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**DEVELOPED ASSAM
FOR DEVELOPED BHARAT
PM MODI'S VISION**



“ From the self-confidence of Assam, the potential of Assam, and the progress of Assam, India's growth story is getting new strength. Today, Assam is making its identity among the fast-growing states. ”

-Prime Minister Narendra Modi

CBC 01101/13/0044/2526

Fitch ups India's GDP growth estimate for FY26; projects USD 70/barrel oil in 2026

NEW DELHI, March 13: Fitch Ratings on Friday raised India's GDP growth forecast for current fiscal and the next to 7.5 per cent and 6.7 per cent, and projected global crude oil price to average USD 70/barrel in 2026.

Fitch had, in December, projected India's GDP growth for current fiscal at 7.4 per cent and 6.4 per cent for 2026-27.

Fitch expects growth to slow in first half of FY27, with rising inflation constraining real incomes and limiting consumer spending growth.

GDP growth slowed in the December quarter to 7.8 per cent YoY from 8.4 per cent in September quarter.

"We estimate that for 2025-26 financial year (starting April 2025), growth will be 7.5 per cent, a marginal upward revision from December. Domestic demand is the biggest growth driver this year, with consumer spending and investment rising by (an estimated) 8.6 per cent and 6.9 per cent in the current fiscal year," Fitch said.

In its Global Economic Outlook-March 2026, Fitch projected world GDP growth at 2.6 per cent in 2026 on the assumption that the Iran war does not result in a larger or an enduring spike in energy prices that pushes the annual 2026 oil price forecast above USD 70/barrel. Global growth last year was 2.7 per cent.

"But a scenario where oil prices rise to USD 100 and stay there



would be a significant adverse global supply shock," Fitch Ratings Chief Economist Brian Coulton said.

Fitch said oil prices have risen by USD 20/barrel to around USD 90 (Brent) since the US and Israel attacked Iran at the end of February.

Fitch's baseline assumption in the Global Economic Outlook report is that oil prices remain in the USD 90-100 range through March - as the Strait of Hormuz remains effectively closed for around a month - before falling to the mid USD 60s in second half of 2026 in a fundamentally oversupplied market.

"This implies an annual average price of USD 70 in 2026, up from USD 63 in the December GEO. We believe this revision would not have a material impact on global growth, inflation or monetary pol-

icy," Fitch said.

However, there are huge uncertainties and there is a possibility of more sustained disruptions to oil shipments and significant damage to production facilities in West Asia.

With regard to India, Fitch said there are tentative signs that real activity is slowing in January and February, but the economy remains resilient, and credit growth is still in double digits.

A comprehensive revision of national accounts data including a re-basing of the base year to 2022-23, from 2011-12 earlier, has resulted in a smoother path for real GDP, with growth in 2023-24 and 2024-25 now estimated at 7.2 per cent and 7.1 per cent, respectively, rather than 9.2 per cent and 6.5 per cent in the previous national accounts.

Fitch said it expects investment

growth to ease in the short-term but recover in sequential terms from second half of next fiscal with looser financial conditions and lower real interest rates.

The government's budget forecasts public capital expenditure to rise in line with nominal GDP growth.

Weaker domestic demand will affect imports, translating into a positive net trade contribution to growth. At the margin, a lower US ETR (effective tax rate) following the US Supreme Court decision and the Section 122 blanket tariffs will support external demand.

"We expect overall GDP growth to slow to 6.7 per cent in FY26-27 and to 6.5 per cent in FY27/28 (these forecasts are revised upwards by 0.3 percentage points from the December GEO)," Fitch said.

Headline inflation has started to build from the lows associated with falling food prices last autumn, reaching 2.7 per cent in January, up from 1.2 per cent in December.

"We expect inflation to rise steadily to 4.5 per cent by December 2026. Persistently higher oil prices could cause inflation to rise faster than the expected gradual pace.

The Reserve Bank of India's policy committee kept the policy rate at 5.25 per cent in February and reaffirmed a neutral stance for monetary policy. "We expect interest rates to remain at this level this year and next," Fitch added. (PTI)

Markets in freefall for 3rd day on geopolitical worries, boiling crude; Sensex sinks 1,400 pts

MUMBAI, March 13: Equity benchmarks Sensex and Nifty wilted under selling pressure for the third straight day on Friday as rising crude prices raised concerns over inflationary pressures and global economic stability amid the widening conflict in West Asia.

Intense selling in global markets, unabated foreign fund outflows and continuing weakness in the rupee also dented investor sentiment.

The 30-share BSE Sensex tumbled 1,579.82 points, or 2 per cent, to 74,454.60 during intra-day trade. The benchmark finally settled at 74,563.92, down 1,470.50 points, or 1.93 per cent.

A total of 3,348 stocks declined,

while 941 advanced and 132 remained unchanged on the BSE.

The 50-share NSE Nifty tanked 488.05 points, or 2.06 per cent, to end at 23,151.10.

The sharp correction has largely been driven by the surge in crude oil prices and rising macroeconomic concerns for energy-importing economies like India, Hariprasad K, Research Analyst and Founder, Livelong Wealth, said. The market capitalisation of BSE-listed firms slumped by ₹ 10,24,181.74 crore to ₹ 4,29,82,252.27 crore (USD 4.65 trillion) on Friday.

On the weekly front, the BSE benchmark tanked 4,354.98 points

or 5.51 per cent, and the Nifty dropped 1,299.35 points or 5.31 per cent.

Since February 27, the 30-share BSE Sensex has nosedived 6,723.27 points, or 8.27 per cent. During this time, the market valuation of BSE-listed companies eroded by ₹ 33,68,419 crore to ₹ 4,29,82,252.27 crore (USD 4.65 trillion).

"Sentiment remained fragile amid escalating geopolitical tensions in the Middle East, which have pushed crude oil prices close to the USD 100 per barrel mark and raised concerns over inflationary pressures and global economic stability. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 3...

PM unveils projects

in the North East and enhance national energy security, officials said.

Major railway electrification projects, including the ₹ 420-crore Rangiyi-Murkongselek rail line (558 km) and the Rs 1,180-crore Chaparmukh-Dibrugarh rail line (571 km), and Badarpur-Silchar and Badarpur-Churairai rail lines, built at a cost of around ₹ 650 crore, were dedicated to the nation by the PM.

Modi also laid the foundation stone for the 194-km Furkating-Tinsukia rail line doubling project costing over ₹ 3,600 crore.

In the waterways sector, Modi laid the foundation stone for cruise terminals at Bishwanath Ghat in Biswanath district and Neamati in Jorhat district.

He performed the Bhoomi Poojan for the Regional Centre of Excellence (RCoE) at Bogibeel in Dibrugarh, which will serve as a premier maritime training and research hub for the North East region.

The Prime Minister also inaugurated the approach road connecting Pandu Jetty to NH-27 in Guwahati.

