

6 NATION 66 lakh names likely to be deleted in post-SIR Bengal electoral rolls Indo-US trade deal will destroy Indian farmers: Rahul Gandhi 7 NORTHEAST Sikkim CM lauds PM for launching HPV vaccination campaign for girls Manipur CM flags off 33 maternity ambulances

CREATING NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE YOUTH OF ASSAM 8.30+ lakh youth trained under PM Kaushal Vikas Yojana, Skilling Gen-Next for jobs across key industries 15+ lakh MSMEs registered on the Udyam Portal, 2,000+ DPIIT-recognised startups boosting entrepreneurship across the state DEVELOPED ASSAM DEVELOPED BHARAT PM MODI'S VISION

Trump urges Iranians to 'take over your government' • Strike targets offices of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei • Death toll in strike on girls' school in southern Iran touches 40

US, Israel launch 'Operation Epic Fury' against Iran

DUBAI, Feb 28: The US and Israel launched a major attack on Iran on Saturday, and President Donald Trump called on the Iranian public to "seize control of your destiny" by rising up against the Islamic leadership that has ruled the nation since 1979.

Some of the first strikes appeared to hit areas around the offices of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and Iranian media reported strikes nationwide. Smoke could be seen rising from the capital. It wasn't immediately clear whether the 86-year-old leader was in his offices at the time of the strike.

"When we are finished, take over your government. It will be yours to take. This will be probably your only chance for generations," Trump said in a video announcing "major combat operations" were underway. "For many years, you have asked for America's help, but you never got it."

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu echoed that sweeping goal. "Our joint operation will create the conditions for the brave Iranian people to take their fate into their own hands," Netanyahu said.

The strikes opened a stunning new chapter in US intervention in Iran and marked the second time in eight months that the Trump administration has used military force against the Islamic Republic.



They also came just weeks after Trump ordered a military operation to capture Venezuela's president, Nicolás Maduro, and bring him and his wife to New York to face federal drug conspiracy charges.

The targets included members of Iran's leadership, according to a US official and another person briefed on the attacks who both spoke on

condition of anonymity because they were discussing classified information on an ongoing operation.

There was no immediate information on whether top officials had been killed.

Tensions have soared in recent weeks as American warships moved into the region. Trump said he wanted a deal to constrain Iran's

Indian Embassy in Iran advises nationals to 'stay indoors'

TEHRAN, Feb 28: The Indian Embassy in Iran on Saturday issued an advisory for its citizens, urging them to exercise "utmost caution" and "remain indoors as far as possible" amid the ongoing regional tensions.

"In view of the developing situation, all Indian nationals in Iran are advised to exercise utmost caution, avoid unnecessary movements and remain indoors as far as possible," the embassy said in a post on X.

It further said that all the Indian nationals may also consider to monitor news, maintain social awareness and await any further guidance from the Embassy of India. The advisory came after Israel launched a pre-emptive military strike against Iran on Saturday. (PTI)

nuclear programme at a moment when the country is struggling at home with growing dissent following nationwide protests.

The immediate trigger for Saturday's strikes appears to be the unsuccessful latest round of nuclear talks. But they also reflect the dramatic changes across the region that have left Iran's leadership in its weakest position since the Is-

lamic Revolution nearly half a century ago. Israeli and American strikes last June greatly weakened Iran's air defences, military leadership and nuclear programme.

A regionwide war, sparked by Hamas' October 7, 2023 attack on Israel, has left Iran's network of proxies across the Middle East greatly weakened. US sanctions and global isolation, meanwhile, have decimated Iran's economy.

Iran responded to the latest strikes as it had been threatening to do for months — first launching a wave of missiles and drones targeting Israel. It followed with strikes targeting US military installations in Bahrain, Kuwait and Qatar. The United Arab Emirates and Iraq shut down their airspace.

Iran's Foreign Ministry issued a defiant statement, saying the country "will not hesitate" in its response. In a statement posted on X, the ministry said: "The time has come to defend the homeland and confront the enemy's military assault."

At least 57 people were reported killed at a girls' school in southern Iran in the Israeli-US strikes, according to Iran's state-run IRNA news agency. At least 45 others were wounded in the attack in Minab in Iran's Hormozgan province. The White House and the Israeli military did not immediately respond to a request for comment on reported strike on the school.

In an indication (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

311 supporters of APHLC and Congress turn saffron Assembly polls: Tuliram confident of BJP's clean sweep in Karbi Anglong



HT Correspondent DONGKAMUKAM, Feb 28: Expressing unwavering confidence in the saffron wave sweeping through the hills, Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) Chief Executive Member (CEM), Tuliram Ronghang, predicted a landslide victory of BJP in the upcoming assembly

polls in the state. Addressing a mass joining programme at the Rongkuroi LP School playground in West Karbi Anglong on Saturday, Ronghang asserted that the BJP is on track to win all five Assembly seats across the twin hill districts. Ronghang highlighted a significant shift in the region's political

landscape, specifically noting the increasing support from diverse communities. He pointed out that the Rongkuroi area, a 100% Christian-dominated region, is now openly embracing the BJP's vision.

"The people have already made up their minds. Because of trust, belief, and our developmental track record, it is clearly visible that even traditional opposition strongholds are coming into the BJP fold," the CEM stated.

The CEM noted that the influx of leaders and workers from the Indian National Congress and APHLC into the BJP has become a daily occurrence. According to Ronghang the continuous defection of senior opposition leaders reflects their declining influence. New members are bolstering the BJP's organisational structure, leaving "no realistic chance" (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Help us to take state forward, appeals Himanta

BJP launches 'Jan Ashirwad Yatra' to reach out to people ahead of polls

DHEKIAJULI, Feb 28: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday launched the state BJP's 'Jan Ashirwad Yatra' from Dhekiajuli in Sonitpur district as the party seeks a third straight term in the upcoming Assembly polls.

He sought the support of the people to ensure that the BJP retains power and the journey of a developed and secure Assam continues to move forward.

Accompanied by state party president Dilip Saikia, Union Minister Pabitra Margherita and other top leaders, Sarma stood atop an open van leading the procession.

People lined up on both sides of the roads, greeting the chief minister with traditional scarves and flowers, with the leaders waving to the cheering crowds.

In his address before launching the Yatra, Sarma said, "It was in 2014 when you all had reposed faith in Narendra Modi and elected him the prime minister. In 2016, you (public) instated the first BJP government in Assam, led by Sarbananda Sonowal. Again in 2021, you all voted for the BJP. During this entire period, we have tried to work for the people



of the state to the best of our abilities, and the picture of development we see now reflects our dedicated efforts," he said.

While mistakes might have been made

along the way or certain things may not have gone the way people wished for, it was not due to any laxity of efforts, the CM asserted.

"And this is why we (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

'AI is already helping to predict early weather warnings with much greater accuracy'

AI a huge opportunity and serious risk for climate: UNEP official

NEW DELHI, Feb 28: Artificial Intelligence (AI) offers significant potential to help the climate crisis, but its high energy and water requirements could worsen environmental challenges if not managed properly, a senior official of the United Nations (UN) said.

In an interview with PTI Videos, Martin Krause, Director of the Climate Change Division at the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), said from a climate perspective, AI presents both a huge opportunity and a serious risk.

Citing examples of AI as part of the climate solution, the official highlighted AI-driven early weather warning systems, renewable grid integration, and satellite-based alert systems to track emission sources promptly, while also voicing concerns over the



significant water and energy demands of the data centres.

"AI is already helping to predict early weather warnings, such as floods and storms, with much greater accuracy, and if deployed at scale, it could protect hundreds

of millions of people," Krause, who attended the recently concluded AI Impact Summit in Delhi, told PTI.

"Secondly, integrating renewable energy into the national grid, as is currently happening in

India, requires recalibrating and balancing the grid, and AI is already helping to achieve this," he said.

The India AI Impact Summit, held from February 16-20 in New Delhi, focused on AI's transformative potential across governance, innovation, and sustainable development.

Considering the magnitude of energy consumption by AI data centres, the UNEP Climate Change division chief noted the importance of integrating renewable energy to prevent a rise in greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fuels.

He added that site-specific assessments are needed to determine the right mix of energy sources to power the data centres.

"The key point is that there must be guardrails to ensure that, while AI (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Assam govt inks MoU with AAI

Pre-feasibility study for 5 greenfield airports to be conducted soon



GUWAHATI, Feb 28: The Assam government has signed a memorandum of understanding with the Airports Authority of India (AAI) to conduct a pre-feasibility study for constructing five greenfield airports in the state.

The greenfield airports are proposed to be established at Manas National Park, Umrangso, Ma-

juli, Diphu and Charaideo.

Transport Commissioner and Secretary Akashdeep and AAI chairman Vipin Kumar signed the agreement in the presence of Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma here on Friday evening.

Speaking on the occasion, Sarma thanked the AAI for undertaking the initiative to carry out the (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Himanta, Japan minister discuss issues of mutual interest

GUWAHATI, Feb 28: Japan minister Iwao Horii called on Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, with the two leaders discussing policy support, enhancing connectivity and building a vibrant semiconductor ecosystem around the Tata facility in the state.

"I am deeply grateful to H.E. Iwao Horii @iwaonarajp, Hon'ble State Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan, for his visit to Assam," Sarma said in a post on X on Friday.

Sarma maintained that the minister's travel to Guwahati soon after the formation of the new government in their country reflects the growing importance of Assam in the broader India-Japan strategic partnership.

"H.E. Iwao Horii conveyed the strong interest of Japanese companies in building a vibrant semiconductor ecosystem around the Tata OSAT facility in Jagoiroad, while also creating opportunities to skill our youth in emerging (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

PM inaugurates semiconductor plant at Sanand India making its mark in hardware: Modi

SANAND, Feb 28: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday inaugurated Micron Technology's semiconductor plant at Sanand in Gujarat, and said that after being known for its strength in software, the country is "firmly establishing its identity" in the hardware sector too.

The inauguration of the US-based company's ATMP (Assembly, Testing, Marking and Packaging) plant - the first such facility in the country - reflects a deep partnership between India and the United States, he said.

The message has reached the world loud and clear: India is capable, India is competitive and India is committed, Modi said.

India's message for global investors is "India is ready, India is reliable, and India delivers," and both dynamic market and global opportunities await investors in the country, the prime minister added.

"India, long known for its software strength, is now firmly establishing its identity in the hardware sector as well," he said.

The prime minister said the event is a testament to the strong cooperation and collaboration between India and the US, especially in the areas of AI and chip technologies where the partnership between the two countries is very important.

"The world witnessed a period of industrial revolution throughout the 20th century. During that time, countries that were ahead in factories, machines, and mass production made rapid progress. But this is the century of the AI revolution, and



semiconductors are the bridge to this change. The tiny chip is the medium connecting both the industrial revolution and the AI revolution," he said. "If oil was the regulator of the last century, the microchip will be the regulator of this century. With this thought in mind, India decided to move forward rapidly in the semiconductor sector," Modi said, noting that the country announced its Semiconductor Mission at a time when the world was battling COVID.

"During the pandemic, everything felt like it was falling apart, but the seeds we planted with conviction are now growing and bearing fruits," the PM further said.

India is rapidly becoming an integral part of the global semiconductor value chain, and the entire world wants to secure the supply chain of both these technologies for a better future for humanity, he said.

The two largest democracies - India and the US -- are continuously striving for this, the PM stated, adding that their collective effort will also make the global supply chain of critical minerals more secure and reliable.

His government has so far approved 10 projects under the Semiconductor India programme, and besides the Micron plant, three more projects are also going to start production very soon, he added.

"The semiconductor ecosystem we are building is not limited to any one region, it is pan-India," the PM said, adding that work has started in projects located in Noida (Uttar Pradesh), Assam, Odisha and Punjab. The semiconductor ecosystem isn't just about a single factory and India is focusing on the entire value chain, said Modi.

"India Semiconductor Mission 2.0

was announced in this budget. Its objective is the same: as production increases, demand for material components and services in India will also increase. This is the biggest opportunity," he said.

The PM said another advantage for India is its significant manufacturing ambitions. "India has a large population that is becoming first-time users of gadgets. Whether it is electronics, automobiles, or other technologies, demand in India is constantly growing," he said, highlighting the exponential growth of electronics production and exports in the last 11 years. As electronic component manufacturing expands, domestic demand for semiconductors will also grow, Modi said, adding that both a dynamic market and global opportunities await investors in India. The new plant will create a new ecosystem at Sanand, the prime minister said.

"When a major automotive company arrived here, an entire ecosystem developed with it," he said, in apparent reference to the setting up of TATA Nano factory years ago.

"This pioneering facility is also poised to spawn a new ecosystem. In the future, Sanand will write a new chapter of its success in the semiconductor sector," he said. The ATMP facility will manufacture SSD (Solid State Drive) storage devices as well as RAM type DRAM and NAND products, stated a government release. The company has invested Rs 22,516 crore for its Sanand plant, the release added. (PTI)

Landmark Announcements at IESA Vision Summit 2026



HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Feb 28: The India Electronics and Semiconductor Association (IESA) successfully concluded the IESA Vision Summit 2026, marking a pivotal moment in India's ascent as a global semiconductor powerhouse. Over two impactful days, the Summit convened more than 1,500 industry leaders, innovators, policymakers, academia, and technology pioneers to define the next phase of India's electronics and semiconductor growth trajectory.

The Summit featured a series of high-impact MoUs, strategic partnerships, product unveilings, and talent development initiatives — reinforcing India's shift toward an integrated, execution-ready semiconductor ecosystem. Announcements spanned the full value chain, including design, advanced packaging, testing, automation, AI-enabled engineering, workforce development, and commercialisation.

During the official unveiling of collaborations and MoU exchanges, Mr. Ashok Chandak, President, IESA, said, "India's semiconductor momentum is now structured, collaborative, and execution-driven — advancing with scale, speed, and global ambition. This was not incremental progress; it was ecosystem alignment in action. From backend capability expansion and post-silicon integration to AI-enabled engineering, talent creation, and startup acceleration, these announcements collectively move India from NPI to product ownership and toward scalable volume manufacturing."

Family businesses must innovate to secure future growth: ISB report

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Feb 28: Family-owned businesses contribute more than three-fourths of India's GDP and are expected to play an even larger role in the country's growth by 2047. However, new research from the Indian School of Business (ISB) highlights that many mid-sized family enterprises are yet to fully leverage India's rising tide of economic growth, owing to their singular focus

on short-term profits i.e., EBITDA, resulting in them holding back from investing in the future through technology and ecosystems, as seen in the case of global companies.

A new ISB report titled "Business Innovation - An imperative for Indian family-led business" highlights that while family-run firms continue to form the backbone of local and regional economies, many still rely on incremental growth models and are not fully capitalising on opportunities in high-growth sectors. This gap is most visible among mid-sized enterprises that are often built on strong operational foundations, but lack the vision and ambition to create markets, invest in intangible assets, and design future revenue models adjacent to their core business.

The report, authored by ISB's Centre for Business Innovation and the Thomas Schmidheiny Centre for Family Enterprise, analyses innovation and growth patterns across leading Indian family businesses across

sectors such as auto, retail, pharma, healthcare, IT, construction, and many more. It shows that firms investing in product innovation, supply chain integration, and customer engagement demonstrate stronger long-term value creation, growth and resilience than those following traditional operating approaches.

The findings indicate that strategic inertia — rather than market volatility — is emerging as the biggest risk for many family enterprises. In an environment shaped by digital transformation, global competition, and evolving consumer markets, the absence of integrated growth models and bold investments in technologies (including but not limited to AI) and partnerships, especially in high-growth markets of the Global South, are constraining scale and global expansion of Indian family-led enterprises. To address these challenges, the report introduces the ARISE framework - Ambition, Risk-taking, Innovation, Speed&Scale, and Ecosystem thinking

— as a roadmap for future-ready growth. It highlights the importance of bold goals, timely decision-making, business model innovation, and strategic partnerships to help family businesses scale, compete globally, and create long-term value.

Professor Rajendra Srivastava, Novartis Professor of Marketing Strategy & Innovation, ISB and Executive Director, ISB Centre for Business Innovation, said, "India's family-owned businesses are entering a new era — one that demands not only stewardship and legacy, but also agility and innovation. Therefore, the need of the hour is to unlearn past focus on EBITDA and invest aggressively in future growth through technology, design thinking, platform business models, markets and brand development. Through examples across sectors, the report highlights companies that have employed an innovation mindset to transform their business by scaling up growth opportunities in dynamic Indian markets."

IMFA completes strategic acquisition of TSL's ferro-chrome plant in Odisha

BHUBANESWAR, Feb 28: Odisha-based Indian Metals and Ferro Alloys Ltd (IMFA) has announced the completion of its strategic acquisition of Tata Steel Limited's ferro-chrome plant at Kalinganagar in Jajpur district.

According to a company statement, the transaction is valued at ₹ 707.26 crore, comprising a base consideration of ₹ 610 crore along with GST and net working capital. The acquisition has been funded entirely through internal accruals.

Established in 1961, IMFA is a fully integrated producer of value-added ferro-chrome.

