

6 NATION
 ● Budget lacklustre, disappointing: Congress
 ● This Budget reflects people's unwavering trust in PM Modi: BJP chief Nitin Nabin

7 ARUNACHAL
 ● Karko village backs PFR for Siang Upper Multipurpose Project
 ● Ngandam urges Wancho community to shift from jhum cultivation

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প্ৰতিশ্ৰুতি প্ৰদান, প্ৰতিশ্ৰুতি পূৰণ

তথ্য আৰু জনসংযোগ সঞ্চালকালয়, অসমৰ দ্বাৰা প্ৰচাৰিত | Connect with us @diprassam | dipr.assam.gov.in | অসম বাৰ্তা ছাবস্ক্ৰাইব কৰিবলৈ ৭৬৩৬৮০৪৯৪৩ ত Assam লিখি বাটছপ কৰক

DIPR/D/HLT/290/2-Feb-26

Budget announces measures to boost growth amid global risks ● No major changes to personal income-tax slabs

FM sticks to fiscal discipline, shuns populist measures

NEW DELHI, Feb 1: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Sunday announced a slew of measures to boost manufacturing, a tax holiday for global data centres, and incentives for the agriculture and tourism sectors as she unveiled a ₹ 53.5 lakh crore Budget seen as a long-term blueprint for sustaining growth amid rising global risks.

Sticking to fiscal discipline and shunning populist measures despite five key states, including West Bengal and Tamil Nadu, heading to polls soon, her Budget for the fiscal

year beginning April, however, rattled stock markets, with a higher transaction tax on derivatives trading weighing on sentiment.

The Budget 2026-27 has simplified the customs regime by rationalising exemptions, waiving customs duty on 17 cancer drugs, while easing baggage rules and reducing duty to 10 per cent on goods imported for personal use.

Presenting her record 9th straight Budget, Sitharaman stepped up the government's capital expenditure outlay to ₹ 12.2 lakh crore from ₹ 11.2 lakh crore last year, underscoring its focus on infrastructure-led growth amid global uncertainty.

The government will prioritise scaling up manufacturing across seven sectors -- pharmaceuticals, semiconductors, rare-earth magnets, chemicals, capital goods, textiles and sports goods, she said. Also, the emphasis will be on job creation and

technology-driven development.

A series of initiatives were also announced for the livestock, fisheries and high-value agriculture sectors, while a ₹ 10,000 crore investment has been proposed over the next five years to develop India as a biopharma manufacturing hub. An integrated programme for the textile sector was also announced.

For tourism, the development of ecologically sustainable mountain trails in Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Jammu and Kashmir, as well as the development of 15 archaeological sites, was also proposed.

Support for small businesses includes a dedicated ₹ 10,000 crore SME Growth Fund to create future Champions, incentivising enterprises based on select criteria.

The measures announced in the Lok Sabha complement last year's sweeping income tax and GST cuts, which, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

PM Modi says Budget 'ambitious', 'futuristic'



NEW DELHI, Feb 1: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday described the Budget 2026-27 as "ambitious" and "futuristic", stressing that it will further strengthen India's global role as its 140 crore citizens

are not satisfied with being the fastest growing economy and the nation is determined to soon become the world's third largest economy.

In his televised post-budget comments on the Budget, presented by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in the Lok Sabha, Modi said this was a unique budget, which focused on reducing fiscal deficit and controlling inflation while simultaneously ensuring high capital expenditure and high growth.

"This Budget strengthens India's global role anew. India's 140 crore citizens are not satisfied with being the fastest growing economy, and the nation is determined to soon become the world's third largest economy," he said. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Himanta: Budget to benefit Assam meaningfully

GUWAHATI, Feb 1: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday hailed the Union Budget as a "reform-oriented" one, from which the entire eastern region, including the state, will "benefit meaningfully".

He said the Budget maintained a fine balance between India's global aspirations and grassroots development.

In a series of X posts, Sarma listed out several points from the Union Budget, which was presented earlier in the day by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, and asserted that Assam is going to gain in many aspects.

"Compliments to Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri @narendramodi Ji and Hon'ble Finance Minister Smt @nsitharaman Ji for presenting the #ViksitBharatBudget2026, which



strikes a fine balance between India's global aspirations and grassroots development," he said.

Assam, where assembly elections are likely in March-April, and the eastern region stand to "benefit meaningfully" from this reform-oriented Budget, Sarma said.

"The announcement of Self-Help Marts (SHE-Marts) will further strengthen Assam's efforts towards building a robust ecosystem of Lakhpati Didis under #MMUA," he added.

Sarma said that the emphasis on skilling in the Budget aligns with Assam's vision to emerge as a trusted hub for skilled professionals in healthcare, AI and other allied sectors.

"This Budget provides ₹ 2 lakh crore under the Special Assistance to States for Capital Investment, which will accelerate infrastructure activities in Assam," he added.

The CM pointed out that the Budget for FY'27 also has a provision of ₹ 6,812 crore for the development of the Northeast, underlining the Modi government's sustained focus on the region. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Assam Oppn terms Union Budget 'complacent, pro-corporate'

GUWAHATI, Feb 1: Opposition parties in Assam, where assembly elections are likely in March-April, on Sunday termed the Union Budget for the next fiscal as "complacent" and aimed at protecting only the interests of the big corporates.

Leaders from different opposition parties said there is nothing concrete for Assam despite the state going for elections within a few months, accusing the Centre of having an "indifferent attitude" towards the Northeast.

"The Union Budget 2026-27 reflects complacency at a time when the country needs vision, purpose, clarity and urgency. It was a tem-



plate budget and offered no real roadmap even as shifting global conditions demand foresight and preparedness," Assam Congress president Gaurav Gogoi said.

Had it been an election year for Lok Sabha, the BJP would have tried to present a bold, aggressive budget and (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Assam to benefit from thrust on Tier-2 & 3 cities, Buddhist Circuit in Union Budget: Officials

GUWAHATI, Feb 1: Assam is expected to benefit from the Union Budget's thrust on infrastructure development of Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities, as well as the announcement of Buddhist Circuits, officials said.

The focus on MSMEs will also be advantageous for the state, which has a large number of small and medium enterprises, they said. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, in

her Budget speech, announced that focus will be on Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities, and even temple-towns, which need modern infrastructure and basic amenities.

With a focus on the 'Purvodaya' states and the northeastern region, the Budget has proposed the development of an integrated East Coast Industrial Corridor with a well-connected node at Durgapur in West Bengal.

It also has provision of 4,000 e-buses for the entire region.

The Budget also proposed creation of five tourism destinations in the five 'Purvodaya' states. The proposal for setting up a Buddhist Circuit in the region, including Assam, also features in the Union Budget for 2026-27. "The North-Eastern Region is a civilisational confluence of (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Sitharaman proposes 'East Coast Industrial Corridor', 5 tourism destinations in 'Purvodaya' states

NEW DELHI, Feb 1: The government on Sunday proposed the development of an 'East Coast Industrial Corridor' with a well-connected node at Durgapur in West Bengal, and creation of five tourism destinations in five 'Purvodaya' states.

Presenting the Union Budget 2026-27, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman also proposed to launch a scheme for the development of Buddhist circuits in six northeastern states -- Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Assam, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura.

In her speech, she made a slew of announcements on a range of sectors, including agriculture, finance, health, employment, industry and tourism.

"I propose the development of an East Coast Industrial Corridor with a well-connected node at Durgapur, creation of five tourism destinations in five Purvodaya states, and the provision (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Personal finance highlights impacting middle-class

- ▶ New Income Tax Act
- ▶ Automated process of getting NIL deduction certificate
- ▶ No Income Tax on motor accident claims
- ▶ Rationalisation of TCS rates
- ▶ TDS on supply of manpower
- ▶ Extension of revised ITR filing deadline
- ▶ Depositories to accept form 15G/form 15H
- ▶ No change in the ITR filing deadline for individuals
- ▶ NRIs can use PAN while selling their property in India
- ▶ Foreign asset disclosure scheme
- ▶ Rationalizing penalty and prosecution
- ▶ Share buyback to be treated as capital gains
- ▶ Customs duty for personal good halved
- ▶ STT hiked on futures and options

Tea Association of India hails Budget

GUWAHATI, Feb 1: Tea Association of India (TAI) on Sunday welcomed the Union Budget's proposal to extend a scheme aimed at strengthening education and health services for tea workers in poll-bound Assam and West Bengal.

"The Tea industry is thankful for extending the Pradhan Mantri Cha Shramik Protsahan Yojana for one more year, which was introduced for 2024-25 and 2025-26 with an outlay of ₹ 1,000 crore to provide for the welfare of tea workers, especially women and their children, in Assam and West Bengal," TAI secretary general PK Bhattacharjee said.

The scheme is aimed at making need-based interventions in tea garden areas for, inter-alia, strengthening provisions of education and health services to tea workers.

"The tea industry is also delighted as the Budget takes care for the provision for providing social security for plantation workers in Assam," Bhattacharjee said.

The provision covers family pension-cum-life insurance benefits for plantation workers in Assam through the Deposit Linked Insurance Scheme (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

CHEAPER/COSTLIER

CHEAPER:

- Cancer drugs
- Drugs, medicines and food for special medical purposes related to seven rare diseases
- Drugs and medicines imported for personal use
- Key Components for Microwave Ovens
- Components or parts, including engines of aircraft
- Solar glass ingredients
- Goods imported for nuclear power projects
- Capital goods for critical minerals

COSTLIER:

- Low cost imported umbrellas
- Potassium Hydroxide
- ATM/Cash dispenser machine and its parts and components
- Film & broadcasting equipment for foreign crews
- Imported Zoo animals & birds
- Fertiliser inputs as Ammonium phosphate / nitro-phosphate fertilisers and Naphtha
- Coffee roasting, brewing or vending machines
- Castor oil cake (PTI)

Budget to spur overall growth of Northeast: Industry bodies

GUWAHATI, Feb 1: Industry bodies in the Northeast on Sunday welcomed the Union Budget as a "balanced and fiscal-disciplined" one, which will spur development in the region and position it as a "multi-dimensional growth engine".

The thrust on MSMEs and tourism sectors, along with infrastructure push for Tier 2 and 3 cities, will benefit the region, the industry bodies said.

"This is not a populist budget. I think it is a balanced and fiscal-disciplined one," Federation of Industry and Commerce of North Eastern Region (FINER) president Bajrang Lohia said. Lohia said the push for MSMEs will benefit Assam and the Northeast as the region has mostly medium and small enterprises.

Infrastructure development boost for Tier 2 and 3 cities will also benefit

the region, he maintained.

"Development of Buddhist circuits will help the tourism sector, which in turn, will propel the economy," the FINER president said.

Former FINER president R S Joshi, welcoming the Budget, said, "Some may say that there is no specific mention of the Northeast. But it is a Union Budget. Allocation in all sectors has gone up and this will benefit the region too."

He stressed that it has to be borne in mind that the budget has been prepared keeping in mind the geo-political tensions, including Russia-Ukraine War, tariff hikes by the US and "other negativities".

"We will need to go through the fine print. If there is anything lacking, FINER will bring it to the notice of the minister concerned and the region's



MPs," Joshi added.

The North East India Regional Council of the Indian Chamber of Commerce (ICC) said, "We find it to be a budget with an emphasis on growth, inclusiveness and forward thinking. We feel that this is a budget that will encourage the overall development of the northeastern region."

The regional unit of the ICC said the budget adopts the 'Ashtalakshmi' development model for the Northeast,

positioning the region as a multi-dimensional growth engine through focused investments in connectivity, tourism, infrastructure, agriculture, healthcare and industrial development.

It welcomed the announcement of development of Buddhist circuits across six northeastern states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Mizoram, Sikkim and Tripura, "aimed at positioning the region as a major spiritual and cultural tourism destination".

The industry body also hailed the proposed high-speed rail link connecting Siliguri in West Bengal to Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh, and announcement of provision for 4,000 electric buses across the northeastern region.

"The combined focus on heritage-led tourism and green infrastructure reflects a balanced and future-ready development (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Budget: India to establish Mega Textile Parks in challenge mode

NEW DELHI, Feb 1: The government on Sunday announced the setting up of Mega Textile Parks in challenge mode with a focus on integrated infrastructure and value addition, among a raft of reforms, including a five-pronged integrated policy framework, to provide a shot in the arm to India's employment-intensive textile sector.

The proposed establishment of new Mega Textile Parks will attract investments, improve compliance and traceability, and create integrated hubs for scale, quality control and exports.

It will also support growth in technical textiles, a high-potential segment critical for industrial, medical, defence and infrastructure applications.

To strengthen khadi, handloom and handicrafts, the Mahatma Gandhi Gram Swaraj Initiative will be launched. The initiative will focus on global market linkage, branding, streamlined training, skilling, quality improvement and process moderni-



sation. It will benefit weavers, village industries, rural youth and support the One District One Product (ODOP) initiative.

In a major boost to exports of textiles, leather and marine products, the Budget announced the Extension of the export obligation period from 6 months to 12 months for exporters of textile garments, leather garments, leather or synthetic footwear and

other leather products manufactured using duty-free imported inputs.

This measure will provide greater operational flexibility, ease of compliance and improved working capital management for textile exporters, currently grappling with 50 per cent tariffs on Indian goods imposed by the US, India's largest export market. In her budget speech, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman

said, "For the labour-intensive Textile Sector, I propose an Integrated Programme with 5 sub-parts". Under these five sub-parts, she announced a 'National Fibre Scheme' for self-reliance in natural fibres such as silk, wool and jute, man-made fibres, and new-age fibres.

The Finance Minister announced the Textile Expansion and Employment Scheme to modernise traditional clusters with capital support for machinery, technology upgradation and common testing and certification centres; a National Handloom and Handicraft programme to integrate and strengthen existing schemes and ensure targeted support for weavers and artisans; and the Tex-Eco Initiative to promote globally competitive and sustainable textiles and apparels.

She also unveiled the SAMARTH 2.0 skill development scheme to help local manufacturers become more efficient, innovative and sustainable, and expand their presence in global markets. (PTI)

Union Budget shifts India's electronics, semiconductor journey from trust to scale-up: IESA

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Feb 1: The Union Budget has reinforced India's transition from aspiration to execution in the electronics and semiconductor sector, building on the credibility achieved in 2025 and setting the stage for scale-up in 2026-27, India Electronics and Semiconductor Association (IESA) President Ashok Chandak said on Sunday.

Chandak said the Budget strongly builds on the progress made under the India Semiconductor Mission (ISM), Electronic Components Manufacturing Scheme (ECMS), Production-Linked Incentive (PLI), Design-Linked Incentive (DLI), Chips to Startup (C2S) and other ESDM initiatives over the past year. "India has clearly moved from aspiration to credibility and is now recognised as a serious, investible destination for electronics and semiconductors. As the ecosystem enters a critical phase of execution and

scale-up, the Budget rightly sustains policy momentum," he said. Welcoming the announcement of ISM 2.0, Chandak described it as a key signal of India's evolving semiconductor ambition. He said the new phase marks a shift from a fab-centric approach to a full value-chain strategy encompassing equipment, materials, Indian intellectual property and supply-chain resilience, including chemicals, gases and upstream inputs.

"This evolution is critical if India is to move from being a participant to a structural player in the global semiconductor ecosystem," he said, adding that the quantum of funding under ISM 2.0 is awaited.

He said the enhanced focus means India's ambition is no longer limited to chip manufacturing alone but extends to owning capabilities across design, tools and materials—areas that define long-term competitiveness, sustainability and

strategic autonomy. On electronics manufacturing, Chandak welcomed the significant expansion of the ECMS to ₹40,000 crore, noting the strong industry response to the scheme. He highlighted the introduction of a 2 per cent profit margin support for electronic manufacturers, along with components warehousing and logistics hubs, as measures that would enhance global competitiveness.

He said continued emphasis on value addition, customs simplification, MSME support, capital goods and ease-of-doing-business reforms provides confidence and continuity to the electronics industry. Chandak also underscored the importance of Budget provisions promoting technology adoption through industry-led research and training, job creation and strategic focus areas such as the AI Mission, Quantum Mission and research, development and innovation funding.

Contd. from Page 1...

FM sticks to fiscal

together with spending on infrastructure, labour law overhaul, and the RBI's interest rate reductions, have so far helped the Indian economy withstand the punitive 50 per cent tariff US President Donald Trump has imposed on Indian goods.

The FY27 Budget comes against a complex backdrop. While domestic demand has held up and inflation has moderated from recent highs, global uncertainties - including geopolitical tensions, volatile commodity prices and uneven monetary easing by major central banks - continue to cloud the outlook. At home, the government faces pressure to boost consumption, accelerate job creation and step up capital spending, while keeping the fiscal deficit on a downward path.

"Today, we face an external environment in which trade and multilateralism are imperilled and access to resources and supply chains are disrupted. New technologies are transforming production systems while sharply increasing demands on water, energy and critical minerals," Sitharaman said while presenting the Budget in the Lok Sabha.

India, she said, will continue to take confident steps towards Viksit Bharat, balancing ambition with inclusion.

"As a growing economy with expanding trade and capital needs, India must also remain deeply integrated with global markets, exporting more and attracting stable long-term investment."