Modi also inaugurated the PM Ekta Mall in Guwahati, which has been envisioned as a major commercial and tourism hub for Assam and the North Eastern region, featuring permanent stalls for One District One Product (ODOP) items, GI-tagged products, handicrafts and handloom goods from Assam and other states.

The facility also includes showrooms of leading Indian brands, food courts, modern amenities, parking and digital kiosks, providing a platform for local artisans and promoting regional culture and industry. (PTI)

'I am repaying my

misinformation "even amid the West Asia war situation".

Modi also said that the Congress kept India dependent on foreign nations for decades, but the NDA government changed that gradually, focusing on achieving self-reliance in all sectors from agriculture to energy.

"The NDA government is known for empathy and good governance. We believe in development for all sections of the society," he added. (PTI)

Assam polls: Congress'

endeavour to publish tomorrow the list of seats that have been allotted to our alliance partners. A residual 5-7 per cent of seats will remain; given the prevailing political situation, we may discuss these at a later stage," he said.

The Congress, on March 3, had released its first list of 42 candidates for the upcoming Assam Assembly polls, fielding Gogoi from the Jorhat seat.

Taking a lead in announcing the names of its candidates even before the declaration of the polls, the opposition party had fielded Congress Legislature Party leader in Assam, Debabrata Saikia, from the Nazira constituency.

Former Pradesh Congress Committee (PCC) president Ripun Bora has been fielded from the Barchalla constituency.

The polls for the 126-member Assam Assembly are likely to be held in April.

The Congress is seeking to wrest power from the BJP in the northeastern state. (PTI)

Amit Shah to inaugurate

The inauguration of Pragjyotishpur Medical College & Hospital in Guwahati is expected to significantly enhance medical education and healthcare accessibility in the state.

To enable members of the media in Karbi Anglong district to witness the programme, a special live streaming arrangement has been made at the Diphu Medical College.

Officials said the event reflects the Central Government's continued focus on the development of the North-east, particularly in expanding healthcare facilities in both rural and urban areas of Assam.

Local media representatives from Diphu and other parts of Karbi Anglong have been invited to attend the live streaming session from 10.30 am onwards.

Media personnel have been requested to arrive by 10.15 am to ensure smooth coverage of the inaugural address and the subsequent unveiling of healthcare projects.

BJP ensured lasting

seen those difficult days, but now the beats of the 'kham' (drum) and 'siphong' (flutes) are heard," he said.

Only when the people removed the Congress from both the state and the Centre, "we were able to begin the region's development honestly and sincerely", Modi said.

In an apparent reference to Rahul Gandhi's 'Mohabbat ki Dukaan' (shop of love) slogan, the Prime Minister claimed: "The Congress is a 'jhute vaido ke dukkan' (a shop of false promises), and with one lie it gives four more 'super lies' as a gift, as they do not have the intention of fulfilling any promise."

In contrast, the model of the 'double engine' government is before the people and an honest effort is made to fulfil all the promises made, he said.

The BJP's double-engine government is committed to preserve cultural traditions and speedy development of the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR), he said.

He said that he was indebted to the people of BTR for their love and added, "I have always tried to repay it with my service and speedy development of the region."

Modi also mentioned that he had witnessed the grand spectacle of 'Bagurumba dwhou', a Bodo cultural event, at Guwahati in January.

"I feel proud that the Bodo society has kept its language, culture and traditions with such care - whether it is the spiritual traditions of Bathou or the Bwisagu festival, which strengthens Indian civilisation," he said.

The NDA government is also working to preserve Assam's heritage and ensure speedy development, Modi said.

"In today's programme itself, projects worth more than ₹ 4,750 crore have been launched with over ₹ 1100 crore to be spent on the development of road infrastructure in Bodoland, which will further strengthen road connectivity in the state," he said.

Trains have also been flagged off, which will not only be convenient for the people but also promote trade and tourism, the PM said, adding that a railway workshop will be set up here and help the region to be a major logistics hub.

Work on railway connectivity with Bhutan is also progressing along with the modernisation of several stations, he said. (PTI)

One of 28 Indian

emails and facilitated the safe repatriation of more than 223 stranded Indian seafarers.

DG Shipping has been issuing regular advisories, he said.

Indian seafarers and vessels have been advised to use the DG Shipping 24x7 helpline, follow safety advisories issued by authorities and Indian missions, report incidents promptly and conduct enhanced ship-shore security drills.

Sinha said port operations across India remain stable. SOPs have been issued for major ports and state maritime boards, according to priority berthing vessels carrying LPG, a fuel that is running short in the country.

Facilitation measures include additional cargo storage, ad-hoc berthing, priority handling of perishable cargo, faster 'Back to Town' movement with Customs and enhanced bunkering support.

During the ongoing crisis, three Indian seafarer casualties have been reported, and one seafarer remains missing. Four injured seafarers have been treated and discharged, and coordination is underway for the repatriation of mortal remains.

The Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways continues to closely monitor the maritime situation in the Persian Gulf, he added. (PTI)

India, US engaged

negotiators of India and the US have spoken at least 4-5 times since this (West Asia) crisis, and virtual sessions are also happening.

"There is no breakdown of talks. We are discussing. We are trying to see that we keep the agreement ready, but signing of the agreement will only happen at an opportune time, because this agreement, as you all are aware, is based on comparative advantage, preferential access to the US market," the official added.

The US tariffs are not going away; they will be calibrated and placed at a level where India is going to get a comparative advantage vis-a-vis its competitors in the US market, another official said.

Before the US Supreme Court ruling, the Trump administration had announced in a joint statement to reduce tariffs on India to 18 per cent from 50 per cent. The tariffs at that time on India were among the lowest compared to its competitor nations, such as China, Thailand, Bangladesh, Indonesia, and Vietnam.

"So, since their side of the deal is not clear, there cannot be any signing ceremony right now. But the deal is there, and the design structure and the position of the deal are there," the official said.

The US had announced that it would reinstate the tariffs, which were set aside by the court. Initiation of Section 301 investigations by the US against 16 economies is a step in that direction.

"So, their intent is very clear. Now, what actions follow we have to see and based on that, we will have to take the next steps," the official added.

At present, there are no reciprocal tariffs. The 10 per cent levies are for all countries for 150 days.

"The basket of goods and services that India supplies to the US...we are in a good zone," the official added.

During the April-January period of this fiscal year, the country's exports to the US increased 5.85 per cent to USD 72.46 billion, while imports rose 13.87 per cent to USD 43.92 billion. (PTI)

HFCL secures ₹10,159 crore OFC supply agreement with global multinational

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 13: HFCL Limited, a leading Indian telecom technology company specialising in next-generation technologies such as Wi-Fi, optical fibre and 5G, has secured a long-term international supply agreement for Optical Fiber Cables (OFC) with a global multinational corporation.

According to the company, the total potential value of the contract is estimated at approximately USD 1.10 billion (around ₹10,159 crore), based on prevailing selling prices of OFC products.

The five-year agreement will be executed through the company's overseas wholly owned subsidiary, with purchase orders to be issued periodically in accordance with project requirements and specifications.