Spread across 115 acres in Kalinganagar, the newly acquired facility consists of four furnaces with a production capacity of one lakh tonnes per annum (tpa).

The capacity will increase to 1.5 lakh tpa once the partially built fifth furnace is commissioned in about a year, the statement said.

IMFA managing director Subhrakant Panda said: "It is a transformative deal which marks a key milestone in the company's growth journey. We are committed to creating value for all stakeholders by working towards a smooth and seamless integration which delivers significant operational synergies". (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

US, Israel launch 'Operation

of the scope of the conflict, flights across the Middle East were disrupted and air defence fire thudded over Dubai, the commercial capital of the United Arab Emirates, Saturday afternoon. Associated Press journalists saw the aftereffects of the blast from an interceptor.

Shrapnel from an Iranian missile attack on the capital of the UAE killed one person, state media said.

Attack was coordinated between Israel and US

The US military has for weeks amassed forces in the region, even as US and Iranian envoys held talks in Switzerland and Oman aimed at finding a diplomatic solution.

"Active and serious negotiations have yet again been undermined," Oman's Foreign Minister Badr al-Busaidi said in a post on X. Al-Busaidi, a key mediator in the nuclear talks, travelled to Washington on Friday to meet with Vice President JD Vance. "Neither the interests of the United States nor the cause of global peace are well served by this," al-Busaidi said. "And I pray for the innocents who will suffer. I urge the United States not to get sucked in further."

Israel said the operation has been planned for months between the Israeli and US militaries.

Trump, in justifying the military action, claimed that Iran has continued to develop its nuclear programme and plans to develop missiles to reach the US. He also acknowledged that there could be American casualties, saying "that often happens in war." It was a notable call on Americans to brace themselves from a US leader who swept into office on an "America First" platform and vowed to keep out of "forever wars" that had bogged down his recent predecessors.

Trump's statement indicated the US was striking for reasons far beyond the nuclear programme, listing grievances stretching back to the beginning of the Islamic Republic following a revolution in 1979 that turned Iran from one of America's closest allies in the Middle East into a fierce foe. The US president said he was aiming to "annihilate" the Iranian navy and destroy regional proxies supported by Tehran.

He also called on the Iranian Revolutionary Guard to lay down its arms, pledging that members would be given immunity, while warning they would face "certain death" if they didn't.

Trump had threatened military action — but held off — following Iran's recent crackdown on protests spurred by economic grievances and evolved into a nationwide, anti-government push against the ruling clerics. The Human Rights Activists News Agency says it confirmed more than 7,000 deaths in the crackdown and that it is investigating thousands more. The government has acknowledged more than 3,000 killed, though it has under-counted or not reported fatalities from past unrest.

Iran has said it hasn't enriched since June, but it has blocked international inspectors from visiting the sites America bombed during a 12-day war then. Satellite photos analysed by The Associated Press have shown new activity at two of those sites, suggesting Iran is trying to assess and potentially recover material there. Iran currently has a self-imposed limit on its ballistic missile programme, limiting their range to 2,000 kilometres. That puts all the Mideast and some of Eastern Europe in their range.

Iran had hoped to avert a war, but maintains it has the right to enrich uranium and does not want to discuss other issues, like its long-range missile programme or support for armed groups like Hamas and Hezbollah. The strikes could rattle global markets, particularly if Iran is able to make the Strait of Hormuz unsafe for commercial traffic. More than 14 million barrels per day of oil passed through the strait in 2025, about a third of total worldwide oil exports transported by sea.

Strikes hit targets across Iran

Iranian media reported strikes nationwide. Roads to Khomeini's compound in downtown Tehran had been shut down by authorities as other blasts rang out across the capital.

Khomeini has not made a public appearance in recent days and wasn't immediately seen after. During the 12-day war in June, he was believed to have been taken to a secure location away from his Tehran compound. Targets in the Israeli campaign included Iran's military, symbols of government and intelligence targets, according to an official briefed on the operation, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss nonpublic information on the attack.

Iran retaliates

Hours after the strikes, Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard said it launched a "first wave" of drones and missiles targeting Israel, where a nationwide warning was issued as the military said it was working to intercept incoming Iranian missiles. There was no immediate word on any damage or casualties from the ongoing attack.

Meanwhile, Bahrain said that a missile attack targeted the US Navy's 5th Fleet headquarters in the island kingdom. Witnesses heard sirens and explosions in Kuwait, home to US Army Central. Explosions could be also heard in Qatar.

The Iranian-backed Houthis in Yemen vowed to resume attacks on Red Sea shipping routes and on Israel, according to two senior Houthi officials. They spoke on condition of anonymity because there was no official announcement from the Houthi leadership.

US embassies or consulates in Qatar, United Arab Emirates and Israel posted on social media that they told staffers to shelter in place and recommended all Americans "do the same until further notice." (AP)

Assembly polls: Tuliram confident

for the opposition. Today's event saw 311 supporters from the APHLC and Congress, led by Sanjay Kramsa, officially merge with the BJP.

Prior to the rally, Rongkhang engaged in a marathon of inaugurations and foundation-laying ceremonies under the No. 111 Rongkhang Legislative Constituency, signalling a push for infrastructure ahead of the polls. He inaugurated Langminso Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya & Pudem Sarpo Boys Hostel; laid foundation stone for Pavers Block road at Rongkuroi Rongrup, and switched on new solar street lighting for Rongkuroi.

The programme was attended by a host of dignitaries, including MP Amarsingh Tisso, who briefed the gathering on central schemes. Other notable attendees included Darsing Ronghang (MLA, Howraghat); Radip Ronghang (President, BJP West Karbi Anglong District Committee); and various Executive Members (EMs), Members of Autonomous Council and Board Chairmen of the KAAC.

Help us to take state

have a developed and secured Assam today. My appeal to all is to help BJP retain power so that we can continue to take the state forward in this journey," he added.

Earlier, the CM offered prayers at the Gupteswari temple here before commencing the Yatra.

Besides Dhekiajuli, the Yatra will cover the Assembly constituencies of Borsola, Tezpur, Naduar and Rongpara on the first day. State party president Saikia had said earlier that the Yatra will travel around 70-80 km daily, with an outreach target of nearly one lakh people per day.

The 'Jan Ashirwad Yatra' has been organised with the objective of taking the party's vision, achievements and organisational goals to the people ahead of the forthcoming Assembly elections, he had said.

The first phase, which will conclude on March 9, will cover 34 Assembly constituencies across the state. State Cabinet Minister Ashok Singhal had been assigned the responsibility of chief convener, while Union Minister Margherita and other senior leaders had been named as co-convenors.

'Jan Ashirwad Sabhas' will be organised in constituencies where the Yatra will not pass through. (PTI)

AI a huge opportunity and

and data centres bring significant benefits, they do not end up depleting the scarce natural resources we all depend on," the senior UN official stated.

At the recently concluded AI Impact Summit, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres had cautioned that as AI's energy and water demands soar, data centres must switch to clean power, rather than "shift costs to vulnerable communities".

In December 2025, the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-7) adopted its first resolution on the sustainable use of Artificial Intelligence — one of eleven resolutions adopted at the session.

The resolution encourages its Member States and all relevant stakeholders to promote, and cooperate toward, the sustainability of AI by harnessing the opportunities and benefits of AI systems in support of the environment and by minimising its environmental impacts. (PTI)

Assam govt inks MoU

pre-feasibility study at the five identified locations. He maintained that a greenfield airport at Manas would not only address strategic and security considerations, but also significantly boost wildlife tourism in the region. He further said the proposed airports at Majuli, Umrangso, Diphu and Charaideo would enhance regional connectivity and increase tourist footfall, thereby contributing to local economic development. The chief minister also maintained that the development of these greenfield airports would enable Assam to set a model that could be replicated by other states.

He requested the AAI to consider upgrading Rupsi Airport to a full-fledged airport, keeping in view its strategic proximity to the Siliguri corridor.

Sarma also urged AAI to take steps to boost international flight connectivity from Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport in Guwahati. The development of the greenfield airports will reinforce the state's role as a key gateway to the Southeast Asian nations, he added. (PTI)

Himanta, Japan minister discuss

technologies and Japanese language proficiency," he added. The Chief Minister's Office (CMO), in a post on social media, said Japan's Ambassador to India, Keiichi Ono, also accompanied the visiting minister. "Discussions focused on policy support, enhancing connectivity, and leveraging #ActEast advantages to position Assam as an attractive investment destination," it said. (PTI)

NAME CORRECTION

Sitoli Mallik, W/O: Sukharanjan Mallik, R/O: Uttar Bidyannagar, Hojai, Assam, declared through an affidavit on 5th July 2011 at Kamrup Metro & Rural Guwahati that, my previous name was Sitoli Roy. But after marriage with Sukharanjan Mallik become Sitoli Mallik. Now I used to write Sitoli Mallik for all purpose.

BPF seat-sharing pact with BJP sees Brahma ready for electoral fray

Pramila Rani Brahma keen to contest 2026 polls from Kokrajhar

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Feb 28: Ahead of the 2026 Assam Assembly elections, a seat-sharing agreement has reportedly been finalised between the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Bodoland People's Front (BPF), led by Hagrama Mohilary in the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) region.

According to sources, the BPF will contest 11 of the 15 Assembly constituencies in the BTC area, leaving four seats for its ally BJP.

Among the 11 constituencies to be contested by the BPF is the 3 No Kokrajhar (ST) Assembly constituency. Senior BPF leader and former Cabinet minister Pramila Rani Brahma has expressed her keen interest in contesting again from the Kokrajhar (ST) LAC.



Speaking to the media on Saturday, Brahma said she is ready to enter the electoral fray if the party grants her a ticket for the upcoming Assembly elections.

"I have never asked for a ticket.

The people want me, the party wants me," she said.

She further remarked that she was politically defeated in the last Assembly elections and added that the very person who defeated her

is now asking her to contest again.

However, she stated that all decisions will be discussed within the party and that the final decision will depend on the party and its high command.

Meanwhile, when asked about reports that Sewli Mohilary, wife of Hagrama Mohilary, is also interested in contesting from the Kokrajhar seat this time, Brahma said she may contest and that contesting elections is not a crime.

"If she wishes to contest, the party and the people must agree. We cannot simply go and contest anywhere on our own," she added.

It may be mentioned that earlier in the day, Brahma attended the 17th foundation day celebration of Bodoland University, held at the university complex in Kokrajhar.

Viksit Bharat Youth Parliament 2026 concludes at Kokrajhar University

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Feb 28: A one-day conference on the theme of "Viksit Bharat Youth Parliament 2026" was held on Saturday at Kokrajhar University. Organised by the NSS Unit of the university in collaboration with 'My Bharat (Meri Yuva Bharat)'.

The programme began with the ceremonial lighting of the lamp at the university auditorium by Registrar Dr Banabeena Brahma. Retired Assam government administrative officer Prafulla Kumar Hazarika and Executive Magistrate of Kokrajhar, Shubham Sinha, attended as invited guests.

It is noteworthy that around 100 student participants from various educational institutions took part in the Kokrajhar district-level event. Participating institutions included Cotton University, Bodoland University, Fakiragram College, St Ann's College, Kokrajhar Girls' College, Inspiria Knowledge Campus and Kokrajhar University.

The participants mainly deliberated on the theme: "50 Years of Emergency: Lessons for Indian Democracy." A panel of judges selected the top 10 participants at the district level to represent the Youth Parliament at the state level. During the event, District Youth Officer Himanshu Kumar delivered a brief speech highlighting the importance of democracy and the active role of youth in strengthening it.

The programme was attended by several academicians and students, including Dean of Student Welfare of Kokrajhar University Dr Bimal Kanti Basumatary, Head of the Political Science Department Dr Mamata Narzary and Head of the Political Science Department of St Ann's College, Utpal Gaur Brahma, among others.

Memorial service held for journalist Dharendra Nath Chakraborty

HT Correspondent

MORIGAO, Feb 28: In memory of veteran journalist Dharendra Nath Chakraborty, a memorial service was organised by the Morigaon District Journalist Association (MDJA) at its meeting hall here on Saturday.

The memorial service was presided over by MDJA president Ajit Sarma in the presence of distinguished guests and leaders of leading organisations of Morigaon district.

UNIDO flags global warming threat, pushes solar thermal tech

Stresses urgent shift from fossil fuels; 50% subsidy announced for industrial solar projects

HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, Feb 28: With rising temperatures forcing the use of fans and air-conditioners as early as February, global warming has emerged as a serious threat to humans, wildlife and nature, said United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO) National Coordinator Debajit Das at a workshop held here on Friday.

"While air-conditioners cool indoor spaces, they contribute to higher temperatures outdoors. The extraction and use of fossil fuels, along with coal and other inputs in industrial processes are significantly accelerating global warming," Das said, warning that the planet is steadily moving towards destruction if urgent corrective measures are not taken. The workshop was organised at the Sonitpur Journalists' Union hall

in Tezpur by the School of Engineering under Indian Institute of Technology, under the aegis of the Union Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, UNIDO, the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and CST.

Highlighting the need to reduce industrial dependence on coal and other combustible materials, Das stressed that the adoption of solar thermal technology is crucial to curb atmospheric warming, protect biodiversity and counter greenhouse gas emissions. He noted that although solar energy is widely discussed, public awareness about solar thermal technology remains limited despite its efficiency, cost-effectiveness and suitability for industrial applications.

"Temperatures are already touching 42-44 degrees Celsius during summer. One can only

imagine how severe the situation could become by 2050. Preventive action must begin now and solar thermal technology can play a decisive role," he said. Das further announced that to encourage entrepreneurs, UNIDO would provide up to 50% financial assistance for approved projects, with a maximum subsidy of ₹2.5 crore. In this initiative, the Department of Energy of Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati will act as the principal technical partner.

Inaugurating the workshop, Prof DC Baruah of Tezpur University, said that public awareness on the issue was essential and described the workshop as a significant step in that direction. Prof Pankaj Kalita of Guwahati University participated as a resource person. A total of 18 entrepreneurs took part in the workshop.

NFR ramps up Holi preparedness across stations

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 28: In view of the upcoming Holi festival and the anticipated surge in passenger traffic, the Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) has implemented a series of comprehensive and passenger-friendly measures across its entire zone to ensure safe, smooth and comfortable travel. With a strong focus on teamwork, vigilance and a passenger-first approach, NFR is geared up to provide a safe, efficient and pleasant festive travel experience.

As part of the festive preparedness plan, Indian Railways will operate 14 pairs of Holi Special trains over NFR for a total of 128 trips to manage the additional rush during the peak travel period. These special services will supplement regular train operations and provide additional capacity, benefiting passengers travelling to and from key

destinations across the region. All major railway stations under NFR jurisdiction have been prepared with enhanced arrangements to manage the anticipated rush.

Dedicated holding areas have been set up at major stations to manage passenger flow efficiently. These areas are equipped with real-time Passenger Information Systems, clean drinking water, hygienic toilets, adequate seating and proper ventilation to ensure comfort. For enhanced safety and crowd regulation, additional RPF, GRP and commercial staff have been deployed round-the-clock. Queue management, regulated entry and continuous monitoring of platforms and circulating areas are being undertaken to prevent overcrowding and ensure smooth movement of passengers.

Technological support has further strengthened preparedness ef-

forts. Real-time CCTV surveillance, drone monitoring at sensitive locations, automatic ticket vending machines for faster ticketing, Segway scooters for rapid response and dedicated war rooms at divisional offices and headquarters are ensuring 24x7 operational oversight and swift response to any contingency.

Intensified cleanliness drives are being carried out across stations and trains to maintain high standards of hygiene during the festive season. Close coordination among operating, commercial, security and engineering departments is ensuring seamless execution of the preparedness plan. With a strong focus on vigilance, coordination and passenger-first service, Northeast Frontier Railway remains committed to delivering a safe, secure and pleasant travel experience during the Holi festival.

Workshop on 'Preparation of Eco-Friendly Holi Colours'



HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Feb 28: A workshop titled "Preparation of Eco-Friendly Holi Colours" was successfully conducted at Dhing College on Saturday. The workshop was organised by the Eco Club and Department of Botany under the Environment Education Programme (EEP), an initiative of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC), Government of India. The workshop was sponsored by the Assam Science Technology and Environment Council (ASTEC), Govt of Assam, promoting sustainable

Holi practices.

The workshop was inaugurated by Dr Biman Hazarika, who in his inaugural speech stretched on the need and importance of using organic holi colours. The other faculty members present in the workshop were Dr Snigdha Mahanta, vice Principal, Dr Nandan Kumar Borthakur, and Gobin Chandra Bharali.

Dr Biman Hazarika, Principal, Dhing College, also inaugurated the draft copy of 'The beginner's guide to organic holi'. The resource person present in the workshop was noted manuscript painter

Mridu Mocham Bora, recipient of 'Asom Gaurav'. He emphasised integrating Indigenous Knowledge Systems, urging a shift from toxic chemical colours to natural plant-based alternatives like turmeric and beetroot extracts.