And to do that, the government will also continue to prioritise fiscal consolidation, targeting a reduction in the debt-to-GDP ratio to 55.6 per cent in the next financial year from 56.1 per cent, and the fiscal deficit to 4.3 per cent from 4.4 per cent in the current year. It plans to borrow ₹ 17.2 lakh crore from bond markets, where yields have firmed amid elevated government borrowing.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi described the Union Budget 2026-27 as "historic", saying it reflected the aspirations of 140 crore Indians and strengthened the reform journey and charts a clear roadmap for Viksit Bharat.

Modi also said the Budget was a "highway of opportunities".

"This Budget is the foundation for our journey towards a Viksit Bharat by 2047. This year's Budget will give India's reform express new energy and new momentum," he said. "We want to become the world's third-largest economy as soon as possible." While there were no major changes to personal income-tax slabs, the government announced tax and incentive measures aimed at boosting investment and ease of compliance for industry. A biopharma manufacturing hub with an outlay of ₹ 10,000 crore, the second edition of the semiconductor mission, a ₹ 40,000 crore outlay for electronics component manufacturing, establishing rare earth corridors in mineral-rich states, setting up three dedicated chemical parks and strengthening capital goods capability were among measures announced.

Among the major announcements were a 20-year tax holiday to overseas firms that provide global data centre services from the country, as New Delhi steps up efforts to woo investors in its fast-growing digital infrastructure sector.

The government also proposed a 15 per cent safe harbour on costs for data centre services provided by a related entity of a foreign cloud firm. The move is expected to benefit overseas cloud companies structuring their India operations through group entities by providing greater tax certainty and improving operational efficiency. The announcement comes as India sees some of the world's largest data centre investments, led by cloud majors such as Google, Microsoft and Amazon Web Services, which together have committed around USD 40 billion in 2025 alone.

Alongside, Securities Transaction Tax (STT) has hiked on futures trading to 0.05 per cent from 0.02 per cent and to 0.15 per cent from 0.01 per cent on options.

Also, tax on buyback for all types of shareholders will be taxed as capital gains.

Other measures include TCS on the sale of overseas tour packages slashed to 2 per cent, while the same on overseas education, and medical expenses under LRS (Liberalised Remittance Scheme) cut to 2 per cent. Sitharaman said the new Income Tax Act, 2025, will be implemented from April 1, with simpler rules and forms coming out soon. The Budget focuses on 3 Kartavyas -- accelerating growth, fulfilling aspirations, and Sabka Sath, Sabka Vikas. "This threefold approach requires a supportive ecosystem. The first requirement is to sustain the momentum of structural reforms - continuous, adaptive, and forward-looking. Second, a robust and resilient financial sector is central to mobilising savings, allocating capital efficiently and managing risks. Third, cutting-edge technologies, including AI applications, can serve as force multipliers for better governance," she added.

The government, she said, has undertaken comprehensive economic reforms towards creating employment, boosting productivity and accelerating growth.

"Over 350 reforms have been rolled out. These include GST simplification, notification of labour codes, and rationalisation of mandatory Quality Control Orders." High-level Committees have been formed, and in parallel, the central government is working with the state governments on deregulation and reducing compliance requirements. For the infra push, a new Dedicated Freight Corridor will be set up connecting Dankuni in the East to Surat in the West. Besides, 20 new National Waterways (NW) will be operationalised over the next five years, a Coastal Cargo Promotion Scheme will be launched, and incentives will be provided to indigenise the manufacturing of seaplanes.

For clean energy, an outlay of ₹ 20,000 crore over the next five years was announced for Carbon Capture Utilization and Storage (CCUS) technologies.

The government will develop seven high-speed rail corridors between cities as 'growth connectors' to promote environmentally sustainable passenger systems.

Tax measures include tax exemption on interest awarded by the Motor Accident Claims Tribunal to a natural person, rationalising of penalty and prosecution provisions, exemption from Minimum Alternate Tax (MAT) to all non-residents who pay tax on presumptive basis, and TCS rate for sellers of specific goods namely liquor, scrap and minerals will be rationalised to 2 per cent and that on tendu leaves will be reduced from 5 per cent to 2 per cent.

The basic customs duty exemption given to capital goods used for manufacturing Lithium-Ion Cells for batteries has been extended, as has been the same on the import of goods required for Nuclear Power Projects. Duty-free personal import of drugs/ medicines and food for 7 more rare diseases has been allowed.

To address practical issues of small taxpayers like students, young professionals, tech employees, and relocated NRIs, she proposed to introduce a one-time 6-month foreign asset disclosure scheme. Christian de Guzman, Senior Vice President, Moody's Ratings, said in addition to the continued spending on infrastructure, the Budget provides tactical support for the economy against the backdrop of prevailing external uncertainties, including the unresolved issues around US tariffs, and despite the proven resilience of economic growth over the past year.

"At the same time, support for the economy, which includes measures announced in recent months such as GST rationalisation, will lead to an ongoing erosion of tax revenue as a share of GDP that will worsen debt affordability as measured by interest payments relative to revenue. Moreover, we do not expect significant progress on debt reduction, which supplants deficit consolidation as the anchor for fiscal policy, leaving our broader assessment of India's fiscal strength intact." (PTI)

PM Modi says Budget

The prime minister emphasised that this is the collective resolve of millions of Indians and India's role as a trusted democratic partner and trusted quality supplier is continuously expanding. He underlined that the recent major trade deals India has undertaken are aimed at ensuring maximum benefits for the country's youth and for small and medium enterprises, with significant steps taken in this Budget to advance that direction.

"Today's Budget is historic and reflects the empowered spirit of the nation's

women. This budget is ambitious and addresses the aspirations of the nation," he said. Modi congratulated the finance minister and her team for presenting a "futuristic" and "sensitive" budget that is dedicated to the welfare of villages, the poor and farmers. He highlighted that Sitharaman, as a woman finance minister, has set a new record by presenting the country's budget for the ninth consecutive time.

The prime minister said the Budget is a highway of immense opportunities, one that fulfils the dreams of the present and strengthens the foundation of India's bright future. He emphasised that the Budget will serve as the basis for India's high flight towards becoming a developed nation by 2047.

Modi noted that the Reform Express on which India is riding will gain new energy and new momentum through this budget.

He underlined that the path-breaking reforms provide the aspiring, courageous and talented youth of India with an open sky to soar and the Budget realises the vision of trust-based governance and a human-centric economic framework.

He emphasised the Budget presents an ambitious roadmap to accelerate Make in India and the Atmanirbhar Bharat campaign with the unprecedented support given to sunrise sectors with the BioPharma Shakti Mission, Semiconductor Mission 2.0, Electronic Component Manufacturing Scheme, creation of a Rare Earth Corridor, strengthening critical minerals sector, new schemes in the textile sector, promotion of high-tech tool manufacturing and preparation of champion MSMEs.

It is futuristic and addresses both present and future needs of the nation, the prime minister said. He said the support extended to MSMEs, including small and cottage industries, will empower them to grow from local to global.

"The Budget takes several major steps to strengthen infrastructure, including a dedicated freight corridor, expansion of waterways across the country, a high-speed rail corridor, special focus on the development of tier-2 and tier-3 cities, and promotion of municipal bonds to provide stronger economic foundations for cities," he said. Modi stressed that all these measures will accelerate the journey towards a developed India. "The greatest capital of any nation is its citizens, and in recent years the government has made unprecedented investments to enhance their capabilities," he said, adding that a continuous effort has been to strengthen skill, scale and sustainability. Reiterating Sitharaman's statement that this is a youth power budget, Modi emphasised that the provisions made in the budget will prepare leaders, innovators and creators across different sectors.

He noted that through the establishment of medical hubs, allied health professionals, promotion of the 'Orange Economy', including audio-visuals and encouragement of gaming, tourism and the Khelo India Mission, new opportunities will open for the youth. He also said that a major tax concession has been announced to make India the world's data centre hub.

He said this budget will give a significant boost to employment generation.

The prime minister expressed happiness that concrete steps have been taken to promote tourism, particularly in the Northeast, and that the foundation of balanced development has been strengthened by empowering different states.

Highlighting that more than 10 crore women are associated with self-help groups, he said the Budget prioritises building a modern ecosystem for women-led and women-run self-help groups, with the aim that every household welcomes prosperity. He noted that the campaign to build new hostels for girl students in every district will make education more accessible.

Modi stressed that agriculture, dairy and fisheries have always been given the highest priority by the government. He pointed out that in this Budget, important measures have been taken for farmers engaged in the production of coconut, cashew, cocoa, and sandalwood. The Bharat Vistaar AI tool will greatly help farmers by providing information in their own language, he said, adding that promoting entrepreneurship in fisheries and animal husbandry will create more employment and self-employment opportunities in villages. (PTI)

Himanta: Budget to benefit

"The Budget's continued emphasis on fiscal discipline and price stability is equally commendable," he added. In her speech, Sitharaman announced that the target for capex will be raised to ₹ 12.2 lakh crore for FY'27 from the ₹ 11.2 lakh crore in the current fiscal. She announced a slew of measures to boost infrastructure in the country, including in tier-2 and tier-3 cities.

Sarma said, "The formal acceptance of the 16th Finance Commission recommendations is expected to enhance Assam's share in tax devolution to 3.258 per cent from 3.128 per cent, providing greater fiscal space for development. Overall transfer to our state is set to increase substantially through this budget."

He emphasised that the Budget places a strong thrust on futuristic industries -- semiconductors, electronics manufacturing, data centres, chemical parks and rare earths -- creating new employment opportunities for the youth. "Targeted support for fisheries, commercial farming, and Amrit Sarovars will benefit farmers and cooperatives alike," Sarma said.

He said that the new tourism circuits in the Northeast, along with investments in infrastructure and public transport in smaller towns, will accelerate Assam's urbanisation and connectivity. "The focus on the Orange Economy opens new avenues for creative talent and content creators in the region," the Assam CM said.

He also welcomed the decision to upgrade the National Mental Health Institute at Tezpur, as it will "significantly strengthen" specialised healthcare services in Assam. Speaking to reporters later, Sarma said that an increase in tax devolution will instantly help Assam in mopping up an additional ₹ 2,000 crore next year and thereafter, it will keep on increasing proportionately. Earlier in the day, he expressed hope that the Union Budget for 2026-27 would offer more tax devolution to the state. "We look at how much revenue devolution is done in the budget. We see how much money was given to us last fiscal, and how much will be allocated this year. I am sure that we will get more funds this time compared to last year," he said before the Budget was tabled in Lok Sabha. Talking about the proposals to develop infrastructure in tier-2 and tier-3 temple cities, he said, "I think with Maa Kamakhya in Guwahati, we fulfil all the qualifications. Budget has promised ₹ 5,000 crore for the urban corridor." The Assam CM asserted that the budget has given a lot of emphasis on reforms, ease of doing business and MSMEs.

"So, this is a very good budget considering the current geopolitical and economic situation. I welcome the budget wholeheartedly," he added. (PTI)

Assam Oppn terms Union

long-term reforms, he added. "Instead, this reads like the budget of a government content to sit back and coast through the next three years in power. There is little ambition for structural transformation, but ample comfort for select corporate friends and entrenched big business interests," Gogoi said.

While countries such as the US, UK, China and Japan are acting decisively to strengthen their domestic economies through long-term reforms, India has been offered hesitation, drift and a worrying lack of purpose, the Deputy Leader of the Congress in Lok Sabha said.

Assam Jatiya Parishad President Lurinjyoti Gogoi alleged that the Union Budget presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has once again exposed the indifference of the Centre towards Assam and the Northeast. "While the government has been claiming record infrastructure spending and output growth, there is no outline of how Assam will actually benefit from the budget announcements," he added.

Lurinjyoti Gogoi said the rising prices of essential commodities, unemployment among youths and the economic burden on the middle-class are completely ignored in the Budget. "There are no meaningful tax breaks, no concrete employment guarantees, and no special economic packages for marginal or flood-prone areas like Assam. The economic structure of Assam has been destroyed due to massive borrow-

ing without transparent state-wide financial allocation," he added.

The BJP chief claimed that the future of the new generation of Assam is becoming increasingly uncertain. "Floods devastate Assam every year, farmers suffer, tea plantation workers remain neglected and small-scale industries collapse -- but this budget has no answer. Farmers in Assam are frustrated with not getting proper market prices," he added. Lurinjyoti Gogoi further alleged that the Centre has not paid any attention to the agricultural sector.

"Instead, the Centre prefers selected areas and projects where corporate interests are protected. This is not a budget to achieve social justice for the people, but a budget prepared for the benefit of corporates," he added.

"For Assam, this budget clearly reflects the discrimination, neglect and lack of full accountability of the Centre," he added.

CPI(M) Assam state secretary Suprakash Talukdar alleged that the Union Budget is an "assault" on the federal structure of the country.

"This budget is meant only to benefit the corporate sector, and nothing else. In the name of controlling expenditure, the benefits to the poor have been slashed," he added.

Rajior Dal general secretary Rasel Hussain accused the BJP government of neglecting Assam and the Northeast in the Union Budget, as it did not announce "anything specific" for the region. "This budget is clearly meant to promote the corporates of the country, not the common man," he added.

All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) organisational general secretary and MLA Aminul Islam said there are only two things for Northeast in the budget -- slight rise in DoNER funds and creation of a Buddhist circuit. "The budget is very frustrating for Assam and Northeast. There is nothing for MGNREGA, education and health sectors. We thought there would be something big as Assam is going for polls," he added.

Terming it as a "routine budget", Islam said GST slabs and tax analysis are also not encouraging for the common people. In her speech, Sitharaman announced that the target for capex will be raised to ₹ 12.2 lakh crore for FY'27 from the ₹ 11.2 lakh crore in the current fiscal. She announced a slew of measures to boost infrastructure in the country, including in tier-2 and tier-3 cities. (PTI)

Assam to benefit from thrust

Theravada and Mahayana/Vajrayana traditions. I propose to launch a scheme for development of Buddhist Circuits in Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Assam, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura," Sitharaman said. The scheme will cover preservation of temples and monasteries, pilgrimage interpretation centers, connectivity and pilgrim amenities. It has also been proposed to upgrade the National Mental Health Institutes in Tezpur as a Regional Apex Institution. (PTI)

Sitharaman proposes 'East

of 4,000 e-buses," Sitharaman said. Marking 100 days of Modi government 3.0, it had announced in September 2024 that various initiatives have been launched under the Viksit Bharat 2024 vision to build a strong foundation for a prosperous India.

These included the Purvodaya initiative aimed at all-round development of the eastern region of India, encompassing Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Odisha, and Andhra Pradesh. It focuses on human resource development, infrastructure enhancement, and economic opportunities to propel the region towards becoming a key driver of a developed India. Sitharaman, in her Budget speech, also laid emphasis on Buddhist sites in the northeastern region, saying it is a "civilisational confluence" of Theravada and Mahayana or Vajrayana traditions of Buddhism.

"I propose to launch a scheme for the development of Buddhist circuits in Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Assam, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura. The scheme will cover preservation of temples and monasteries, pilgrimage interpretation centres, and pilgrim amenities," she said. Many of the northeastern states are endowed with historic monasteries and other Buddhist sites. (PTI)

Budget to spur overall

strategy for the region," it said.

Chairman of the North East India Regional Council of ICC, Mahesh Saharia, said the 47 per cent increase in allocation for the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER), taking the total allocation to ₹ 5,915 crore, emphasises the government's commitment for the region. Sarat Kumar Jain, chairman, Assam and Meghalaya State Committee of ICC, also lauded the Budget. "It is a decisive step toward strengthening India's economic resilience while ensuring balanced regional growth," he said. Jain welcomed the decision to upgrade the National Mental Health Institute in Tezpur as a regional apex centre. FICCI Northeast Advisory Council also welcomed the Budget, maintaining that it presents "an inclusive and forward-looking roadmap for economic growth and employment generation, with a clear focus on priority regions, manufacturing, infrastructure, tourism and reforms, in line with the government's vision of Sabka Sath, Sabka Vikas".

"The continued emphasis on public capital expenditure, manufacturing, MSMEs and infrastructure provides a solid foundation for long-term growth and employment generation. Strengthening healthcare and education ecosystems will be critical for regions such as the Northeast to fully participate in India's growth journey," FICCI Northeast Advisory Council chairman Ranjit Barthakur said.

He said the emphasis on inland waterways and multimodal logistics is especially relevant for the Northeast. Ghanshyam Dhanuka, chairman, FICCI Assam State Council, said that the Budget contains several announcements of direct relevance to Assam, while also addressing key national priorities.

"The proposed development of Buddhist circuits is a significant initiative. This will strengthen tourism infrastructure, preserve cultural heritage and create employment opportunities linked to the local economy," he said.

FICCI Assam State Council co-chairman Joydeep Gupta welcomed the Budget's emphasis on digital and technology-led growth with a clear regional focus.

Highlighting region-specific opportunities, Gupta said, "The promotion of agarwood as a high-value forest and aromatic product can boost rural livelihoods, exports and agro-forestry-based enterprises in Assam."

FICCI Northeast State Council co-chairman Larsing Sawyan said that the Budget's initiatives will have a tangible impact at the community level. (PTI)

Tea Association of India

for tea plantation workers. These schemes are implemented by the Assam government for workers governed under the Assam Tea Plantation Provident Fund and Family Pension and Employees Deposit Linked Insurance Act.