The agreement marks the first instance in HFCL's history of securing a long-term, multi-year OFC supply arrangement of this scale, further strengthening its presence in the global fibre connectivity market.

Under the agreement, HFCL will supply a minimum quantity of multi-million fibre kilometres of OFC annually from calendar year 2026 to 2028.

The contract also provides for an automatic extension of an additional two years, taking the agreement through to 2030.

The arrangement additionally allows the subsidiary to supply OFC to authorised affiliates and assignees of the customer.

HFCL develops next-generation digital network solutions for telecom operators, enterprises and governments.

Policy refinements under Press Note 3 framework to strengthen electronics manufacturing ecosystem: IESA

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 13: The recent policy refinements under investments under the Press Note 3 framework represent a balanced and pragmatic step towards strengthening India's electronics manufacturing ecosystem while safeguarding national interests, said Ashok Chandak, President of the India Electronics and Semiconductor Association (IESA).

Chandak said that by providing greater clarity on beneficial ownership and introducing faster approval timelines, the government has created a more enabling environment for attracting global capital and technology partnerships into upstream electronics manufacturing.

He noted that India's electronics growth now requires strengthening the components and materials ecosystem, which remains a missing layer in the country's manufacturing value chain.

Investments in passive components such as multilayer ceramic capacitors (MLCC), resistors and inductors, connectors and electromechanical components, printed circuit board (PCB) fabrication and materials, elec-

tronic capital goods, and semiconductor supply chain materials such as polysilicon and silicon wafers can significantly reduce import dependence and enhance domestic manufacturing capabilities.

"These segments form the backbone of electronics manufacturing and account for nearly 40 per cent of the bill of materials in electronic products," Chandak said.

Highlighting the market potential, Chandak said India's current demand for these segments is already substantial.

The passive components market is estimated at around \$6-8 billion, connectors at about \$2-3 billion, and the PCB ecosystem exceeds \$6 billion.

Together, these segments represent a combined opportunity of \$15-18 billion at present, which could expand to \$35-40 billion by 2030 as India's electronics production continues to grow.

He added that localising manufacturing in these areas would increase domestic value addition, enable deeper integration into global supply chains, and support the expansion of sectors such as mobile devices, con-

sumer electronics, automotive electronics, telecom infrastructure and industrial electronics.

At the same time, Chandak stressed that both industry and policymakers must exercise continued vigilance to ensure that investments remain non-strategic and non-controlling, with strong safeguards related to beneficial ownership, board representation and access to technology.

While India should actively leverage global capital and manufacturing capabilities, it is equally important that no external entity is able to influence strategic decision-making or exert undue pressure on the country's critical technology sectors, he said, adding that industry leaders must approach partnerships with a long-term national perspective rather than focusing on short-term opportunities.

Chandak further said that the policy refinements, along with initiatives such as the Electronics Components Manufacturing Scheme, can help India build a strong domestic electronics components ecosystem and unlock the next phase of growth in the country's electronics manufacturing journey.

Odisha aims to contribute 5 pc to country's GDP by 2047: Chief secy Garg

BHUBANESWAR, March 13: Odisha Chief Secretary Anu Garg on Friday said the state aims to contribute 5 per cent to the country's GDP by 2047.

She said this while inaugurating a two-day global summit on blue economy here at the Convention Centre, Lok Seva Bhawan.

"To achieve the ambitious target, key contributions are expected from fisheries, maritime infrastructure, coastal tourism, and marine biotechnology through the Odisha Marine Biotechnology Research & Innovation Corridor (OMBRIC)," she said.

Presenting the state's vision for a 'Viksit Odisha' by 2036, Garg highlighted the state's economy, demogra-

phy, geography, ecosystem, and its 575 km coastline.

Union Secretary of Earth Sciences Ravichandran underscored the unexplored potential of the oceans, noting that over 95 per cent of the deep ocean remains uncharted globally, while highlighting opportunities in offshore energy, marine biotechnology, and the challenges of climate impacts, coastal erosion, and marine pollution.

Ambassador of Timor-Leste to India, Karlito Nunes, shared insights on his country's focus on strengthening marine and coastal sectors and highlighted the importance of international cooperation and partnerships in advancing Blue Economy initiatives. (PTI)

Darjeeling tea industry flags LPG supply disruption risk



KOLKATA, March 13: Production of Darjeeling tea could see a further dip due to non-availability of industrial LPG, a tea association has warned, flagging the risk of supply disruption to factories in the West Bengal district.

In a recent letter to the deputy chairman of the Tea Board in Kolkata, the Darjeeling Tea Association cited a Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas communication, which asked all public sector oil marketing companies to ensure that LPG procured by them is supplied and marketed solely to households.

The association warned that the order could result in non-availability of industrial LPG to tea estate factories, directly impacting manufacture of Darjeeling tea and the livelihoods of 55,000 permanent workers and their families.

"The members of this association request to use your good offices with the concerned ministry to ensure uninterrupted supply of industrial LPG to the factories of the Darjeeling tea industry," the

letter stated. The association noted that Darjeeling tea estates had largely converted factories from coal-fired to industrial LPG over the past decade.

The development comes at a particularly vulnerable time for the Darjeeling tea industry, which is grappling with a prolonged production crisis.

Output has collapsed from a peak of around 14 million kg in 1990 to under 6 million kg in recent years, with 2024 and 2025 recording new historic lows. Data for January-November 2025 showed a further 8.79 per cent decline compared to the corresponding period in 2024.

The industry also faces structural challenges on multiple fronts, it said.

Cheaper tea from Nepal, often bearing similar characteristics, has flooded the domestic market, causing price stagnation for certified Darjeeling produce, industry sources said.

Analysts have also pointed to inadequate bush replacement in gardens as a contributor to the sustained output decline, contending that the industry has not done enough to rejuvenate ageing plantations.

Any disruption to industrial LPG supply during the first flush - the season that commands the highest premium globally and whose entire produce is largely exported - could deal a further blow to an industry already struggling to arrest its decline, they said. (PTI)

CANCELLATION OF E-AUCTION FOR THE CONTRACT OF OPERATION AND MANAGEMENT OF PAY & USE TOILET & 1ST CLASS WAITING HALL

This is to inform you that e-Auction for the contract of Operation and Management of Pay & Use Toilet at Chaparmukh and Operation and Management of 1st Class Waiting Hall at Diphu Railway station over Lumding Division invited by the Lumding Division in IREPS E-Auction Module vide E-Auction Catalogue No. PNU-LMG-01-26 dated 25-02-2026 has been CANCELLED by the competent authority under Administrative ground.

Divisional Railway Manager (C), Lumding

NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
"SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE"

27 YEARS OF DEDICATED JOURNALISM
THE HILLS TIMES
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PUBLISHED SIMULTANEOUSLY FROM GUWAHATI & DIPHU

SATURDAY, MARCH 14, 2026

THE HILLS TIMES 3

Kopili Hydro-Electric Project dedicated to nation • First phase of distribution of land pattas to tea garden workers launched

PM unveils projects worth ₹ 19,680 cr

GUWAHATI, March 13: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday dedicated to the nation and laid the foundation for projects worth around ₹ 19,680 crore, with focus on infrastructure and energy sectors.

