

Cervical or lumbar spondylosis, herniated or bulging discs, spinal stenosis, and degenerative disc disease are some of the most common conditions affecting the spine. These types of problems often develop gradually with symptoms typically present as mild stiffness, intermittent back/neck pain or some discomfort from sitting too long. As the problem continues to worsen, compressed or irritated nerves may also develop, which then causes other symptoms that the person with the problem will experience as being very annoying



and sometimes debilitating such as: an unexpected tingling sensation; numbness; shooting pain traveling down their arms or legs; muscle weakness; and a lack of stability or coordination while walking. If the spinal disorder continues to go untreated, permanent nerve damage or loss of bladder/bowel control may occur.

There are many potential causes of nerve disorders (e.g., diabetes, infections, trauma, inflammation, and compression due to spinal abnormalities). Peripheral Neuropathy, radiculopathy, and nerve entrapment syndromes often cause burning sensations, altered sensation, or decreased strength in the affected area(s). Due to the misdirection of nerve peripheral pain, patients often delay seeking treatment, thinking that the pain will heal on its own; therefore, this delay is one of the biggest contributors to poor outcomes for these patients.

Establishing an accurate diagno-

sis and implementing treatment can be very important to the long-term treatment of problems with the spine and/or nerves. Imaging studies, including MRI and CT scans, as well as digital subtraction angiography, may be used to identify the site of the nerve compression and/or the pain. Neurophysiological testing can be used to assess nerve function and damage. The earlier that nerve compression is diagnosed, the sooner targeted treatment can begin before permanent changes occur.

Over the last few years, significant changes have occurred in the treatment of disorders related to the brain, spine, and peripheral nerves due to advances in neurology and interventional neuroradiology. The majority of patients who previously required extensive open surgery to treat their conditions can now receive treatment through minimally invasive image-guided techniques. Minimally invasive image-guided techniques

will result in less damage to surrounding tissues, lower complications, shorter hospital stays, and faster recovery time than traditional open surgical techniques. In selected cases, the use of specific pain management techniques and targeted nerve injections may provide long-term relief and improve function.

In addition, prevention and long-term care for the spine is also very important. Maintaining correct posture, exercising regularly, strengthening the muscles of the abdomen and lower back, and creating ergonomically sound work environments can significantly reduce the stress placed on the spine. Paying close attention to the body's early warning signs and seeking the advice of a qualified professional rather than self-treating is critical.

Spinal and nerve conditions should never be overlooked or considered normal. Most people who suffer from spinal and nerve conditions can experience significant relief and preserve their neurological health if they seek prompt evaluation and intervention with the latest diagnostic approaches and customized treatment plans. The most effective method to protect the spine is to be aware of the body's warning signs and to take immediate action. (The author is the Director Neurology & Interventional Neuroradiology, Batra Hospital)

## COVID vaccines and heart attacks: Science drowned in rumors

By: Dr Satyawan Saurabh

If there's one fear that has spread rapidly in India since the COVID pandemic, it's the alleged link between COVID vaccines and heart attacks. Viral messages on social media, videos filled with incomplete information, heated debates in TV studios, and some irresponsible statements have created the perception that vaccines like Covishield and Covaxin are causing sudden heart attacks in young people. This fear has become so profound that many have even started calling vaccines "slow poison." But the real question is: is this fear based on scientific facts, or is it merely a long series of rumors and misconceptions?

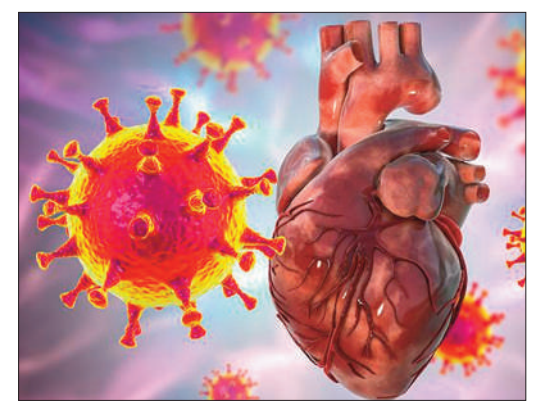
In recent months, questions were raised linking 22 sudden deaths in Karnataka's Hassan district to COVID vaccines, further fueling this debate. Following this, claims began spreading rapidly on social media that young people were dying due to "wrong injections." However, after a detailed investigation, an expert committee formed by the state government clearly concluded that no direct causal link was found between these deaths and COVID vaccines. This conclusion is not limited to a single committee, but is also confirmed by studies conducted by the country's top health institutions.

Numerous independent studies conducted by the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), the Union Health Ministry, and the Serum Institute of India have repeatedly demonstrated the safety of COVID-19 vaccines used in India. A multi-center study conducted by the ICMR across 47 major hospitals in 19 states analyzed the causes of sudden deaths. The results were clear—in approximately 85 percent of cases, the cause of death was pre-existing coronary artery disease, characterized by the accumulation of fatty deposits (plaque) in the arteries. In the remaining cases, genetic factors, unhealthy lifestyles, excessive mental stress, obesity, smoking, and the aftereffects of COVID-19 infection were found to be responsible. No direct or conclusive link to the vaccines was found.

It's true that AstraZeneca admitted in court that its vaccine could cause an extremely rare condition—a syndrome characterized by blood clots and low platelets. But this condition was observed in only a handful of cases out of millions, and only in the first few weeks after vaccination. Medically, this condition and heart attack are two distinct disease processes. To equate the two is not only scientifically incorrect but also misleading to the public.

The reality is that COVID infection itself proved far more dangerous for the heart. According to the World Health Organization and studies conducted in several countries, including India, a person infected with COVID had a two- to three-fold increased risk of heart attack, stroke, and heart failure. The virus causes widespread inflammation in the body, which can seriously damage the heart muscle and blood vessels. The first and second waves saw numerous cases of relatively young and previously healthy individuals experiencing serious heart problems. In this context, vaccines played a protective role in reducing the risk.