Eco Club Coordinator Dr Sanjeeb Kumar Nath outlined the workshop's focus on practical demonstrations to curb festival pollution, aligning with ASTEC's statewide eco-initiatives. He highlighted the Botany Department's initiative, "PrakritiAabir," the organic Holi which was launched on February 25, 2026, inspiring youth-led sustainability. The other resource persons included Dr Paramita Chakravarty and Sampurna Kashyap, who gave a detail on organic Holi preparation process.

Over 60 students participated in hands-on training on colour extraction from plant materials and filler base preparation for organic Holi colours. The hands-on training was led by Dr Nath, Dr Chakravarty and Sampurna Kashyap, who demonstrated eco-friendly Holi preparation methods and applications.

Tezpur University explores strategic collaboration with Hyundai Motor Company, Korea

HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, Feb 28: A high-level delegation from Hyundai Motor Company (HMC), Korea, led by Chang Jin Kim and Siyun Kim, General Managers, HMC, Korea visited Tezpur University recently and held strategic discussions with the Vice-Chancellor (Acting), Prof Amarendra Kumar Das, along with the Deans of the University, regarding the establishment of an industry-driven Hyundai Centre of Excellence (CoE) at Tezpur

University.

The proposed Hyundai CoE initiative is being coordinated by Dr Manashita Borah of the Department of Electrical Engineering, in close collaboration with the visiting delegation comprising Chang Jin Kim and Siyun Kim, General Managers, HMC, Korea.

The proposed Centre of Excellence aims to undertake focused research in the thrust areas of Electric Vehicles (EVs) and Battery Technology.

A key objective of this collaboration is to develop a robust research ecosystem with the broader vision of establishing the largest Pan-India battery expert network, fostering innovation and industry-academia synergy in advanced energy storage solutions. The discussions underscored mutual interest in strengthening collaborative research, capacity building, and technology development aligned with India's growing emphasis on sustainable mobility and clean energy transitions.

Congress workers stages dramatic head shaving protest

Threaten mass resignation if constituency is allotted to Rajiv Dal



HT Correspondent

DALGAON, Feb 28: In a dramatic display of anger and defiance, thousands of Congress workers and supporters shaved their heads at Kharupetia in Darrang district on Saturday, protesting the party high command's reported move to allocate the prestigious Dalgaon Assembly constituency to Rajiv Dal as part of a possible opposition alliance.

The protest comes even as talks of seat-sharing among opposition parties continue to dominate political circles in Assam.

Dalgaon has been a traditional stronghold of the Indian National Congress, having been won by the party in three consecutive Assembly elections before the seat slipped to the All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF). In the last panchayat polls, Congress regis-

tered a sweeping victory in the area, capturing both development blocks, all 27 anchalik panchayats, the majority of panchayat member seats and three zilla parishad constituencies.

The only exception was the Shyamtila-Apariya zilla parishad constituency, where Congress-denied candidate Mayuri Khatun contested on a Rajiv Dal ticket and won with the support of Congress workers.

Local leaders and workers expressed strong resentment, stating that Rajiv Dal has little organisational presence and negligible public support in Dalgaon. Despite more than a dozen local aspirants submitting applications for the ticket, the party high command is reportedly favouring Azizur Rahman, a leader from distant Lakhimpur.

After an earlier demonstration at Rajiv Bhavan in Guwahati, Saturday's head-shaving protest in Kharupetia sent a strong message. Senior Congress leaders, workers and supporters issued an ultimatum to the party leadership, warning that if the Dalgaon seat is handed over to Rajiv Dal, it would amount to giving a walkover to the sitting AIUDF MLA, Majibur Rahman.

They warned that they would not accept what they termed a "suicidal decision" and threatened that the entire local unit would resign en masse if the seat is allotted to Rajiv Dal.

The development has added fresh strain to the already delicate opposition alliance talks ahead of the next Assembly elections.

Live ammunition recovered in Jorhat

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, Feb 28: Police recovered live ammunition on Saturday from Madhubon Lane in the Cholahora area, following a tip-off from morning walkers.

Authorities seized four rounds of 9 mm pistol ammunition from the roadside and reviewed CCTV footage from nearby houses to check for suspicious activity overnight. Hrishikesh Hazarika, Jorhat OC, confirmed the recovery and said further investigation is underway. The police team also cautioned residents against leaving abandoned or locked-up old houses unsecured, as thieves sometimes use them as shelters by breaking in at night. Officials suspect the ammunition may have accidentally fallen from a miscreant's pocket.

Separately, last night, police arrested three youths from Titabor area with an illegal pistol and ammunition. The arrested were identified as Acharya Gogoi (26), Bharat Gogoi (26), both from No 2 Moran Gaon and Danish Barua of Chinamara area.

Tamulpur DRDA Project Director Bhaskar Jyoti Barua retires

HT Correspondent

TAMULPUR, Feb 28: Bhaskar Jyoti Barua, the efficient and popular Project Director of the Tamulpur District Rural Development Agency, formally retired on Saturday after a long career in service. On this occasion, the officers and staff of the District Rural Development Agency accorded him a warm farewell a day earlier. He began his career on January 6, 1997, as a Junior Engineer in the Rural Development Department. During his tenure as Project Director of Udalguri and Tamulpur districts from 2021 to 2026, the Tamulpur development block secured a top position in the NITI Aayog rankings.

Tribute to leader Semson Sing Ingti on 78th death anniversary

HT Bureau

DIPHU, Feb 28: The Karbi hills resonated with solemn remembrance on Saturday as the people of Assam honoured the legacy of their founding leader, Semson Sing Ingti on his 78th death anniversary.

The Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), alongside the general public, organised a commemorative event at the Semson Sing Ingti Park in Diphu, the administrative headquarters of the district. Dignitaries and citizens gathered to pay floral tributes at the statue of the leader, affectionately known as "Ru" (Teacher/Mentor).

Semson Sing Ingti is revered as the architect of the Mikir Hills District, later renamed Karbi Anglong. In the 1940s, he spearheaded a pivotal movement to mobilise the Karbi tribe, successfully demanding a separate administrative district that reflected the identity and needs of its dominant population. Today, that vision has evolved into the Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong districts, both governed by the KAAC.

The Chief Executive Member (CEM) of KAAC, Dr Tuliram Ronghang, led the ceremony by garlanding the statue of the late leader. He was joined by several Members of the Autonomous Council (MACs), senior officials and local dignitaries.

Reflecting on the significance of the day, Dr Ronghang shared a message on social media:

"With heartfelt prayers and floral tributes, we remember Ru Semson Sing Ingti, the founder of Karbi Anglong, on his 78th death anniversary. His visionary leadership and selfless dedication to the people will forever remain in our hearts. We are eternally grateful for his legacy."

The anniversary serves as a perennial reminder of the struggle for self-determination and the cultural identity of the Karbi people, a journey catalysed by Ingti's early leadership.

Dr Rajiv Kumar Mahatta conferred Bharat Gaurav Award

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, Feb 28: Eminent Assamese poet and journalist Dr Rajiv Kumar Mahatta was honoured with the prestigious "Bharat Gaurav Award" at a ceremony held in Kolkata.

Dr Mahatta received the honour at the event titled "Honoring Indian Talent - Bharat Gaurav Award," organised to recognise individuals who have made significant contributions in various fields across the country.

The award was presented at a solemn ceremony held at Abanindra Hall, located within the Rabindra Sadan campus in Kolkata, under the initiative of the Mahabanga Sahitya Parishad Charitable Trust. Several distinguished personalities from different parts of the country attended the event and delivered speeches.

Dr Mahatta has been actively contributing to the fields of journalism and literature for a long time as the editor of "Hamder Adhikar." The organisers, including editor Dr Shyamal Goswami, stated that the award was conferred in recognition of his significant contributions towards promoting social awareness, encouraging literary pursuits and raising issues of public interest through the media.

The organising body stated that the primary objective of the event was to bring together accomplished individuals from various states on one platform to celebrate Indian talent. The association of NITI Aayog in relation to the conferment of the award was also highlighted during the programme.

Guests and dignitaries present at the event expressed hope that Dr Rajiv Kumar Mahatta would continue to contribute further to society and the literary world in the coming days.

It may be mentioned that the Mahabanga Sahitya Parishad Charitable Trust is a government-registered and ISO-certified organisation, as informed by the organisers. Many prominent personalities from various fields were present at the ceremony.

Vacancy Announcement

Retusa Women Farmer Producer Company Limited (RWFPL) is seeking applications for the following positions based out at Namsai, Arunachal Pradesh. RWFPL is one such Producer Enterprises established in Namsai being promoted by FDRVC which will be dealing mainly Ginger and Orange with other commodities.

FDRVC as Technical Support Agency has been retained to hire following positions for this Producer Enterprise

Sl no	Post	Eligibility	Experience	Other desired skill
1	Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Farmer Producer Company (1 Post)	• Post graduation or Graduation or an equivalent degree in food technology, Agriculture, Horticulture, Agribusiness Management and other related fields	• Minimum 5 years of experience in business operations with top line and bottom line responsibilities out of which 2 year experience in handling paddy, ginger and other commodities. • Experience of handling operations for 2/3 years in large size FPO/Dairy processing/Food processing units with annual turnover of more than 5 Cr would be an added advantage	• Candidate having experience of working in AP are encouraged to apply • English/Hindi/Assamese/Local speaking candidate will be given preference
2	IT executive	• Graduate in any subjects, (preferably in agriculture, Agri business and allied subject)	• Must be able to handle data and record • Must have a system (laptop)	• Candidate having experience of working in AP are encouraged to apply • English/Hindi/Assamese/Local speaking candidate will be given preference
3	Warehouse Supervisor	• Graduate in any subjects	• Preference will be given to the candidate with 1-3 years of experience in warehouse management, logistics, transportation, labour handling.	• Candidate having experience of working in AP are encouraged to apply • English/Hindi/Assamese/Local speaking candidate will be given preference
4	Area Procurement officer (4 Posts)	Graduate in any discipline. Preference will be given to agriculture, Agri business and allied subject	• Preference given to the candidate with 1-3 years of experience in processing ginger chilli and other commodities from rural farmers • Candidates from Agri input/output industry, rural marketing or FMCG industry or any other similar industries are encouraged to apply	• Candidate having experience of working in AP are encouraged to apply • English/Hindi/Assamese/Local speaking candidate will be given preference

How to apply: candidates are requested to send their CVs on jobs@fdrcv.in / aindam@fdrcv.in, mentioning "CEO - Retusa / APO - Retusa/IT-Retusa/WS-Retusa" in the subject of mail.

Visit website: www.fdrvc.org / Whatsapp: 9883325521.

Last Date of Application: 17/03/26

When childhood meets the algorithm

By: Satyabrata Borah

The idea that a government might seriously consider banning social media for children under the age of sixteen would have sounded extreme not very long ago. Social media was once celebrated as a great equaliser, a digital playground where young people could express themselves, connect across borders, and find communities beyond the limits of their immediate surroundings. Today, that optimism has faded into something more cautious and uneasy. The UK government's move to consider such a ban reflects a growing global anxiety that the digital world we have built may be shaping young minds in ways we do not yet fully understand, and in some cases, may already be harming them.

At the heart of this debate is mental health. Over the past decade, there has been a sharp rise in reported anxiety, depression, self-harm, and feelings of loneliness among children and teenagers. While many factors contribute to this trend, social media has increasingly been placed under the microscope. Endless scrolling, algorithm driven content, constant comparison with carefully curated online lives, and exposure to bullying or harmful material have become routine parts of childhood. For adults, these pressures are challenging enough. For children whose sense of identity and self-worth is still forming, they can be overwhelming.

The UK's consideration of a social media ban for under sixteen users is not emerging in isolation. It is part of a broader rethinking of how digital technology fits into human life, especially the lives of the young. Lawmakers are asking uncomfortable questions. Is it reasonable to expect children to navigate platforms designed by some of the world's most powerful companies, whose business models depend on attention and engagement? Are parental controls and voluntary safeguards enough when children can easily bypass them? And at what point does the state have a responsibility to intervene, not to restrict freedom for its own sake, but to protect wellbeing?

Supporters of the proposed ban argue that childhood has quietly been transformed without proper consent or reflection. Smartphones and social platforms have slipped into everyday life faster than society could adapt. Many parents feel they are fighting a losing battle, try-

ing to limit screen time or monitor online behaviour while knowing their children risk social exclusion if they are not present on the same platforms as their peers. A clear legal boundary, they argue, would take some of that pressure away. If social media simply is not allowed below a certain age, the argument goes, children can focus more on offline friendships, play, learning, and rest, without feeling left out.

Critics, however, warn that bans can oversimplify complex problems. Social media is not a single, uniform experience. For some young people, especially those who feel isolated due to geography, disability, or identity, online spaces can be a lifeline. They can offer support, information, and a sense of belonging that may be missing in the physical world. A blanket ban risks cutting off these positive connections along with the harmful ones. There is also the practical challenge of enforcement. Age verification systems raise serious concerns about privacy, data security, and surveillance. If not handled carefully, measures intended to protect children could end up exposing them and others to new risks.

While the UK debates these questions, similar conversations are unfolding elsewhere. In the United States, Washington state lawmakers are exploring AI guardrails and school cell phone policies. This reflects a recognition that technology is no longer just a consumer product but a powerful social force. Artificial intelligence systems now influence what content people see, how information spreads, and even how students learn and complete assignments. Without clear rules, these systems can reinforce bias, encourage addiction-like behaviour, or blur the line between human and machine generated content in ways that confuse and mislead.

School cell phone policies are another piece of the same puzzle. Many educators report that constant phone use in classrooms disrupts attention, reduces deep learning, and weakens face to face interaction. At the same time, phones are often defended as tools for safety, accessibility, and modern education. The challenge for lawmakers and educators is to find policies that recognise both realities. Banning phones outright may improve focus, but it may also ignore the ways technology can support learning when used thoughtfully. The discussion in Washington state suggests a desire to



move beyond extremes and toward frameworks that place human development, especially that of children, at the centre of technological decision making.

While governments are tightening rules around certain uses of technology, young innovators are moving in a seemingly opposite direction. Around the world, new mobile first health platforms and wellness initiatives are emerging, many of them created by people who grew up with smartphones themselves. These innovators are not rejecting technology. Instead, they are trying to reshape it into something more supportive, humane, and accessible. Mental health apps, telemedicine services, and digital wellness tools are expanding access to care, particularly in regions where traditional healthcare infrastructure is limited or overstretched.

This contrast highlights an important truth. The problem is not technology itself, but how it is designed, regulated, and integrated into daily life. Social media platforms have largely been optimised for growth and profit, not for the mental health of young users. Wellness platforms, at least in their stated aims, try to reverse that logic. They focus on helping users understand their emotions, manage stress, connect with professionals, or build healthier habits. When used responsibly, mobile technology can re-

duce barriers to care, making support available to people who might otherwise have none.

The global nature of these developments also matters. A child in the UK scrolling through social media is not experiencing something entirely different from a teenager in India, the US, or Africa. The platforms are global, the algorithms are global, and the pressures they create often cross borders. At the same time, access to mental health care varies dramatically from one country to another. In many places, there are simply not enough trained professionals to meet demand. Mobile first health platforms promise to bridge some of these gaps by offering scalable, affordable support.

Digital wellness tools are not a substitute for strong public health systems, supportive communities, and informed parenting. There is a risk that societies might turn to apps as quick fixes, placing responsibility on individuals to manage stress and anxiety without addressing deeper structural issues such as poverty, academic pressure, social inequality, and family instability. Technology can help, but it cannot carry the entire burden of human wellbeing.

What connects the UK's proposed social media ban, Washington state's policy explorations, and the rise of mobile

health initiatives is a growing awareness that the digital age requires new forms of responsibility. For a long time, innovation raced ahead while regulation lagged behind. Companies experimented first, and society dealt with the consequences later. Now, that pattern is being questioned. Governments are stepping in not because they dislike technology, but because they are beginning to see its long term social costs.

There is an emerging demand for a more ethical approach to design. Parents, educators, and young people themselves are asking why platforms are built to keep users hooked for hours, why harmful content spreads faster than helpful information, and why children are treated as just another market segment. These questions challenge the tech industry to rethink its priorities. If children's mental health is truly a concern, then safety features, time limits, and transparent algorithms should not be optional extras but core components.

The debate also forces society to reflect on what childhood should look like in the twenty-first century. Previous generations worried about television, video games, or comic books. Each new medium brought its own moral panic. But social media is different in scale and intimacy. It is not something children watch occasionally. It is something many

live inside, shaping how they see themselves and others from a very young age. Deciding where to draw boundaries is not about nostalgia for a pre digital past. It is about acknowledging that human development has limits, and that not everything technically possible is psychologically healthy.

There is no perfect solution. A social media ban for under sixteen users may reduce certain harms, but it will not magically solve the youth mental health crisis. AI guardrails can improve accountability, but they cannot eliminate all risks. Mobile wellness platforms can expand access to care, but they cannot replace human connection. What these efforts can do, if aligned thoughtfully, is signal a shift in values. They can show that societies are willing to put wellbeing ahead of unchecked growth, and children ahead of convenience.