The provision includes the central government's contribution to the scheme as well as reimbursement of administrative charges, ensuring social security and financial protection for plantation workers and their families.

The TAI secretary general further said the Budget focuses on long-term structural growth of the country and empowers the 'Yuva Shakti' (youth power). "It is a progressive Budget, which has a clear roadmap for Viksit Bharat," he added.

Bhattacharjee said it has adopted a "comprehensive approach to strengthening agriculture and enhancing farmers' incomes by integrating technology, resource management, and crop diversification". He said a key initiative in the Budget is 'Bharat-VISTAAR', a multilingual AI-powered agricultural advisory platform that integrates AgriStack and ICAR agricultural practices.

The planters' body further maintained that the Budget has strengthened MSMEs and start-ups as engines of employment and growth. "The Budget also provides support to the tourism, infrastructure development and ensure long term energy security and stability," Bhattacharjee added. (PTI)

Assamese must lead fight to protect identity: CM

Warns of identity crisis at Mahabir Chilarai Divas event in Darrang

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 1: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday warned of a growing identity crisis for the Assamese community, urging citizens to take the lead in safeguarding their heritage. Speaking at the 516th Biswa Mahabir Chilarai Divas at Pipora Dookan in Darrang, he said Assamese people are becoming a minority in areas historically ruled by Mahabir Chilarai and Maharaj Narayan.

Sarma stressed that while the government has worked to reclaim lost identity over the past five years, administrative efforts alone are insufficient. "The government can initiate action, but people must lead this movement," he said, describing the Garukhuti land reclamation drive as only the beginning.

He also highlighted the Koch Rajbongshi community's struggle in undivided Goalpara, noting encroachment by immigrants from Bangladesh. Paying tribute to Mahabir Chilarai, Sarma called him a visionary leader whose support of Srimanta Sankardev sparked a cultural renaissance with the 'Vrindavani Vastra' as a lasting symbol. He said Chilarai and Lachit Barphukan's courage should inspire Assamese society to preserve its civilisational legacy.

Blood donation camp held at Kampur on CM's birthday



HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Feb 1: A blood donation camp was organised at Kampur on the occasion of Chief Minister Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma's 57th birthday on Sunday.

The event was jointly organised by the Rewati Mohan Borthakur Foundation and the Nagaon Bhogeswari Phukanani Civil Hospital Blood Bank. Around 50 youths participated in the camp, donating blood to help those in need. Certificates were presented to the donors by hospital authorities at the conclusion of the event.

Bibhuti Bhushan Borthakur, organiser of the Foundation, expressed his gratitude to the Blood Bank team and the youth who came from various panchayats in Kampur to participate, making the camp a success.

15 B'deshi migrants pushed back from Assam: Himanta

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 1: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday announced that 15 Bangladeshi immigrants were pushed back from the state, without specifying the district where the action took place.

Posting on X, Sarma said, "I do what I say, ALWAYS! So when I say, we will go all out against illegal infiltrators, we back it up with firm actions. 15 illegal Bangladeshis have been PUSHED BACK right to where they belong. Our mission continues..."

The Assam government has been actively pushing back illegal migrants from Bangladesh through its borders, as part of its ongoing crackdown on infiltration.

CM Sarma urges calm during voter roll notices

Citizens advised to respond to SR notices without fuss

GOALPARA, Feb 1: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday said citizens served notices during the ongoing Special Revision (SR) of electoral rolls in the state should appear before authorities without creating any fuss.

The CM said he will also present his credentials before the election authorities if any complaint against him through Form 7 is filed.

Opposition parties have alleged that the SR exercise is being used to harass genuine citizens, mostly religious minorities, by "BJP agents", with Form 7 being used to file complaints against bona fide voters.

"The SR is a constitutional process. If notice is served, one can go and say they are Indians. The issue ends there. What is there to cry about," Sarma said, speaking to reporters on sidelines of a government programme in Goalpara district.

Sarma asserted that he will also appear for hearing before the relevant authorities if anyone files complaint through Form 7 against him.



"We are not kings or emperors. All are equal in a democracy," he added.

The chief minister also chided people who approached the media after receiving notices during the SR process.

"They should have kept the notice in their pockets and cleared their names by going to the authorities. If they would have not shown

it to reporters, no one would have known about it," Sarma said, dismissing a section of people who projected receiving notice as an 'insult'.

By using Form 7, one can request for deletion of own's name for any of three reasons — permanently shifted, already enrolled or not Indian citizen.

Similarly, any voter of that con-

stituency can apply for deletion of names of others on basis of any of five reasons — death, under age, absent/ permanently shifted, already enrolled, or not Indian citizen. Hearing is conducted by the authorities on the basis on Form 7 applications before deletion of names.

He indicated that only 'Miyas' (Bengali-speaking Muslims) are being served notices during the voter revision drive in the state as a tactic to 'keep them under pressure'.

'Miya' is originally a pejorative term used for Bengali-speaking Muslims in Assam and the non-Bengali speaking people generally identify them as Bangladeshi immigrants. In recent years, activists from the community have started adopting this term as a gesture of defiance.

Stating that "Bangladeshi Miyas" live in Assam, the CM had said more than 5 lakh complaints have been filed by BJP workers during the SR process against such "foreigners". (PTI)

649th birth anniversary of Sant Guru Ravidas observed



HT Correspondent

KHERONI, Feb 1: The 649th birth anniversary of Sant Guru Ravidas was observed with deep devotion and solemnity at Kheroni in West Karbi Anglong district of Assam on Sunday.

The programme was held at Dr BR Ambedkar Bhawan, Kheroni Charali and was organised by the West Karbi Anglong Rabidas Sammilan under the presidency of noted social worker Prem Chand Ram.

The event began with floral tributes and the ceremonial lighting of lamps before the portrait of Sant Guru Ravidas, the revered 15th-century saint, poet, mystic and social reformer known for his teachings on equality, devotion and the eradication of caste-based discrimination.

Addressing the gathering, Prem Chand Ram and Rajesh Ram highlighted the life, philosophy and en-

during teachings of Guru Ravidas, stressing the continued relevance of his message of social harmony, brotherhood, unity and the elimination of discrimination in contemporary society.

Jeetendra Harijan, Vice Principal of Kapili College, also spoke on the occasion, elaborating on the saint's spiritual contributions and reformative ideals. He urged the community to follow the path of truth, devotion and social upliftment as advocated by Guru Ravidas.

A significant development during the ceremony was the formal resolution to constitute the West Karbi Anglong Rabidas Sammilan as an organised body. Jeetendra Harijan was unanimously elected as its president, while Sarmanand Ram was appointed as Secretary. The event was attended by distinguished guests including Bishnu Ram, president and Tuntun Ram, secretary of the West Karbi Anglong Anusuchit Jati Chhatra Sanstha.

A large number of members of the Rabidas community participated in the programme, making the occasion a spiritually enriching and meaningful celebration that reinforced the saint's ideals of equality and social justice at the grassroots level.

Sivasagar Kobi Chakra holds annual meeting

HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, Feb 1: The Sivasagar Kobi Chakra on January 31 held its annual meeting at a picturesque spot near the Dikhow river at Meteka Ghat. The meeting was presided over by Ashrumoni Dutta Ghosh, president of the Sivasagar unit of the poets' body.

The programme was attended by Hemanta Rajkhowa, president of the district committee, along with noted poets Haren Gogoi, Bijay Rabidas, Brojen Das, Mukul Nath, Suresh Bhunya, Haren Chandra Nath, Dr Jatin Konwar and Pranjal Abir Das.

During the meeting, senior poet Bijay Rabidas's new poetry collection titled 'Aandhare Abori Dharibo Tuk' was formally released by senior journalist Manoj Kumar Borthakur in the presence of all office bearers. Borthakur also delivered a speech highlighting trends in contemporary literature.

PK Das, General Manager (Drilling), ONGC Assam Asset, addressed the gathering and remarked that poets and artists belong to a unique and sensitive genre of society.

Shyamanta Ghosh also spoke, sharing his experiences and feelings while interacting with poets from different parts of the district.



Mukul Nath lit the ceremonial lamp in front of 'Pathar Kobi' Ram Gogoi, the founder of Sadou Asom Kobi Chakra, the parent organisation.

Several poets, including Subhan Sing Gam, Binu Borthakur, Jayjyoti Gogoi, Chitralekha Rajkhowa and Bithi Gogoi, recited their self-composed poems. Kalpana Gogoi and Silpika Hatibara added colour to the event by rendering songs.

The meeting concluded with a grand feast, marking a fitting end to the literary gathering.

Workshop on PM-NAPS held for ITI trainees in Sivasagar

HT Correspondent

SIVSAGAR, Feb 1: In a strategic move to bridge the gap between vocational training and industrial employment, the state's Directorate of Employment and Craftsman Training (DECT) hosted a comprehensive day-long workshop on the Prime Minister's National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme (PM-NAPS) at Hotel Brahma-putra.

The workshop was organised with the support of the Regional Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (RDSDE) under the aegis of the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE). It witnessed an enthusiastic participation of over a hundred attendees, including students and instructors from various trades of ITI Gargaon.

The objective of the programme was to simplify the apprenticeship process and highlight the enhanced benefits available under the PM-NAPS framework by bringing together trainees and industry experts on a common platform.

The workshop featured a panel of resource persons who shared practical insights into the evolving landscape of industrial training. Among them were Sushil Baruah, Assistant Manager, DICC, Sivasagar and Apurba Kumar Deka, Superintendent, ITI Gargaon.

Upasana Dutta, Project Executive, delivered a detailed technical presentation on the implementation of the scheme with a special focus on financial incentives for employers and stipend support for trainees. She emphasised that the scheme has been streamlined to provide improved facilities and greater opportunities than earlier.

The event was orchestrated by Kamaiah Engineering Services Pvt Ltd, Guwahati, which ensured a productive and high-energy environment throughout the programme.

KA devotees begin Padyatra to Sankaradeva Sangha session

HT Correspondent

HOWRAGHAT, Feb 1: In a remarkable display of faith and endurance, a group of devotees from Karbi Anglong district has begun a long-distance foot pilgrimage (Padyatra) to attend the 95th Annual Central Session of Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha. The three-day event will be held on February 6-8 at the Jyoti-Bishnu Samanway Khetra in Dholabil, Tezpur.

The group from Belguri village commenced their journey on Sunday morning at 6:00 AM. After seeking blessings at the Belguri Primary Branch Namghar, the pilgrims set out on a trek covering approximately 150 kilometres to reach the venue.

Maruti Brezza destroyed in highway fire at Rongplimlam

HT Correspondent

BOKAJAN, Feb 1: A Maruti Suzuki Brezza was completely gutted by a sudden fire on the Four-lane highway at Rongplimlam early Sunday morning around 1:00 AM.

The vehicle (Registration No AS09J3511) belongs to Longki Senar, a resident of Doldoli. The driver, Arkush Marak was traveling from Doldoli toward Golaghat with four passengers when the incident occurred.

As the car reached the Rongplimlam stretch, smoke and sparks emerged from the engine bay. Sensing immediate danger, the driver pulled over, allowing all passen-

gers to escape just moments before the vehicle was engulfed in flames.

"We saw fire coming from the engine and managed to jump out just in time. Everyone is safe, but the car and everything inside were destroyed," one passenger said.

While no one was injured, the vehicle and personal belongings were completely destroyed. Dillai Police and the Fire Brigade secured the area and extinguished the remaining embers.

Preliminary reports suggest a short circuit in the engine may have triggered the blaze. Authorities have registered a case and are investigating.

Key participants include Pabitra Patar, Mamoni Patar, Mina Bora, Babita Deka and Jina Bora (from Vothung-aji).

Recognising the challenges of such a long trek, the devotees have appealed to the public for cooperation and support, especially for safe resting places and overall well-being along the route. "We are extremely happy to undertake this journey, chanting 'Hari Nam' for world peace," the devotees said.

The 95th session in Tezpur is expected to draw lakhs of followers, but the dedication of the Belguri group has already captured local hearts as they march toward the Jyoti-Bishnu Samanway Khetra.

NFR's RPF rescues 12 passengers, including 8 minors

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 1: The Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) has successfully carried out multiple rescue operations between January 24 and 28, 2026, ensuring the safety of vulnerable passengers through the vigilant functioning of the Railway Protection Force (RPF).

During these coordinated operations, RPF teams rescued a total of 12 persons, including 8 minors and 4 adults, from various stations and trains under NFR jurisdiction.

The rescued cases included runaway minor girls and boys, destitute children and unattended passengers, identified through regular station surveillance and RailMadad complaints.

Major rescue actions were conducted at Falakata, Lumding, Kishanganj, Rangiya, New Bongaigaon, Kamakhya, Katihar (East) and Guwahati stations.

All rescued minors were safely handed over to Child Line units and recognized child care organizations, while rescued adults were produced before local police authorities for further action.



These prompt interventions highlight the alertness, compassion and strong field-level coordination of RPF personnel in safeguarding vulnerable passengers, especially children.

NFR reiterated its commitment to safe, secure and people-centric railway operations and urged passengers to report any unattended minors or suspicious situations immediately to RPF staff or via RailMadad for swift assistance.

95th Annual Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha conference to begin



HT Correspondent

TEZPUR Feb 1: The 95th Annual Conference of the Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha will be held from February 6 at Jyoti-Bishnu Kshetra in Jamugurihat, Sonitpur district, with thousands of devotees and participants from across Assam and northeastern states, including Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Meghalaya, as well as Delhi and Puri chapters.

Preparations have reached their final stage, with 35 subcommittees overseeing the arrangement of main pandal, naamghar, delegate camps, exhibition halls and cultural spaces.

The three-day programme will feature morning prayers, naam prashanga, cleanliness drives, book fairs, exhibitions and cultural performances, including six Ankiya Naat presentations. Notable events

include a special tribute to singer Zubeen Garg, a lecture by Dr Subratjyoti Neog of Tezpur University on Sankari literature and the launch of publications such as 'Bhakti Bibhaban', 'Aidnatmya Ramayana' and the multilingual souvenir 'Bhakti Dhara'.

The conference will conclude with the unfurling of the Sangha flag, Bhagawat bhraman, a cultural procession and an open session attended by Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, central minister Pabitra Margherita, BTR chief Hagrama Mohilary and other dignitaries.

Organisers say contributions from over 3,400 households across 140 villages have helped ensure the event's success, reflecting devotion, community spirit and the enduring legacy of Srimanta Sankaradeva's teachings.

CM Himanta Biswa Sarma turns 57; PM Modi, Amit Shah extend greetings

GUWAHATI, Feb 1: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma turned 57 on Sunday, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah and a host of other leaders extending greetings on his birthday.

Sarma started the day by offering prayers at the Kamakhya temple in Guwahati.

"Warm birthday wishes to Assam CM Shri Himanta Biswa Sarma ji. Under his leadership, Assam has made remarkable progress in various sectors. Praying for his long and healthy life in service of the people," Modi said in a post on X. Sarma said he was grateful to the PM for his heartfelt birthday wishes.

"Your dedication to Assam has helped the state reach heights once unimaginable. We will continue this momentum and serve our people with utmost sincerity and commit-

ment," Sarma said. Shah wished the chief minister good health and continued strength in public service.

"Warm birthday greetings to Chief Minister of Assam Shri @himantabiswa ji. Your tireless efforts towards realising Modi ji's vision of a developed, peaceful, and safe Assam are commendable," the home minister said.

Sarma acknowledged Shah for the birthday greetings and constant support.

"Your guidance and vision for Assam's growth inspire me deeply to serve the state with greater commitment and responsibility under the leadership of Adamiya @narendramodi ji," he said.

Sarma's predecessor and Union minister Sarbananda Sonowal also extended birthday wishes to the Assam CM.

"Under your strong leadership, our state is marching forward on the path of development & prosperity. May Maa Kamakhya bless you with good health, happiness, peace and abundant energy in the year ahead," he said.

BJP president Nitin Nabin, too, extended birthday greetings to Sarma. "May Maa Kamakhya bless you with good health, long life, and continued strength in serving the people of Assam," Nabin said in a post on X.

During the day, Sarma will travel to Goalpara district for a cheque distribution programme under the 'Mukhya Mantri Mahila Udyamita Abhiyaan' (MMUA) scheme, followed by a Bir Chilarai Divas function at Darrang district and foundation stone laying event of a building of Gauhati Medical College and Hospital in the state capital. (PTI)

Maghi Purnima celebration concludes

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Feb 1: The 46th Maghi Purnima celebration and Annual Conference of the Rupamoni Bathou Dhwrwm Afad concluded on Sunday after a three-day programme at Chandrapur Dalaisa Rupamoni Bathou Mondir in Kokrajhar district.

Founded in 1980 with its head office at Gosgaon, Ranchaidham of Chirang district, the Rupamoni Bathou Dhwrwm is an aboriginal religion of the Bodo community, with traditions of prayer and worship dedicated to Lord Bwrai Bathou.

Thousands of devotees thronged the Mondir complex to offer prayers and participate in the celebrations.

During the conference, members discussed the exploration and significance of the Bathou religion among the Bodo community.