The question then arises: why are sudden deaths and heart attacks appearing to increase after the pandemic? Experts' answer is relatively clear—changed lifestyles following the pandemic. During the long lockdown, physical activity decreased significantly, weight gain increased, mental stress and depression increased, sleep cycles were disrupted, and junk food consumption increased. Further-



more, long-term inflammation, fatigue, and respiratory problems after COVID infection also increase heart risk. Instead of seriously discussing these complex and real causes, it's easier to blame vaccines, but this is far from scientific truth.

This debate isn't limited to health, but is also deeply connected to democracy and social responsibility. When rumors spread, vaccine hesitancy increases. If a new pandemic were to emerge in the future and people distrusted vaccines, the consequences could be even more devastating. History bears witness to the decisive role vaccines have played in humanity's fight against diseases like polio, smallpox, and measles. COVID vaccines are an important part of that scientific tradition.

Unfortunately, some media platforms and social media influencers casually used phrases like "vaccine kills" for TRP and popularity. Half-baked facts were sensationalized, while full scientific reports were rarely discussed. As a result, fear prevailed over reason and rumor over science.

The government and health institutions have a responsibility to actively dispel this confusion. Fact-based findings from institutions like AIIMS and ICMR should not be confined to websites or press releases, but should be disseminated to every village. Training ASHA and Anganwadi workers can create powerful channels for disseminating scientific information, especially in areas where health literacy is low. Political leadership must also exercise restraint—statements without scientific basis undermine public trust and harm health policies.

Calls for "vaccine reversal" or "detox" are completely unscientific. Modern medicine has no theory to prove a vaccine's effectiveness over time. Instead, what's needed is a comprehensive heart health campaign—routine early checkups, blood pressure and cholesterol monitoring, a balanced diet, yoga, and regular exercise—making it a mass movement. This is the real path to heart attack prevention.

In today's digital age, rumors spread at lightning speed, while truth travels relatively slowly. Nevertheless, in the long run, the path of science proves to be the most sustainable. Studies by AIIMS and ICMR unanimously conclude: COVID vaccines are safe and have no direct link to sudden deaths. Vaccines are friends, not enemies.

India has overcome an unprecedented pandemic like COVID through collective efforts. Now, the next challenge is to combat rumors, fear, and conspiracy theories. The most effective "vaccine" to prevent heart attacks is awareness—scientific thinking, accurate information, and responsible communication. By denigrating vaccines, we not only insult science but also endanger our future health. It's time to trust data, not fear, and embrace medical science over myths. (The author is a PhD (Political Science), is a poet and social thinker.)

## Rising male infertility: Time to talk, time to act

By: Dr Gaurav Garg

Infertility is steadily emerging as an important but under-discussed health concern among many couples. In recent years, we have observed a noticeable surge in couples seeking medical advice for difficulty in conceiving. While infertility is traditionally perceived as a woman's issue, medical science clearly shows that male-related factors contribute almost equally to infertility cases.

Conversations around reproductive health are usually private, and hesitation in seeking timely medical help is quite common. This delay often results in emotional distress for couples and may reduce the chances of getting a successful treatment. Early medical evaluation remains the most effective step toward identifying the cause and finding solutions.

**Understanding Male Infertility**

Male infertility refers to a man's reduced ability to initiate a pregnancy due to problems related to sperm production, quality, or delivery.

**In many cases, there are no obvious symptoms. Some men may notice:**

1. Inability to achieve pregnancy despite regular, unprotected intercourse for over a year
2. Abnormal semen test results
3. Discomfort or swelling in the testicular region
4. Associated sexual health concerns

Because symptoms are often subtle, the condition frequently goes unnoticed unless ac-

tively investigated.

**Why Is Male Infertility Increasing?**

**Several factors are contributing to declining male reproductive health:**

- A. Rising stress levels and changing lifestyles
- B. Reduced physical activity and increased obesity
- C. Tobacco use and alcohol consumption
- D. Prolonged exposure to heat due to tight clothing or electronic devices
- E. Environmental factors affecting hormonal balance
- F. Additionally, delayed marriage and parenthood mean many men seek fertility evaluation later in life, when sperm quality may already be declining.

**Diagnosis: Simple and Accessible**  
Evaluation of male infertility is neither complicated nor painful. A routine semen analysis provides valuable information regarding sperm count, movement, and structure.

Depending on results, doctors may advise:  
• Hormonal blood tests  
• Ultrasound examination of the testes  
• Genetic testing in select cases

These investigations help determine the exact cause and guide appropriate treatment. Modern Treatment Options Bring Hope  
Advances in medical science have significantly improved outcomes for men facing fertility challenges. Medical treatment may include correcting hormonal imbalances, treating infections, and prescribing medications or

supplements to improve sperm quality.

Microsurgical procedures, such as correction of varicocele (enlarged veins around the testes), can improve fertility in a substantial number of patients.

For couples requiring assisted support, techniques such as intrauterine insemination (IUI) and in-vitro fertilisation (IVF), including ICSI, have enabled parenthood even in cases of very low sperm counts. Surgical sperm retrieval has further expanded possibilities for men previously considered infertile.

**Breaking Myths, Encouraging Early Care**

One of the most persistent myths is that infertility reflects a lack of masculinity. This belief has no scientific basis and often delays treatment. Another misconception is that male infertility is irreversible. In reality, many conditions are treatable, especially when identified early.