The question is not whether technology should be part of young people's lives. It already is, and it will remain so. The real question is who gets to decide how it shapes those lives. Leaving that decision entirely to market forces has led us to the current moment of concern and correction. Bringing parents, educators, health professionals, policymakers, and young people into the conversation offers a chance to do better.

The UK's consideration of a social media ban is one expression of that effort. It may evolve, be revised, or even be rejected. But the conversation it has sparked is unlikely to disappear. Across the world, societies are waking up to the fact that digital wellbeing is not a niche issue. It is central to education, health, democracy, and the future of the next generation. How we respond now will shape not just how children use technology, but how they grow up in a world where the line between online and offline is increasingly blurred.

In this sense, the moment is both challenging and hopeful. Challenging because it forces us to confront uncomfortable truths about systems we have allowed to grow with little restraint. Hopeful because it shows a willingness to change course, to ask harder questions, and to imagine a digital future that serves human needs rather than exploits human vulnerabilities. If that balance can be found, then technology may yet become not a threat to young minds, but a tool that genuinely supports their growth, resilience, and wellbeing.

European editor Angela Kosta globally promotes literature

By: Dr Ratan Bhattacharjee

The human voice in Angela Kosta is always magical. In Angela Kosta, poetry touches the strings of the soul, inviting the reader to reflect on the fragility and strength inherent in the human experience. Angela Kosta shares the vision, Build Bridges, Not Walls. She stood on the podium of the Senate of Italian Republic to thank with deep gratitude the President of the Verbumlandi Art Association for organizing the magnificent event Premio Divina Mente Donna Dr Regina Resta where women have brought their voice. Guests of honor were Senator Manfredi Potenti and the Honorable Laura Ravetto. Many participants, including: journalists, writers, poets, entrepreneurs, promoters, engineers, boxer, athlete graced this wonderful event. Finally Angela Kosta is honoured to receive the medal of the International Award at the Menotti Art International Festival Spoleto, "Communicating with Europe" as Doctor Honoris Causa and Ambassador of Culture from European Union (Luxembourg and Brussels and Rome), European Parliament's Brussels.

Anyone acquainted with eminent European Editor and Poet Angela Kosta is surely to be amazed by , the positive motivation from her poems such as The Light of Survival . The oceanic light emerges and fills the cracks in the souls of the sick./wherever are there./By embracing the light, everyone recovers from the evils of the century./Diseases and Poverty! The Power of Women persists and sprouts from the same force of life. She finds this strength very prominent active in every field; The grand event of NACIONAL highlights the writers who survive by writing and Pen is the powerful weapon toward this desired peace a disarmed and disarming peace recognized by the Senate of the Italian Republic which expressed deep gratitude for this cultural exchange event between the two countries - Italy and Albania. This grand event was held in the conference hall of the Oxford Hotel, where the publishing house Nacional had the pleasure of hosting and presenting a special cultural and intellectual gathering having resonance of contemporary Italian and international literature within one of the most significant platforms for Albanian culture and letters, the literary and cultural newspaper Nacional. After the exchange of Certificates of Appreciation from both sides, other scholars, writers, and authors also took the floor. The event concluded with coordinator Angela Kosta, who expressed gratitude to the honored guests and all attendees in the hall. In Gazeta Nacional, Angela Kosta herself had the honor of having many editorials approved and published, which she had interviewed, included India and others all with the dream of achieving global peace. Similarly, she contributes to the monthly magazine Saturno Magazine, led by the well-known journalist and writer Francesca Gallelo, and to the platform Alessandria Today, under the direction of Dr. Pier Carlo Lava. As the editor of her three physical magazines - two in English

and especially the Albanian-Italian magazine MIRIADÉ and above all as a female translator and promoter, Angela Kosta has strived to shed light on the veiled shadows of voiceless women who still live under the torment of male egoism.

She works at the RIVISTA a group and the LISSALBA newspapers and continued the crusade against all efforts to ensure freedom for culture, and entertainment. In June 2003 she published her first book in Albania "Forgive Me" in which she recorded her dreams and visions that she nourished since her childhood. She is associated with a number of magazines and her contributions enriched "Alessandria Today" edited by Dr. Pier Carlo Lava, "Le Radici - Rrënjët" based in Rome edited by HasanAziz. She made significant contribution to the International Magazine "Orfeu" (Kosovo) edited by Dibran Fyl. Her articles and translations came out in the newspaper "Përfaqesja Italo Shqiptare - Approach", Gazeta Destinacioni magazine "Obelisk", the International Magazine "Atunis" - the International Magazine "Saturno" and many others. She is also a writer in the Journal Psychology, Sprint News, Lissalba, Pirusti News, Gazeta Dukagini, Tekste Shqip, media Boulevard, Fjala, and Telegraf, The World Today and others. She made significant contribution to International Literature, Language Journal Pinnacle News Review, and in the Elite Magazine published from Lebanao. In June 2003 she published her first book in Albania "Forgive Me" in which she recorded her dreams and visions that she nourished since her childhood. She collaborates and writes articles, interviews, etc. on the newspaper Calabria Live. Angela Kosta writes in her poem, The Apotheosis of Beelzebub, "Silently the devil rules the world/From hell the tentacles extends./Like a vampire/thirsty blood sucks continuously/He becomes livid with those who are helpless./In the storms of life he howls with anger./With furious burning fire he destroys/Humans still in the womb".

She started writing from an early age, so at the age of six and this child prodigy wrote her first poem dedicated to her mother. She had a fairly peaceful childhood and adolescence. But she was exposed to the violence of dictatorship as she grew up and came to know the reality around her. Poetry, more than ever, is a space of sharing, meeting and light. Antonio Ma at is featured on the cover of Literary Barcelona Magazine. Angela keeps deeply connected to Founder & Editor-in-Chief, Hassane Yarti, and the entire Barcelona Adabia team along with Antonio Ma at and his team for promoting writers and poets and also the journalists all over the globe. She gives them space in those global magazines in the LISSALBA newspapers also she plays a vital role of coordinator

Angela Kosta came out with Antologia, a wonderful anthology of poems written by a huge number of poets from all over the world. The Anthology has in the meantime created a poetic wave all over Europe, Asia Africa and the USA. The poetic anthology

is a wonderful milestone of translation from various languages into Italian published by Lena Graphic publishing House Pristina in April 2024 available also in Amazon. Angela Kosta got big help from Chief Managing Editor "The Global Nation" and Editor Dr. Mahibubur Rahman in bringing out this anthology who contacted many poets for their contribution to this unique volume. Angela is a renowned poet, social activist and more important than everything is a noble human being who is always ready to help poets and creative minded people. She is an icon of inspiration. She organizes poetic platforms whenever it is possible for her. More, she is a wonderful translator. She translates but it is a mindblowing transcreation as well. She loves Indian poets who got a huge place in her anthology Antologia. She writes articles for the Italian newspaper Calabria Live . Angela was born in Albania in 1973. She has been living in Italy since 1995. She has published 9 books: novels, poems and fairy tales in Albanian and Italian. Angela Kosta is deputy editor-in-chief of the international newspaper Albania Press .

She is also a translator and her publications are seen in various literary magazines and newspapers in Albania, Kosovo and Italy. All these vast experiences have made it possible for her to bring out this wonderful anthology where a mini poetic world is accommodated. The book represented diversity of ideas and viewpoints . Angela herself is a poet of profound sensibility. In the poem For My Mother, Angela so poignantly wrote, "Where are you, my mother?/I wish to kiss your eyes with goodness once again/I want to caress your warm hands just the way you used to do./I want to feel the wrinkles of your untimely old age with my fingers/I don't want to see you in such lethargic condition./Your grey hair are the witness to eternal suffering./You are irreplaceable to me." She is also a translator and her publications are seen in various literary magazines and newspapers in Albania, Kosovo and Italy. Angela s views of a woman are quite interesting. In her poem You are a Lady (translated by Dilip Mewada) she writes, "You ladies,/A fragile martyr./Return from the lost path where there is no whisper./Desperate crying of dirty life,/tears of blood, nail scratched bodies having distressed soul;/You ladies,/Rise!Stay away from everything that negates the "goddess" in you;/Cross the border of patience and violence/Tear off your faded veil./The dark eternal mask;/Free yourself from people who don't deserve you,/your moist smile on the lips;/You ladies,/Live again!/Raise your heads Open fists holding the power of life;/Bloom again to sing.../Smile.../Enjoy your freedom coming out of the prison of hatred. As a champion of women rights Angela looks deeply into the predicaments faced by the women." (The author is International Tagore Awardee poet and writer, a former Affiliate Faculty of Virginia Commonwealth University USA. & multilingual Columnist. He can be reached at profatanbhattacharjee@gmail.com)

Rewiring the mind: Choosing joy over conditioning

By: Dipak Kurmi

Human life is a continuous interplay between experience and perception. From the earliest moments of childhood, every interaction, every observation, and every emotional response contributes to the formation of a complex neural map within the brain. This intricate network of pathways, often referred to as a mental blueprint, shapes the way individuals think, feel, and react to life's many circumstances. Much like a building follows the plan set by its architect, our future responses and behaviors are often guided by this invisible mental architecture.

However, the idea that we are forever imprisoned by the blueprints laid down in our early years is a misconception. Neuroplasticity—the brain's ability to reorganize itself by forming new neural connections—proves that change is not only possible but well within reach for anyone willing to consciously practice it. The key to unlocking this transformation lies in understanding one fundamental truth: while we may not control every situation life throws at us, we always retain the power to control our response to it.

Consider a simple scenario that illustrates this principle vividly. Imagine two individuals preparing to step out when suddenly it starts to rain. One reacts with irritation: "Why did it have to rain now?" The other, perhaps with a smile, steps out to enjoy the coolness of the unexpected shower. The external situation remains unchanged for both, but their internal experiences could not be more different. The source of this divergence is not the rain but the neural pathways that govern their thoughts—pathways built through years of habitual thinking patterns.

Mental conditioning, while often unconscious, has the power to influence our entire life trajectory. It can imprison us within self-imposed limits, blocking opportunities for growth, happiness, and change. Many individuals, even when confronted with solutions to their long-standing problems, prefer to remain within the boundaries of familiar discomfort. The idea of trying something new appears daunting, even if it promises clear benefits. Fear of the unknown and resistance to altering established thought patterns keep them trapped in cycles of dissatisfaction and inertia.

This psychological rigidity becomes particularly evident in times of crisis. Instead of embracing

change, individuals cling to their conditioned responses, perpetuating their suffering. I have witnessed cases where people, fully aware of the steps needed to resolve their issues, deliberately avoid taking action. They fear stepping beyond the comfort of known miseries. The inability to envision new possibilities or adopt different approaches becomes their biggest obstacle.

To break free from these self-defeating patterns, one must first acknowledge that every thought is a choice. Situations do not dictate our feelings; our interpretations do. Recognizing this empowers us to rewire our brains through deliberate practice. With mindfulness and sustained effort, new neural pathways can be created, offering healthier, more constructive responses to life's challenges.

Beyond mental reconditioning, it is crucial to revisit and redefine our life priorities. In a society increasingly obsessed with material success, many find themselves lost in the pursuit of external achievements. But is material accomplishment the ultimate benchmark of a meaningful life? Personal experiences and countless real-life examples suggest otherwise. I once encountered a highly accomplished professional, someone who had climbed the corporate ladder with remarkable speed. On paper, he was the epitome of success. Yet, in private conversation, he broke down, lamenting the hollowness and emotional exhaustion that accompanied his achievements. His story, unfortunately, is far from unique.

Spirituality offers valuable guidance here. It helps us see beyond the transient metrics of success—position, wealth, accolades—and focus on elements that offer lasting fulfillment: peace, contentment, and happiness. This does not imply abandoning ambition or setting aside professional goals. Rather, it calls for a recalibration of priorities—a conscious choice to follow the middle path.

Setting and pursuing goals remains essential for personal growth and societal contribution. However, the approach to these goals makes all the difference. Working towards objectives with dedication, but without obsessive attachment, allows for a balanced, joyful journey. It creates space for other vital aspects of life—time to exercise, moments for meditation, opportunities to learn, and the freedom to relax. This balance fosters mental resilience, ensuring

that the pursuit of goals enhances life rather than diminishes it.

Moreover, adopting this balanced approach brings happiness into the present moment, instead of postponing it until some distant future achievement. Too often, people believe they will be happy after they secure the perfect job, earn a promotion, or purchase their dream home. However, this mindset only delays joy, creating a constant cycle of chasing the next milestone. When happiness becomes conditional, it remains elusive.

Living with balance also fortifies us against life's inevitable disappointments. If a goal is not achieved, it no longer spells emotional devastation. Failure is seen as a passing event, not a definitive verdict on self-worth. The wisdom gained from living sensibly, with spiritual awareness, becomes an enduring source of strength.

Science today supports these timeless spiritual truths. Cognitive behavioral therapy, mindfulness-based stress reduction, and positive psychology all emphasize the role of thought patterns in emotional well-being. They encourage individuals to challenge negative thinking, develop gratitude, and nurture optimism—essentially advocating for neural rewiring through conscious thought.

Meditative practices further deepen this transformation. Meditation not only calms the mind but also creates new neural pathways that foster compassion, resilience, and emotional stability. By connecting with the inner self, individuals begin to view life's events with equanimity, seeing challenges as lessons rather than threats.

In the end, the journey toward mental freedom and lasting happiness begins with one courageous step: taking ownership of our thoughts. By embracing the power to choose our mental responses, we dismantle the barriers built by past conditioning. Each moment becomes an opportunity to think differently, act wisely, and live joyfully.

The blueprint of the mind is never fixed. It is a living, evolving design that can be reshaped with conscious effort, spiritual understanding, and a commitment to balanced living. When we combine discipline with flexibility, focus with relaxation, and ambition with contentment, we chart a path towards a life that is not only successful by external standards but also deeply, authentically fulfilling from within. (The writer can be reached at dipakurmigpltd@gmail.com)



By: Simanta Sarma

Indian puppetry: A new direction

(... continued from the last issue)

Many forms of puppetry depend on oral traditions. Numerous folk stories, scripts, music, and techniques are not preserved in written or digital form. Therefore, with the death of experienced artists or their change of profession, the possibility of losing valuable information has increased.

In many cases, there are limitations in adapting puppet theatre themes according to contemporary social issues and the interests of the younger generation. Although puppet theatre has been used in some instances for education, health awareness, and social messaging, greater initiatives are needed to incorporate modern themes on a larger scale.

The Ministry of Culture, Government of India, the Centre for Cultural Resources and Training (CCRT), the Sangeet Natak Akademi, and various cultural organizations have taken steps to preserve puppetry. Through the theatre festivals, workshops, training camps, and financial assistance, artists have been encouraged. However, these efforts need to be more extensive and organized. Although puppetry faces many challenges, there is significant potential to revive this art with the help of modern technology and new ideas. By incorporating puppet theatre into school education, presenting it through digital media, and connecting it with social themes, the younger generation can be engaged with this art. Cultural tourism and international festivals also provide opportunities to promote this art globally. Amid these challenges, Indian puppetry is moving toward a new direction. Contemporary puppeteers and theatre practitioners are redefining this

art according to modern societal needs rather than limiting it to heritage preservation. Through new materials, smaller and more mobile puppets, modern themes, and innovative staging, puppetry is being given a new form.

Currently, puppetry is being successfully used in education, science communication, health awareness, environmental protection, financial literacy, voter awareness, and social campaigns. Complex subjects can be communicated to the public in a simple, enjoyable, and memorable way through puppet theatre. This usage has made puppetry socially relevant once again.

Indian puppetry is a rich cultural heritage that has evolved over centuries. Despite facing various challenges in the modern era, this art has not disappeared; rather, through new ideas, technology, and social applications, it is moving forward in new directions. Contemporary puppeteers, theatre practitioners, and cultural organizations are redefining puppetry according to modern needs instead of limiting it to tradition.

Earlier, traditional materials such as wood, clay, bamboo, cloth, and leather were used to make puppets. Today, artists have started using fiber, thermocol, foam, plastic, papier-mâché, and recyclable materials. The use of these new materials has made puppets lighter, more durable, and easier to manipulate. Additionally, modern lighting systems, sound technology, and digital projection have made puppet performances more attractive. In some cases, the combination of multimedia and animation has also given puppet theatre a new dimension. For modern stages and mobile performances, smaller and easily portable puppets are becoming more popular. This change has made it easier to present puppet shows in schools, rural areas,

health camps, and social events, making the art more people-oriented and relevant.

Contemporary puppet theatre now includes not only mythological or historical stories but also various modern social issues. Topics such as health awareness, environmental conservation, gender equality, the importance of education, and children's rights are successfully presented through puppet theatre. Because of its simple and enjoyable presentation style, even complex subjects become easy for ordinary people to understand. This medium has proven especially effective in creating awareness among rural communities and children. Many educational institutions and science organizations are now using puppet theatre as a teaching tool. It is being used in schools to explain moral education, hygiene, and scientific concepts. Various science centers and educational institutions in India are also using puppetry to promote science communication and scientific temper.