The concluding day featured an open session chaired by Dharani Kanta Narzary, president of the Rupamoni Bathou Dhwrwm Afad. Chief preacher Guruswami Tikendra Basumaty graced the occasion as the chief guest, while retired APS officer Pradeep Kumar Brahma, former Bodoland University registrar Dr Shekhar Brahma, social worker Santosh Kumar Kakhlary and noted writer and retired headmaster Bibekananda Narzary were prominent atten-



dees. A new committee for the Rupamoni Bathou Dhwrwm Afad was formed during the delegate session, with Dhanesh Narzary appointed as president for the next two-year tenure.

The Moni Bathou, the organisation's mouthpiece and the Aronbarini Thanshali souvenir were also released to mark the conference.

Our Demow Correspondent adds: On Sunday, devotees gathered at Sri Sri Garakhiya Than in Dhemechi Kalalur Gaon near Demow to offer prayers on the occasion of Maghi Purnima. People from various places lit earthen lamps, incense sticks and offered horai. The traditional Naam Prasaanga is held here every year on Maghi Purnima.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Success is the sum of small efforts repeated day in and day out. - Robert Collier

2026-27 Defence Budget

As Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman prepares to present the Union Budget for the financial year 2026-27 on February 1, the question everyone is asking is simple yet critical: will our armed forces get what they truly need to keep us safe in an increasingly dangerous world? Let us be honest about the numbers. When we hear figures like ₹6.81 lakh crore, which was the amount allocated for defence in the last budget, it sounds absolutely massive. That amount is more money than any other ministry gets, making up around thirteen percent of everything the central government spends. It increased by about nine and a half percent from the year before, which seems impressive on the surface. Nearly one-fourth of the entire defence budget goes directly towards pensions for retired soldiers. These are people who served the nation with honour, and they absolutely deserve every single rupee of support in their retirement. Then there is a significant amount set aside for salaries of serving personnel, uniforms, food, fuel for trucks and jets, and maintaining all the existing equipment. By the time all these essential daily expenses are covered, the amount that remains for actually modernising our forces—buying new fighter jets, advanced submarines, or developing artificial intelligence for warfare—is much less than what is actually needed. India currently spends only about one point nine percent of our GDP on defence. Defence experts and retired generals keep emphasizing that we need to push this to at least two point five percent or even three percent to match what other major powers spend and to properly handle the unique threats we face on our borders.

The 2025-26 budget showed some very promising signs of this shift. Capital expenditure—that is the technical term for money spent on buying new heavy equipment—was increased to around ₹1.8 lakh crore, and remarkably, seventy-five percent of that money was reserved specifically for Indian manufacturers. This policy means more jobs for people working in factories across Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, and other states. It means our economy benefits while our military gets stronger. Research and development also got more funds, with the DRDO receiving nearly ₹27,000 crore. Programs like iDEX are encouraging young innovators and startups to create drones, cyber security tools, and AI-based systems for defence. Imagine being part of a team that builds the technology protecting our country—that is the kind of opportunity this push for self-reliance is creating for the youth.

Assam's Economic growth amid persistent inequality challenges

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

Assam today stands at a complex economic crossroads where visible signs of growth coexist with deep-rooted inequalities that refuse to fade quietly into history. Over the last decade, the state has witnessed notable economic activity marked by infrastructure expansion, rising investments, improvements in connectivity, and a growing presence in national development narratives. New highways slice through once-isolated landscapes, bridges redefine mobility across the Brahmaputra, and industrial announcements project Assam as an emerging gateway to Southeast Asia. Yet beneath this surface of progress lies an uncomfortable paradox: economic growth in Assam has not translated evenly into social and economic justice, leaving large sections of the population trapped in vulnerability, informal livelihoods, and regional imbalance.

Assam's economic growth trajectory has been shaped by strategic public investment and policy emphasis on infrastructure-led development. Roads, railways, airports, and digital connectivity have significantly improved, reducing logistical bottlenecks that historically constrained trade and mobility. The expansion of the National Highway network, the inauguration of new rail links, and the modernization of airports in Guwahati, Dibrugarh, Silchar, and other towns have helped integrate Assam more closely with national markets. This improved connectivity has encouraged private investment in sectors such as cement, food processing, oil and gas services, hospitality, and logistics. For urban Assam, particularly Guwahati and its surrounding areas, the impact has been transformative, generating employment opportunities, real estate growth, and a burgeoning service economy.

However, this growth remains spatially concentrated. The benefits of infrastructure and investment flow disproportionately towards urban centers and select industrial corridors, leaving vast rural and riverine regions economically stagnant. Districts heavily dependent on agriculture, fishing, and forest-based livelihoods continue to struggle with low incomes, seasonal unemployment, and limited access to markets. The recurring floods of the Brahmaputra and Barak rivers further exacerbate these disparities, destroying crops, infrastructure, and homes year after year. While growth statistics may show upward movement, they often fail to capture the cyclical economic devastation faced by flood-prone communities, for whom development remains fragile and reversible.

Agriculture, which employs a significant portion of Assam's population, illustrates the contradiction between growth and inequality most starkly. Despite contributing less to the state's Gross Domestic Product compared to services and industry, agriculture remains the primary livelihood for millions. Productivity levels remain low due to fragmented landholdings, limited irrigation coverage, inadequate mechanization, and dependence on monsoon patterns. Although government schemes and minimum support interventions exist, their reach and effectiveness are uneven. Farmers cultivating small plots struggle to access credit, modern inputs, and fair market prices, while middlemen continue to capture a disproportionate share of value. Economic

growth elsewhere in the state does little to improve the structural vulnerabilities of this agrarian population, reinforcing rural-urban income gaps.

The industrial sector, often projected as the engine of Assam's economic future, also presents a mixed picture. While oil, natural gas, tea, cement, and emerging manufacturing units contribute substantially to state revenues, employment generation remains limited. Capital-intensive industries create fewer jobs relative to their investment size, and local employment absorption is often constrained by skill mismatches. Many high-paying technical and managerial positions are filled by workers from outside the state, while local youth remain confined to low-wage, contractual, or informal roles. This disconnect fuels perceptions of exclusion and raises critical questions about who truly benefits from Assam's industrial growth.

Tea, one of Assam's most iconic industries, epitomizes enduring inequality within a profitable sector. Despite global recognition and consistent demand, tea garden workers continue to endure low wages, poor living conditions, and limited access to quality healthcare and education. Generations of workers remain trapped in a cycle of deprivation, their economic contributions undervalued and their social mobility severely restricted. The prosperity generated by the tea industry rarely trickles down equitably to those who sustain it through daily labor, highlighting the moral and economic contradictions embedded within Assam's growth story.

Urbanization has emerged as another key driver of economic expansion, particularly in Guwahati, which has evolved into the commercial and administrative nerve center of Northeast India. The city's expanding economy offers opportunities in retail, real estate, education, healthcare, and information services. Yet rapid urban growth has also intensified inequality within city spaces. Informal settlements expand alongside luxury apartments, and migrant workers power construction booms while living without basic civic amenities. Rising living costs push low-income families to the urban margins, reinforcing spatial segregation and economic insecurity. Urban growth, while contributing to aggregate economic indicators, thus mirrors and magnifies existing social divides. Education and skill development play a decisive role in determining who can participate meaningfully in Assam's economic growth. While literacy rates have improved and higher education institutions have expanded, significant quality gaps persist. Rural schools suffer from teacher shortages, inadequate infrastructure, and high dropout rates, limiting upward mobility for students from marginalized backgrounds. Technical and vocational education, crucial for industrial and service sector employment, remains insufficiently aligned with market needs. As a result, educated unemployment coexists with skill shortages, creating frustration among youth and reinforcing inequality in access to stable, well-paying jobs.

Gender inequality further complicates Assam's economic landscape. Women contribute extensively to agriculture, handloom, handicrafts, and informal trade, yet their labor often goes unrecognized and underpaid. Limited access to land ownership, credit, and formal employment restricts women's economic au-

tonomy. Although self-help groups and microfinance initiatives have empowered many women at the grassroots level, these efforts operate within a broader economic structure that continues to undervalue women's work. Economic growth that fails to address gender disparities risks remaining both incomplete and unjust.

Ethnic, regional, and social inequalities also intersect with economic disparities in Assam. Communities in char areas, hill districts, and border regions face compounded disadvantages due to geographic isolation, weak public services, and historical neglect. Development policies that prioritize visible infrastructure over human development risk deepening these divides. When growth narratives overlook the lived realities of marginalized communities, they breed alienation and undermine social cohesion, which is essential for sustainable development.

Fiscal constraints pose another challenge in translating growth into equity. Assam's dependence on central transfers limits its ability to independently finance expansive welfare and development programs. While investments in infrastructure are crucial, underinvestment in health, education, nutrition, and social security weakens the long-term foundations of inclusive growth. Public healthcare facilities remain overstretched, and out-of-pocket medical expenses continue to push vulnerable families into poverty. Without robust social protection mechanisms, economic shocks such as floods, pandemics, or market fluctuations disproportionately harm those already on the margins.

Assam's economic future depends not merely on sustaining growth but on redefining its purpose and distribution. Growth that concentrates wealth, opportunities, and power in limited pockets cannot deliver lasting prosperity or social stability. Inclusive growth requires deliberate policy choices that prioritize human development alongside physical infrastructure. Strengthening rural economies through agricultural modernization, value addition, and market access can help bridge income gaps. Expanding quality education and skill training tailored to local industries can enable broader participation in emerging sectors. Ensuring fair wages, labor rights, and social security for informal and industrial workers can restore dignity to labor and reduce inequality. Equally important is empowering local institutions and communities to participate in development planning. When people see themselves as stakeholders rather than passive recipients of growth, development becomes more resilient and equitable. Addressing gender disparities, regional imbalances, and historical exclusions is not a peripheral concern but central to Assam's economic transformation.

Assam's growth story, therefore, is not one of failure but of unfinished promise. The foundations of progress are visible, yet their benefits remain unevenly distributed. Bridging the gap between economic expansion and social equity is the defining challenge of the present moment. If Assam can align its growth ambitions with a genuine commitment to inclusion, it can transform economic momentum into shared prosperity. Otherwise, growth will remain statistically impressive but socially fragile, advancing numbers while leaving too many lives unchanged. (The author is the recipient of the 'Yuba Lekhak Sanman - 2025' from the Government of Assam)

Union Budget 2026: Expectations and direction

By: Satyabrata Borah

The Union Budget 2026 of India comes at a defining moment for the country, when economic resilience, social responsibility, and long term vision must come together in a carefully balanced manner. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman will present the Union Budget 2026 on Sunday, February 1, an event that is watched closely not only by economists and policymakers but also by ordinary citizens whose lives are shaped in countless ways by budgetary decisions. More than a financial document, the Union Budget has always been a statement of intent, reflecting how the nation understands its present challenges and future aspirations.

India today stands at a complex crossroads. The economy has shown remarkable resilience despite global slowdowns, geopolitical tensions, inflationary pressures, and climate related disruptions. At the same time, expectations from the government remain high. Citizens look to the budget for signals of relief, opportunity, and direction. In this context, the Union Budget 2026 is expected to strike a careful balance between sustaining economic growth and ensuring that the benefits of development reach all sections of society. The responsibility before the government is not merely to manage numbers but to nurture trust and confidence in the country's economic future.

Economic growth remains a central pillar of the budget. India continues to be among the fastest growing major economies in the world, yet the nature of this growth is as important as its pace. The Union Budget 2026 is expected to emphasize quality growth that generates employment, strengthens productivity, and reduces inequality. Public investment, particularly in infrastructure, has emerged in recent years as a powerful driver of economic momentum. Continued focus on roads, railways, ports, airports, and digital infrastructure is likely, as such investments create immediate jobs while laying the foundation for long term efficiency and competitiveness.

Fiscal discipline is another critical aspect of the budget framework. While increased spending is necessary to support growth and welfare, maintaining macroeconomic stability is equally important. The Union Budget 2026 is expected to continue on the path of gradual fiscal consolidation, signaling commitment to responsible public finance. This approach reassures investors and rating agencies while ensuring that future generations are not burdened with unsustainable debt. The challenge lies in balancing prudence with compassion, ensuring that essential social spending is protected even as deficits are managed.

Employment generation remains one of the most pressing priorities. India's large and youthful population represents a powerful demographic advantage, but only if sufficient productive opportunities are created. The budget is expected

to support job creation through multiple channels, including infrastructure projects, manufacturing expansion, services sector growth, and support for small and medium enterprises. Employment today is not only about income but also about dignity, security, and skills, and budgetary policies increasingly reflect this broader understanding.

The social sector occupies a central place in the moral vision of the Union Budget. Education continues to be seen as the cornerstone of long term development. In 2026, the education system faces the dual challenge of improving foundational learning while also preparing students for a rapidly changing job market. Budgetary allocations are expected to support digital education, skill development, vocational training, and research in higher education. Investments in teachers, institutions, and learning infrastructure are investments in the country's future human capital.

Healthcare remains another major focus area. The lessons of recent years have underscored the importance of strong public health systems. The Union Budget 2026 is expected to further strengthen healthcare infrastructure, especially in rural and underserved areas. Increased spending on primary healthcare, preventive care, mental health services, and affordable medicines reflects a growing recognition that health is both a social good and an economic necessity. A healthy population is more productive, more resilient, and better able to participate in national development.

Agriculture continues to support a significant portion of India's population, directly and indirectly. The Union Budget 2026 is expected to address long standing challenges faced by farmers, including income instability, climate risks, and market access. Rather than relying solely on subsidies, policy emphasis has been gradually shifting toward improving productivity, promoting sustainable practices, expanding irrigation, and strengthening supply chains. Support for agri technology, food processing, storage infrastructure, and exports can help make agriculture more resilient and profitable, benefiting both farmers and consumers.

Rural development more broadly remains essential for inclusive growth. Investments in rural housing, drinking water, sanitation, roads, and digital connectivity improve living standards while integrating rural economies with national markets. Employment guarantee programs and self employment initiatives are expected to continue, providing income security while creating durable community assets. Such spending not only reduces poverty but also stimulates demand in rural areas, contributing to overall economic stability.

Urban India faces a different set of challenges. Rapid urbanization has increased pressure on housing, transport, sanitation, and environmental resources. The Union Budget 2026 is expected to support sustainable urban development

through investments in mass transit systems, affordable housing, waste management, and smart city initiatives. Urban planning that prioritizes inclusivity, safety, and environmental sustainability is increasingly seen as essential for improving quality of life and maintaining economic competitiveness.

Tax policy is among the most closely watched aspects of the budget. For individual taxpayers, there is often hope for relief amid rising living costs. For businesses, stability and simplicity in taxation are crucial for long term planning. The Union Budget 2026 is expected to continue efforts to simplify the tax system, reduce compliance burdens, and enhance transparency. A fair and predictable tax regime strengthens trust between the state and citizens while supporting revenue mobilization.

Indirect taxation and the broader tax administration framework also remain important areas of reform. Continued improvements in compliance systems, dispute resolution mechanisms, and digital tax infrastructure can enhance efficiency and reduce friction. Effective tax administration is not merely about collection but about creating a culture of voluntary compliance based on fairness and clarity.

Technology and digital governance are expected to play a prominent role in the Union Budget 2026. India's digital public infrastructure has transformed service delivery and financial inclusion. The budget is likely to build on this foundation by supporting innovation in emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, data analytics, and cybersecurity. At the same time, issues of digital access, data protection, and ethical use of technology require careful attention to ensure that digital progress remains inclusive and secure.

Manufacturing and industrial development remain central to India's ambition of becoming a global production hub. The Union Budget 2026 is expected to support policies that encourage domestic manufacturing, attract investment, and integrate Indian firms into global value chains. Strategic support for sectors such as electronics, renewable energy equipment, pharmaceuticals, and electric mobility reflects an effort to align industrial growth with future oriented technologies. Ease of doing business reforms and skill development initiatives complement these efforts by fostering entrepreneurship and innovation.

Small businesses, startups, and the informal sector play a vital role in employment and economic dynamism. The budget is expected to continue supporting these sectors through improved access to credit, simplified regulations, and targeted incentives. Strengthening the financial ecosystem, including banks and non banking institutions, can have a multiplier effect on growth by enabling small enterprises to expand and innovate.

Environmental sustainability and climate resilience have become integral to

economic planning. The Union Budget 2026 is likely to reflect this shift by allocating resources toward renewable energy, energy efficiency, sustainable agriculture, and climate resilient infrastructure. India's development strategy increasingly recognizes that long term prosperity depends on protecting natural resources and adapting to climate risks. Green finance initiatives and incentives for clean technologies signal a commitment to aligning economic growth with environmental responsibility.

Energy security remains closely linked to both economic stability and sustainability goals. Continued investments in renewable energy, modernization of power grids, and promotion of energy storage solutions are expected. Managing the transition in a way that protects livelihoods and ensures affordability remains a key policy challenge.

Gender equity and social inclusion are also expected to feature prominently in the Union Budget 2026. Programs aimed at increasing women's workforce participation, supporting entrepreneurship among marginalized communities, and ensuring access to education and healthcare contribute to both social justice and economic growth. Inclusive policies unlock untapped potential and strengthen social cohesion. The external sector shapes many budgetary choices in an interconnected world. Export competitiveness, trade facilitation, and foreign investment flows are critical for sustaining growth. The budget is expected to support export oriented industries, improve logistics, and enhance the ease of cross border trade. A stable macroeconomic environment enhances India's attractiveness as a global investment destination.