**Protecting Reproductive Health**  
Simple lifestyle measures can support male fertility:

- Maintaining a healthy weight
- Avoiding tobacco and limiting alcohol
- Staying physically active
- Seeking timely medical advice

**A Public Health Message**  
Infertility should be approached as a shared medical concern rather than a social stigma. Open discussion, early evaluation, and access to modern treatment can help many couples achieve parenthood. (The author is a Senior Consultant - Urology/Andrology, Max Smart Super Speciality Hospital, Saket)

# 'The PM was forced to withdraw the three black anti-farm laws in 2021' US trade deal proof of 'Abki baar Trump se haar': Cong's swipe at govt

## Two JeM terrorists killed in Kishtwar encounter

**NEW DELHI, Feb 22:** Taking a swipe at the government over the interim US trade deal, the Congress on Sunday said it was reflective of "Abki baar Trump se haar" and must be put in "cold storage" in view of the confusion following the American Supreme Court's verdict striking down President Donald Trump's global tariffs.

Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said the terms of the framework for the interim agreement must be renegotiated and the clause talking about import liberalisation, especially of agricultural products, must be scrapped.

Ramesh said an agreement is about give and take but India had only given under the interim trade pact. "Prime Minister Narendra Modi had given a slogan in Houston in 2019 - 'Abki baar Trump Sarkaar' but this framework for an interim agreement is proof of 'Abki baar Trump se haar,'" Ramesh told PTI Videos.

What happened on February 2 that there was a need for the prime minister to "force" President Trump to announce the trade deal, Ramesh asked.

"This is directly linked to Mr. Rahul Gandhi's attack in Parliament on the PM on the failures on the external security front. So this announcement of the deal was part of managing the news and the headlines," Ramesh alleged.

The framework for the interim

trade agreement states that in the event of any changes from either side, the US and India agree that they can modify their commitments, Ramesh pointed out.

President Trump has changed the tariffs so India has every right to change its commitments, he argued. "The first commitment we have made is to reduce or eliminate tariffs on a wide range of food and agricultural products. Our demand to the PM is to put this in cold storage," Ramesh said.

India committed to eliminate or cut down import duties on all US industrial goods and a wide range of American food and agricultural products, he pointed out. This commitment in the joint statement must be changed because as per this statement, India has every right to do so, Ramesh said.

"The direct impact of this commitment is going to be felt on soybean farmers, maize farmers, fruits and nuts cultivators, cotton farmers. It will impact farmers in J&K, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Himachal Pradesh to begin with. Then there is mention of additional products in the joint statement. What is meant by that," Ramesh asked.

"Our second question is that when the PM, the commerce minister (Piyush Goyal), knew from December that any time (now) the Supreme Court verdict could come, many believed that it could be struck down. Why did you hur-



riedly strike a deal when you knew the verdict could go against Trump," Ramesh said.

"I hope in light of the massive confusion that surrounds this issue, this joint statement is put on cold storage, we renegotiate the terms, this is a one-sided deal. This will be detrimental to the interests of lakhs and lakhs of farmers in different states of the country," Ramesh said. On the one hand the US president and the US secretary of state are claiming that India has stopped buying Russian oil, but the government is saying India is going to maintain our strategic autonomy, so what is the clarity on all these issues, Ramesh asked. "So, I am afraid these tough questions that are being asked of the prime minister and the PM is evading all these questions," he alleged. Any

agreement is about give and take but India has only given, he claimed. On the Congress' agenda, Ramesh said the first in the series of Kisan Maha Chaupals will be held in Bhopal on February 24, the second in Maharashtra on March 7, and the third in Sri Ganganagar.

"Our objective is to fully protect the interests of farmers," he asserted. "The PM was forced to withdraw the three black anti-farm laws in 2021. Our objective is to ensure the interests of the farmers are fully protected in any agreement that we sign," he added.

On the change in tariffs by Trump, Ramesh said there is massive confusion and uncertainty.

"The best course for India is to put this framework agreement into cold storage, renegotiate the terms of the engagement to fully protect

the interests of farmers," he said.

In a major setback to what was Trump's pivotal economic agenda in his second term, the US Supreme Court, in a 6-3 verdict written by Chief Justice John Roberts, ruled that the tariffs imposed by Trump on nations around the world were illegal and that the president had exceeded his authority when he imposed the sweeping levies. Earlier this month, as the US and India announced they reached a framework for an Interim Agreement on trade, Trump issued an Executive Order removing the 25 per cent punitive tariffs imposed on India for its purchases of Russian oil, with the US president noting the commitment by New Delhi to stop directly or indirectly importing energy from Moscow and purchasing American energy products.

Under the trade deal, Washington would charge a reduced reciprocal tariff on New Delhi, lowering it from 25 per cent to 18 per cent.

Shortly after the court verdict, Trump asserted that there is "no change" in the trade deal with India. "I think my relationship with India is fantastic and we're doing trade with India... India was getting its oil from Russia. And they pulled way back at my request, because we want to settle that horrible war where 25,000 people are dying every month," Trump had said at a news conference Friday in the White House. (PTI)

**JAMMU, Feb 22:** Two Pakistani terrorists affiliated with proscribed Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) outfit were killed on Sunday in an encounter with security forces in Jammu and Kashmir's Kishtwar district, officials said. The bodies of both the slain terrorists were charred beyond recognition, the officials said, adding that preliminary assessments by security agencies suggest that one of the deceased is believed to be Saifullah, a notorious Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) commander.

He had reportedly infiltrated into Jammu and Kashmir nearly five years ago and had since remained active in the region, allegedly masterminding several deadly attacks on security forces including the one in July 2024 that left four soldiers including a captain dead. He had escaped a number of encounters in the past.

Northern Army Commander Lt Gen Pratik Sharma complimented the troops of White Knight Corps for their "swift and precise" action to neutralise the two terrorists. "The Army Commander commends the commanders and troops on ground for their persistence in challenging terrain and weather conditions. Northern Command remains committed to ensuring a terror-free Jammu and Kashmir," the army said in a post on X. The terrorists were neutralised during the "Trash-I" operation in the general area of Passerkut in Chatroo belt and two AK-47 rifles along with other am-

munition were recovered from them. "Pursuant to credible intelligence inputs collated from J-K Police, IB (Intelligence Bureau) and own intelligence sources, a deliberate joint operation was launched in the Kishtwar region under operation Trash-I to track and neutralise terrorists operating in the area. "Following successful contact established earlier, troops of CIF (Counter-Intelligence Force) Delta, in close coordination with police and CRPF, re-engaged the terrorists today at approximately 11 am in challenging terrain," the Army's White Knight Corps said in a post on X. Displaying tactical precision, seamless synergy and resolute aggression, the troops dominated the encounter site wherein two terrorists have been successfully neutralised, the Army said. "The hunt continues - those who seek to disturb peace will find no sanctuary," it said.