He also launched the distribution of land pattas to tea workers of Assam in garden housing lines, and released the 22nd instalment of the PM-KISAN scheme for over 9.3 crore farmers across the country.

Modi had reached Guwahati earlier in the day on a two-day visit to the poll-bound state, his fourth in as many months.

To provide homestead land rights to the tea garden community, the PM launched the first phase of distribution of land pattas to workers of 106 tea gardens across 20 districts, officials said.

Secure land ownership is expected to improve housing security, enable better access to institutional credit and welfare



schemes, and promote long-term social and economic mobility, they added.

In the same programme, Modi released the 22nd instalment of the PM-KISAN scheme to over 9.3 crore farmers across the country, under which eligible farmers receive ₹ 2,000 directly into their bank accounts.

The PM dedicated to the nation the Kopili Hydro-Electric Project located in Dima Hasao and West Karbi Anglong districts of the state.

Constructed at a cost of over ₹ 2,300 crore, the project will enhance clean energy generation, improve grid stability in the region and ensure reliable power supply

to households, farmers and industries.

The Capacity Enhancement Project of the Numaligarh-Siliguri Product Pipeline (NSPL) of Oil India Limited was also dedicated to the nation by the Prime Minister.

The project will facilitate the expansion of the Numaligarh Refinery Ltd (NRL) from 3 million metric tonnes per annum to 9 MMTPA by enabling the evacuation of additional petroleum products.

The PM also inaugurated Phase 1 of the North East Gas Grid, a major pipeline project connecting Guwahati with Numaligarh, Gohpur and Itanagar (Arunachal Pradesh), with a branch line extending to Dimapur (Nagaland).

He also laid the foundation stone for NRL's Rail-Fed POL Terminal at Panchgram in Hailakandi district. These projects will significantly strengthen energy infrastructure (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

'I am repaying my debt to tea garden workers'

Assam ending 'historic injustice' by giving land pattas to tea garden workers: PM

GUWAHATI, March 13: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday asserted that by offering land rights to tea workers within garden housing lines, the BJP-led government is ending a "historic injustice" towards the community.

Lashing out at the Congress, Modi said the opposition party never looked after the tea garden workers during its tenure.

"We have given land pattas to them, and I must congratulate the Assam government for ending a historic injustice towards the tea garden workers," the PM said at an official event here, as he dedicated to the nation and laid the foundation for projects worth around ₹ 19,680 crore, with focus on infrastructure and energy sectors.

He also released the 22nd instalment of the PM-KISAN scheme for over 9.3 crore farmers across the country at the same programme.

Modi kicked off the process of giving land rights to tea garden workers in the housing or labour lines within the estate premises, with 28,241 families receiving it in the first phase. The PM ceremonially handed over the pattas to three families at the event.

"Actually, I am repaying my debt by giving land pattas to all tea garden workers. The tea leaves produced by you reached Gujarat, and by selling tea brewed from it, I have reached in this position today. I have your blessings," eluding to his 'chaiwala' profession, drawing applause from the gathering.

He maintained that while the tea garden workers have given Assam and India recognition at the global level, the previous Congress government never even enquired about them.

The PM said that Assam is becoming a model for all northeastern states, and its development in the last 10 years is leaving an imprint in West Bengal, as people there want a "BJP government this time".

Assembly elections in Assam and West Bengal are likely to be held in April.

Elaborating on the welfare steps of the BJP-led NDA government for farmers, Modi said, "We have insulated our farmers from global incidents like COVID-19 and wars. We have spent ₹ 12 lakh crore as fertiliser subsidies to give relief to the farmer brothers."

He claimed that the PM-KISAN scheme has drawn queries from developed nations, marvelling at how India was able to transfer money to bank accounts of crores of farmers with the click of a button.

Stressing that the welfare of farmers was crucial for his government, Modi said a security net was being developed around them through various schemes and measures to ensure social security in all aspects.

"The Congress gave ₹ 6.5 lakh crore as MSP in 10 years before 2014, while we have provided ₹ 20 lakh crore in the last decade," he pointed out.

Without elaborating, the Prime Minister said the Congress was spreading (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Abhi-Neel lynching case hearing concludes, verdict on April 6



HT Correspondent NAGAON, March 13: Hearing in the sensational 2018 Abhi-Neel mob lynching case concluded at the Nagaon District and Sessions Court on Friday, with the court fixing April 6 for pronouncement of the verdict.

Family members of the victims expressed hope that justice would be delivered after the conclusion of the hearing.

The fathers of Abhijit Nath and Nilutpal Das said they have full faith in the judiciary and expect the accused to receive the strictest punishment.

Public prosecutor Jiyaur Kamar said the prosecution presented strong arguments during the final hearing. "The court has fixed April 6 for delivering the verdict," he said.

Defence counsel Manas Saraniya, meanwhile, said the court would deliver a fair judgment and expressed hope that innocent persons would be acquitted.

Abhijit Nath and Nilutpal Das were allegedly lynched by an irate mob on June 8, 2018 at Panjuri village under Dokmoka Police Station in Karbi Anglong district.

The two youths, both residents of Guwahati, were beaten to death by the mob.

Following the incident, a case was registered and the trial initially began at the Diphu Court.

However, on the demand of the victims' families and members of the public, the case was later transferred to the Nagaon District and Sessions Court for a fair trial under Sessions Case No. 53(N)/2018.

BJP ensured lasting peace in NE: Modi
Rain affects PM's Kokrajhar travel schedule, addresses rally virtually

GUWAHATI, March 13: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday said that sounds of bombs and gunfire are a thing of the past in the Northeast, and asserted that the BJP ensured long-lasting peace in the region, while the Congress, during its tenure, signed various accords for "selfish political interests".

Addressing a public meeting in Assam's Kokrajhar district virtually from Guwahati after rain disrupted his travel schedule, Modi said the state was writing a new chapter of peace and development under the "double-engine" government.

Modi alleged that the Congress endangered national security by handing over the land of indigenous people to infiltrators.

"Punish the Congress in the upcoming elections and send a clear message that there is no place for infiltrators in this country," he asked the people.

The elections for the 126-member Assam Assembly are likely to be held in April.

Modi alleged that the Congress was always in league with the infiltrators and never legally granted land rights to the state's indigenous population.

ulation.

The Congress handed over Adivasi land to the infiltrators, and in districts like Dhubri and Goalpara, the situation was grim, affecting Kokrajhar's demography, he said.

"I am happy that Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma is leading a big drive to clear land from encroachment, and the BJP government has handed rights to the indigenous people. I am also grateful to people from the tribal communities for extending their cooperation in this regard," the PM said.