Public sector enterprises and disinvestment policy also form part of the broader fiscal strategy. The Union Budget 2026 is likely to outline a pragmatic approach that balances resource mobilization with strategic considerations. Improving governance and efficiency in public enterprises can contribute to better service delivery and fiscal health.

Ultimately, the Union Budget 2026 is significant not only for its financial allocations but for the vision it articulates. It reflects how the nation interprets its responsibilities toward citizens in a rapidly changing world. By prioritizing inclusive growth, investing in human and physical capital, embracing innovation, and committing to sustainability, the budget has the potential to reinforce India's long term development trajectory.

For citizens, the budget influences everyday life, from employment prospects and prices to access to public services. For businesses, it shapes confidence and investment decisions. For policymakers, it serves as a roadmap that aligns immediate actions with long term goals. As Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman presents the Union Budget 2026 on Sunday, February 1, the country will look not only at the numbers but at the story they tell about India's future.

Budget 2026 and the common man: Between expectations and everyday realities

By: Mowsam Hazarika

For the common man, the Union Budget is not a document of macroeconomic projections or fiscal ratios; it is a reflection of everyday life—prices at the market, availability of jobs, access to healthcare, quality of education and the security of a stable income. Budget 2026 arrives at a time when ordinary citizens continue to navigate rising living costs, employment uncertainty and growing aspirations for a better quality of life.

Against this backdrop, Budget 2026 seeks to balance economic growth with social responsibility, placing emphasis on targeted welfare, infrastructure development and fiscal discipline. The real question, however, is how these priorities translate into tangible relief for the common man.

Cost of Living and Household Pressures

One of the foremost concerns for ordinary households is the rising cost of essentials—food, fuel, healthcare and education. While Budget 2026 avoids large-scale populist giveaways, it underscores the need for price stability through improved supply chains, infrastructure and market efficiency.

Investments in logistics, storage and transportation can indirectly help control prices by reducing wastage and inefficiencies. For the common man, such measures matter more than headline announcements, though their impact may be gradual rather than immediate.

Employment and Income Security

Employment remains central to the budget's relevance for the common citizen. Budget 2026 reiterates its focus on job creation through public investment, support for small and medium enterprises and skill development initiatives. Infrastructure projects are expected to generate both direct and indirect employment, particularly for semi-skilled and unskilled workers.

However, for young job seekers and informal workers, the concern lies in the quality and stability of employment. Without sustained private sector participation and region-specific planning, employment gains may remain uneven.

Healthcare and Education: Everyday Essentials

For millions of families, access to affordable healthcare and quality education determines financial security. Budget 2026 continues to emphasize strengthening public health infrastructure and educational institutions, recognising that private alternatives are increasingly beyond the reach of the common man.

Improved primary healthcare facilities, preventive care and better public schooling can reduce out-of-pocket expenditure and provide long-term social



returns. Yet, the effectiveness of these measures depends heavily on implementation at the state and local levels.

Housing, Urban Services and Daily Life

Urban and semi-urban households face daily challenges related to housing, transport, water supply and sanitation. Budget 2026's focus on urban development offers scope for improving civic amenities, public transport and affordable housing.

For the common man, the success of such initiatives is measured not in policy language but in reduced commuting time, reliable water supply and safer living environments.

Targeted Welfare and Social Security

Budget 2026 reinforces the shift towards targeted welfare delivery rather than universal subsidies. For beneficiaries, this can mean better focus and reduced leakage. However, for the common man, especially those on the margins, accurate identification and timely delivery remain critical concerns.

Social security for the elderly, women, informal workers and economically vulnerable groups continues to be an area where expectations often exceed outcomes.

A Budget of Incremental Relief

Budget 2026 may not offer dramatic instant relief to the common man, but it aims to create conditions for gradual improvement in living standards. Its emphasis on stability, investment and targeted support reflects an understanding that sustainable welfare cannot be built on fiscal imprudence. For ordinary citizens, the budget's success will ultimately be judged not by policy intent but by lived experience—whether daily life becomes a little more affordable, secure and hopeful. Budget 2026 sets the direction; its impact on the common man will depend on execution, accountability and responsiveness on the ground. (The author is a poet, Science Writer, Sustainability Advocate, Former Director, Assam Seed & Organic Certification Agency, Ex-Joint Director of Agriculture, Assam. Advisor, Media and Publicity, Assam Science Society and Advisor, Ankurita Asom)



Painkiller + rest is better than physiotherapy - Is it really true?

By: Dr Yogitaa Mandhyaan

If I had a rupee for every time I've heard this in my clinic, I could probably fund free physiotherapy sessions for half of Kolkata. This casual advice—often shared by well-meaning relatives, friends, or even that neighbour who claims their knee pain vanished after two weeks of complete bed rest—has become one of the most dangerous myths in healthcare today. And honestly? It's costing people their mobility, their independence, and years of pain-free living.

Let me introduce myself. I'm Dr. Yogitaa Mandhyaan, a physiotherapist with nearly two decades of clinical experience. Over the past 20 years, I've worked with thousands of patients across Kolkata and beyond—from young IT professionals hunched over laptops to elderly grandmothers struggling with knee arthritis, from sports injuries to post-surgical rehabilitation. What truly drives me isn't just treating pain—it's watching a patient walk without wincing, seeing someone lift their grandchild again, or hearing "Doctor, I can finally sleep through the night."

And that's exactly why I need to address this myth head-on.

The Illusion of the Quick Fix

Here's what typically happens: You wake up with back pain. Maybe you slept in an awkward position, or perhaps you've been sitting at your desk for 10 hours daily. The pain is sharp, un-

comfortable. So you pop a painkiller—maybe a Combiflam or a Voveran—and decide to "rest it out" for the weekend. By Monday, the pain has dulled. Problem solved, right?

Wrong.

What you've done is silenced the alarm without addressing the fire. Painkillers are brilliant at masking symptoms. They're like putting a piece of tape over your car's check engine light. The light stops bothering you, sure, but the engine? Still broken. And now you're driving around completely unaware that something fundamental needs fixing.

In my years of practice, I've seen this pattern repeat itself dozens of times each month. The person who ignored their initial back pain with painkillers and rest shows up six months later with a herniated disc. The young woman who "rested" her ankle sprain comes back with chronic instability and recurring injuries. The uncle who believed bed rest would cure his frozen shoulder now can't lift his arm above his head.

What Rest Actually Does (And Doesn't Do)

Now, don't misunderstand me—rest has its place in healing. In the acute phase of injury, during the first 24-72 hours, some rest is necessary. But there's a massive difference between strategic rest and prolonged immobilisation.

When you rest completely for extended periods, here's what your body does: muscles weaken, joints stiffen, circulation decreases,

scar tissue forms incorrectly, and your nervous system starts perceiving normal movements as threatening. I've treated patients who rested for just two weeks and lost significant muscle strength. Getting that back? It takes weeks of dedicated work.

The human body is designed for movement. Our joints need motion to produce synovial fluid—nature's lubricant. Our muscles need activation to maintain strength and flexibility. Our circulatory system needs movement to deliver nutrients and remove waste products efficiently. When you lie in bed for days, you're essentially telling your body, "We don't need these functions anymore." And your body, being the efficient machine it is, starts shutting them down.

The Painkiller Problem Nobody Talks About

Let's talk about those painkillers you're casually popping. NSAIDs—non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs like ibuprofen, diclofenac, or naproxen—are among the most commonly overused medications in India. Walk into any pharmacy in Kolkata, and you don't even need a prescription for most of them.

But here's what happens when you rely on them long-term: gastric ulcers and bleeding, kidney damage, cardiovascular risks, liver problems, and perhaps most ironically, medication-overuse headaches. I've had patients develop serious gastrointestinal issues because they were taking painkillers daily for months to manage what could have been resolved with proper

physiotherapy in weeks.

And there's another insidious effect: painkillers give you false confidence. You feel better, so you move incorrectly. You load weight on a joint that's still damaged. You twist in ways your body isn't ready for. Because the pain signal—your body's warning system—has been chemically switched off, you end up causing more damage without even realising it.

Why Physiotherapy is Better Than Painkillers

This is where physiotherapy fundamentally differs from the painkiller-and-rest approach. Physiotherapy doesn't just suppress symptoms—it addresses the root cause of your pain.

When a patient comes to see me, we don't just ask "where does it hurt?" We ask, "Why does it hurt?" Is it because of muscle imbalance? Poor posture? Weak core stability? Limited joint mobility? Improper movement patterns? Once we identify the actual problem, we create a targeted treatment plan.

Through manual therapy, we restore normal joint mechanics. Through therapeutic exercises, we rebuild strength in weakened muscles and improve flexibility in tight ones. Through movement re-education, we teach your body to move correctly again—whether you're lifting a bag of groceries or playing with your children. Through modalities like ultrasound, TENS, or laser therapy, we promote actual tissue healing, not just pain suppression.

The difference in outcomes is staggering. A recent patient of mine, a 45-year-old software engineer with chronic lower back pain, had been living on painkillers for eight months. Within six weeks of targeted physiotherapy—core strengthening, postural correction, and ergonomic modifications—he was pain-free and off all medications. Not because we masked his pain, but because we fixed what was broken.

The Movement Philosophy

Throughout my career, I've learned one fundamental truth: movement is medicine. But that first step toward proper treatment is often the hardest. It means admitting that the quick fix didn't work. It means committing to showing up for therapy sessions, doing your home exercises, and trusting the process. But once you take it, everything changes.

I've watched elderly patients regain the ability to climb stairs independently. I've seen young athletes return to their sports stronger than before their injuries. I've witnessed people who had resigned themselves to "living with the

pain" discover that they don't have to—not when they address the problem properly.

The Real Cost of Choosing Wrong

Here's something I want you to consider: What's more expensive in the long run? Investing in a few weeks of physiotherapy now, or spending years buying painkillers, risking medication side effects, gradually losing mobility, and potentially needing surgery later?

I'm not exaggerating. In Kolkata alone, I've seen countless cases where delayed or avoided physiotherapy led to conditions that required surgical intervention—knee replacements that could have been postponed or avoided, spinal surgeries for problems that were manageable with proper rehabilitation, and shoulder surgeries for frozen shoulders that responded beautifully to physiotherapy when caught early.

The financial cost is significant, but the human cost is even greater. It's the grandmother who can't play with her grandchildren because her knees hurt too much. The young professional whose career is affected because chronic neck pain makes working at a computer unbearable. The athlete whose sports career ends prematurely because a "minor" injury was never properly rehabilitated.

Moving Forward, Literally

If there's one message I want you to take from this, it's this: Your body deserves better than being numbed into silence.

Pain is communication. It's your body saying, "Something here needs attention." And while painkillers can give you temporary relief—which sometimes you genuinely need—they should never be your only strategy. Rest has its place, but movement is medicine.

Modern physiotherapy combines evidence-based techniques with individualised care. We use manual therapy, therapeutic exercises, education, and yes, when appropriate, adjunct treatments to help your body heal properly. We don't just want you pain-free for a day—we want you functional, strong, and resilient for life.

After nearly two decades in this field, working with everyone from national-level athletes to homemakers managing daily chores, I can say with absolute confidence: The path to lasting recovery isn't through a pill bottle or your bed. It's through proper assessment, targeted treatment, and guided movement.

Your journey to genuine healing is just one step away. Because at the end of the day, life is meant to be lived in movement, not in pain. (Courtesy: Youth Ki Awaaz)

How to cut down on trans fats if cooking from scratch isn't an option

By: Emma Beckett

Work is finished, and you're tired and hungry. Maybe you're rushing home to daycare pickup.

You know you should be cooking dinner from scratch for the healthiest choice but that isn't going to happen for a variety of reasons. You just need something quick and easy.

Then, you remember those headlines about trans fats in some packaged convenience foods and you start to worry.

If this feels familiar, here's what you need to know.

What exactly are trans fats?

Typically, we talk about two major groups of dietary fats — unsaturated and saturated.

Unsaturated fats are liquid at room temperature. Saturated fats are solid at room temperature. It's the saturated fats that are associated with health concerns as they can raise LDL (aka "bad") cholesterol and increase inflammation.

Trans fats are technically unsaturated fats. But a slight difference in their molecular arrangement means they act more like saturated fats — in foods and the body.

Which foods have trans fats?

Small amounts of trans fats occur naturally in some animal foods, such as red meat and dairy. They can also be created when oils are heated to very high temperatures, such as with commercial deep-frying.

But most trans fats in our diets are "industrial" trans fats. These are made when unsaturated fats are deliberately turned into trans fats by a process called hydrogenation. This makes them act more like saturated fats — improving shelf life, taste and texture.

Industrial trans fats can be ingredients in pre-packaged foods such as shelf-stable cakes, pastries, fried savoury snacks and some frozen foods.

Why should we be cutting down on trans fats?

Initially, industrial trans fats were regarded as an innovation as they allowed manufacturers to replace expensive, unhealthy saturated fats. But we now know trans fats don't just act like saturated fats in foods. They also act like saturated fats in the body, raising LDL cholesterol and causing inflammation. This ultimately increases the risk of cardiovascular diseases (such as heart attacks and strokes) even if you don't eat much of them.

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends we keep trans fats to less than 1 per cent of our total energy intake (which is about 2.2 grams per day if you are eating a standard 8,000 kilojoule diet). That means eating less than about four 300g serves of frozen lasagne a day.

The use of trans fats in Australia has declined in recent decades and the average consumption of trans fats is below the WHO-recommended levels. But an estimated 10 per cent or so of Australians are eating more than the WHO recommends.

Some countries have introduced regulations to limit the levels of trans fats allowed in foods. The WHO recommends foods contain no more than 2g of trans fats per 100g of total fats. This hasn't happened in Australia despite some calls for it.

Because "industrial" trans fats are typically found in prepackaged discretionary foods (such as shelf-stable pastries, cakes and biscuits) and con-



venience foods (such as frozen meals), it's tempting to revert to the simplified "just eat fresh whole foods and cook from scratch" style of recommendation.

But cooking from scratch may not be realistic

However, for many people, cooking every meal from scratch isn't practical, affordable or enjoyable. But there are practical and meaningful ways to eat less trans fats even when eating convenience and discretionary foods, without changing your whole lifestyle or becoming a chef.

When shopping for snacks, frozen or other pre-packaged convenience products, check the labels for trans fats. But this can be a bit tricky as they're not always mentioned, or may be called something else.

In Australia, it's not mandatory to include trans fats on food labels, unless a manufacturer makes nutrition or health claim about fats or cholesterol. If this is the case, trans fat needs to be listed on the nutrition information panel.

The rest of the time, the trans fat content does not have to be listed, but manufacturers might declare it voluntarily.

You can also look for "hydrogenated" or "partially hydrogenated" in the ingredients list.

However, manufacturers only have to declare hydrogenation if a specific vegetable oil is listed. If the ingredient is generic "vegetable oil", the manufacturer doesn't have to specify whether that oil has been hydrogenated.

So, for certainty, look for products that specifically list the unsaturated fats they use as ingredients (for instance, canola oil, sunflower oil or olive oil), as these would have to include the extra detail.

Don't stress about cooking with oils at home, as they don't get hot enough to produce a meaningful amount of trans fats. Most margarines and shortenings in Australia have now been reformulated to have little to no trans fats.

If you are ordering takeaways or fast foods, deep frying at high temperatures can lead to a modest increase in trans fats. Choosing outlets that use liquid vegetable oils reduces this risk. Most fast-food chains in Australia use high-oleic canola oils or blends that don't contain trans fats.

We don't need to turn into chefs overnight

At the end of the day, trans fats are not necessary, nor are they health-promoting. But we don't need to overhaul our lives, cook every meal from scratch or track every gram of fat we eat.

With a little bit of label-reading, a few simple swaps, and a general pattern of choosing foods made with plant-based oils instead of solid fats can give you the confidence you are minimising your exposure to trans fats. (Courtesy: Down to Earth)

Herbal medicines are not necessarily effective for every person

By: Dr Vijay Garg

This makes it tricky, when we assume that if this herb has benefited this person in this merge, then it will also benefit me. Just as allopathic medicines do not necessarily have an effect on everyone, herbal medicines are also not necessarily effective for every person. It is not right to expect a hundred percent benefits from herbs.

Herbal is not a low-level medicinal facility. But mistaking it for a miracle is also wrong. Not every herb drug is herbal. But these days the word herbal seems to be a guarantee of trust. Just by looking at herbal, natural or Ayurvedic written on any product you assume that a hundred percent will be safe without side effects but this is not the right thing to do.

Not safe in every case

It is important to understand that not everything in nature is safe. Dhatura, Aak etc. are natural medicinal plants, but their side effects are also known throughout the world. Similarly, many herbs can do harm instead of good in the wrong amounts, produced incorrectly and given to the wrong person. Therefore, blindly using herbal or considering it without any kind of side effects is a mistake. Many people start using herbal because if it doesn't help, it won't hurt. Because there is no side effect of some kind in herbal. But it is not so. Herbal medicines can also not only cause harm but side effects are possible from them. Therefore, it is necessary to seek the advice of experts even while using herbal. Don't make assumptions on your own. Do not believe in miracles.