Quoting preliminary information, the officials said the terrorists were found hiding inside a mudhouse on the foothills of a hill and opened fire on the approaching search parties, leading to an intense gunfight. The mudhouse caught fire during the exchange of firing and was gutted completely. Later, the charred bodies of the terrorists were recovered from the scene and efforts are on to identify them, the officials said, adding the intelligence inputs have earlier suggested the presence of Saifullah and his associate, both Pakistani nationals. (PTI)

## Oppn to boycott Fadnavis govt's high tea invite, says Jadhav

**MUMBAI, Feb 22:** Senior Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Bhaskar Jadhav said the Opposition would boycott the customary tea party hosted by Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Sunday on the eve of the Maharashtra legislature's Budget Session.

Fadnavis had personally written to senior members inviting them to the event, which is a tradition on the eve of a session of the legislature, Jadhav added.

"The ruling party is arrogant and shows little respect towards the Opposition. Since there is no respect, no decency and no regard for the Constitution, we have decided to decline the high tea invitation," Jadhav told reporters.

He also slammed the trade deal between India and the United States, claiming it would adversely affect cotton growers and fisherfolk from the state.

However, the Fadnavis government has expressed no regret over the Union government's decision; therefore, it was decided to boycott the high tea invitation, the Shiv Sena (UBT) leader added. Jadhav said another reason for the Opposition to decline the invite was due to the Maharashtra government's "ambiguous stand" on the death of Ajit Pawar in a plane accident.

He also slammed the state government over the execution of the Mukhyamantri Majhi Ladki Bahin scheme, claiming that before the 2024 assembly elections, it had disbursed Rs 1,500 per month to women without any verification and "bought votes", and later declared more than 50 lakh women ineligible on trivial grounds. And now, many women will not receive the allowance because they have not completed e-KYC, he said.

Congress legislative party leader Vijay Wadetiwar said 22 farmers had died by suicide in Yavatmal, while 76 had ended their lives in the Marathwada region, alleging

that the state government had done nothing about it.

He also criticised the state government over the memoranda of understanding signed at the World Economic Forum in Davos, pointing out that many of the companies were located in Maharashtra itself, and some did not have sufficient capital.

The Opposition will demand a white paper on the matter, he said.

He also questioned why, if such large investments were coming to Maharashtra, the government could not increase the monthly stipend of the Ladki Bahin scheme funds from Rs 1,500 to Rs 3,000.

"Since December, Maharashtra had sought Rs 29,000 crore from the Union government but had not yet received it," he said, alleging that Gujarat received favourable treatment over Maharashtra.

The Congress leader claimed that nearly 600 acres of land near Nagpur, classified as reserved forest land, had been given to the Adani Group on lease at Rs 1 lakh per acre and alleged that the government had also permitted a mining project adjacent to the Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve.

"When the Maha Vikas Aghadi was in power, it had opposed the decision and did not grant permission," he said. He also claimed that 1,57,000 women and girls were missing in Maharashtra.

Satej Patil, leader of the Congress in the legislative council, stated that nearly 70 lakh youths had registered themselves as unemployed in the state.

He also criticised the Rs 1.02 lakh crore Shaktipeeth Mahamarg project, saying it was unnecessary and that nobody had asked for it, yet the state was pushing it. Patil also alleged that a raid on Minister Narhari Zirwal's office in Mantralaya could not have taken place without the consent of Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis. (PTI)

## Corruption, misgovernance intensified in UP during BJP rule: Akhilesh Yadav

**LUCKNOW, Feb 22:** Samajwadi Party (SP) president Akhilesh Yadav alleged on Sunday that corruption and misgovernance have intensified in Uttar Pradesh, while asserting that "as sufferings increase, the PDA will grow stronger".

PDA is an acronym used by SP leaders to refer to backward (pichhde), Dalit and minority (alpsankhyak) communities.

Addressing a press conference at the party headquarters here, Yadav questioned the BJP government's development claims, saying, "We are unable to find development. Where is it? The pipelines being laid are pipelines of corruption."

He alleged irregularities in infrastructure projects, claiming that water tanks are bursting due to poor-quality work and that corruption is visible on the ground.

Taking a swipe at Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's proposed visit to Japan later this month, Yadav said, "I have heard that the chief minister is going to Japan but is

not going to Kyoto. He should go there and see what is to be done here and what he has not been able to do in the last 10 years."

After coming to power in Uttar Pradesh in 2014, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) had announced that Varanasi would be transformed into a Kyoto-style city. Referring to the BJP-led Centre's ambitious projects, Yadav said the cost of the proposed bullet train has escalated sharply from the initial estimate.

Apparently hinting at a tussle between the two deputy chief ministers and the chief minister, without naming anyone, Yadav said, "Today, when he (the chief minister) has flown out of India, we are making an offer - bring 100 MLAs and become the chief minister. Both of them (the deputy chief ministers) share the same ambition. Whoever manages to bring the numbers will get the reward. The offer is open for a week."

Adityanath embarked on a four-day

visit to Singapore and Japan on Sunday.

Yadav also accused the BJP of spreading hatred through social media by circulating "fake videos" and alleged that attempts were made in the past to incite communal tension for electoral gains.

He further alleged that the security covers of opposition leaders are being withdrawn as part of a political strategy to "demoralise and insult" them. On religious matters, Yadav criticised the state government over a recent FIR against Shankaracharya Avimukteshwaranand Saraswati. He alleged that Saraswati was prevented from taking a holy dip during the Magh Mela and added that such actions are unprecedented in the country's spiritual traditions.