Modi alleged that Kokrajhar has witnessed the betrayal of the Congress for decades, as the opposition Congress had made false promises.

"The Congress signed peace accords just for show and for selfish interests, but the BJP worked for permanent peace, and ensured the development of Bodoland," Modi said.

He said that hills of Bodoland echoed for decades with sounds of guns and bomb blasts, but "now those days are over, and it is moving ahead in the path of peace and development".

"The people have suffered and lost a lot over the years...we have (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

One of 28 Indian-flagged vessels stranded in Strait of Hormuz sails away safely

NEW DELHI, March 13: One of the 28 Indian-flagged vessels stranded in the Strait of Hormuz during the ongoing hostilities in the region has since sailed away safely, a senior official said.

The Indian-flagged oil tanker, Jag Prakash, which is carrying gasoline from Oman to Africa, has set sail from east of the Strait of Hormuz, Rajesh Kumar Sinha, Special Secretary in the Ministry of Shipping, said at a media briefing.

Hundreds of ships had been stranded in the narrow sea lane between Iran and Oman since the US and Israel launched attacks on Iran, and Tehran targeted the region in retaliation.

Sinha said in all 28 Indian flags vessels were stuck - 24 on the west of the Strait of Hormuz and four on the east.

One of the four on the east, Jag Prakash, has now set sail, he said, adding that the ves-

sel is carrying fuel for an African destination.

Ship tracking websites showed the vessel loading gasoline from Sohar port in Oman and was headed to Tanga in Tanzania. It is due to reach Tanga on March 21.

"Three vessels remain stuck at the east side with 76 seafarers on board," Sinha said.

The 24 Indian-flagged vessels stuck west of the Strait in the Persian Gulf have 668 sailors onboard.

Around 23,000 Indian seafarers are working across merchant, harbour and offshore vessels in the wider Gulf region, he said, adding that DG Shipping continues coordination with ship owners, RPSL agencies and Indian missions.

"All Indian vessels and crew are being actively monitored," he said.

Since activation of the 24-hour control room, DG Shipping has handled over 2,425 calls and 4,441 (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Amit Shah to inaugurate Pragjyotishpur Medical College tomorrow

DIPHU, March 13: Amit Shah, Union Home Minister of India, will preside over a high-level programme on March 15 during which the Pragjyotishpur Medical College & Hospital will be physically inaugurated.

According to officials, the programme will also feature the virtual inauguration and foundation stone laying of several healthcare projects across the state, marking another step towards strengthening Assam's healthcare infrastructure. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Assam polls: Congress' CEC approves second list, to be released soon

NEW DELHI, March 13: The Congress' Central Election Committee (CEC) met here on Friday and approved the second list of candidates for the Assam Assembly elections, which is expected to be released soon.

The CEC meeting, chaired by Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, was attended by former party chief Rahul Gandhi, AICC

general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, Congress' in-charge for Assam Jitendra Singh, Pradesh Congress Committee president Gaurav Gogoi, among other leaders.

Following the meeting, Gogoi told reporters that the list finalised during the meeting is likely to be released on Saturday. "We will also (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

No signing ceremony right now

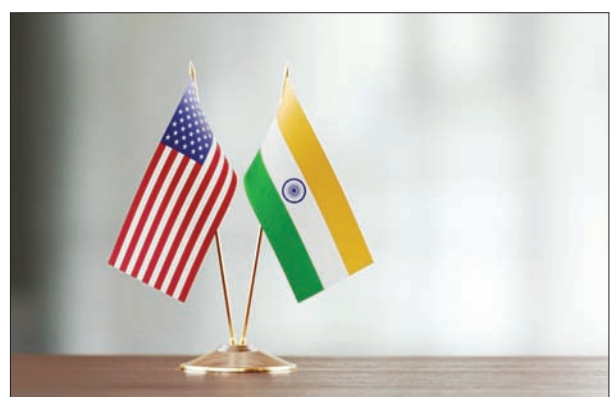
India, US engaged in talks: Commerce ministry

NEW DELHI, March 13: India and the US remain engaged in discussions for a mutually beneficial bilateral trade agreement, the commerce ministry said on Friday.

Chief negotiators of the two countries were scheduled to meet last month in Washington to finalise the legal text for the first phase of the bilateral trade agreement, but it was agreed to be postponed following a decision of the US Supreme Court striking down sweeping tariffs of the American administration.

The ministry has denied reports about a hold off on bilateral engagement.

"We have noted a media report regarding ongoing trade talks with the US. It is denied that there is any hold off in bi-



lateral engagement. It is reiterated that the two sides remain engaged for a mutually beneficial trade agreement," the commerce ministry said in a statement.

The remarks came after the United States Trade Represent-

tative (USTR) on March 11 launched a fresh round of Section 301 trade investigations targeting policies and industrial practices of 16 economies, including India and China. Following the US Supreme Court's ruling, Pres-

ident Donald Trump announced 10 per cent tariffs on all countries for 150 days from February 24. And now the US has announced these investigations.

An official clarified that at no point in time have the two sides ever stated that the trade talks have stopped or "we are not doing an agreement".

Some countries, such as Bangladesh, Malaysia, and Cambodia, have signed trade deals with America, but some others have only finalised and not inked the legal text. India and the US have finalised the contours of the first phase of the trade pact.

"Every country is watching how the overall scenario of tariffs is in the US. The chief (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

भारतीय वायु सेना INDIAN AIR FORCE
JOIN INDIAN AIR FORCE AS AN AGNIVEERVAYU

INDIAN AIR FORCE INVITES UNMARRIED INDIAN MALE AND FEMALE CANDIDATES TO APPEAR IN RECRUITMENT RALLY FROM 20 MAR 2026 TO 23 MAR 2026 TO JOIN THE IAF AS AGNIVEERVAYU (OTHER THAN SCIENCE) INTAKE 02/2026 AT SHILLONG (MEGHALAYA).

| | | |
|----|---|--|
| 1. | Venue / Location | HQ Eastern Air Command IAF, Nonglyer PO Upper Shillong, Meghalaya-793009 |
| 2. | Marital Status and Date of Birth Block | Candidate should be unmarried and born between 02 July 2005 and 02 January 2009 (both dates inclusive). |
| 3. | Educational Qualification | Candidate should have passed Intermediate/ 10+2/ Equivalent Examination in any stream/ subjects from Education Boards recognised by Central/ State/ UT with minimum 50% marks in aggregate and 50% marks in English. OR Passed two years Vocational Course from Education Boards recognised by Central/ State/ UT with minimum 50% marks in aggregate and 50% marks in English in Vocational Course (or in Intermediate/Matriculation if English is not a subject in Vocational Course). OR Passed Three years Diploma Course in Engineering (Mechanical / Electrical/ Electronics/ Automobile/ Computer Science/ Instrumentation Technology/ Information Technology) from Central, State and UT recognised Polytechnic institute with 50% marks in aggregate and 50% marks in English in Diploma Course (or in Intermediate/Matriculation, if English is not a subject in Diploma Course). Note-1. Education Boards recognised by Central, State and UT as on date of selection test shall only be permitted. Note-2. Exact aggregate percentage of marks before decimal as written in the marks sheet of 10+2/ Intermediate/ Equivalent Examination/ Three years Diploma Course/ Two years vocational course OR calculated as per the rules of concerned Education Board/ Polytechnic Institute shall only be considered (For example 49.99% should be taken as 49% and not to be rounded off to 50%). |
| 4. | Stream | Agneervayu (other than science). |
| 5. | Time & Date of Rally | Reporting time at Rally Venue: 6 AM on 20 Mar (For female) and 22 Mar 26 (For male)(as per details given below at Para 6) & Last time to report 1000 Hr. |
| 6. | Domicile States Covered | 20 Mar 26: Female candidates of all districts of States of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya and Sikkim. 22 Mar 26: Male candidates of all districts of States of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya and Sikkim. |