The problem arises as soon as we take the

herbal to be a miracle or magical. Many people when there is no immediate relief in allopathy, they come to the treatment of herbs thinking that it may not bring any benefit immediately but there will be some harm and eventually some good. That is, there will be no side effects. But these assumptions are wrong. Actually the formation of such a perception is amazing marketing of herbs. Many companies say that these herbs are a hundred percent natural and there is no side effect, as well as the sure cure with them. All of these things don't stand up to scientific scrutiny. These are straight-up propaganda hoops. In such a case it is not right to expect hundred per cent advantages from any herb. This also makes things difficult in and of itself, when we assume that if this herb has benefited this person in this merge, it will benefit me as well. That doesn't make sense. Just as allopathic medicines do not necessarily have to affect everyone, herbal medicine does not have to impact every person. Many times many people resort to the refuge of herbal treatments in order to avoid the hefty fees of doctors and the expensive tests they perform. But these can be your own problem, herbal medicines are not responsible for this. So don't expect miracles from Herbal.

Not the same cure for every disease

There are some diseases in which herbal medicine can only be helpful but the main cure is not from them. Such as heart attacks, brain strokes or brain hemorrhages and other serious illnesses, herbal does not have a cure for these troubles. They have to stay in the hospital, surgery and monitoring. Similarly, the severe infection of typhoid, TB, is also not cured by herbal medicines.

5 biggest skincare mistakes to avoid in 2026

By: Dr Rupika Singh

Today, skincare is changing rapidly than ever. With new products, Korean skincare trends and technology taking over the cosmetic market, consumers are spoilt for choice. What hasn't changed however is the basics.

In 2026, the aim is not just to fix your acne or pores. Pay attention to your routine. Here are five basic skincare mistakes you should avoid making in order to protect your skin.

Mistake #1. Treating your skin like a social media new trend

A 28-year-old marketing professional walked into a clinic complaining of sudden breakouts and burning skin. Reason? A viral 'glass skin' routine that included double cleansing, exfoliating toner twice daily, retinol, vitamin C and slugging (applying a thick layer of petroleum jelly or something similar on your face as part of your nightly skin care routine). What she didn't realise is that her skin barrier was severely compromised.

You have to remember that what is working for someone else may not work for you. How your skin responds to various routines depends upon your genes, climatic conditions or hormones.

The mistake? Indian skin type is

prone to pigmentation.

When you overload your skin with too many active ingredients, it leads to redness, sensitivity or acne.

What to do instead?

Build a boring but consistent routine. Start with a cleanser. Follow it up with a moisturiser and sunscreen.

Mistake #2. Chasing results with no focus on skin barrier health

A bride-to-be started weekly chemical peels at home to 'brighten skin faster'. Within a month, she developed patchy pigmentation and dryness that worsened with makeup. Her skin wasn't dull; it was inflamed.

The mistake? Over-exfoliation doesn't guarantee natural glow. Dullness, acne and premature ageing are increasingly linked to skin barrier damage. Excess and unnecessary exfoliation strips your healthy skin of ceramides, disrupts the microbiome and triggers pigmentation.

What to do instead? Focus on barrier-repair ingredients like ceramides, cholesterol, panthenol and niacinamide. Remember: A calm skin is a glowing skin.

Mistake #3. Subscribing to

anti-aging actives too early or too aggressively

A 22-year-old college student began using prescription-strength retinoid (vitamin A skincare treatment, usually prescribed by an expert) regularly at night because she believed that 'prevention is better than cure'. Within weeks, she developed peeling, acne flares and post-inflammatory pigmentation. The mistake? Starting a strong retinoid without expert recommendation or guidance.

Anti-ageing is not about starting early; it's about starting smart. Using potent actives too young or too frequently can backfire, leading to sensitivity and long-term damage.

What to do instead? If you're under 25, focus on using sunscreen and antioxidants and improving hydration and sleep. Retinoid should be introduced gradually, based on skin concern; not out of fear of ageing.

Mistake #4. Skipping sunscreen when indoors or during winters

A software engineer working from home noticed worsening melasma (patches on the face) despite using expensive serums. The culprit? No application of sunscreen while indoors, especially when her routine involved sitting and working near a window daily.

The mistake? Skipping sun-

screen because 'I don't go out much.'

It's high time someone told you that blue light from screens and UVA rays through glass can also contribute to pigmentation and collagen breakdown. Winters don't block UV damage; clouds don't either. What to do instead? A broad spectrum sunscreen is mandatory even when it is a cloudy day or you are staying indoors. Opt for one that is lightweight and helps to moisturise the skin.

Mistake #5. Expecting skincare to fix damage caused by poor lifestyle

A 35-year-old influencer invested heavily in luxury skincare but continued to complain of skin dullness and hairfall. When discussing her daily regime, we realised she lacked good quality sleep. She had high levels of stress and her meal timings were imbalanced.

The mistake? She solely relied on expensive skincare products while neglecting the role of sleep, diet and stress.

Good, healthy skin is an extension of internal wellness. With high cortisol levels, acne gets worsened, stress begins premature ageing and nutrient deficiencies reflect on the skin long before the blood reports show abnormalities.

(Courtesy: Rediff.com)

Budget lacklustre, disappointing: Cong

NEW DELHI, Feb 1: The Congress on Sunday described the Union Budget as "totally lacklustre" and blind to India's real crises, saying it did not offer any solution to the country's economic, social and political challenges.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said the Narendra Modi government had run out of ideas as there was no policy vision or political will, and the Budget provided no solutions or even slogans to paper over the absence of substance.

"The Modi Government has run out of ideas. Budget 2026 does not provide a single solution to India's many economic, social, and political challenges. "Mission Mode" is now 'Challenge Route'. Reform Express rarely stops at any "Reform" Junction. Net result: no policy vision, no political will," Kharge said in a social media post.

"This Budget offers no solutions, not even slogans to hide the absence of policy," the Congress chief said.

Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi said the Budget was "blind to India's real crises", and highlighted how the youth were without jobs, manufactur-

ing was falling and farmers were in distress.

"Youth without jobs. Falling manufacturing. Investors pulling out capital. Household savings plummeting. Farmers in distress. Looming global shocks - all ignored," the Congress leader said.

"A Budget that refuses course correction, blind to India's real crises," Gandhi said in a post on X.

Congress general secretary, communications, Jairam Ramesh said the speech by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman was "non-transparent" as it gave no idea of the budgetary allocations for key programmes and schemes.

"While the documents need to be studied in detail, it is clear after 90 minutes that Budget 2026/27 falls woefully short of the hype that was generated about it. It was totally lacklustre," Ramesh said in a post on X.

"The speech was also non-transparent since it gave no idea whatsoever of budgetary allocations for key programmes and schemes," he said.

Another Congress general secretary KC Venugopal said the Budget was not for



common people, but for large corporations and wondered how people could welcome it as there was nothing in it.

"How can people welcome this Budget, there is nothing in it. It is completely hollow," he said.

"A listless, heartless budget from a clueless government. What began last session with the axing of MGNREGA has gone forward with massive welfare cuts in the name of 'fiscal discipline'," he said on X, alleging that it was a Budget for nobody

except crony capitalists.

Congress general secretary Randeep Surjewala termed the Budget as "politically directionless" and "policy-wise bankrupt".

"Technical Mumbo Jumbo, Zero Substance! Lots of Committees, Zero Deliverables! Not a word for farmers. Not a word for Unemployed Youth. Not a word for labour. Not a word for SC, ST, OBC's. Not a word for workers. Not a word for social sectors. Not a word for Opposition

ruled states. Reform Express derailed even before leaving the station," he said.

Congress deputy leader in the Rajya Sabha Pramod Tiwari said the Budget was "most disappointing" as it offered nothing to the farmers, youth or the country's economy.

"The faces of the ruling party show that there cannot be a more disappointing budget than this, which has cheated people... it is the most disappointing. It offers nothing for the farmers, for providing employment to the youth and for the country's economy... It is one which has cheated people and given disappointment to the country," he told reporters. Kharge said farmers still awaited meaningful welfare support or an income security plan.

"Inequality has surpassed the levels seen under the British Raj, but the Budget does not even mention it or provide any support to SC, ST, OBC, EWS, and Minority communities.

"The Finance Commission's recommendations will have to be studied more, but they do not appear to provide any relief to State Governments which are under severe financial stress. Federalism has be-

come a casualty," he said.

Highlighting what was missing, the Congress chief said there was no revival strategy for manufacturing, and asked, "Where is 'Make in India'?"

"Jobs: no serious plan for employability for our Youth or increasing participation of women in workforce. What is the outcome of earlier internship and skill development schemes?"

"Private investment: no confidence signal - FDI and wage stagnation ignored. Why only minor adjustments, no structural reforms? Infrastructure: promises repeated, delivery missing-cities still unliveable.

"Social Security: There was not a single substantial announcement on social security and welfare. There is not one word on the allocation for the new law that has replaced MGNREGA. Why?" he said. In her speech, Sitharaman announced that the target for capex will be raised to ₹12.2 lakh crore for FY27 from the ₹11.2 lakh crore earmarked for the current fiscal year. She announced a slew of measures to boost infrastructure in the country, including in tier-2 and tier-3 cities. (PTI)

'Series of subheadings, completely short of overall vision': Tharoor slams Budget

NEW DELHI, Feb 1: Senior Congress leader Shashi Tharoor on Sunday used a cricketing analogy to express his disappointment with the Union Budget, saying Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman "seems to have missed the ball".

In an interview with PTI at the news agency's headquarters, Tharoor said Sitharaman's Budget speech seemed to have "lots of subheadings but very few specifics", and was "completely short" of an overall vision. As a Kerala MP, Tharoor said, he had nothing to be happy about in this Budget.

Tharoor asserted that the biggest unanswered question remains jobs, noting that there was little in the Budget speech to indicate how employment would be generated.

Asked whether the finance minister has "hit it out of the park" or "missed the ball completely and been stumped," Tharoor said, "I don't know if she's been stumped yet, but she certainly seems to have missed the ball. In one or two places, she may have got edges, but I'm not quite sure that we've got anything off the meat of the bat so far."

Noting that it was a fairly short Budget speech, Tharoor said it seemed to have lots of subheadings but very few specifics.

"There was nothing there for the states. In fact, fiscal devolution remains unchanged at 41 per cent, and many states have complained that they don't have enough to fulfil their own obligations to their citizens," the former Union minister

said, adding that there was "genuine concern" over it.

He claimed that there were very few details on key aspects, such as what would be set up and where and cited Kerala as an example, saying the state has been waiting nearly 15 years for an All India Institute of Medical Sciences, but no announcement was made.

"There was a reference to an All India Institute of Ayurveda being established, but not any indication as to where. Kerala would imagine that, as a major centre of Ayurveda, it should be a logical place, but they haven't promised us that," the Thiruvananthapuram MP said.

In fact, Kerala was only mentioned in the context of rare earths and the turtle trail, he said.

"Even when coconuts and cashews were talked about, the state wasn't mentioned. So, I am assuming that some of these subheadings she spoke about will translate into concrete projects and programmes for us...but where details came, we had reason for disappointment, for example, ship repair for inland waterways, they are parking them in Varanasi and Patna despite Kerala having so many rivers and inland waterways," he said.

"I have a lot of these questions and concerns about that, and on the larger issue of where the country is heading, the biggest question remains jobs. There was little saying that we will generate jobs through this or that," Tharoor said.

He claimed that the speech was completely short of an overall vi-

sion.

"What was it supposed to be about - whether it is supposed to be proclaiming a new reform era? It did not do that...What was it about? It was a series of subheadings, but there was no clear unifying vision," the Congress leader said.

Criticising the Budget, Tharoor said welfare measures were not specified, except for the reference to the Mahatma Gandhi Gram Swaraj Yojana.

"What is interesting is that they took away Mahatma Gandhi's name from the Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme and applied it to another alleged village development scheme. I'd like to see what exactly comes out of it and what kind of allocations it has," he said.

"Some of these conversations perhaps need to await the full budget document," he added.

Tharoor said he was not sure whether the finance minister had paid attention to the issues that voters and politicians usually focus on.

"For example, there was absolutely nothing for the middle class or the lower middle class that one could hear," he said.

Tharoor also asked why there was no clarity given on whether the GRAM G Act would be given adequate financing. He said he was surprised not to hear his state mentioned more often in the Budget speech.

"It was also short on the kind of couplets from Thiruvalluvar we got used to hearing not only from Nirmala ji but even from the prime

minister and other leaders, the vice president and others who used to love quoting Thiruvalluvar. Here's an election opportunity in Tamil Nadu, a few months away. No Thiruvalluvar in the speech. I was surprised," he said, taking a swipe at the government.

Normally, there is one big headline coming out of the Budget speech, but it was not the case this time, he said.

Asked about concerns surrounding India's trade, particularly in the context of the deal not being sealed with the US as well as tariff issues, Tharoor said, "Well, the US was our largest market, and that market has certainly been affected by the 50 per cent tariffs.

"People have done various workarounds... I don't know at this stage, unless some kind of accommodation can be found with the Americans, whether we will be able to recapture the chunk of the American market that we have lost."

Tharoor said, conversely, the European Union could emerge as India's next biggest market. While there is much to be enthusiastic about in the deal that was announced, he cautioned that it has not yet come into force.

"I had understood that all 27 countries of the European Union need to ratify it. I see the commerce minister has made a statement, saying that it is not necessary. I think we will have to wait to hear from the Europeans as to when and how this can come into force," Tharoor added. (PTI)

This Budget reflects people's unwavering trust in PM Modi: BJP chief Nitin Nabin

NEW DELHI, Feb 1: BJP national president Nitin Nabin on Sunday said that the Union Budget is a step forward towards fulfilling the resolve of making India a developed country alongside ensuring the welfare of every section of society, including the poor, farmers, women and youth.

"This Budget fully reflects the unwavering trust that the people have in Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The prime minister's guiding principle of 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas' is clearly evident in every dimension of this Budget," Nabin said.

Nabin also highlighted that the Budget for 2026-27 is also a clear reflection of the continuity of policy and good governance of the NDA government under Prime Minister Modi, with Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman presenting it for the ninth consecutive time.

"This Budget is a step forward towards realising the dreams of a developed India by 2047 while ensuring the welfare of every section of society, including the poor, farmers, women, and youth," the BJP chief said.

"I wholeheartedly welcome the Budget. The fact that Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has presented the country's Budget for the ninth consecutive time is a clear reflection of the continuity of policy and good governance of the government of India," he added.

Nabin said that despite global uncertainties, the way India's econ-

omy continues to grow at nearly 7 per cent indicates that the country's GSP and GDP have been consistently strengthening, while inflation has been kept under control.

"This is a well-thought-out Budget, which reflects confidence in inclusive progress and clearly shows the government's intention to strengthen projects related to education and infrastructure," he said.

The BJP president noted that it's also a "youth-driven Budget" as it seeks to generate new employment opportunities for them. "Through infrastructure growth, it aims to advance manufacturing units and emphasises the creation of new employment opportunities," he said.

Nabin mentioned that the support extended by the government to sectors such as semiconductors, electronics, sports, and biopharma is "commendable".

"The strong support system established through approximately ₹400 crore for the semiconductor sector and ₹10,000 crore for the biopharma sector clearly demonstrates the government's serious focus on generating new employment opportunities," he said.

The BJP chief emphasised that the Budget also clearly reflects Mahatma Gandhi's vision of 'Gram Swaraj'.

"It will benefit our artisans and small cottage industries and strengthen employment in rural areas. The government's continued efforts are also evident in the development of tourism and cultural

centres, aligning with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision," he said.

Nabin said the finance minister's announcement about the operationalisation of 20 new national waterways over the next five years is a step towards opening "new dimensions" in transportation. "While we have traditionally focused on airways, roadways, and railways, the development of waterways now offers better opportunities for progress," he said.

Plans to develop Patna and Varanasi as ship-repairing centres will also generate large-scale new employment opportunities in these regions, he added.

Nabin said the priority given to the coconut industry and fisheries in the budget reflects the government's intention to ensure inclusive progress, bringing all sectors and communities along.

"I also congratulate Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman for increasing the Budget allocation for the transport sector. Similarly, the provision of ₹7.8 lakh crore for defence clearly indicates that the nation's security is non-negotiable," he added.

Nabin said the Budget reflects a "clear intention" to include every section of society in development and progress. Whether it is the youth, women, the middle class, or any other segment of society, clear direction and resources have been allocated for all in the Budget, he said. (PTI)

SC to hear plea challenging Sonam Wangchuk's detention

NEW DELHI, Feb 1: The Supreme Court is slated to hear on Monday a plea filed by Gitanjali J Angmo, the wife of jailed climate activist Sonam Wangchuk, against his detention under the National Security Act.

A bench of Justice Aravind Kumar and Justice P B Varale is likely to hear the matter.

On January 29, Wangchuk, who is under detention in Jodhpur Central Jail, denied allegations that he made a statement to overthrow the government like Arab Spring, emphasising that he has the democratic right to criticise and protest.

Senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for Wangchuk's wife, submitted that police have relied on a selective video to mislead the detaining authority.

It had also directed medical exami-

nation by a specialist doctor of the climate activist after he complained of stomach issues due to water contamination.

Angmo's claims the detention is illegal and an arbitrary exercise violating his fundamental rights.