Puppetry is currently being used as an important medium in various government and social campaigns. Health departments use puppet theatre for vaccination drives, sanitation campaigns, and public health awareness. It is also effective in promoting financial literacy, voter awareness, environmental conservation, and women's safety. Government agencies, NGOs, and cultural groups are working to create awareness at different social levels through puppet theatre.

For the revival of puppetry, various cultural organizations and government institutions have been organizing training camps, workshops, and festivals. The Sangeet Natak Akademi, Ministry of Culture, and regional cultural centers are playing important roles in preserving and developing puppetry. International puppet festivals have also

helped introduce Indian puppetry to the global stage. Cultural tourism has further increased the importance of puppetry, as tourists from India and abroad show interest in traditional puppet performances, creating new economic opportunities and global recognition for artists. An important feature of the new direction of puppetry is its connection with modern theatre and technology. By combining live actors, puppets, music, modern lighting, sound design, video, and multimedia, a new theatrical language has emerged. This fusion has made puppetry a powerful medium of symbolic and abstract expression. Traditionally, puppetry was associated with folk culture, religious narratives, and social education. However, with developments in theatrical styles and technology, new dimensions have emerged. Puppet theatre is no longer limited to traditional presentation but has integrated with modern theatrical thinking, stage design, and advanced technology, making it more creative and contemporary. The combined use of live actors and puppets has become an important modern theatrical trend. In such performances, actors interact with puppets or control their movements, creating deeper and more symbolic expressions. Many global theatre practitioners have used this method to develop new theatrical languages, and in India too, contemporary theatre groups are using this fusion to present social, psychological, and philosophical themes.

Modern lighting has added a new dimension to puppet theatre. The use of colored lights, dynamic lighting, and special projections enhances the dramatic atmosphere. Particularly in shadow puppetry, modern lighting makes movements and shapes clearer. Stage design has also evolved with technology, including movable stages, projection screens, and digital scenery, making performances more realistic. Music and sound have always been important in puppetry, and modern sound technology has further enhanced presentations. Recorded music, digital sound effects, and live music combinations increase emotional impact and audience engagement.

Video projection, animation, and multimedia are increasingly used in puppet theatre. These technologies help present background scenes, narratives, and symbolic imagery effectively, aligning puppetry with international standards. One of the greatest strengths of puppetry is symbolic expression. Through puppets, human emotions, psychological states, and philosophical ideas can be conveyed effectively. Modern theatrical experiments use puppetry to explore abstract themes such as human psychology, social conflict, and environmental crises.

This approach has established puppetry not only as a folk art but also as an important part of contemporary theatre. The fusion of modern theatre and technology has also made puppetry more effective in education and social awareness. Multimedia-assisted puppet performances in schools, science centers, and social programs help explain complex topics in simple ways.

This integration has also brought Indian puppetry to international recognition. Indian puppet performances are being presented successfully in international theatre festivals and cultural exchange programs, enhancing creativity and global appreciation.

Indian puppet theatre is one of the oldest and richest performing arts of the country. Over time, it has remained closely connected with Indian society, religious traditions, and folk culture. With modern theatrical experiments, technological use, and cultural exchange programs, Indian puppetry has gained greater global recognition and appreciation. Its presence in international festivals, cultural events, and research fields continues to grow.

Indian puppet theatre is regularly presented in festivals around the world. In Europe, Asia, and America, Indian artists have performed string puppets, shadow puppets, and glove puppets, earning international praise. These festivals provide opportunities not only for promotion but also for creative collaboration and exchange with puppetry traditions from other countries.

The integration of modern technology and theatrical experimentation has made Indian puppetry more appealing to international audiences. Multimedia, modern lighting, and sound technologies have enhanced presentations, enabling Indian puppetry to evolve in harmony with global contemporary theatre trends. Research on Indian puppetry is being conducted in universities and cultural research centers worldwide. These studies have highlighted its historical significance, theatrical language, and social role at the global level. Puppetry has also been included in theatre education and cultural studies in many academic institutions.

Indian puppet theatre has also gained importance in the field of cultural tourism. Tourists from both India and abroad have

shown interest in enjoying Indian folk theatre and puppet performances. This interest has created new financial and professional opportunities for artists. Moreover, as international cultural organizations such as UNESCO emphasize the preservation of folk arts, the global recognition of Indian puppetry has increased.

International collaboration has provided Indian puppetry with opportunities to learn new theatrical styles and techniques. Joint theatre projects and workshops with artists from different countries have enabled new creative experiments. This collaboration has given puppetry a more modern and multidimensional form. National and international puppet festivals, workshops, and training programs have strengthened this new direction of puppetry. Under the Ministry of Culture, Government of India, institutions such as the Sangeet Natak Akademi, Centre for Cultural Resources and Training (CCRT), National School of Drama, Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA), and various cultural organizations have provided opportunities for research, documentation, and performance. Additionally, the active participation of women artists and independent puppeteers has introduced new voices, themes, and perspectives into puppetry.

Today, Indian puppetry stands at an important crossroads. The balance between preserving tradition and integrating modernity will determine the future of this art form. In its new direction, puppetry respects the past while fulfilling present needs and preparing the path for the future. Indian puppetry is a rich folk performing art that has evolved over centuries. It has played a significant role in society, culture, and education. At present, puppetry is at a crucial turning point, where balancing tradition and modernity has become essential. This balance will shape its future development. Puppetry is deeply connected with Indian folk culture, religious narratives, and social values. To preserve this art, it is essential to document traditional techniques, scripts, music, and presentation styles. Governments and cultural institutions have undertaken research, documentation, and preservation initiatives in this field. Institutions such as the Sangeet Natak Akademi, Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA), and the Centre for Cultural Resources and Training (CCRT) are playing important roles in preserving the heritage of puppetry.

For the future development of puppetry, it is extremely impor-

tant to engage the younger generation with this art. By incorporating puppet theatre into schools and educational institutions, creativity and cultural awareness among students can be enhanced. Through various training camps, workshops, and theatre festivals, puppetry techniques are being spread among the new generation. These initiatives will help maintain the continuity of the art form. The use of modern technology has further brightened the future prospects of puppetry. Through digital media, multimedia, animation, and online platforms, puppet theatre can now reach larger audiences. Social media and video platforms have created new opportunities to promote puppetry globally.

Puppet theatre has become a powerful medium for creating awareness in various sectors of society. Topics such as health awareness, environmental protection, financial literacy, the importance of education, and social development are presented in a simple and engaging manner through puppetry. It is expected that this medium will gain even greater importance in social development in the future. Puppetry can also play an important role in cultural tourism. Interest in folk arts among tourists is increasing. By linking puppet theatre and puppet-making crafts with tourism, new economic opportunities can be created for artists. This will not only improve artists' livelihoods but also ensure the preservation of the art. Through cultural exchange and joint theatre projects with different countries, Indian puppetry has gained new directions. Participation in international festivals and research activities has increased its global recognition. Such collaborations will continue to support the creative growth of puppetry in the future.

Thus, Indian puppetry is not merely a memory of the past; it remains a living, powerful, and relevant art form even today. Its ability to evolve in harmony with society has kept it timeless and will preserve it as a valuable cultural heritage for future generations.

Indian puppetry is not just a legacy of the past; it is still a vibrant and dynamic art form. The integration of tradition, modern technology, education, and social application can further enrich its future. Its adaptability to social change has ensured its continuity and strengthened its potential to be preserved as a valuable cultural heritage for generations to come. (The author is an Assistant Professor, Sualkuchi Budarum Madhab Satradhikar College, Sualkuchi)

For the future development of puppetry, it is extremely impor-

Stories that refuse silence: Arundhati Roy's powerful narratives in 'The God of Small Things' and 'Mother Mary Comes to Me'

By: Plabon Jyoti Nath

Arundhati Roy's literary world unfolds at the intersection of remembrance and invention, where lived experience is reborn through the language of fiction. "The God of Small Things" and "Mother Mary Comes to Me" together form a mirror of the self— one veiled in narrative art and another revealed in personal confession. The memoir's spiritual and emotional reflections breathe silently beneath the surface of the novel, shaping its tone of loss, tenderness, and defiance. In "Mother Mary Comes to Me" Arundhati Roy tries to describe the complex relationship with her mother as well as her childhood filled with struggle and complexities and the journey of her from a trivial, timid girl to a famous writer. The same resonance echoes throughout the novel "The God of Small Things" where Roy sagaciously depicts all her experiences blending them with her strong imagination and tries to portray her inner struggle between faith, freedom and societal judgement. Arundhati Roy, the novelist extraordinary, can be called as one of the towering figures of Indian English Literature, who, through her extraordinary writing style, skills and intellectual thinking had made a safe sphere in this literary field. Perhaps no other single author has established such a momentous impact on Indian English Literature in recent years as Arundhati Roy did. Her Booker prize winning novel "The God of Small Things" invited endless criticism and reaction from all quarters and corners of society. Though exclusively known for its thematic and stylistic innovations and experimentations, the novel is centred on the basic theme of social criticism and precisely, a voice of protest, like any genuine writer, anxious to establish a core of her own. It is a story of five generations of a family and talks ill of the irrelevant male dominance, illegitimate love, family discontent, conjugal discord, etc. This novel is bitter in a sense as it originated from several small things. "Small" is permanent, "Small" is relevant, "Small" is teasing, wonderful and what not. It is a protest against the patriarchal system of oppression and exploitation, against the communist establishment, against public administration (particularly the police department), against legitimate unification of the two sexes called arranged marriages against the concepts of Christianity. Etc. It is radical, subversive, wit, irony, exaggeration and sarcasm. The voice of protest is the voice of disagreement, a staunch refusal to accept the existing pattern as a radical humanist.

On the other hand in "Mother Mary Comes to Me," Roy revisits the emotional turbulence of her childhood,

where her mother's fury became both a wound and a revelation. In recent years, Arundhati Roy has not written with such simple and touching beauty as she does in Mother Mary Comes to Me. The language of this book feels clear and natural, like clean water flowing freely. Every line moves softly and smoothly, carrying a deep emotional rhythm. Through this gentle flow of words, Roy takes us back to her unusual childhood, which was very different from what most children experience. She did not grow up like the usual "mummy-daddy" children who live in stable families. Instead, her childhood was spent on the edge of respectability—partly free, partly difficult, but never ordinary. There was a touch of privilege in her life, but it was mixed with struggle, loneliness, and constant change.

The main reason behind the writing of this book is the grief that Roy felt after her mother's death. This deep emotional pain pushed her to remember, reflect, and finally write about her mother, Mary Roy. Mary Roy was a remarkable woman—strong, independent, and bold. She was a teacher, an educationist, and a woman who built institutions and fought against unfair patriarchal laws. In the first hundred pages of the book, Roy talks about her

The title Mother Mary Comes to Me might make readers think that the book is about a saintly or gentle mother figure, like the holy Mother Mary from Christian belief. But in reality, it is not like that. Arundhati Roy's mother was not a soft, ideal mother full of sweetness and patience. She was strong, sometimes angry, and often strict. So, the title works like a "red herring"—it leads the reader in one direction but reveals something completely different.

This book is not a simple, tearful story of loss. It is not written with blind devotion or with a misty sense of sorrow. Instead, it is a very honest and emotional attempt to understand the complex bond between a mother and a daughter. Roy's tone keeps changing—sometimes she is full of admiration, sometimes she feels hurt or confused, and sometimes she even seems to rebel against her mother's power. Through her writing, Roy explores how love and pain can exist together in the same relationship. She understands that her mother's anger and strictness shaped her into the person she became—strong, questioning, and creative. The book, therefore, becomes not only a story about her mother but also a journey of self-discovery.

Mother Mary Comes to Me shows Arundhati Roy at her most personal and thoughtful. Her words are simple but powerful, honest but filled with love. It is a story of memory, grief, and the complicated beauty of family bonds—a daughter's heartfelt search to make peace with the mother who both hurt her and made her

who she is. It can be said that, Mary Roy, Arundhati's mother, was both her greatest inspiration and her biggest challenge. Her strong and complex personality shaped Arundhati's thoughts, giving her the courage to question power and express herself freely. It touches me how Roy uses small, everyday details to express big issues like caste, gender, and social inequality. Her focus on the "small things" teaches us that even the smallest moments can reveal deep truths about human life.

After reading both Mother Mary Comes to Me and The God of Small Things, I can clearly see how her fiction mirrors her own experiences. The real events from her life become the foundation for the stories and characters we find in her novel. I admire how Arundhati Roy transformed her personal pain into powerful social criticism. Instead of hiding her struggles, she wrote about them openly, turning her writing into a voice of protest and self-expression. The way Roy presents her mother as both strong and flawed feels deeply honest. It shows that real love includes both admiration and conflict, and that understanding someone often means accepting their imperfections. I think the connection between Ammu and Mary Roy shows how personal stories can grow into universal symbols of resistance. Through Ammu, Roy pays tribute to her mother's courage and highlights the struggles of women everywhere. Roy's courage to question patriarchy, politics, and social injustice through her writing truly inspires me. She teaches that a writer's duty is not only to tell stories but also to speak the truth, even when it is uncomfortable. To me, Arundhati Roy is more than just a novelist; she is a mirror of truth. Through her words, she reflects her society, her past, and her inner world, making her voice one of the most powerful in Indian English literature.

Roy's courage to speak against the systems of power—be it family, religion, or politics—shows her as a true voice of resistance. In Mother Mary Comes to Me, she honestly looks back at her mother with both love and pain, trying to understand the roots of her own identity. This emotional journey helps us see that behind every act of rebellion lies a story of survival and self-discovery. Thus, both works together form a complete picture of Arundhati Roy as a woman of emotion, thought, and protest. Her writings remind us that the "small things" of life—childhood memories, silent pains, and private loves—can often reveal the biggest truths of humanity. (The author is an M.A. Second Semester student, Department of English, Sibsagar University, Sivasagar. He can be reached at 9707417661)

Balloon Dream's

By: Otteri Selva Kumar

Usha and Magesh walked hand in hand along Marina Beach, the salty breeze gently tousling their hair. It was an ordinary Sunday, but for them, each shared moment felt like a rediscovery of love they'd vowed years ago. Marina, with its expanse of golden sand and bustling crowds, bore witness to their enduring affection.

As the sun dipped towards the horizon, painting the sky in hues of orange and purple, Usha's eyes caught sight of a little boy darting between the groups of visitors. He was no older than seven, with a look of earnest determination etched across his face. Strapped to his back was a cluster of colorful balloons, bobbing joyously with each of his hurried steps. His name, they would soon learn, was Selvam.

Magesh, noticing the boy as well, smiled softly. "Remember when we used to chase after balloons at fairs?" he asked Usha, his voice carrying a wistful edge. Usha chuckled, her eyes lighting up with remembrance. "How could I forget? You always picked the biggest one, and then struggled to carry it through the crowd."

Nostalgia swelled between them as they approached the boy. Selvam stopped in his tracks, offering them a shy, gap-toothed smile. His little hands clutched a string tightly, at the end of which a particularly large balloon bounced eagerly in the breeze.

"Would you like a balloon?" Selvam asked, his voice hopeful, the innocence of youth twinkling in his dark eyes.

Usha knelt down beside him, her saree catching the sand. "What's your favorite color, Selvam?" she inquired.

"Blue, madam," he replied without hesitation, his gaze drifting upwards to a blue balloon, as vast as the summer sky.

"And why blue?" Magesh asked, his interest piqued as he crouched beside Usha. "Because it's like the ocean, sir. Vast and full of secrets and stories," Selvam said, his voice a whisper, as if he was sharing a sacred

truth. Moved by his words, Usha reached for her purse and handed him a note, much more than what the balloon cost. "We'll take the blue one, and keep the rest for your dreams, perhaps for a storybook about the ocean."

Selvam's eyes widened in astonishment and gratitude. He handed them the balloon, then looked at the money and back at them, unsure of how to respond.

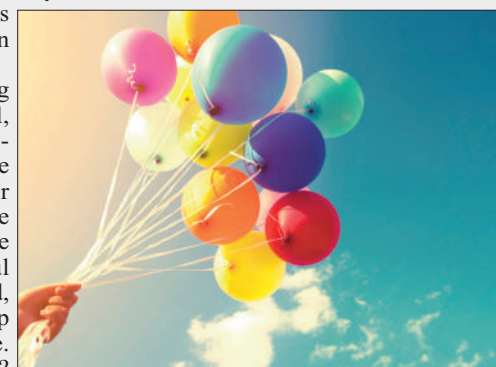
"It's okay," Magesh assured him with a gentle smile. "Consider it a token for the beautiful dreams you carry." Clutching the balloon string, Usha and Magesh continued their walk, the blue balloon dancing merrily above them. Each step seemed lighter, their hearts full, not just with love for each other, but a shared moment of kindness.

"Let's make a wish," Usha suddenly proposed, stopping in her tracks and gazing at the balloon against the backdrop of the setting sun.