The FIR against Saraswati and his disciple, Mukundanand Brahmachari, has been lodged in Prayagraj over allegations of sexual abuse of a minor and another person over the last one year, including during the Magh Mela. (PTI)

## Top Maoist leader Devji surrenders before Telangana police

**HYDERABAD, Feb 22:** Top Maoist commander and the organisation's key "strategist" Thippiri Tirupati alias Devji has surrendered, a top police official said on Sunday.

Devji hails from Telangana's Jagtial district and his surrender can be seen as a deadly blow to the outlawed organisation, which now lacks leadership.

Devji (62) is believed to have succeeded the late CPI (Maoist) general secretary Nambala Keshav Rao alias Basavaraju, who died in May 2025.

Another senior Maoist leader, Malla Raji Reddy, along with several cadres of the CPI (Maoist) have also surrendered.

Their surrender comes days before the Union government's March 2026 deadline to eliminate Naxalism in the country.

"The surrender will be officially shown in a couple of days...they are with Telangana Police," the official told PTI.

According to reports, Devji, carrying a bounty of Rs 1 crore on his head, created the People's Liberation Guerrilla Army (PLGA) and went on to become a key Central Committee member of the CPI (Maoist) and the politburo member of the Maoist party.

Devji, presently working as the in charge of Central Military Commission (CMC), operated from Maad in Chhattisgarh.

In 1982, while studying Intermediate in Korutla in Jagtial District, he was attracted towards the Radical Student Union (RSU), sources said.

During the same period, clashes occurred between RSU and Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) members in Karimnagar district and Devji was named as an accused in the case, they said.

In 1983, Devji joined CPI ML (PWG) and went underground. During 1983-1984, he worked as a Dalam member in Gachiroli Dalam and in 1985 he was elevated to area committee member. He was then elevated as central committee member in 2001 and was in charge of CMC in 2016, the sources added.

One of the influential strategists in the proscribed organisation - Mallojula Venugopal Rao, alias Sonu, a native of Telangana, who surrendered before police along with 60 other cadres in Maharashtra's Gadchiroli district in October 2025, had called for "temporarily renouncing armed struggle" and said they were ready for a ceasefire.

His stand was met with resistance from other senior cadres, with Devji and other leaders "appearing to favour continuing the armed struggle".

The "division" in outlook between the two sections within the Maoists is "very clear" in view of the statements coming out, the sources had then said.

Security forces led by the CRPF had launched an extensive operation named "KGH 2" spread across areas like Nambi and Korgotolu Hills (KGH), also known as Karregutta Hills, along the Chhattisgarh-Telangana border on February 17. (PTI)

## Embraer CEO pledges to make India global manufacturing base for KC-390 aircraft

**NEW DELHI, Feb 22:** Brazilian aerospace giant Embraer on Sunday signalled its readiness to set up a major production hub for its KC-390 Millennium aircraft to support the broader Asia-Pacific market if it wins the Indian Air Force's contract for up to 80 transport planes.

In an exclusive interview to PTI, Embraer's President and CEO Francisco Gomes Neto pitched KC-390 Millennium as the "best" option for India, leveraging a wave of NATO acquisitions to position the plane as the new 'global benchmark' for tactical airlift. By choosing our aircraft, the Indian Air Force will have an alignment with a rapidly expanding, interoperable alliance of modern air forces, he said as the force intensifies its hunt for a versatile tactical airlifter.

Describing the KC-390 as a much superior multi-mission workhorse, Neto said if awarded the Indian contract, the company will turn India into its primary production hub for aircraft to support the Asia-Pacific market.

The Embraer CEO said the company is eyeing to set up an exclusive

regional MRO (Maintenance, Repair, and Overhaul) hub for KC-390 operators in India while looking at a long-term symbiotic relationship with the country in both defence and civilian aerospace sectors.

The top executive, highlighting the acquisition of KC-390 by several high-profile NATO member nations, including Sweden, the Netherlands and Portugal, projected the plane as a strategic counter to the legacy dominance of Lockheed Martin's C-130J.

Neto said the KC-390 Millennium is a better fit for the future needs of modern air forces as it is a new generation multi-mission transport and aerial refuelling aircraft. "Our aircraft has been chosen by nine European countries. It's NATO's best choice. We believe that the KC-390 is very well positioned to address the Indian Air Force's requirement," Neto said.

The Embraer President and CEO was in New Delhi as part of Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's delegation.

"We really believe that we are very well positioned for this contract, and



our aircraft would be the best solution for India; not only for the Indian market, but maybe in the future, for the countries in the Asia Pacific region," he said.

In 2022, the Indian Air Force issued a Request for Information (RFI) to purchase medium transport aircraft (MTA) to replace its ageing fleet of Soviet-era AN-32 and IL-76 planes.

The IAF plans to procure around 80 military transport aircraft and the multi-billion dollar procurement is likely to be cleared by the Defence Ac-

quisition Council in the next couple of months.

Besides KC-390 Millennium, the other top contenders for the deal are Airbus Defence and Space's A-400M plane and Lockheed Martin's C-130J Super Hercules. The IAF already operates 12 C-130J Super Hercules.

In February 2024, Embraer announced a partnership with Mahindra to bid for the MTA programme.

Neto said the KC-390 is the most technologically advanced and versatile option for IAF and cited its load-car-

rying capability, diverse mission roles and jet-powered feature as against the rival platforms, and its latest digital avionics as well as low life-cycle costs.

Unlike the turboprop C-130J Super Hercules, the KC-390 is jet-powered and it offers a 26-ton payload as against the 20 ton capability of C-130Js. The aircraft has a cruise speed of 470 knots and has the ability to fly faster while operating from unpaved or short runways.