On November 24, the top court deferred the matter after Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Centre and the Union Territory of Ladakh, sought time to respond to the rejoinder filed by Angmo.

On October 29, the court sought responses from the Centre and the Ladakh administration on an amended plea of Angmo.

Wangchuk was detained under the stringent National Security Act (NSA) on September 26, two days after violent protests demanding statehood and Sixth Schedule status for Ladakh left

four people dead and 90 injured in the Union territory.

The government had accused him of inciting the violence.

According to the amended plea, the detention order is founded upon "stale FIRs, vague imputations, and speculative assertions, lacks any live or proximate connection to the purported grounds of detention and is thus devoid of any legal or factual justification".

"Such arbitrary exercise of preventive powers amounts to gross abuse of authority, striking at the core of constitutional liberties and due process, rendering the detention order liable to be vitiated by this court," it alleged.

The plea said it is wholly preposterous that after more than three decades of being recognised at the state, national, and international levels for his contributions to grassroots education,

innovation, and environmental conservation in Ladakh and across India, Wangchuk would suddenly be targeted.

Angmo said the unfortunate events of violence in Leh on September 24 cannot be attributed to the actions or statements of Wangchuk in any manner.

Wangchuk himself condemned the violence through his social media handles and categorically stated that violence would lead to the failure of Ladakh's "tapasya" and peaceful pursuit of five years, Angmo said, adding it was the saddest day of his life.

The NSA empowers the Centre and states to detain individuals to prevent them from acting in a manner "prejudicial to the defence of India".

The maximum detention period is 12 months, though it can be revoked earlier. (PTI)

Cong takes dig at govt after Trump's 'India to buy Venezuelan oil' remark

NEW DELHI, Feb 1: The Congress on Sunday took a swipe at the Modi government over US President Donald Trump's remarks that India is going to buy oil from Venezuela instead of Iran, saying the American leader continues to give "information on what our own government has done or will be doing".

The opposition party's dig came after Trump, responding to a question, told reporters while travelling on Air Force One, "China is welcome to come in and we'll make a great deal on oil. We welcome China."

"We've already made a deal. India is coming in, and they're going to be buying Venezuelan oil as opposed to buying it from Iran. So, we've already made that deal, the concept of the deal," Trump said. Congress general secretary in-charge



communications Jairam Ramesh shared the audio of Trump's remarks on X.

"He (Trump) told us Op Sindoor had been halted. He told us India had stopped buying Russian oil. And now this," the Congress leader said.

"President Trump continues to give us information on what our own government has done or will be doing," Ramesh said on X. (PTI)

Air Marshal Wallia takes charge as AOC-in-C Eastern Air Command

KOLKATA, Feb 1: Air Marshal Inderpal Singh Wallia on Sunday assumed charge as Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief of the Eastern Air Command of the Indian Air Force (IAF), an official said.

An alumnus of the National Defence Academy, Wallia is qualified on all variants of MiG-21, MiG-23, MiG-27, Jaguar and Sukhoi-30 MKI.

Commissioned in the fighter jet stream of the IAF in June, 1988, he has over 3,200 hours of accident-free flying experience, the Defence official said.

Wallia has also served as the Defence attache at the Indian Embassy of Japan and South Korea.

Wallia succeeds Air Marshal Surat Singh, who superannuated on January 31, after 39 years of service.

Prior to taking over as the AOC-in-C, Eastern Air Command, he was senior air staff officer at headquarters, EAC, the official said.

On the same day, Air Marshal Devendra P Hirani took charge as the senior air staff officer at the Eastern Air Command. (PTI)

Budget has never been a constraint for DRDO: Joint director BK Das

KOLKATA, Feb 1: DRDO joint director Binoy Kumar Das on Sunday said that budget has never been a constraint for the premier government research organisation engaged in designing and developing state-of-the-art defence technologies and weapon systems.

He said that there has always been great support from the Union government for making the defence research and production sector self-sufficient.

Speaking to reporters on the Union Budget proposal presentation day, the distinguished scientist said, "The government has always had unconditional support for DRDO (Defence Research and Development Organisation), and budget has never been a constraint for us."

He said that the DRDO has been asked to work on the next-generation technology, which nobody in the world has got.

"We have to work on such equipment which our armed forces are dreaming to have, and we can't wait to import such equipment because with today's changing geopolitical situations, the kind of war scenarios happening, the dynamism has changed," he said after receiving the JIS Maha Samman award for his contributions in the fields of science and India's



Defence research at the Science City auditorium here.

He said that the young, fresh and best minds are together working to build a great India second to none, for which this budget is going to help the Defence research and manufacturing sector in India

to realise and empower the systems.

"This budget is going to help us to realise and empower our systems that what we develop...and make my country an economic superpower by export as well," he said.

"We have to develop the best of the

systems which will be exported from India to the rest of the world, so we are at a technology inflection point of this country," Das said.

Stating that India was denied import of defence technologies a few decades back, he said, "Today with pride we are denying import." He said that India, which has made significant breakthroughs in the semiconductor field by mastering the Gallium Nitride (GaN) technology, is working on self-sufficiency to the core in semiconductor technology.

"It is the mission of our government that we should be able to be self-sufficient to its core," Das said, adding that this can be achieved when in-depth research is done on the basic field, and semiconductors happen to be one of them.

"Who knows, a few years later (export of) even the basic semiconductor could be stopped to India," the DRDO joint director said when asked about the breakthrough in GaN technology, possessed by a select few countries including the USA, China and France, and had earlier been denied to India.

Asserting that India should be prepared for such denial, if that happens, he said, "And we can't be ready overnight. That is the reason the semiconductor mission

has gone in.

"By the time we realise our semiconductors, our own chips, India will be completely self-sufficient, not only in systems or subsystems, also on the technology as well as the basic core components, so that we can design and develop our systems, and produce those in numbers that nobody can choke the production," he said.

Asked about a time frame for developing such basic components within India, Das said that development of this kind of core technology takes time, giving examples of the USA, Japan and Taiwan.

"We could have also done it at the component level, but more important is first to be self-sufficient in the basic systems," he said.

"We have realised the systems, we have realised subsystems and now we are in situations to realise the components. Could be in another five to 10 years, we should be fully ready with our own," Das said.

Stating that denial is subjective, he said that 30 years back, when they made the first Agni missile with the test launch on May 22, 1989, the systems had been denied to India by those few countries possessing it. (PTI)

Karko village backs PFR for Siang Upper Multipurpose Project

Fifth village to sign MoU with Arunachal govt supporting preparatory works

ITANAGAR, Feb 1: Residents of Karko village in Arunachal Pradesh's Upper Siang district on Sunday signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the state government, extending their support for the preparation of the pre-feasibility report (PFR) for the Siang Upper Multipurpose Project (SUMP), a project of national importance.

The MoU signing marks a key milestone in advancing the preparatory phase of the project and underscores a process based on informed consent, sustained dialogue and community participation, while ensuring due consideration of environmental and social concerns, an official communique said.

The MoU was signed in Yingkiong, the district headquarters, between Dumiiin Nokar, representing the residents of the village and Upper Siang deputy commissioner Talo Jerang, on behalf of the state government in the presence of village residents and senior officials.

The programme was attended by Pasigat West MLA Ninnong Ering, who is also the advisor to the state Hydro Power minister and Tuting MLA Alo Libang, along with senior officials of the district administration and the hydro power department.

Addressing the gathering, Ering said the



agreement reflected the government's scientific, transparent and responsible approach to development.

He emphasised that preparation of the PFR is a crucial first step to comprehensively assess technical feasibility, environmental impact and social implications, while safeguarding national security and long-term strategic interests.

Libang, in his address, reiterated the long-

term significance of the Siang Upper Multipurpose Project for both Arunachal Pradesh and the nation.

He said the project is envisioned to strengthen energy security, improve flood moderation and contribute to overall regional development, while ensuring that the rights, welfare and active participation of local communities remain a priority.

Residents of Karko village expressed ap-

preciation for the government's consultative approach and awareness-building initiatives and reaffirmed their cooperation in the PFR-related activities of the project.

So far, five villages have formally signed MoUs supporting the preparation of the PFR for the project.

Earlier endorsements came from Riew, Riga, Pangkang (Kumku) and Begging villages, reflecting growing community engagement in the Siang belt ahead of the PFR process.

The Siang Upper Multipurpose Project, envisioned as a major hydropower and flood-control initiative with an estimated capacity of around 11,000 MW, is considered vital for energy security, regulated river flow, water storage, flood moderation and sustainable regional development. Proponents say the preliminary feasibility studies will help assess technical viability, environmental impacts and implications for local communities as part of a comprehensive planning process.

The MoU signing reflects continued cooperation, transparency and mutual understanding between the state government and the people of Karko village in taking forward the preparatory works of the SUMP. (PTI)

Ngandam urges Wancho community to shift from jhum cultivation

Calls for eco-friendly farming and wildlife conservation in TCL region



HT Correspondent

ITANAGAR, Feb 1: Honchun Ngandam, MLA and Advisor to the Minister for Public Works Department (PWD), has appealed to the Wancho community in the Tirap, Changlang and Longding (TCL) region to gradually move away from the traditional practice of jhum (shifting) cultivation.

Addressing the general public, Ngandam emphasised the need for a phased transition towards modern and eco-friendly agricultural practices to ensure environmental conservation and long-term economic stability.

He said that the Government of Arunachal Pradesh, under the leadership of Chief Minister Pema Khandu, is committed to providing sustainable alternatives to the peo-

ple.

He informed that through the Agriculture and Horticulture departments, the state government is strengthening schemes for high-value crops such as tea, ginger and tamul (betel nut). These permanent cultivation methods are aimed at replacing the soil-depleting cycle of shifting cultivation, while offering more stable and reliable income sources to the farming community.

Ngandam urged the people to adopt modern farming techniques that help preserve the state's rich biodiversity. He also appealed to air gun users to refrain from hunting wildlife.

Stressing that the protection of fauna is as vital as the conservation of flora, he said the ecological health of the TCL region depends on an immediate end to poaching and indiscriminate hunting.

By moving away from traditional hunting and jhum practices and embracing conservation-led livelihoods, Ngandam said the Wancho community can play a leading role in Arunachal Pradesh's green revolution.

Governor extends Donggin Festival greetings SAYA seeks probe into GUPS Ambam affairs

Alleges acute teacher shortage, zero enrolment and possible fund misuse

HT Correspondent

ITANAGAR, Feb 1: The Governor of Arunachal Pradesh, Lt General KT Parnik, PVSM, UYSM, YSM (Retd), extended his warm greetings to the people of the state, especially to the Adi community, on the auspicious occasion of the Donggin festival.

Celebrated in an atmosphere of joy and gaiety, the Governor said that Donggin marks the beginning of the new agro-horticultural season and reflects the close bond between the people and nature. He noted that the rituals and festivities associated with the festival in-

spire the spirit of sowing, cultivation and hard work, while also helping preserve age-old customs and traditions.

The Governor said that passed down through generations, Donggin continues to nurture the rich emotional, cultural and social values of the Adi community, thereby strengthening their collective identity and heritage.

Expressing his good wishes, he said, "May this joyous festival usher in happiness, prosperity, abundant harvests and a deep sense of unity and fraternity among all."



JNC fraternity bids adieu to iconic Principal Dr Tasi Taloh

Long association with JNC would always remain a matter of pride and emotional attachment



HT Correspondent

PASIGHAT, Feb 1: The Jawaharlal Nehru College (JNC), Pasigat fraternity organised a befitting farewell and felicitation programme at the JNC Auditorium on January 30, to mark the superannuation of its outgoing Principal, Dr Tasi Taloh, who retired after completing 39 years of dedicated service in the education sector.

Vice-Principal of JNC, Dr Leki Sitang, in his address expressed immense gratitude for Dr Taloh's visionary leadership and outstanding contribution to the institution.

He said that during Dr Taloh's tenure, JNC witnessed remarkable academic and infrastructural growth and modernisation.

Key initiatives included the establishment of new academic departments such as Mass Communication, strengthening of science laboratories, installation of CCTV surveillance, completion of environmental audits, signing of Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with national and international institutions and promotion of student-centric and community outreach programmes, including the campus community radio station.

His role in campus development and protection of college land was also highlighted.

Hailing from Ledum village in East Siang district, Dr Tasi Taloh completed his graduation from Jawaharlal Nehru College, Pasigat and later obtained his PhD from Rajiv Gandhi Univer-

His illustrious 39-year career included 14 years in school education and impactful tenures at Indira Gandhi Government College (IGGC), Tezu and in Tirap district.

Heads of departments, faculty members, ministerial staff and students spoke at length on Dr Taloh's role in institutional strengthening, discipline and inclusive administration.

Speakers appreciated his unwavering commitment to academic growth, staff welfare and holistic student development.

Among the key speakers were Secretary of the Staff Council Agin Taboh, HoD Education Dr DP Panda, Associate Professor Koj Taru, Dr Tatum Mibang, HoD Botany Dr Kento Kadu, HoD Zoology Dr SK Sinha, English Department faculty Dr Pema Mize and others, who expressed gratitude for Dr Taloh's mentorship and guidance.

In his farewell address, Dr Taloh expressed heartfelt gratitude to the faculty, staff and students for their cooperation and support throughout his service.

He said his long association with JNC would always remain a matter of pride and emotional attachment and urged all stakeholders to continue working collectively to uphold and enhance the legacy of JNC in academic excellence.

The programme concluded with cultural performances, including a traditional Kado dance, presented in honour of the outgoing Principal, the release informed.

Cleanliness top priority since election: Yukar Yaro

HT Correspondent

ITANAGAR, Feb 1: "Cleanliness and hygiene have been my top priorities since I was elected as corporator of the Itanagar Municipal Corporation (IMC) from Ward No-10", said Yukar Yaro while speaking to the media.

Yaro said that a mass social service and cleanliness drive was carried out in Ward 10 on the day, marking the second such drive in January during her second term as an IMC corporator.

The drive covered the Gandhi Market area and the arterial road connecting NH-415 via Gandhi Market, Gramin Nirman Bhawan, Itafort Urban Community Health Centre, Fire Service Station and Itanagar Police Station. She stated that cleanliness drives are mandatory for everyone and stressed that the IMC alone cannot maintain sanitation unless all stakeholders join hands and extend their support.

"Only with collective participation can we ensure that Itanagar city remains clean and hygienic," she said.

Highlighting the main objective of the IMC and the municipality, Yaro said that keeping the city clean is a shared responsibility.

She appealed to the residents of the twin capital city to dispose of household garbage only through IMC garbage trucks and refrain from throwing waste on streets, city roads and the National Highway.

She further urged citizens to use dustbins at home so that waste can be properly collected and disposed of through municipal vehicles, adding that public cooperation is essential for effective waste management and cleanliness in the city.

Golden Pagoda Marathon 2.0 concludes successfully in Namsai

Event showcases Arunachal Pradesh's sporting and tourism potential

HT Bureau

NAMSAL, Feb 1: The second edition of the Golden Pagoda Marathon (GPM 2.0) 2026 concluded on Sunday in Namsai with greater scale, participation and international presence, building upon the success of its inaugural edition. Organised under the theme "India's Most Scenic Run with Culture," the event reaffirmed Arunachal Pradesh's growing prominence on the sports and tourism map.

The marathon featured four categories: the 42-km full marathon, 21-km half-marathon, 10-km run and 5-km fun run, along with a special pre-event Namsai Run to encourage community participation. The flagship full marathon witnessed stellar performances, with Kenya's George Nganga Kimotho winning the men's race in 02:19:13, followed by Ethiopia's Amuma Terefe Seifu (02:21:26) and Tsegaye Molla (02:21:23). In the women's full marathon, Genet Shikur Reshid of Ethiopia finished first in 02:55:38, with Senait Keefelegn Lesharge (02:57:13) and Firehiwot Shemsu (02:58:06) completing the podium.

The half-marathon saw Jyoti claiming the women's title (01:18:42), while Rahul Yadav won the men's category (01:08:42). In the 10-km race, Ravi Choudhary (00:30:24) and Anisha Bisht

(00:38:09) emerged victorious in the men's and women's categories, respectively. The 5-km event was won by Humen Senapati (00:16:00) and Priya Chettri (00:18:21).

The marathon was flagged off from the iconic Golden Pagoda by MLA Zingnu Namchoom (47-Namsai), MLA Puiunyo Apum (Dambuk), Deputy Commissioners KN Damo (Lohit) and CR Khampa (Namsai), along with other dignitaries. Eminent athletes and motivational icons, including Sky London Book of Records holder Uday Singh, barefoot ultra-runner Shishupal Podder and ultra-runner Anika Konwar, inspired participants. Er Joram Lali served as the official Event-cum-Race Director of GPM 2.0.

The event drew over 2,000 participants from Ethiopia, Kenya, Sweden and 28 Indian states. Set amid Namsai's scenic landscapes, spiritual landmarks and vibrant culture, the Golden Pagoda Marathon has become a signature sporting event for Arunachal Pradesh, blending endurance sport with tourism and community engagement. The success of the second edition underscores the state's growing capacity to host large-scale national and international events while promoting adventure tourism and sustainable development.