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QUOTE OF THE DAY

My religion is very simple. My religion is kindness.
-Dalai Lama

Quota for women in state bar councils

In December 2025, the Supreme Court of India, led by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant passed a historic decision, reserving thirty percent posts in all State Bar Councils for women. The Court passed these directions in a Public Interest Litigation, pointing out that the percentage of women representatives in the bar council was far smaller than the number of women practicing at the Bar. The Court's view was motivated to rectify the skewed ratio that resulted from gender bias, of the male-dominated bar against women candidates, which made it tough for women to compete without reservation with men in bar elections. The enthusiasm with which women lawyers have welcomed this opening, is evident from the large number of women who have stood as candidates in the Bar Council Election. For instance, since the 1960s, the Delhi Bar Council has only elected two women lawyers. But last February almost 80 women candidates contested and 30 percent of the Bar Council will consist of women for the first time in India's history.

In many ways, a similar change has unfolded as far as the designation of women lawyers as senior advocates by various High Courts and the Supreme Court is concerned. Over the past four decades, most courts had designated only two or so women. This shift did not occur through reservations, but through the Supreme Court's decision in *Indira Jaising v. Supreme Court of India (2017)* ('Indira Jaising - I'), which set up, for the first time, an objective marking framework to assess candidates applying for designation (although on subjective satisfaction of the Permanent Committee). Following *Indira Jaising - I*, one witnessed a significant increase in the number of women being designated. In subjective systems, women tend to be more invisible and vulnerable to gender bias. However, one could argue, the more objective the selection system, the less the bias finds space to operate.

Enthused by these successes, there is a clamouring from the women's bar to ensure that elevation to the bench is made more inclusive by ensuring that more women are elevated to both the High Court and Supreme Court. This would not just encourage women professionals but would also ensure that the justice system benefits from diversity. While this process of gender equity in Courts at all levels is a laudable tribute to the promise of our great Constitution, which has promised all citizens a right to equality to ensure that no one is discriminated solely on the ground of gender, one does observe with some discomfort that a significant majority of the women who are able to partake in the opportunities that have expansively emerged are Hindu Upper Caste, upper middle class women, often belonging to legal families or having powerful male mentors.

Trump is continuously giving misleading picture on Hormuz strait creating confusion

By: Anjan Roy

As in any war, conflicting narratives are emerging in Iran and it is becoming increasingly difficult to get at what is happening on the ground. These have become all the more real as Iran has now started savage attacks on US facilities in the Gulf region and on Israel and Tel Aviv city. Besides, the relentless attacks on all oil industry capacities are further speeding up disaster for the global economy.

Oil prices, after coming down for a short while, have clawed back beyond \$100 per barrel on Thursday, even in the wake of release of large quantities of oil from the strategic reserves of various countries. The Iranians are claiming their total block out of the Strait of Hormuz should drive oil prices to a \$200 a barrel shortly. That could mean disaster for the global economy.

This gives Trump's claims of normalising oil prices a total lie. Trump had observed that with large scale releases from strategic oil reserves and further pressures on freeing up Strait of Hormuz, oil prices would come down sharply. None of that happened.

Iran has claimed to have destroyed no less than twelve vessels passing through the Strait of Hormuz. US, on its part, claimed to have sunk some 16 Iranian navy vessels and an equal number of Iranian mine-laying ships in the Strait of Hormuz. Iran has spread out mines along the Strait which make it extremely dangerous for vessel to pass through the channel without

The most dramatic among these differing perceptions is the one which gives away the stark differences between two principal players—US and Israel. While the US is seeking to paint a picture of definitive achievements of the military operations of the two allies, Israel is seeking to convey that the there is lot of military offensives still to be taken up.

US president, Donald Trump bragged that the campaign was going on very well and the objectives have been already achieved. He even had stated that there were few targets left in Iran yet to be targeted. He is already weaving a story that prepares for US withdrawal from a tricky situation.

Israel on the other hand said that there were plenty of unattended objectives which have yet to be achieved. Israel is looking at a much longer frame in which its principal enemy, Iran, is no longer in a position to mount another military campaign. The two have different views on long term objectives and what they wanted to finish.

The compulsions before Israel are apparent. Iran is mounting severe missile attacks and destructive offensives. Hence, Israel is seeking to tackle the problem at the origin.

If there had been one big victim of the war, it would be Donald Trump's bravado. Despite Trump's claims of forcing the Strait of Hormuz open with US military escorts for passing vessels, US defence forces have stated that they were not yet ready to undertake any escort services.

It is clear that going through Hormuz with commercial vessels in tow would be too dangerous and mean certain destruction. The US navy has stayed away from doing any escort sorties.

The other point of vainglorious claim of Donald Trump has been his claim that the stocks markets were particularly fond of him and markets had hit the highs as never before. What happened since the war was started, is that stocks have fallen sharply.

Along with that, the US Treasury bond yields have jumped, making US government's borrowing cost shoot. This could have major impact on US fiscal position, which was already at ruinous levels.

Thirdly, the war has raised the risk perceptions thereby pushing up the exchange rate of the US dollar. This will further dent US ambitions for jacking up its exports through competitiveness.

All in all, it is high time for Donald Trump to seek an escape route from the current imbroglio over the Iran war. The US now wants to get out at all costs.

For Israel the opposite is true. Unless Iran is completely tamed and its military hobbled, Israel can face hostilities in near future, Israel wants to cripple Iran once for all, even if it means dragging it for much longer. (IPA Service)

War in the Middle East and Global Instability

Geopolitics of the Middle East has now taken such a terrifying shape that it has become a profound challenge for the economic and political stability of the entire world. Toward the end of last February, the large-scale attack jointly launched by the United States and Israel targeting Iran's nuclear bases and military centers has completely altered the old equations of this region. The leadership vacuum created after the death of Iran's Supreme Leader and the retaliatory attacks carried out by Iran against Israel and its allied forces have pushed the world to the threshold of a Third World War. This war, unlike previous conflicts, is not confined merely to territorial disputes on land; rather, its impact has spread from maritime trade to satellite technology in outer space. The conflict of interests among the world's powerful nations and the struggle for religious and hegemonic dominance among Middle Eastern countries have now taken such a complex form that controlling it through any kind of diplomatic discussion has become almost impossible. This situation is pushing the people of the world toward an uncertain future where, instead of peace and progress, only conflict and economic recession seem to dominate. The entire Middle East has now turned into a furnace in which new crises are emerging every moment, and the heat of it is being felt in the daily lives of people in every country of the world.