"What kind of wish?" Magesh inquired, playing along with her spontaneity.

"A wish for our future, together and happy, just like today. But also for Selvam, that he finds his path, like we found ours." Together, they closed their eyes for a brief moment, their thoughts silent prayers carried by the gentle sea breeze. When they opened their eyes, the balloon seemed to glow brighter, its blue more profound against the twilight sky. As darkness gently rolled in with the tide, they decided to release the balloon into the sky. With a shared breath, they let go of the string, watching as it ascended higher and higher, until it was just a speck in the vastness, a fleeting dot in the enormity of life's canvas.

Hand in hand, Usha and Magesh walked back through the soft sand, their hearts and souls imprinted with the day's simple yet profound joys. Behind them, the sounds of the beach continued—children laughing, waves crashing, but above all, the silent whispers of a blue balloon, carrying dreams into the twilight with balloons so much colour full.



66 lakh names likely to be deleted in post-SIR Bengal electoral rolls, 60 lakh under adjudication

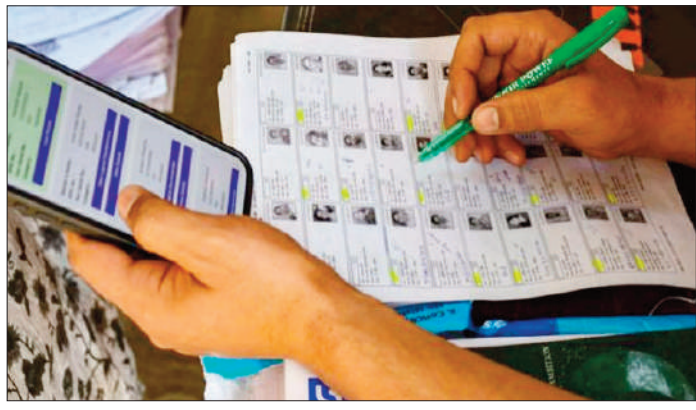
KOLKATA, Feb 28: The Election Commission on Saturday published West Bengal's post-SIR electoral rolls, showing that nearly 66 lakh names are likely to be deleted since the exercise began in November last year while another 60 lakh have been kept 'under adjudication', in a sweeping churn of the voter list ahead of the assembly polls due in April.

The phased publication of the final but incomplete rolls marked the culmination of a 116-day statewide exercise that began on November 4, when booth-level officers started distributing enumeration forms. The draft rolls published on December 16 had already pared down the electorate from 7.66 crore to 7.08 crore, deleting over 58 lakh names on grounds of death, migration, duplication and untraceability.

With nearly eight lakh additional deletions recorded after hearings and scrutiny, the total number of SIR-linked omissions has now climbed to around 66 lakh, according to senior officials.

The figure could still shift as fresh inclusions under Form 6 and objections under Form 7 are processed and supplementary rolls issued.

Around 60.06 lakh voters have



been categorised as 'under adjudication', largely on grounds of 'logical discrepancies' in their forms. Their fate will be decided by judicial officers in the coming weeks, potentially altering the electoral arithmetic further. The scale of deletions and the large number of names kept under adjudication have turned the SIR into a high-stakes political flashpoint.

District-wise data underlined the scale of the shake-up. In Nadia, bordering Bangladesh, around 2.73 lakh names have been deleted, with the electorate dipping from 44.18 lakh at the start of the process to 41.45 lakh in the final roll. The electorate had gone down to 42,02,261 in the draft rolls.

Bankura saw a net reduction of about 1.18 lakh names. From an initial 30,33,830 voters in November, the draft rolls saw the number dip to 29,01,009.

After further scrutiny, around 4,000 more deletions were recorded, partially offset by fresh inclusions, leaving the final figure at around 29.15 lakh.

In north Kolkata, comprising seven assembly constituencies currently held by the TMC, around 4.07 lakh names were omitted during SIR, of which 3.9 lakh were removed in the draft stage and another 17,000 in the final list. The scale of fresh additions in the zone is yet to be officially ascertained. Alipurduar in north Bengal

recorded 1,02,835 deletions, with 11,96,651 names featuring in the final rolls.

The electoral rolls of Hooghly also witnessed a churn as the number of voters dipped from 47,75,099 voters at the beginning of the process to 44,40,293 now, reflecting a total deletion of 3,34,806 names since November, while 1,73,064 voters remain under adjudication, district administration sources said.

The electorate of the district had dipped to 44,56,224 in the draft rolls.

Hard copies of the updated rolls were displayed at SDO and BDO offices across districts, drawing long queues of anxious residents checking whether their names had been marked 'approved', 'deleted' or placed under 'consideration'. Soft copies were yet to appear on the designated EC portals and mobile application till last reports.

The commission maintained that the SIR -- the first intensive statewide roll revision since 2002 -- was a statutory clean-up aimed at ensuring a "pure and error-free" roll ahead of a major election. Of the 7.08 crore electors appearing in the draft rolls, around 6.4 crore have been marked as "approved" so far. (PTI)

Indo-US trade deal will destroy Indian farmers: Rahul Gandhi

BARNALA (PUNJAB), Feb 28: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Saturday targeted Prime Minister Narendra Modi over the Indo-US interim trade deal, claiming that it will destroy Indian farmers.

Addressing the Kisan Mahachaul rally here, Gandhi alleged that the deal had been stalled for four months due to disagreements over the opening of the agriculture sector.

"Question arises, the work which PM did not do for four months, why did he do it within 15 minutes?" he said and asked why the trade deal was suddenly done.

Gandhi said that Modi gave a guarantee to US President Donald Trump that every year India will buy US products worth Rs 9 lakh crore.

He said that the deal will "destroy Indian farmers".

During his address, Gandhi claimed he was not allowed to speak in the Lok Sabha recently after the President's address because he wanted to comment on former Army Chief Manoj Naravane's memoirs.

The Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha said he intended to refer to an unpublished book by Gen Naravane (ret'd), which, he claimed, described a lack of response from the political leadership during Chinese troop movements near the border.

"I asked experts why this deal was stuck. I got a reply that the US wants to open the Indian agriculture sector, and our government does not want to open it," said Gandhi.

Nothing happened on this front for four months, he said.

He said the prime minister called up the US president without consulting the Cabinet, the Agriculture minister and the Defence minister and the External Affairs minister.

Modi told US President Donald Trump that he was ready for the deal, said Gandhi.

Under this deal, India allowed the US to sell soybeans, corn, cotton, fruits and almonds, he said.

"Our farmers are not mechanised. They have small land holdings", he said, adding that in the US, the



landholdings are bigger and also mechanised.

"Narendra Modi ji has opened the door of the agriculture sector. Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Odisha farmers of all these states will be ruined," he alleged.

US goods will come, and our farmers will be destroyed, he said.

"Modi did not want to do this. I know it. Because for four months, he was trying to stop it. We have connections in the government, we know the bureaucrats, and we asked them whether they will open the agriculture sector. They said they are not doing it, he said. "Never ever has any prime minister, be it of the Congress or the BJP could open the agriculture sector, he said.

Then the question arises that the work which Modi did not do for four months then why did he do it within 15 minutes?" he asked.

Gandhi said that if India buys goods worth Rs 9 lakh crore every year, then what will happen to our small and medium-scale sector? It will be finished, he claimed.

He further claimed that PM Modi told the US that India will buy oil from a country that it wants. (PTI)

21 dead, 8 critically injured in Andhra Pradesh cracker unit explosion, CM to visit spot



VETLAPALEM (ANDHRA PRADESH), Feb 28: As many as 21 people were killed and eight others critically injured in the cracker unit blast here in Kakinada district on Saturday, a top police official said.

"We have information that 20 people were killed in the incident," Kakinada Superintendent of Police G Bindu Madhav told PTI.

Andhra Pradesh Home Minister Vangalapati Anitha told PTI that six people were critically injured in the cracker unit blast.

Anitha said she was on her way to the blast site.

Tourism Minister K Durgesh said Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu is expected to visit the site.

"This is the biggest blast in the state. Full details are yet to come. There is no chance that anyone would survive. Some people are undergoing treatment, he told reporters.

The intensity of the explosion at Vetlapalem village in Samarlakota mandal was so strong that bodies were flung into nearby paddy fields, a police official said.

An investigation into the cause of the fire, which led to the blast, is ongoing, police officials said. The Kakinada Government General Hospital superintendent said the hospital received seven patients with burns ranging from 90 to 100 per cent. She said they are under treatment. Chief Minister N Chan-

drababu Naidu expressed sadness over a large number of cracker manufacturing workers losing their lives at Surya Fireworks, said an official release.

"The explosion at a crackers manufacturing unit at Vetlapalem village in Kakinada district has really pained me. Multiple people losing their lives in this accident is sad," Naidu said in a post on 'X'.

Horror scenes played out amid lush green paddy fields as locals were seen shifting bodies in 'barakalu', sheets made of fertiliser bags.

Fire and smoke emanated from the blast site, and an ambulance rushed to rescue the injured.

Naidu said he spoke to officials about the accident and directed them to extend immediate help to the victims.

"We are monitoring the rescue efforts and will come to the aid of the affected families," he said.

Around 20 people were working in the crackers unit when the blast occurred.

Naidu directed senior officials and ministers to visit the accident site.

Police have deployed drones to locate body parts flung into nearby agricultural fields. (PTI)

Oppn raises SIR concerns in Gujarat assembly debate; Speaker allows limited discussion on exercise

GANDHINAGAR, Feb 28: Congress and AAP MLAs on Saturday raised concerns in the Gujarat assembly over alleged irregularities in the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, including deletion of voters' names.

During a discussion in the House on an appropriation Bill authorising expenditure incurred in this fiscal for voter list revision, the Opposition flagged complaints about large numbers of Form 7 applications, meant for deletion of names from voter lists, being filed across constituencies without the knowledge of voters concerned. The debate began after the BJP government sought passage of an appropriation Bill to regularise expenditure incurred on SIR-related work in the state.

While Speaker Shankar Chaudhary had already allowed two Congress MLAs and one AAP legislator to speak on the Bill, Gujarat Forest and Environment Minister Arjun Modhwadia raised a point of order contending that matters pertaining to Election Commission of India (ECI) cannot be discussed in the state assembly.

Citing Article 324 of the Constitution, he said the EC is an autonomous constitutional body responsible for conducting Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha elections and that the state government has no authority to interfere in its

processes, including voter list preparation or revision.

He argued that while state machinery performs election-related tasks, it does so strictly under the control of ECI as per Representation of the People Act.

Issues concerning voter list revisions, EVMs, VVPATs and related matters therefore fall outside the jurisdiction of the state government, Modhwadia said while urging the assembly speaker to disallow discussion on them.

BJP MLA and former speaker Ramanlal Vora supported the point of order, reiterating that though employees belong to the state, their election duties are carried out under direct control of EC and, hence, the assembly was not the appropriate forum to question those processes.

Congress and AAP members, however, opposed the move to block the discussion. Congress MLA Kiriti Patel said while the legislative assembly cannot question independent decisions of EC or matters pending before courts, administrative flaws where the state government bears responsibility must be open to debate. Congress MLA Amit Chavda said protection of the constitutional right to vote was paramount in a democracy.

"Since the ground-level machinery from booth-level officers to election officials belongs to the state government, this House

should examine errors in the preparation of electoral rolls and other administrative lapses," he said. Congress MLA Shailesh Parmar claimed since funds from the state treasury were being used for SIR, the assembly had the right to debate how the money was being spent.

After hearing arguments from both sides, speaker Shankar Chaudhary, delivering his ruling, said he had reviewed past records and found that similar discussions on supplementary demands had been permitted by former speakers.

Under Article 324, the ECI is autonomous and the assembly cannot discuss its statutory and constitutional duties, including SIR exercise, he said in his ruling.

However, Chaudhary clarified that members were permitted to discuss the supplementary demands and administrative lapses of the state machinery involved in implementing the exercise.

He cautioned that there was a "thin line" between criticising state administration and attacking the autonomy of ECI and warned members not to cross it. After being allowed to speak, AAP MLA Chaitar Vasava alleged there was a sudden influx of thousands of Form 7 applications around January 17 and 18 across constituencies to delete names of registered voters from the rolls. (PTI)

'Ex-Muslim' YouTuber slashed several times in his office in UP's Loni; 7 booked

GHAZIABAD (UP), Feb 28: A 50-year-old YouTuber known for his alleged controversial videos on a particular religion was stabbed multiple times by two bike-borne individuals wearing helmets in the Loni area here, leaving him seriously injured, police said.

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath called for strict action in the matter. The police said they have formed 10 special teams to nab the suspects.

Salim Ahmed, alias Salim Wastik, was attacked in his office in Ali Garden shortly after morning prayers. The assailants had been seen loitering near the premises.

Ahmed sustained serious injuries to his neck, abdomen and ear. His condition remains critical, a source from the hospital said.

Locals gathered following the commotion and alerted the police, who rushed him to a hospital in Loni. He was later referred to Guru Teg Bahadur (GTB) Hospital in Delhi due to his critical condition, ACP Loni Siddhartha Gautam said.

Ahmed runs a YouTube channel "Salim Wastik" and goes by the title "Ex-Muslim."

Preliminary investigation suggests that he may have been targeted over his videos allegedly criticising certain practices within the Muslim community, the officer said.

An FIR has been lodged at the complaint of his son, Usman, against seven named individuals, Gautam said. Efforts are underway to obtain CCTV footage from the area to identify and trace the assailants, the ACP added.

Meanwhile, Adityanath, in a statement, said, "Those who play with law and order will not be spared. There is no place for terror in Uttar Pradesh and the law will take its course."

Raids were carried out at four locations, two in Delhi and two in Ghaziabad, and some important clues were obtained, they said.

Force has been deployed in the area as a precautionary measure.

An AIMIM leader identified as Ajar, Ashraf, Shahrukh, Sonu and Bhati Builder have been named in the FIR, the police said. (PTI)

Over 47,000 names deleted in Mamata Banerjee's Bhabanipur seat after SIR

KOLKATA, Feb 28: Ahead of the 2026 assembly elections in West Bengal, the publication of the post-SIR electoral rolls on Saturday triggered fresh political ripples in Bhabanipur, a constituency represented by Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, with over 47,000 names struck off and more than 14,000 kept "under adjudication".

South Kolkata's Bhabanipur assembly segment, widely regarded as Banerjee's pocket borough, had 2,06,295 voters when the SIR process began on November 4 last year.

The draft roll, published on December 16 last year, showed deletion of 44,786 names.

In the final list released on Saturday, another 2,324 names were removed, taking the total deletions to 47,094, a figure roughly 11,000 less than the over 58,000-vote margin secured by Banerjee in the 2021 Bhabanipur bypoll.

This comparison is likely to add a sharper political edge to the constituency's pre-2026 electoral discourse. (PTI)

HC defers Delhi govt's mandate to pvt schools to form fee-regulation committees

NEW DELHI, Feb 28: The Delhi High Court on Saturday deferred the implementation of the city government's mandate to private schools to constitute school-level fee-regulation committees (SLFRCs) for the upcoming academic session. A bench of Chief Justice D K Upadhyaya and Justice Tejas Karia said during the pendency of the petitions challenging the government decision, the constitution of the SLFRCs shall remain in abeyance and the schools shall be entitled to collect the same fees for the academic year 2026-2027 as they did the previous academic year.

Any exorbitant fees, the bench added, shall be regulated in accordance with law.

The bench passed the order on pleas moved by several school associations seeking a stay on a

February 1 notification of the Delhi government that asked the schools to set up the SLFRCs within 10 days. The petitioners include the Delhi Public School Society, Action Committee Unaided Recognised Private Schools, The Forum of Minority Schools, Forum for Promotion of Quality Education for All, Rohini Educational Society and Association of Public Schools.

The court said the fees for the upcoming session are unlikely to be fixed for each of the schools prior to April 1 in terms of the timelines provided in the February 1 notification.

It added that the Delhi School Education (Transparency in Fixation and Regulation of Fees) Act, however, provides that the schools can collect the fee of the previous academic year until the fee is fixed or approved under the pro-

visions of the Act and therefore, no prejudice will be caused if the notification is put in abeyance at this stage. The court said no irreparable loss would be caused to the students if the notification is stayed as any fees levied during the pendency of the matter would be subject to the outcome of the petitions and schools would be liable to refund any excess amount.

"It would be expedient to defer the constitution of the SLFRC during the pendency of the petitions, which will be hard finally on March 12," the court opined. Seeking a stay, the schools claimed that the notification is legally unsustainable as it changes the timelines prescribed in the Delhi School Education (Transparency in Fixation and Regulation of Fees) Act for the constitution of the SLFRCs. (PTI)

'They've done it': CM, LG, political parties hail J-K's maiden Ranji win

JAMMU/SRINAGAR, Feb 28: Political parties in Jammu and Kashmir on Saturday congratulated the Union territory's Ranji team for its maiden title triumph in Karnataka's Hubballi, saying the players have scripted a historic victory in golden letters and brought pride and honour to the region.