HT Correspondent

ITANAGAR, Feb 1: The Save Arunachal Youth Association (SAYA) has appealed to the state government and the education department to enquire into the state of affairs of Government Upper Primary School (GUPS), Ambam, under Pistana circle in Keyi Panyor district, particularly regarding teachers' transfer, posting and overall school functioning.

Addressing media persons at the Arunachal Press Club (APC) on 31 January, president-cum-villager Likha Rajnik said parents are deeply concerned over the lack of quality education being imparted at the school.

He alleged that GUPS Ambam has been facing an acute shortage of teachers since 2019, which has severely affected academic activities.

Rajnik urged the state government to immediately transfer teaching staff to the school, stating that teachers have been posted "for no use" while continuing to draw monthly salaries.

He claimed that the student enrolment has been declining steadily since the school's upgradation, primarily due to poor academic performance caused by teacher absenteeism.

"Parents are in complete apprehension that teachers are not providing quality education," Rajnik said, adding that at present there is almost zero enrolment at the school.

The villagers said that the shortage of teachers, especially in remote and far-flung areas, is not a new issue in the state, but has now become a serious concern, adversely affecting students' academic performance year after year and forcing parents to withdraw their children from government schools.

Expressing apprehension over possible misuse of government funds, one villager alleged that grants provided by the education department for infrastructure development, uniforms, stationery, sports items, blackboards and other necessities might have been illegally siphoned off by school authorities, as there is reportedly no one to look after the school at present.

Indian Army, ITBP conduct Phase-II of joint firing exercise 'Agni Pariksha'

HT Correspondent

PASIGHAT, Feb 1: The Indian Army and the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) successfully conducted Phase-II of the joint firing exercise 'Agni Pariksha' from January 25 to 28, 2026, at Tezu in Arunachal Pradesh, with the aim of enhancing inter-force combat synergy and operational preparedness.

The four-day exercise witnessed the participation of Spearhead Gunners of the Spear Corps, along with personnel from artillery regiments, infantry battalions and the ITBP. The collaborative training initiative was validated through live artillery

firing and marked a significant step towards strengthening joint operational integration and coordination between the forces.

The primary focus of the exercise was to familiarise non-gunner personnel with artillery procedures and the execution of various firing missions. Infantry and ITBP troops were trained to independently conduct multiple artillery firing drills under the supervision of experienced gunners, thereby enhancing their understanding of effective firepower integration in battlefield scenarios.

The exercise exposed participating per-

sonnel to realistic combat conditions, which helped improve mutual trust, coordination and responsiveness among the Indian Army and ITBP units.

Exercise 'Agni Pariksha' Phase-II highlights the Indian Army's commitment to jointmanship, interoperability and realistic training and underscores its resolve to continually evolve, innovate and strengthen inter-agency cooperation to effectively meet emerging operational challenges, according to an official press statement issued by the Spearhead Gunners of Spear Corps from Sagar Military Station.

Devika Sihag secures maiden Super 300 title at Thailand Masters

BANGKOK, Feb 1: Young Indian shuttler Devika Sihag clinched her maiden BWF Super 300 crown after Malaysia's Goh Jin Wei retired midway through the women's singles final of the Thailand Masters, a USD 250,000 event, here on Sunday.

The 20-year-old from Haryana was leading 21-8, 6-3 when world No. 68 Goh, a two-time former world junior champion, pulled out due to a hamstring injury, handing the Indian the biggest title of her career.

"I'm really happy today as this is my first Super 300 title. I'm excited to play more tournaments ahead," Devika said.

"I've played very good matches here. I've learnt a lot. I'll implement them in my game and rectify my mistakes. Coming into the match I didn't think about winning or losing, rather wanted to give my 100%. That gave me the confidence.

"I thought to start with a good pace initially, and that worked well. She was tired I believe & had cramps. I wish for her recovery..

With this victory, Devika becomes only the third Indian woman to win a Super 300 women's singles title, joining an elite list that includes PV Sindhu and Saina Nehwal.

Ranked world No. 63, Devika trains under coach Umendra Rana at the Padukone-Dravid Centre for Sports Excellence in Bengaluru and has also been sharpening her



game alongside two-time Olympic medalist P. V. Sindhu under Indonesian coach Irwansyah Adi Pratama.

The final brought ecstasy for Devika but agony for her opponent Goh, who looked exhausted after playing four long three-game matches in the run-up to the final.

On Sunday, the Malaysian looked visibly tired as her movement was laboured. Goh,

who has struggled for form and fitness over the past two years and had complained of fatigue on Saturday, found it difficult to move around the court, often troubled by her left leg which would not budge.

In a solid start Devika opened up a 4-0 lead with the help of her deep returns, mixing her strokes well. A lucky net cord helped Goh log her first point.

The Indian's ability to produce cross-court and straight smashes, along with drops from the same action, helped her deceive her opponent as she zoomed to 9-2.

A precise smash followed by another delightful shot helped her take an 11-4 lead at the break.

A body smash from Goh was the first convincing shot, but Devika made her scramble across the court as the Malaysian just could not read the Indian.

The Malaysian looked exhausted and did not seem to have enough fuel to go through the grind that Devika put her through. It was one-way traffic as Devika held 13 game points with a superb net cross.

Another backhand net cross sealed it for the Indian. After the change of sides, Devika moved to a 6-3 lead as her opponent looked in discomfort and eventually decided to quit.

Devika's rise on the circuit has been steady. She claimed her maiden international title at the Malaysia International in August 2025 and later contributed to India's mixed team bronze at the 2025 World University Games.

Last season, she finished runner-up at the Indonesia Masters Super 100 and reached four finals in 2024, winning the Swedish Open and Portugal International, while finishing second at the Estonian International and Dutch International. (PTI)

India U17 girls gear up for stringent Bangladesh test



POKHARA, Feb 1: India will look to book their place in the final with a game to spare when Pamela Conti's Under-17 side take on a strong Bangladesh side in their second match of the SAFF U19 Women's Championship at the Pokhara Rangasala Stadium here on Monday.

Fielding their U-17 team as part of preparations for the AFC U17 Women's Asian Cup in China later this year, India began their campaign with a hard-fought 1-0 win over hosts Nepal.

Another victory against Bangladesh, coupled with Bhutan failing to beat Nepal in the later kick-off, will confirm India's spot in the title clash.

The Young Tigresses were pushed hard by Nepal, with the decisive goal coming in the 49th minute through Pearl Fernandes, the 16-year-old striker's 10th goal for the U17 national side.

Reflecting on her first match in charge, head coach Conti felt her players were eager but still adapting to her system.

"In my humble opinion, with me being a new coach, the players had a strong desire to do more, and to prove themselves. They are still not fully secure in their place in the team, and they want to show more, which led us to make more mistakes than usual.

"Overall, I am happy because I saw good things. But there were also things that were not so good, which we need to work on. And

that is exactly why we are here," she said.

Despite the picturesque backdrop of the Annapurna Himalayan range, the Pokhara pitch conditions posed challenges to India's possession-based style.

"The quality of the ground did affect us a lot. It makes playing with ball control and passing much more difficult. We have technically skilled players, and were superior to Nepal in that aspect, but the conditions definitely played their part," the Italian added.

Attention now shifts to Bangladesh, who stormed into the tournament with a commanding 12-0 win over Bhutan and are expected to provide a sterner physical test.

Conti and her staff even watched their rivals in action to assess their strengths.

"I think Bangladesh are a physically strong opponent. We need to take that into account. I believe that technically, we can hurt them a lot if we work better.

"But at the same time, I always think that there is much more to work on. Whether you win, lose, or draw, you have to come back and say: this is not enough, we cannot be satisfied with what we have.

"And for us, with very little time working together, the players have had to learn a new system of play that we have introduced. We have to improve a lot to achieve results. That means working, especially on the physical side," she added. (PTI)

Anahat enters final of Squash on Fire

NEW DELHI, Feb 1: Indian teenage star Anahat Singh reached her maiden PSA bronze-level final at the Squash on Fire Open in Washington with a 3-1 victory over Sabrina Sobhy of the USA.

The Indian world No. 31 and seventh seed defeated the American 11-9 11-3 9-11 11-5 in the semifinals. Sabrina is ranked world No. 23. Anahat will meet top seed and world No. 10 Georgina Kennedy of England in the title clash. Anahat had defeated second seed Sana Ibrahim of Egypt in the quarterfinals. (PTI)

National Rowing Championship concludes

PUNE, Feb 1: The Services Sports Control Board (SSCB) and the Army Sports Control Board have secured the first and second positions, respectively, in the overall standings at the 43rd Senior National Rowing Championship held at the Army Rowing Node (ARN) in Pune, officials said on Sunday.

The championship, held from January 27 to 31 at the ARN under the Mission Olympics Wing of the College of Military Engineering (CME), witnessed high-intensity contests, strong performances by elite rowers and smooth organisational conduct, marking another key moment for competitive rowing in the country, a release said.

Teams from various states and services participated in the championship. One of the major highlights was the Para Single Scull event, which organisers said reflected the values of resilience and inclusivity in sport.

Medal-winning crews from both SSCB and ASCB included rowers trained at the Army Rowing Node, underlining its role in developing elite talent under the Mission Olympics programme, the officials noted. The closing ceremony was attended by Lt Gen Dhiraj Seth, General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Southern Command, as the chief guest. Lt Gen Vipul Singhal, Deputy Chief of Army Staff, Lt Gen Vikas Rohella, Engineer-in-Chief, other senior Army officials and civil dignitaries, including Rowing Federation of India president Balaji Maradapa, were also present.

Addressing the gathering, the Army Commander praised ARN and CME for the conduct of the championship and reaffirmed the Indian Army's commitment to promoting high-performance sport and strengthening India's presence at national and international competitions. The Army Rowing Node at the CME in Pune recently won the World Rowing's 'Programme of the Year' honour for its role in the development of the sport, beating competition from initiatives based in France and the United Kingdom. (PTI)

Govt proposes launch of Khelo India mission to transform sports sector over next decade

NEW DELHI, Feb 1: The government's flagship Khelo India programme to scout grassroots-level sporting talent is set to get a boost with Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Sunday proposing the launch of a Khelo India mission to also focus on systemic development of training centres and coaches over the next decade.

Presenting the Union Budget for the year 2026-27, the minister said the mission will facilitate an integrated talent development programme through inter-linking pathways. The Khelo India programme was launched in 2017 and its primary objective was to hold national level competitions across age groups for talent identification.

"Sports sector provides multiple means of employment, skilling and job opportunities. Taking forward the systematic nurturing of sports talent which is set in motion through the



Khelo India programme, I propose to launch a Khelo India mission to transform the sports sector over the next decade," Sitharaman said during her Budget speech in the Lok Sabha.

"The mission will facilitate: (a) an integrated talent development pathway supported by training centres which are foundational, intermediate and elite levels; (b) systematic development of coaches and support staff; (c) integration of

sports science and technology; (d) competitions and leagues to promote sports culture and provide platforms; (e) development of sports infrastructure for training and competition."

The Finance Minister also said India has the potential to emerge as a global hub for high quality and affordable sports goods.

"I proposed a dedicated initiative for sports goods that will promote manufacturing, research and innovation in equipment design as well as material sciences," she said.

A Sports Ministry-appointed task force led by national Pullela Gopichand had recently advocated for a greater emphasis on building a pool of high-quality coaches. It has proposed a Target Olympic Podium Scheme for coaches to ensure that they are provided financial support similar to what elite athletes are getting to enhance India's medal prospects going forward. (PTI)

Different surfaces, day games in T20 WC are new challenges but we can adapt: NZ captain Santner

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, Feb 1: Skipper Mitchell Santner said New Zealand will rely on their past experience in the sub-continent and inherent adaptability skills to tame different conditions to come good in the upcoming T20 World Cup. The Kiwis played eight white ball matches (3 ODIs and 5 T20Is) in India in the run-up to the ICC showpiece, beginning on February 7.

"I guess we've had a few players who played in Chennai recently in the IPL or obviously games throughout our careers. So, I think the last couple of years have shown that Chennai is a pretty good wicket," said Santner after the fifth T20I against India here on Saturday, which they lost by 46 runs.

New Zealand, placed in Group B along with Afghanistan, UAE, South Africa and Canada, will play three group matches in Chennai and one in Ahmedabad.

In that, two matches will have 11 am

starts, while the other games will begin at 3 pm and 7 pm.

Santner said the Antipodeans have the wherewithal to rise up to the challenge.

"The day game is going to be slightly different. Guys are going to have to reset their clocks, try to get up a little bit earlier. But again, it's a new challenge for us. We go to Ahmedabad for one game on red soil, then we go to Chennai on black soil, so it's going to be slightly different.

"I guess we pride ourselves on trying to adapt as quickly as we can on surfaces. So, I think, going throughout the World Cup, we have to adapt to different surfaces. We've got three games in Chennai, so, it might play a lot different to what here, or it could play the same. And if it does, we kind of know how to operate," he explained.

In that context, Santner said the testing T20I series against India which they lost 1-4 will stand them in good stead. (PTI)

Break and batting tweak help Suryakumar rediscover form before T20 World Cup

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, Feb 1: India T20I skipper Suryakumar Yadav said a short break after the South Africa series last year and a conscious change in his batting approach helped him rediscover his touch, as he led from the front in India's dominant 4-1 series win over New Zealand just ahead of the T20 World Cup starting next Saturday.

After enduring a rare lean patch in 2025 with no half-century to his name, Suryakumar bounced back strongly to finish as the leading run-scorer and player-of-the-series against New Zealand. The turnaround came after a period of self reflection following the South Africa series in December where he had managed just 34 runs in four innings, with a highest score of 12.

"After the South Africa series break, I returned home, stored my kit bag, and took a complete 9-10 day rest," the Indian T20I skipper said on 'Amul Cricket Live' following their 46-run win over New Zealand in the fifth and final rubber here on Saturday. "As the new year began, I resumed

practice, reflecting on the previous year's shortcomings — particularly my strike-rate in the initial overs.

"In 2021-23, I attacked from the first 5-10 balls at a strike-rate of 200-250; now, I settle in over the first 5-7 balls, doubling my strike-rate thereafter. This approach clicked from the very first game in Nagpur, building momentum that revived my form." One of India's finest T20 batters, Suryakumar had struggled for consistency after taking over the captaincy.

In 2025, he scored just 218 runs from 21 matches at an average of 13.62 and strike rate of 123.16, the first time his annual strike rate dipped below 150.

But he peaked at the right time, amassing 242 runs in five matches against New Zealand at an average of 80.66 and a strike rate of 196.74 as India posted three 200-plus totals, including 271 for five in the final game, their third highest T20I score.

Abhishek Sharma continued his blazing run at the top while Ishan Kishan marked an explosive comeback.

With India eyeing a historic third and back-to-back T20 World Cup triumph on home soil, Suryakumar said: "Home games always bring pressure, but without it, there's no thrill in the sport.

"Chasing a historic back-to-back World Cup win on home soil, no team has done it before, feels like a rewarding responsibility and positive pressure. With massive crowd support across venues, I'm excited, and the team shares that enthusiasm." Suryakumar said the team combination has also been fine-tuned to maximise batting firepower without compromising bowling strength.

"In high-risk T20s with explosive top-order batting, we need an extra specialist batter at No. 7 or 8. Our core bowlers - Jasprit Bumrah, Varun Chakaravorthy, Arshdeep Singh, and Axar Patel, can deliver full 16 overs, providing a massive edge. Hardik Pandya, Shivam Dube (2-2 overs each), and occasionally Abhishek Sharma offer flexibility, making a seven-batter plus all-rounder setup with an eighth batter ideal for the World Cup squad." (PTI)

India find WC template in NZ series: Kishan, SKY, Abhishek soar

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, Feb 1: Suryakumar Yadav nodded in appreciation from the dugout when Abhishek Sharma creamed New Zealand pacer Jacob Duffy for a six in the third ball of the first over during the fifth T20I here.

The Indian skipper was at non-striker's end when Ishan Kishan pulled a steep bouncer from Kyle Jamieson over square leg for a six, and once again he nodded in appreciation.

The reasons for his delight could have been: 1. India have found an explosive new template to fuel their title defence in the upcoming T20 World Cup.

2. India now have a core team — Abhishek, Suryakumar, Kishan — at the top, capable of executing that strategy consistently.

But Kishan's is the warmest

story among that group. He did not even have a BCCI central contract a year back. Now, he is no longer an outlier but a worthy piece in the management's scheme of things.

Abhishek and Suryakumar too had struggles of their own, but they were largely on field in nature.

On the other hand, Kishan had to quell his inner demons as well, and going by the outings in the just-concluded five-match T20I rubber against New Zealand, he has done a marvellous job of it. The left-hander made 215 runs from four matches at a strike-rate of 231.18.

Kishan's strong statement
In a matter of four matches, Kishan has overtaken Sanju Samson as the primary choice for India's wicketkeeper batter in the World Cup. Suryakumar detailed Kishan's importance in this marauding



batting line-up. "We always knew what Ishan Kishan brought to the table. We have seen how he played in domestic cricket just before this series. We always wanted him to bat the same way, not change his identity. I think he was opening (in do-

mestic cricket), and here he batted at No. 3. But we wanted him to be a game changer and whenever he took to the field, he batted that way. I think he has given a strong statement," he said, hinting at the Jharkhand man opening with Abhishek in the World Cup.