"The aircraft is more than 50 per cent American equipment," Neto said, describing the plane as the "true" 21st-century airlifter that offers significant tactical lift.

Embraer has been emphasising that the KC-390 would provide India with a "stronger heft" in tactical airlift, bridging the gap between heavy lifters and smaller transport planes.

"The aircraft is quite prepared to operate from short and even unpaved runways. Compared to C-130Js, KC-390 is 25-30 per cent faster, and its operational cost will be less because it is a jet-powered aircraft as against the turboprop (C-130Js)," Neto said. (PTI)

## Sabarimala Tantri 'trapped' in gold loss case: Cong

**THIRUVANANTHAPURAM/KANNUR, Feb 22:** The arrest of Sabarimala Tantri Kadararu Rajeevaru in the gold loss case triggered a fresh war of words in Kerala on Sunday with the opposition Congress alleging that the chief priest was "deliberately trapped" in the case, while the ruling CPI(M) said he figured in a "list of big thieves".

The recent observation by the Kollam Vigilance Court that there was no iota of evidence against Rajeevaru in the case led to fresh political debate in the state, with opposition parties targeting the state government.

Senior Congress leader Ramesh Chennithala alleged that the Tantri (chief priest) was "deliberately trapped" in the gold loss case and suspected political intervention behind his arrest without any evidence.

Addressing a press conference here, he claimed that the Special Investigation Team (SIT), probing the case, was controlled by the Chief Minister's Office and Rajeevaru was arrested to prevent the investigation reaching some "big shots".

Chennithala alleged that the SIT failed to comply with the directions issued by the Kerala High Court and did not conduct a proper probe into the alleged conspiracy behind the case.

Though the tantri is a person who is revered as the father of Lord Ayyappa, he was arrested and jailed for 41 days without any evidence, he said.

The Kollam Vigilance court, which had granted bail to the tantri, clearly stated that there was no iota of evidence against him. "So, we should assume that the Sabarimala tantri was deliberately trapped in the case. It is clear that there was a political intervention to arrest the tantri," he alleged.

He further alleged that though there was clear evidence to arrest certain "big shots", no action has been taken so far in this regard.

The tantri was arrested and jailed to divert the course of the investigation and to ensure that it does not reach Devaswom Minister V N Vasavan and former minister Kadakampally Surendran, he said.

He also accused former Travancore Devaswom Board (TDB) president P S Prasanth of "committing serious lapses" in connection with the gold loss issue. But, he was questioned secretly and let go, he said.

The decision to sabotage the SIT probe was taken at a higher level after the ruling LDF had suffered a massive drubbing in the recent LSGD polls, he alleged. People of the state would give a befitting reply to what he termed as "political misuse" of the case.

CPI(M) state secretary M V Govindan rejected the Congress allegations and asserted that no one involved in the matter would be protected.

Speaking to reporters in Kannur, he said the SIT probe is yet to be completed and claimed that Congress leaders also have a role in the alleged gold theft. He alleged that certain political parties were attempting to use the issue to target the CPI(M) and the state government, adding that "news becomes news only when it is against the CPI(M) and the government, but not when it is against the BJP or the Congress."

Responding to the allegations that the arrest of Rajeevaru was linked to his opposition to women's entry at the hill shrine, Govindan said the tantri figures in the "list of big thieves" and asserted that no one involved in the matter would be protected. The law would take its own course, he said, adding that not "a speck of gold" from Sabarimala should go missing. Asked about the court observations granting bail to Tantri, state Law Minister P Rajeev said there were some unusual aspects involved in it.

"If a High Court division bench has observed that the investigation is proceeding in the right direction, it is not usual for a lower court, while considering a bail plea, to make observations that appear like a final verdict in the case," he told media in Kochi.

He said such powers can be exercised by the Supreme Court.

"While reading the order, those with a basic understanding of law may feel that the Vigilance Court has adopted an approach akin to that of the Supreme Court," the minister further said.

Rajeev further said that unlike in other cases, the state government was not exercising any supervisory role in the matter and that decisions such as whether to file an appeal against the bail order did not come before the government.

"The High Court division bench is monitoring all aspects related to the case," he said adding that reports on the progress of the investigation and that regarding each arrest in the case had been submitted before it by the SIT. (PTI)

## Incident in Malviya Nagar sparks outrage; FIR registered under multiple sections

# 3 northeastern women allege racial abuse by neighbours in South Delhi

**NEW DELHI, Feb 22:** Three women from Arunachal Pradesh were allegedly subjected to racial slurs, humiliation and intimidation by their neighbours, who called them "dhandhewali", following a dispute over some repair work at their rented flat in south Delhi's Malviya Nagar.

The police said an FIR under BNS sections pertaining to outraging a woman's modesty and promoting enmity on grounds of religion, race, etc. has been registered against two people -- Harsh Singh and his wife Ruby Jain.

On February 20, the women had called an electrician at their fourth-floor flat around 3.30 PM for getting an air conditioner installed.

A senior police officer said during the process, dust and debris from the drilling work fell to the floor below, prompting objections from their neighbours, Harsh Singh and his wife.

What began as a disagreement over falling debris soon turned ugly, with the women alleging that the couple hurled abuses and made derogatory and racial remarks targeting them and the northeastern community.

A purported video of the incident also has been making rounds on social media.

In the video, the accused woman can allegedly be heard calling the northeastern women "momo" and saying, "₹ 500 mei massage parlour mei kaam karne waali dhandhewali (You work at massage parlours as sex workers for ₹ 500)."



"Are you sitting here to do business? Have you opened a massage parlour at home?" the accused woman said.

A police officer was present at the spot when the altercation was happening. In the video, the policeman is also seen intervening and trying to pacify the situation.

The man, identified by police as Harsh Singh, is also allegedly heard using derogatory remarks during the heated exchange.

The accused woman was also seen saying that the man they are talking to is a son of a "big politician". The victims are seen confronting the couple in the video.