The Paras Dogra-led team scripted an extraordinary tale of resilience in Indian domestic cricket to claim their maiden Ranji Trophy title on the basis of a first-innings lead, after the final against eight-time champions Karnataka ended in a draw.

Celebrations erupted across the Union territory, with firecrackers, beats of dhokas and drums reverberating through streets and sweets being distributed in the twin capital cities and other areas from where team members hail.

"They've done it. Well done J&K," Chief Minister Omar Abdullah said in a post on his personal handle on X immediately after the team's win. Abdullah had travelled to Hubballi to cheer for the team.

His party, the National Conference (NC), described the winter as historic glory.

"Historic glory for the Jammu and Kashmir cricket team in the Ranji Trophy! You have made every Jammu & Kashmiri resident proud with your grit and brilliance," the party said on X.

Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha termed the win as the "finest hour", saying the victory has filled the entire UT with pride and emotion.

"Emotions surging beyond words as I watch our Cricket team claiming the Ranji Trophy. To every fierce player who carved history through sheer grit: thank you from entire UT beaming with pride. You have immortalized history—embrace it with honor," the Lt Governor said in a post on X.

Meanwhile, PDP president and former chief minister Mehbooba Mufti said the players "both from Kashmir and Jammu" reflect the strength of unity, and the win sends a strong message against forces attempting to divide people along religious lines.



"Today is truly a very blessed day for our Jammu and Kashmir. In my opinion, it is a slap on the faces of those forces who try to divide Hindus and Muslims and create conflict between them," Mufti told reporters on the sidelines of a party function in Katra township of Reasi district.

"They have shown that when we move forward together, when Hindus and Mus-

lims stand united, we can achieve great things not only for Jammu and Kashmir but for the entire country," the PDP leader said.

All India Congress General Secretary and Leader of the Congress Legislature Party Ghulam Ahmad Mir also congratulated the team on behalf of the party. Thanking the players and the team management, he said the side has etched its

success in golden letters. "They have made us proud and honoured us with their grand victory," Mir said.

J&K BJP chief and MP Sat Sharma, too, extended greetings and said, "They (the team) have not only made us proud with such a massive win but have also opened new pathways for cricket in the country."

The UT cabinet ministers also congratulated the team.

Deputy Chief Minister Surinder Kumar Choudhary said the win would boost the morale of players in other sports as well. "It is a matter of great pride for J&K that its boys have won the Ranji Trophy final. Their achievement will inspire the next generation and give a fillip to sports promotion in the region," he said.

Cabinet minister Sakina Itoo emphasised that the victory "reflects the talent, resilience, and determination of our youth."

Itoo said the win stands as a symbol of unity, hope, and collective pride for Jammu & Kashmir, inspiring every

young dreamer across our regions to believe in their potential.

"Wishing the team continued success in bringing more glory to J&K" she said.

Peoples' Conference led by Sajad Lone said it was a monumental moment in the sporting history of Jammu and Kashmir.

"This triumph is not just a victory on the field, but a testament to resilience, discipline and the indomitable spirit of our youth. You have made the entire region proud and inspired a generation to dream bigger," the party said.

alled Baramulla MP Engineer Rashid's Awami Ithihaad Party (AIP) termed the victory a proud and defining moment for the youth of the region.

In a statement, a party spokesman said the remarkable triumph reflects the talent, determination and resilience of J&K's young cricketers who have brought immense pride and joy to people across the Union Territory.

"This historic achievement has shown that given opportunity and support, the youth of Jammu & Kashmir can excel at the highest level," he said. (PTI)

Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination will safeguard girls's health and future

Sikkim CM lauds PM for launching HPV vaccination campaign for girls



GANGTOK, Feb 28: Sikkim Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang on Saturday lauded Prime Minister Narendra Modi for launching the nationwide Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination campaign for girls and said the drive will safeguard their health and future.

"In a landmark step towards safeguarding health and the future of our young daughters, the Hon'ble Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi Ji, today launched the nationwide Human Papillo-

mavirus (HPV) vaccination campaign for girls aged 14 years," he said in a social media post.

Tamang said he joined the occasion through video conference and that the drive was also launched in Sikkim.

"This transformative initiative will annually benefit approximately 1.15 crore girls across all states and Union territories, marking a decisive stride in the prevention of cervical cancer and the promotion of women's health," the chief minister said.

The vaccine will be administered free of cost at designated government health facilities, ensuring equitable access and inclusive outreach, he said.

"I earnestly urge everyone to come forward and actively create awareness about the importance of HPV vaccination. Let us work together to educate families, encourage eligible girls to avail themselves of this free preventive healthcare service and dispel any misconceptions surrounding the vaccine," Tamang added. (PTI)

HNLC commander surrenders

SHILLONG, Feb 28: An area commander of the banned Hynniewtrep National Liberation Council (HNLC), described as active in West Khasi Hills, surrendered to police at Mairang police headquarters on February 25. He was escorted to meet the Director General of Police in the presence of family members, village authorities and senior officers, a statement issued by the Assistant Inspector General of Police (A) said on Friday.

The commander, identified as Samuel Wahlang Pahsyntiew of Umphowin village, is suspected of involvement in the March 9, 2024 IED blast near Shillong's Syndicate Bus Stand — Them Mator area — and other incidents. During questioning, he revealed that he and Bangladesh-based HNLC cadres had been trying to recruit young people into the outfit over the past two years, police said.

Acting on this and other information, investigators registered CBPS (ER) Case No 01(02)2026 and arrested two suspected cadres from Umsning. Police said the pair is suspected of both recruitment and planting an IED at Umsning market on October 12, 2025, which was recovered and defused.

"He has provided actionable information, which is being processed. Further action is being taken in accordance with law and the surrender policy of the State Government," the AIG said, adding that operational sensitivity prevents disclosure of further details at this stage. (NNN)

Manipur CM flags off 33 maternity ambulances

An initiative to strengthen maternity healthcare services

IMPHAL, Feb 28: Manipur CM Y Khemchand Singh on Saturday flagged off 33 ambulances to strengthen maternity healthcare services, according to an official statement.

The ambulances have been funded by the North Eastern Council, it said.

The flagging-off ceremony took place ahead of the launch of the Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination drive against cervical cancer at the Jawaharlal Nehru Institute of Medical Sciences (JNIMS) in Imphal.

Singh visited the registration counter, vaccination room and observation room at JNIMS, interacting with doctors, nurses and beneficiaries. He also handed over a vaccination certificate to a

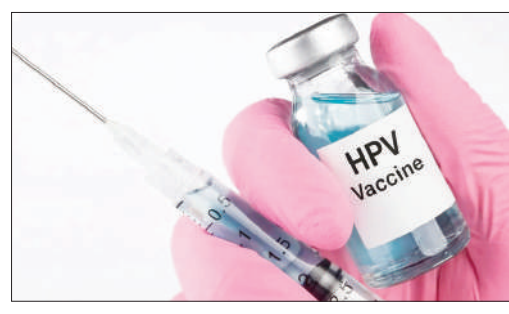


girl who received the HPV vaccine.

The vaccine protects against infection caused by the Human Papillomavirus, the leading cause of cervical cancer -- one of the most

common cancers among women. The single-dose vaccine is being administered to girls aged 14-15 years as part of the nationwide drive, launched by PM Narendra Modi. (PTI)

Nagaland rolls out free HPV vaccination for 14-year-old girls



HPV vaccine will be available daily at government health facilities to ensure maximum coverage.

The vaccine is voluntary and parental or guardian consent is mandatory, he informed.

Referring to the World Health Organisation's global strategy to eliminate cervical cancer, Khinchi highlighted the 90-70-90 targets to be achieved by 2030: 90 per cent of girls fully vaccinated by age 15, 70 per cent of women screened by ages 35 and 45 and 90 per cent of women with cervical disease receiving appropriate treatment.

The WHO also proposes reducing cervical cancer incidence to below four cases per one lakh women in every country.

Terminating the rollout of the Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination programme a significant milestone under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu on Saturday said the initiative marks an important step towards securing the health and future of young girls in the state. Joining the nationwide launch of the programme by Modi from Ajmer, the state formally rolled out the vaccination drive at Tomo Riba Institute of Health & Medical Sciences (TRIHS) at Naharlagun, near here. Accompanied by Health Minister Biyuram Wahge and senior officials of the Health and Family Welfare Department, Khandu launched the state-level campaign aimed at protecting adolescent girls aged 14-15 against cervical cancer, an official communique informed.

"I extend my heartfelt congratulations to all the people of Arunachal, especially our women. Today's launch marks an important step towards securing their health and future," Khandu said. Highlighting the seriousness of cervical cancer, he said the disease burden remains alarming.

In 2024 alone, nearly 78,500 new cases of cervical cancer were reported in India. Unfortunately, around 42,000 women lost their lives. These were not just statistics. They were mothers, sisters and daughters whose lives were cut short," he said. Stressing that nearly 99.7 per cent of cervical cancer cases in India are caused by persistent infection with HPV, Khandu described vaccination as a powerful preventive tool. "The good news is that this is one cancer which can be prevented through vaccination," the chief minister said, adding that the HPV vaccine has been globally tested with remarkable success." (PTI)

Manipur Youth Congress protests against BJP, demands release of IYC chief

IMPHAL, Feb 28: The Manipur unit of the Youth Congress on Saturday staged a protest against the alleged "dictatorial rule of the BJP" and demanded the immediate release of Indian Youth Congress president Uday Bhanu Chib and other leaders from jail.

Protesters gathered at Congress Bhavan and attempted to march to the state BJP office, located around a kilometre away, but were stopped at the gate by police personnel, leading to a brief scuffle.

The demonstrators held placards and raised slogans against the BJP and Prime Minister Narendra Modi. They also tried to burn an effigy of the prime minister, which was seized by police, officials said.

The members also held placards and raised slogans such as "BJP down down" and "Narendra Modi is compromised."

State Youth Congress president W Anand Singh told reporters, "Youth Congress has been raising its voice against unemployment, for the protection of constitutional rights and for the poor sections of the country and the state. However, Youth Congress leaders have been imprisoned and threatened, though we are not frightened." (PTI)

'Greater emphasis on Science education needed to address Nagaland's unemployment challenges'

KOHIMA, Feb 28: Nagaland needs a complete change of direction in its academic and economic priorities, with greater emphasis on Science education to address unemployment, a senior official said on Saturday.

Speaking at the National Science Day celebrations in Kohima, Science & Technology Department Principal Secretary I Himato Zhi-momi said Nagaland has over 70,000 unemployed youths, while most graduates passing out each year are from the Arts stream.

Arguing that Science education offers stronger employment prospects, he urged parents, teachers and students to prioritise scientific disciplines.

"The economic foundation of the state must rest on engineers, doctors, technicians and researchers," he said, stressing that sustained investment in science and technology would be central to achieving India's goal of becoming a developed nation.

The National Science Day commemorates physicist CV Raman. The state marked the day with its first-ever state-level Science & Technology Awards.

The Outstanding Achievement in Science & Technology Award was jointly conferred on Sapu Changkija and Vintsole Khamo. Sapu was recognised for his contributions to ethnobotany and sustainable farming systems, while Khamo was honoured for advancing clinical research and medical science facilities.

The Young Scientist Award was presented to Imlisongla Aier, a PhD graduate from IIT Delhi, for her work in clean energy, indoor air quality and environmental health. (PTI)

Four PREPAK (PRO) militants arrested in Manipur

IMPHAL, Feb 28: Security forces have arrested four militants belonging to the banned PREPAK (PRO) outfit in various districts of Manipur for their alleged involvement in extortion activities, a police statement said on Saturday.

The militants were arrested in the last 48 hours.

An insurgent, identified as Kshetrimayum Laiba Meitei (42) was arrested from his residence at Lamdeng Khunou in Imphal West district on Thursday.

Another cadre of the outfit was apprehended from Khuman Lampak area the same day.

Security forces on Friday arrested another cadre of the outfit from Uyal Makha Leikai area in Thoubal district. He was identified as Thokchom Rabichandra Singh (36).

Another cadre of the outfit, identified as Khurajam Rojtkumar Singh (37) was arrested from his residence at Thongju Part-II Makha Leikai in Imphal East district, the police statement said.

Meanwhile, security forces, during an operation at Thinghi-



jang village in Churachandpur district, seized an AK-47 rifle with a magazine, three single-barrel rifles, one bolt-action rifle and one bolt-action sniper rifle with a scope on Thursday.

In a separate operation at Sangaitheh Makha Leikai area in Imphal West district on Friday,

security forces seized a modified .303 rifle without a magazine, two country-made bolt-action single-barrel guns, four pistols along with a magazine each, two grenades without detonators, one HE bomb and fifteen .303 cartridges, it added. (PTI)

NPF gains strength in Dimapur Municipal Council

HT Correspondent

KOHIMA, Feb 28: In a major political development in Dimapur Municipal Council (DMC), two councillors of the National People's Party (NPP) have joined the ruling Naga People's Front (NPF), raising the NPF tally to 17 in the 23 wards. Councillors Jonathan Yephthomi of Ward No 23 and Nikali Sumi Chishi of Ward No 7, along with their supporters, officially joined the NPF on Saturday, giving a major boost to the party's strength in the local government.

The move is expected to strengthen the NPF's commitment to serving the people of Dimapur, with the councillors pledging to work together for the betterment of the people, focusing on development and progress in the city and the party.

Welcoming the two DMC councillors at the Central Office, MLA and NPF Secretary General Achumbemo Kikon said that after the merger of two regional political parties, people had realised the importance of having a strong regional political party to protect the Naga people and their identity. He also said that Chief Minister Dr Neiphiu Rio, who took over as the President of the party and has a tall vision for the Naga people had inspired many people to



join the NPF.

Kikon pointed out that NPF is a very disciplined party and power lies at the grassroots level has urged the two new leaders not to disappoint the mandate of the people but to deliver goods to their people.

Meanwhile, DMC Chairman Hukheto

Yephthomi, who was also present on the occasion, thanked the party for welcoming the two new councillors and asserted that they would carry forward the party's principles faithfully.

Manipur governor meets Home Minister Amit Shah

New govt in place after President's rule; security operations discussed

NEW DELHI, Feb 28: Manipur Governor Ajay Bhalla met Union Home Minister Amit Shah here on Saturday and discussed various issues related to the state, officials said.

A new government took over in Manipur in early February, ending a year-long President's rule imposed following prolonged violence involving Meiteis and Kukis.

Security forces are conducting operations to seize illegal weapons and destroy poppy fields, while the government is trying to reduce friction between communities, officials



said. Manipur has been gripped

by ethnic violence between the Meitei and Kuki communities

Racial attacks on Northeast people reflect structural racism: GNF

Naga body condemns assault on woman doctor in Gorakhpur

KOHIMA, Feb 28: The Global Naga Forum (GNF) "strongly condemns the shocking racially motivated assault and humiliation" of a Naga woman doctor in Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh. "According to multiple print and social media reports, the incident occurred on February 22, 2026, when the resident doctor of AIIMS Gorakhpur was harassed near Orion Mall and later followed to Gate No 2 of the institute campus", the GNF said in a statement.

She was allegedly subjected to racial slurs, sexually derogatory remarks, stalking and physical molestation, the GNF also said. "That such an incident took place in the vicinity of a premier national medical institution exposes the vulnerability of professionals from the Northeast even within public and institutional spaces", the GNF added.

The statement then said there was another recent disturbing incident in Gorakhpur involving a young Naga woman who was racially profiled and intimidated in a public area. She was mocked for her appearance, verbally humiliated and made to feel unsafe solely because of her ethnicity, the GNF alleged. "These incidents are not isolated episodes of misconduct; they reflect a pattern of targeting women from Nagaland and neighboring states on the basis of their racial identity", it added.

The GNF also said beyond Gorakhpur, similar past and recent incidents in other cities leave no room for denying systemic, structural racism against people from the Northeast who do not look and sound like the people in India's heartland. Three women from the Northeast were racially abused and humiliated in a residential locality in Delhi, the GNF said. Earlier, the killing of Anjel Chakma, a student from Tripura, showed how racially motivated hatred can escalate into fatal violence, it

mentioned. "Taken together, these incidents and others before them reveal a recurring and dangerous pattern of racial hostility fanned by Northeast citizens while studying, working and serving society in mainland India", the Naga body said.

The GNF then said it is against this backdrop of frequent verbal and physical violence against people of the northeast region that the Global Naga Forum expresses serious concern over a video interview in which Minister of Tourism & Higher Education, Nagaland, Temjen Imna Along, publicly argued that what Northeast people face in India is "discrimination" and not "racism." The GNF said the minister was contradicting and schooled on the difference between generic discrimination and structural racism in a video by the editor-in-chief of EastMojo in November 2025. "We strongly stand in support of the editor's intervention. When a public representative engages in public misinformation on an issue of such public consequence, as the minister did, he legitimizes the denial of racism against minorities instead of helping to resolve the problem", the GNF also said.