When the root causes of this global instability are analyzed, it becomes evident that the centers of power in the Middle East have now become completely fragmented. The direct attack on the internal governance system and military strength of a powerful country like Iran has made the Iran-backed armed groups across the region more active and aggressive. Organizations such as Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthis rebels in Yemen, and various military groups operating in Iraq and Syria have now united to wage a collective struggle against Israel and Western nations. As a result, the scope of the war is no longer confined to Gaza or the West Bank; it has now spread from the Mediterranean Sea to the Persian Gulf. This large-scale conflict has rendered millions of people homeless and has created an unprecedented humanitarian crisis. Moreover, the strategic positions adopted by major world powers such as Russia and China in this war have divided the entire world into two clear camps. On one side stand the Western powers led by the United States and European countries, and on the other side are the nations that are under the silent or indirect support of Russia and China. This Cold War-like rivalry has now turned into a hot war on the soil of the Middle East. As a result, the role of international organizations has become ineffective and people's faith in the legal frameworks meant to maintain global peace has almost disappeared. The deep political intrigue and the competition to maintain their respective dominance behind

this military conflict have proved that the security system of the modern world is extremely fragile and may collapse at any moment.

From an economic perspective, it becomes clear that the blow this war has dealt to the global supply chain will be difficult to recover from for many years to come. In particular, the closure of the Strait of Hormuz has halted the transportation of nearly 25 percent of the world's crude oil and a significant portion of liquefied natural gas. As a result, oil prices in the international market have skyrocketed, and the rising cost of transportation for every commodity has led to severe inflation across the world. Not only fuel, but the shortage of various raw materials—from fertilizers used in agriculture to components used in electrical equipment—has pushed the global industrial sector toward a major crisis. Regions such as Asia and Europe, which depend heavily on the Middle East for energy, are now facing a grave economic crisis. This economic instability is affecting not only governments but also the daily livelihoods of ordinary people. The shortage of food items and extreme price increases have triggered social unrest and political protests in many countries. These recent developments clearly demonstrate how even a small military conflict in the Middle East can paralyze the entire global financial system. Because trade routes are no longer secure, shipping companies are now forced to use longer and more expensive routes, leading to a new and costlier system of maritime trade. This economic turmoil proves that in a globalized world no country can remain isolated from another, and the smoke from a fire in one place can poison the air elsewhere.

Another new and terrifying dimension of this Middle Eastern war is the use of modern military technology. Warfare is no longer limited to elephants, horses, rifles, or cannons; rather, a new process has begun where drones, ballistic missiles, and cyberattacks are used to cripple the enemy's backbone. In the ongoing conflict between Iran and Israel, aerial warfare has gained prominence, where unmanned combat aircraft or drones are striking targets thousands of kilometers away with precision. This technology is transforming the nature of war because a country's military can now destroy vital institutions of another country without even entering its territory. At the same time, the growing trend of cyber warfare—through which banking services, power plants, and communication systems can be paralyzed—has become a major threat to any modern state. The consequences of this invisible war can sometimes be even more devastating than direct military attacks because it can disrupt the entire life of a nation's population within moments. The use of such technology has made war more expensive and destructive, where no side remains completely secure.

Attacks on satellites in space have now endangered global information exchange systems, pushing not only military forces but also ordinary citizens toward a kind of digital darkness. This technologically advanced warfare has changed the definition of international security and proves that in the future world, merely possessing military power will not be enough; without technological superiority, no country can claim to be secure.

The war has also exposed the complete failure of the global diplomatic system. International organizations such as the United Nations have now been reduced to mere discussion rooms where no effective decisions can be made. The veto power of powerful nations and their tendency to prioritize their own interests have become major obstacles to establishing peace. The manner in which international laws have been violated after the attack on Iran may encourage powerful nations in the future to attack weaker states. The agreements and treaties that once aimed to control the use or spread of nuclear weapons have now become nothing more than paper tigers. The lack of mutual trust among nations has created an environment where every country feels compelled to join the race for armaments. Diplomatic dialogue has been replaced by threats and retaliation, which is extremely unfortunate for global peace. The grand claims about human rights once made by Western nations have now been lost amid the ruins of the Middle East. Because of this moral decline, a sense of anger and despair has grown among ordinary people around the world, which may give rise to greater extremism in the future.

DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

powerful nations of the world abandon their imperialist mindset and establish new global policies based on justice and equality, such conflicts will continue and the world will remain a center of permanent instability.

The new phase of warfare taking place along the Lebanon-Israel border has made this crisis even more complicated. The military campaign carried out by Israel against a powerful non-state organization like Hezbollah has pushed Lebanon toward a state of devastation. Lebanon, a country already facing economic bankruptcy, has seen its entire social system collapse under the burden of this war. The refugee crisis created by this conflict has now raised concerns not only among neighboring countries but also across Europe. Thousands of people have fled their homes in search of safety in other nations, placing additional pressure on the resources of those countries. This humanitarian tragedy proves that in war it is not only soldiers who die; the most affected are innocent children and women. Bombings of hospitals, schools, and refugee camps have represented an extreme violation of international norms, something that should

pierce the conscience of humanity. The hatred and desire for revenge generated by such horrors will leave a poisonous legacy for future generations. The crisis in Lebanon demonstrates how a nation's internal politics combined with external interference can turn a beautiful country into a desert within moments. This regional instability has also drawn countries like Jordan, Egypt, and Turkey into the complexities of the war in one way or another.

The activities of the Houthi rebels operating from Yemen have created serious anxiety along the Red Sea, one of the world's most important trade routes, posing a major challenge to global commercial security. The attacks carried out by the Houthis against Israeli and allied shipping vessels prove how even an armed group can threaten the world's largest economies. As a result, the number of commercial ships passing through the Suez Canal has decreased significantly, forcing vessels to reroute via the Cape of Good Hope around Africa. This longer route has increased the cost of goods and significantly extended delivery times. Such a situation has compelled major world powers to deploy their naval forces in the Red Sea, turning the region into a heavily militarized zone. This maritime conflict demonstrates that in the modern world, warfare strategies no longer rely solely on massive armies; sudden attacks carried out by smaller groups can also challenge major powers. The insecurity of these trade routes has created uncertainty in global markets, making investors hesitant to invest their money. The instability in the Red Sea has weakened the economic bridge between Europe and Asia, showing clearly that without political stability in a region, global trade can never remain secure.