"Everyone heard what you said about my image. You made false allegations that I drink alcohol. Go check my room if you find any

bottles there," one of the northeastern women can be heard saying.

In another portion of the video, the accused woman is heard making further offensive remarks. "Why don't you sleep with him? Go to my bedroom. You will come to know how old is he," she says.

The Arunachali women further alleged that they were subjected to racist abuse. The accused duo, in the video, can be heard calling the victims "gutter-chaap" and telling them to "go and sell momos" and saying "northeastern people are shit".

At one point, the accused woman, in a perceived attempt to assert social and economic superiority, also says, "Teri aukaat nahi hai... custom officer ka beta hai woh... politician ka beta hai. (You have no standards. He is the son of

a custom officer...a politician's son.)"

The FIR was registered at Malviya Nagar police station under BNS sections 79 (word intended to insult a woman's modesty), 351(2) (criminal intimidation), 3(5) (common intention) and 196 (promoting enmity on grounds of religion, race, place of birth, residence, language, etc.) against Harsh Singh and his wife Ruby Jain, the police said.

However, no arrests have been made in the matter so far.

Section 196 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita is a non-bailable and cognizable offense.

"No physical injuries were reported. However, the complainants have alleged mental harassment and humiliation," the senior officer said.

The women have demanded a formal apology from the accused, stating that the remarks were not merely personal but targeted the dignity of the northeastern community.

According to sources, the situation worsened after the incident when a building broker allegedly informed the women that they would have to vacate the flat within two months due to repair work planned in the building.

The complainants have expressed apprehension about their safety and future accommodation, stating that they felt isolated and insulted in a city where they had come to live and work. The police said further investigation into the matter is underway. (PTI)

## Manipur Cabinet expansion likely next week

CM Yumnam Khemchand in Delhi; pays tribute to late MLA Vungzagin Valte



**IMPHAL, Feb 22:** The expansion of the Yumnam Khemchand ministry is likely to happen by next week as the chief minister has left Imphal for New Delhi on Saturday afternoon.

On February 4, Khemchand was sworn in as chief minister along with two deputy chief ministers and two cabinet ministers. Given the 60-member assembly, the full ministry strength should be 12 members including the chief minister. As such, seven ministerial posts are still vacant. Moreover, the portfolios of those ministers sworn in more than two weeks ago are also still not assigned.

Sources said the expansion of the ministry will be done once the chief minister returns to the state capital Imphal. Khemchand is

likely to return within three days' time.

Meanwhile, upon his arrival in Delhi, Singh, proceeded to Medanta Hospital in Gurugram to pay his last respects to the late Vungzagin Valte, the former MLA of Thanlon assembly constituency in Churachandpur district of Manipur.

He could not recover from the injuries after a mob attacked him on May 4, 2023 in Imphal.

Meanwhile in a solemn display of reverence, the Chief Minister stood in silence before the mortal remains and offered floral tributes, said a statement from the chief minister's office.

The Chief Minister conveyed his deepest condolences to the grieving family and spent approx-

imately ten minutes interacting with them, sharing in their loss and expressing his unwavering solidarity during this hour of grief, it also said.

A prayer service was held, seeking the eternal peace of the departed soul. "The atmosphere was one of profound mourning and collective remembrance as dignitaries and family members gathered to bid a final farewell", the statement added.

A condolence meeting was subsequently held, which was attended by the Chief Minister, MLA Khashim Vashum; MLA Nagsanglang Sanate, the bereaved family members and relatives and prominent leaders of the Zomi community based in Delhi, the statement further added. (NNN)

## Manipur govt announces 3-day state mourning in honour of deceased MLA

**IMPHAL, Feb 22:** The Manipur government has declared a three-day state mourning from Sunday as a mark of respect to the late BJP MLA Vungzagin Valte, an official statement said.

Sixty-one-year-old Valte, a Zomi tribal legislator of Thanlon constituency, died at a private hospital in Gurugram on Saturday afternoon. He had sustained injuries in a mob attack during the early period of ethnic violence in 2023.

During the mourning period, the national flag will be flown at half-mast on all government buildings across Manipur and no official entertainment programmes will be

held, it said.

Valte had been battling with serious injuries he had sustained during a mob attack in Imphal's Nagamapal area when ethnic violence broke out in May 2023 and went to Delhi for medical treatment. After nearly two years of treatment there, Valte returned home to Churachandpur, accompanied by his wife in April last year. On February 7, his health condition suddenly worsened and he was taken to the national capital

the next day via an air ambulance,

his family said. Valte was first elected to the assembly on a Congress ticket in 2012 from Thanlon seat. Five years later, he got elected again but on a BJP ticket and became a minister for the general administration and transport departments. He was re-elected to the assembly in 2022.

Manipur Chief Minister Y Khemchand Singh and his Mizoram counterpart Lalduhoma were among those who consoled the death of the MLA. (PTI)



## Mizoram CM Lalduhoma receives greetings from PM, national leaders on 77th birthday

**AIZAWL, Feb 22:** Mizoram Chief Minister Lalduhoma celebrated his 77th birthday on Sunday, receiving a wave of congratulatory messages from national leaders, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah.

Modi took to X to extend his wishes, praying for the CM's long life and continued health in his service to the people.

Shah emphasised the CM's role in Mizoram's governance, wishing him the strength to continue his leadership for the welfare of the state.

The list of high-profile well-wishers also included Union Minister for DoNER Jyotiraditya Scindia and BJP MP Sambit Patra.

Governor Gen. Vijay Kumar Singh expressed hope that the CM would be granted the wisdom and vigor necessary to maintain the state's trajectory toward peace, stability, and development.

Born on February 22, 1949, Lalduhoma's career has been de-



finied by a transition from high-level law enforcement to the forefront of regional politics.

A former IPS officer, he famously served in the security detail of former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi before resigning to enter politics.

He was elected to the Lok Sabha in 1984 on a Congress ticket.