The Naga body then said positions on such serious issues, when taken lightly especially by those in authority, risk emboldening extremist and majoritarian elements in the country who already view the people from the Northeast as "outsiders". It further stated that statements that downplay racism will only encourage Akhand Bharat activists and like-minded groups to continue acts of racial abuse with greater impunity. "When students are killed, women are harassed and professionals are attacked because of who they are, their ethnicity, one is compelled to question how such realities can be dismissed as mere discrimination," the GNF added. (NNN)

J&K tower over Karnataka to clinch maiden Ranji Trophy title

HUBBALLI, Feb 28: Jammu and Kashmir scripted an extraordinary tale of resilience in Indian domestic cricket to claim their maiden Ranji Trophy title by out-batting traditional heavyweights Karnataka here on Saturday, capping a glorious season that saw them tackle favourites and fellow upstarts with equal tact and confidence.

The bald facts will tell that Jammu and Kashmir held the eight-time former champions to a draw punctuated by a 291-run first innings lead to lock the crown, an advantage they extended to 633 runs after scoring 342/4 in their second innings on the fifth and final day here.

Opener Qamran Iqbal's second first-class hundred (160 not out) and Sahil Lotra's maiden first-class ton (101 not out) added sheen to the historical occasion.

But the day was always meant to be more than just cold numbers, it was meant to tell the story of determination and the power of a dream that was more than six decades in the making.

It was 67 years ago when Jammu and Kashmir made their debut in India's premier domestic competition, which is now 92 years old.

In the past, J&K had entered the quarter-finals in 2013-14, 2019-20 and 2024-25 seasons but succumbed to a train of cataclysmic events and their own frayed nerves.

But over the last five days here at the KSCA Stadium, they hardly resembled first-time final entrants, out-maneuvring a side brimming with India stars with consummate ease.

That Karnataka failed to take a single wicket on the fifth day after J&K resumed



from overnight 186 for four will reinforce the dominance of the tourists in the final.

It was a team effort in its truest sense that led the lesser fancied side to the title.

Pacer Auqib Nabi was a towering presence in the final as he has been throughout this season, taking five wickets for the seventh time this season.

Lotra made a fifty and hundred, skipper Paras Dogra, who became the second batter to go past 10,000 Ranji Trophy runs, while Yawer Hassan, Abdul Samad and Kanhaiya Wadhawan made one half-century each.

They are not household names, perhaps, even in their own state. But this humble bunch produced a magnificent joint effort across 10 Ranji matches in the season that would put a blush on Atlas' face.

After the current season began in silence

in Srinagar following a whipping by Mumbai, Jammu and Kashmir's glorious journey towards the title clash unfurled like a slow-breaking wave. And nothing encapsulated J&K's spirit better than the semifinal against Bengal at Kalyani.

Unlike in the final against Karnataka, they were thrown into turmoil after Bengal took the first-innings lead -- small yet good enough to serve their purpose.

But Nabi bowled them back to contention, masterminding Bengal's dismissal for 88 in the second innings. It, perhaps, made the J&K players aware of the awaiting destiny in Hubballi.

They embraced it gleefully.

Shubham Pundir scored a classy hundred, the foundation for J&K's massive first innings total of 584 and the visitors hardly let

the advantage slip.

Karnataka themselves had shown remarkable consistency since the beginning of the season, and a ninth Ranji Trophy title was taken for granted.

It was not a wrong notion either on account of their form and skill levels.

But the unsuspecting domestic heavy-weight was swept off its feet by a flyweight, not by a knockout punch but by tactical superiority and game awareness.

Karnataka will ponder over the next few days where it all went wrong for them in the title clash, and nothing conveyed the dejection in their hearts than the sight of KL Rahul bowling a few overs.

Harsh views will be exchanged in the boardroom, and a few heads will roll.

But for now, the incredibly feel-good news of a J&K victory will cut across the entrenched lines of the territories socio-economic and political spheres.

We might just have witnessed the breaking down of some barriers at the sun-kissed Hubballi stadium, holding the power to move a whole new generation of youngsters to cricket and to sport in general.

Perhaps, there will be an infrastructure upswing in the area, as Nabi hoped during a recent chat with PTI -- a cricket stadium in every district.

The historic moment came at 2.10pm, when both the skippers sitting inside a freshly-painted but modest dressing room here agreed to shake hands, sending the J&K camp into delirium.

There will be chaos within the team and across the snow-clad region, now. But this time, it will be more joyous in nature. (PTI)

Respect earned but Zimbabwe must learn to adapt in different conditions, says Walsh

NEW DELHI, Feb 28: Zimbabwe's contrasting performances in India and Sri Lanka over the course of their T20 World Cup campaign have shown that the team needs to learn to adapt quickly in different conditions, said bowling coach Courtney Walsh on Saturday.

Zimbabwe stunned the likes of Sri Lanka and Australia in the group stage to qualify for the Super 8. However, their performance dropped drastically after moving from Sri Lanka to India for the next phase of the tournament.

The bowling looked a lot more potent on the slow wickets of Sri Lanka but Zimbabwe conceded more than 500 runs in the Super 8 games against India and West Indies to be eliminated from the semifinals race.

The Sikandar Raza-led side end their campaign against South Africa here on Sunday.

"I think obviously the conditions over here in India is different from what we had in Sri Lanka, different pitches, and all that. So it took a while for us to adapt. We didn't adapt as quickly as we wanted to," said West Indies great Walsh.

"I still think the guys put their hands up they did the best they could. Hopefully we'll have taken away a lot from these conditions here for future references.

"The biggest takeaway is that how quickly you have to adapt in



different conditions is one of the things that we will take away from this group."

However, Walsh feels the the tournament has been a success for Zimbabwe who earned the respect of the cricketing world and hopefully it would lead to more games against the bigger teams.

Following two heavy defeats in the Super 8, Walsh was asked if the occasion got the better of the players.

"No I don't think so just being inside the dressing room I know that wasn't the case we had on that, we wanted to go further. I think unfortunately we came up against a West Indies team that was fired in conditions that they knew better than us. And I think even in the second game against India, it was similar," he said.

The bowlers have not been able to land their yorkers in India and use of variations has not been up to the mark in smaller grounds. (PTI)

'Locked in' Aiden Markram best suited for the opener's role, says SA batting coach Prince

NEW DELHI, Feb 28: Aiden Markram's remarkable consistency at the top of the order in the ongoing T20 World Cup has made it clear that the opening slot remains most suited for the South Africa captain, batting coach Ashwell Prince said on Saturday.

From opening to number five, Markram has batted in different positions in his 75-match T20 International career.

In the lead up to the T20 World Cup, Markram moved himself up and down the order in the series against India.

The trend continued in the following SA20 back home with Markram finally being most productive in the opener's role. The right-hander has racked up three 80-plus scores in the ICC showpiece thus far.

"In the past there might have been different opinions about what his best position in the lineup might be. He's played in different positions, not only for us



but also in leagues he's batted in different positions," said Prince ahead of their final Super Eights game against Zimbabwe here on Sunday.

"I've always been of the opinion that opening is his best position and obviously having a partner such as Quinny who is also a fantastic player, left-right combination they complement each other really well.

"I think he started SA20 in the

middle order and then towards the end when some of the personnel left at Durban, he was opening. And he really ended that competition really strong in that position as an opener. And he's brought that into the World Cup.

"The phrase that my kids would use is he's really locked in at the moment in terms of his focus, his batting and in terms of his captaincy..." he said.

"Playing majority of the games in Ahmedabad helped us"

South Africa are the sole unbeaten team in the tournament. They have played four games in Ahmedabad and the one against Zimbabwe will be their second in Delhi.

Did playing in only two venues helped the team?

"We all have our different opinions about who's been advantaged and who's been disadvantaged in the tournament. People have their opinion. At the end of the day, we are visitors," said Prince. (PTI)

Lovlina, Nikhat to lead 20-member Indian squad at Asian Boxing Championships



NEW DELHI, Feb 28: Olympic medalist Lovlina Borgohain and two-time world champion Nikhat Zareen will spearhead the 20-member Indian contingent at the Asian Boxing Championships in Mongolia from March 28-April 11.

The 20-member squad was finalised after an intensive month-long evaluation process, with players inducted into the ongoing national camp in Patiala following the National Championships in January.

As per the selection policy, finalists at the Asian Boxing Championships in the approved weight categories for the Commonwealth Games and Asian Games will be selected as direct entries for the respective multi-sport contingents.

The continental championship therefore carries added significance as both a medal opportunity and a key qualification pathway for the upcoming multi-sport events.

Lovlina (75kg), who recently struck gold at the Boxam Elite Championship in Spain, will headline the women's squad alongside Preeti (54kg), Arundhati Choudhary (70kg), and Priya (60kg), all of whom also won gold in Spain and have shown consistent form.

They will be joined by reigning world champions Minakshi (48kg) and Jaismine (57kg).

The remaining categories include World Boxing Cup Final gold medalist Nikhat Zareen (51kg), Ankushita Boro (65kg), Pooja Rani (80kg), and Alfia Tarannum Akram Khan Pathan (80+kg), completing a well-

rounded squad that blends experience with emerging talent.

In the men's category, World Boxing Cup Final and Boxam Championship gold medalist Sachin (60kg) leads the contingent.

He is joined by Akash (75kg), who also won gold in Spain, along with silver medalist Deepak (70kg) and Ankush (80kg).

The squad further includes Jadumani Singh Mandengbam (55kg), bronze medalist in Spain and silver medalist at the World Boxing Finals.

Vishwanath Suresh (50kg), Aditya Pratap Yadav (65kg), Lokesh (85kg), Harsh Choudhary (90kg) and Narendar (90+kg) complete the rest of the line-up.

"The Asian Championships are always a true test of quality and consistency. Our focus has been on selecting boxers who have shown form, discipline, and the ability to perform under pressure. We are confident this group can compete strongly against the best in Asia," BFI President Ajay Singh said in a release.

The evaluations were conducted under the watchful eyes of head coaches Santiago Nieva (Women) and CA Kuttappa (Men), with the support staff closely monitoring preparations in camp.

The team heads into the tournament after winning nine gold medals at the Boxam Elite in Spain, the highest among participating nations and securing consistent top-three finishes at the World Championships and World Boxing Cup.

Indian Squad for Asian Boxing Championships

Men: Vishwanath Suresh (50kg), Jadumani Singh Mandengbam (55kg), Sachin (60kg), Aditya Pratap Yadav (65kg), Deepak (70kg), Akash (75kg), Ankush (80kg), Lokesh (85kg), Harsh Choudhary (90kg), Narendar (90+kg).

Women: Minakshi (48kg), Nikhat Zareen (51kg), Preeti (54kg), Jaismine (57kg), Priya (60kg), Ankushita Boro (65kg), Arundhati Choudhary (70kg), Lovlina Borgohain (75kg), Pooja Rani (80kg), Alfia Tarannum Akram Khan Pathan (80+kg). (PTI)

Nabi bowled exceptionally well throughout Ranji season: Padikkal

HUBBALLI, Feb 28: Karnataka captain Devdutt Padikkal on Saturday lavished praise on Jammu and Kashmir pacer Auqib Nabi for bowling "exceptionally well" throughout the Ranji Trophy season, while conceding that his side failed to step up in the final here.

In what turned out to be a one-way traffic in the summit clash of the 91st Ranji Trophy, a persistent and perseverant J&K lifted the trophy for the first-time in their maiden appearance.

They won on the basis of the first-innings lead, after the final ended in a draw on the fifth and final day.

Nabi was one of the architects of J&K's historic campaign, claiming 60 wickets overall, including 5/54 in the final to help his side take a massive lead of 291 runs in the first innings.

"We always understood the toss will play a big role, but at the end of the day it's a final, you know, the pressures of the final will be

there regardless of what you do," Padikkal said after the match. "It was up to us to really step up. Unfortunately, we weren't able to do that and they played much better cricket than us," he added.

Talking about Nabi's performances through the season, Padikkal said, "He has bowled exceptionally well throughout the season. Our batsmen have got a lot of runs as well, so we (had) backed ourselves to play out those spells as well.

"But at the end of the day, he just got the better of us and that's how it goes sometimes, when someone's having such a great season, it's not that easy to really negate that sort of performance from his side and really happy for him."

"I feel to have a season like that to get 60 odd wickets is something incredible. He has put his heart and soul into the whole season and really happy for him as well," the Karnataka skipper said. (PTI)

Desist from using India or Indian in name or activities: Sports Ministry to DCCI



NEW DELHI, Feb 28: The Sports Ministry has directed the Differently Abled Cricket Council of India (DCCI) to refrain from using 'India' or 'Indian' in its name or activities as it is not a recognised national federation.

In a letter to DCCI secretary Ravi Kant Chauhan, the ministry said the use of 'India' or 'Indian' is only permitted for bodies that have been recognised by the government. Similar letters have also been sent to the Women's Football Federation of India and the Indian Body

Builders' Federation among others. "...It has come to the notice of this Department that the expression 'India' is being used by your Federation, namely, Differently-Abled Cricket Council of India, despite the fact that the said Federation is not recognised as National Sports Federation by this Ministry," the letter stated.

"...it is hereby directed to desist from using the expression 'India' or 'Indian' in the name and/or any activities of your Federation. Unauthorized use of the said expressions are liable for appropriate action under the extant rules and applicable laws," it warned.

Although not recognised by the BCCI officially, the DCCI has the backing of the Indian board, which is not a recognised National Sports Federation (NSF) either. Chauhan acknowledged receiving the letter from the ministry and urged it to recognise DCCI.

"...it is not just us but multiple sports bodies have been notified that they can't use the word India since they are not Registered NSF. My plea to ministry would be to accord us NSF status as we have been running the Differently Abled Cricket in the country."

"We have organised World Cups, Asia Cups, national tournaments as well bilateral series. Our national team has played in England, Sri Lanka. The BCCI also recognises us," Chauhan, the secretary of DCCI, told PTI.

A ministry source said with the National Sports Governance Act now in operation, all

sporting bodies will have to take recognition from the soon-to-be-constituted National Sports Board for the ministry's nod.

"It is a matter of few weeks, once the Board begins operations, all affiliation process will be routed through it," the source said.

Taekwondo mess
In another decision, the ministry has decided to withdraw the recognition of the Taekwondo Federation of India.

It also stated that the rival India Taekwondo would not be recognised as the sport's governing body either as none of the two could justify their case to the ministry as directed by the Delhi High Court.

"...upon further examination, it has been observed that the Constitution/Memorandum of Association (MoA)/Bye-laws of Taekwondo Federation of India and India Taekwondo are not fully in conformity with the Sports Code... it is observed that, as on date, both the parties' viz., Taekwondo Federation of India and India Taekwondo do not fully meet the conditions prescribed in the guidelines for recognition of NSFs as contained in the National Sports Development Code of India, 2011."

"...at present, neither of the above said two Federations qualifies for grant of government recognition...in compliance of the directions of the Hon'ble High Court of Delhi dated 06.01.2026, it has been decided that, as neither Taekwondo Federation of India nor India Taekwondo fully meet the criteria prescribed in the Sports Code for grant of recognition." (PTI)



HUBBALLI, Feb 28: BCCI president Mithun Manhas was elated to see Jammu and Kashmir landing their maiden Ranji Trophy title, but his pragmatic mind has already zeroed in on the construction of new stadiums in the valley to take the cricket further forward. After 67 years of toil, Jammu and Kashmir held eight-time champions Karnataka to a draw and bagged the coveted title by virtue of a massive 291-run first inning lead.

"It took us 67 years. It's been a long journey to title. I'm very thankful to BCCI for giving us a state of the art facility academy in Jammu where we'll be having indoor facilities, swimming pool, gymnasium and the same we will be doing in Kashmir," Manhas said in a select media interaction after the Ranji Trophy final here on Saturday.

"Now, what we want is the stadiums coming up in both the places -- Jammu and Kashmir, and not only in J&K for that matter, in Rajouri, Poonch and Chenab

as well because this team has got players from everywhere. "So that's the need of the hour and the elections are going to happen now. Hopefully, we'll get the funds from the BCCI," he added.

Manhas, who has a long association with cricket in J&K, lauded skipper Paras Dogra for bringing a sense of calm to the team's dressing room.

Manhas had roped in Dogra as J&K skipper when the former was working with the Jammu and Kashmir Cricket Association (JKCA). "We were looking for a captain. I think in Paras we found the right captain. He's coming from Himachal, he knows the conditions in J&K pretty well. He's played a lot of cricket in England, which makes him a thorough professional."

"He's the kind of guy who is rarely aggressive. He's very calm, quiet, and goes about his business in a very structured and meticulous way. So that was one calming effect we had in the dressing room," Manhas said.

"You know, we northern boys are very aggressive with each other. That's how we are. But he had one calming effect. So, I think everything started falling in place for us," he noted.

Jay Shah's vision for J&K cricket
The former BCCI secretary Jay Shah, who is currently heading the International Cricket Council, took special attention to improve the standards of cricket, Manhas revealed.

"The association before us, they tried their level best. But the real game-changer happened when the BCCI formed the sub-committee way back in 2021. We are very thankful to Jai bhai and his vision, the way he made this committee, keeping in mind the administration part, the cricketing part, and involving the right players." (PTI)