From 2003, Lalduhoma has been elected to the state Assembly six times. He led the newly floated Zoram People's Movement (ZPM) to a historic landslide victory in the last Assembly polls held in November 2024, unseating incumbent Mizo National Front (MNF) led former Chief Minister Zoramthanga. (PTI)

## Trial run of Agartala-Kolkata bus via Dhaka positive sign: Tripura minister

**AGARTALA, Feb 22:** Tripura Transport Minister Sushanta Chowdhury on Sunday termed the trial run for resuming the Agartala-Kolkata bus service via Dhaka, which remained suspended for a year due to political turmoil in Bangladesh, a "positive sign" for the northeastern state.

The Royal-Maitri international bus service conducted a trial run on Saturday by operating a bus from Agartala to Kolkata via Dhaka.

"We could not accept what happened in Bangladesh over the past year. Now the situation is changing after the formation of a new government through an election," Chowdhury told reporters.

Asserting that the rule of law has been established in Bangladesh, he said the democratically elected gov-

ernment under the leadership of Tarique Rehan would maintain good relations with its neighbours as it has traditionally done.

"The trial run for resumption of the Agartala-Kolkata bus via Dhaka undertaken by the Royal-Maitri international bus service is a welcome and strategic step. I have learnt that the Assistant High Commission office in Agartala will start issuing visas at the earliest," he said.

Asserting that the people of Tripura have never considered Bangladesh an enemy but part of the family, the minister expressed hope that the new government would work to enhance cooperation on all fronts -- from trade and commerce to culture -- for mutual benefit. (PTI)

## Over 17,000 metric tonnes of illegally mined coal seized in Meghalaya's East Jaintia Hills



**SHILLONG, Feb 22:** The Meghalaya Police has seized over 17,000 metric tonnes of coal and 25.5 kg of explosive material in East Jaintia Hills district, as part of a crackdown on illegal mining and transportation, officials said.

The action comes after the February 5 blast at an illegal coal mine in the Thangsku area that killed 34

people and injured several others, prompting stricter enforcement and sustained police operations against unlawful mining activities.

East Jaintia Hills SP Police Pankaj Kumar Rasgania said the district police conducted the raid during the night of February 20-21, recovering 17,322 metric tonnes of illegally mined coal and 25.5 kg of

explosive material from abandoned mines.

No arrests were made during this operation.

Rasgania said 94 FIRs have been registered and 22 people arrested so far since February 5 in connection with illegal mining and transportation.

Following the blast, the state government set up a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to probe the incident and constituted a judicial inquiry commission to examine alleged enforcement lapses.

The Meghalaya High Court is also monitoring related proceedings, and has directed senior police officials to appear during hearings.

Officials said enforcement drives will continue across vulnerable pockets of East Jaintia Hills with strict legal action against those involved in illegal extraction, storage and transportation of coal. (PTI)

## Footfall of devotees at Tripura Sundari temple rose after PM's visit: CM Manik Saha

Daily visitors rise from 4,000 to 7,000-8,000 after redevelopment and inauguration

**AGARTALA, Feb 22:** Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha on Sunday said the footfall of devotees at the Tripura Sundari temple in Gomati district has increased substantially after Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the redeveloped shrine last year. Modi had visited the temple, one of the 51 Shakti Peethas, in September last year, inaugurated the redeveloped complex and offered prayers. An amount of ₹ 32 crore was spent on the shrine's redevelopment.

Saha said the temple earlier witnessed an average daily footfall of around 4,000 devotees.

"I told him that the arrival of devotees to the Tripura Sundari temple would increase after his visit. Now the temple records a daily footfall of 7,000 to 8,000 devotees according to available in-



formation. PM's visit has given global recognition to the temple, attracting more people to the

shrine," he said while addressing a party gathering in West Tripura's Mohanpur on the occasion of

"Mann Ki Baat" programme.

Referring to the stampeed during the Maha Kumbh at Prayagraj in Uttar Pradesh in January last year, the chief minister said several pilgrims had died in the incident.

"After the incident, devotees stopped visiting the Sangam ghat out of fear. Having learnt about the situation, the PM went there and took a holy dip at the Sangam to send a message that all is well. Thereafter, pilgrims resumed visiting the holy place," he said.

Saha said it was Modi who had transformed the Northeast in terms of all-round development. "The PM has renamed the Look East Policy as the Act East Policy to speed up development. He has given the HIRA (Highways, I-Ways, Railways and Airways) model to the Northeast region," he said. (PTI)

## Assam Rifles seize methamphetamine tablets worth ₹ 11.85 cr in Mizoram

**AIZAWL, Feb 22:** Assam Rifles have seized banned methamphetamine tablets worth around ₹ 11.85 crore in Mizoram's Lawngtlai district and apprehended four people, including three Myanmar nationals, a defence statement said on Sunday. The arrests and seizures were made on Friday after the four persons entered India with the contraband items by crossing the Koladyne River on a boat.

Acting on a tip-off, a check-post was set up at Kakichhuha

village and the four persons, including three Myanmar and one Indian were apprehended. Around 80,000 methamphetamine tablets weighing 3.9 kg were seized from their possession, the statement said. The seized meth tablets and the apprehended individuals were handed over to the Mizoram Police for further legal action, it added. Methamphetamine is a powerful central nervous system stimulant used as a recreational or performance-enhancing drug. (PTI)

## Arunachal BJP chief urges Assam voters to vote for good governance

**ITANAGAR, Feb 22:** Arunachal BJP chief Kaling Moyong on Sunday appealed to the people of Assam to vote for good governance, development-oriented policies and democratic values for nation-building, rather than supporting family-based politics.

Both the neighbouring states of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh are currently ruled by the same party, Moyong said, adding that their mutual understanding is clearly reflected in their coordinated development efforts.

Moyong expressed confidence that the people of Assam will again vote for the BJP in the upcoming Assembly polls. (PTI)