Another significant aspect of this conflict is the internal situation of Iran and its global implications. Iran, a country where religious rule and modern nationalism exist in a complex combination, has experienced severe instability following foreign attacks, creating a ripple effect across the Islamic world of the Middle East. The attempts made by Western nations to bring about regime change in Iran have created a near civil-war-like environment within the country. On one side stand government supporters and the military forces, and on the other side are rebel groups, leaving ordinary citizens trapped in extreme suffering. History has often shown that attempts at regime change usually result in severe political chaos, as previously seen in Iraq and Libya. Iran's weakened position has also triggered a new power struggle among neighboring countries, where nations such as Saudi Arabia and Turkey are trying to expand their influence. This rivalry has intensified sectarian conflicts and increased the likelihood of religious extremism across the region. Many experts believe that the war carried out in the name of stopping Iran's nuclear program is actually an attempt at a larger geopolitical restructuring. This

process has created such instability that it may take decades for the world to recover from its consequences.

Beyond military and economic aspects, this war has also had deep psychological and social effects worldwide. Through social media and modern information technology, images and updates of the war's horrors are instantly available in the palms of people's hands, creating a sense of global anxiety and mental unrest. People are increasingly worried about their future, leading to anti-government protests and the formation of public opinion in many countries. Religious and ethnic divisions have become more pronounced, disturbing internal peace within several societies. Among the younger generation especially, anger toward war and distrust toward global governance systems have given rise to a new kind of activism. Movements advocating peace have grown stronger, yet they often appear insignificant in front of the military aggression of powerful nations. This social instability proves that war is not confined to battlefields alone; it also corrupts human thoughts and behavior. The spread of misinformation through information warfare has become a serious threat to democracy, as false news is used to generate fear and hatred among people. In such an environment, distinguishing truth from falsehood has become increasingly difficult, leading to greater intolerance within societies. The current state of the world clearly demonstrates that military victory cannot provide a permanent solution to any problem; instead, it only creates new and more complicated ones.

Finally, it can be said that the military conflict in the Middle East and the instability spreading across the world are not sudden events, but rather the bitter outcome of long-standing misguided policies and hegemonic ambitions. This period of contemporary history will likely be remembered as a dark chapter in human civilization, where despite technological progress, humanity has failed to find a path to peaceful coexistence. Given the deep interdependence of global economies, trade, and security, no part of the world can remain peaceful while another region is engulfed in conflict. To overcome this crisis, powerful nations must rise above their narrow interests and consider establishing a new global social contract. The outdated notion of establishing peace through the power of weapons must be abandoned, and solutions should be sought through dialogue and mutual understanding. Otherwise, the flames of this conflict may engulf the entire world in ashes. The present situation warns us that peace is not a gift but a continuous effort that requires goodwill from everyone. If humanity still fails to awaken, the coming days may leave the world as nothing more than a place of destruction and despair. (The author is the recipient of the 'Yuba Lekhak Sanman - 2025' from the Government of Assam)

Brahmaputra underwater road-Rail Tunnel: A transformative step in connectivity

By: Lalit Nath

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has approved the construction of India's first underwater road-rail tunnel beneath the Brahmaputra River in Assam. The approval of this ambitious infrastructure project marks a historic and memorable moment in the state's development journey.

This initiative is not merely another infrastructure project; rather, it represents a visionary step that can accelerate regional development, strengthen national security and build a modern connectivity network suited to the needs of the twenty-first century. The Brahmaputra has long been the lifeline of Assam, shaping the state's economy, culture and social life. Agriculture, trade, literature and music have all been deeply influenced by this mighty river. However, its vast width has historically made communication between the two banks extremely difficult. Although bridges have helped ease this challenge to some extent, the growing socio-economic needs of the present time demand a more reliable and resilient alternative.

Under the project, separate tunnels will be constructed for road and rail traffic to ensure safe and efficient movement. An additional escape passage will be provided for emergency situations, allowing quick evacuation and rescue operations if required. Cross-passages will be constructed at intervals of about 500 metres to connect the two main tubes, ensuring safe movement during emergencies. The tunnel is planned to be constructed approximately 57 metres below the riverbed. Building such a structure at this depth using Tunnel Boring Machine (TBM) technology is considered a highly complex and forward-looking engineering endeavour. Advanced technology and strict

safety protocols will be essential to ensure stability and security in a region known for seismic sensitivity, powerful river currents and variable geological conditions.

The project is expected to bring significant transformation to the economic, social and strategic landscape of Assam and the wider Northeast region. At present, the road distance between Gohpur and Numaligarh is around 240 kilometres. Once the tunnel becomes operational, this distance is expected to shrink dramatically to about 34 kilometres, reducing travel time from nearly six hours to roughly twenty minutes.

Such a change will not only make travel easier but will also strengthen trade, logistics and regional economic integration.

From a social perspective, the tunnel could usher in remarkable improvements in people's lives across Assam and the Northeast. Better connectivity will enhance access to healthcare, higher education and employment opportunities. Residents of remote rural areas will be able to reach major urban centres such as Guwahati, Tezpur and Jorhat more easily, reducing the difficulties associated with long travel times.

Farmers, in particular, are expected to benefit significantly. Agricultural produce such as vegetables, fruits and grains can reach markets more quickly and in fresher condition. The long travel routes and delays caused by ferry crossings currently result in losses for farmers; the new tunnel could reduce these losses, increase profits and encourage greater agricultural productivity. Faster transportation will also strengthen the rural economy.

Small businesses, entrepreneurs and local traders will likewise gain new opportunities. A dependable all-weather transport network will facilitate the movement of raw materials and finished goods, making distribution

and market expansion easier. As a result, the growth of small and medium enterprises could accelerate, creating new economic opportunities. Beyond transportation benefits, the tunnel has strategic importance as well. The Northeast region is connected to mainland India through a narrow corridor. During natural disasters or potential conflicts, disruptions to major bridges or highways could severely affect connectivity. In such circumstances, an underwater tunnel would provide a crucial alternative route to maintain transportation and supply lines.

The project, estimated to cost around ₹18,662 crore, is also expected to generate significant employment during its construction phase, potentially creating around eight million person-days of work. From an economic perspective, the project could provide immediate stimulus through infrastructure investment. However, timely completion and cost control remain crucial challenges for such large-scale projects. Effective project management, transparency and accountability will therefore be essential.

Technical challenges are equally important. The Brahmaputra is one of the world's most sediment-rich rivers, and Assam lies in a seismically active zone. Constructing an underwater tunnel under such conditions will require advanced engineering solutions, rigorous monitoring and strict adherence to safety standards. Scientific studies and environmental assessments must guide every stage of the project.

Environmental protection must remain a central concern. Careful measures will be needed to ensure that the river's ecosystem and aquatic biodiversity are not adversely affected. Maintaining a balance between development and environmental conservation is a fundamental requirement of modern infrastructure planning.

Symbolically, the Brahmaputra has long represented both connection and separation in Assam's history. For centuries, the river has geographically divided the northern and southern banks, creating barriers in transportation, cultural exchange and economic interaction. Modern technology now offers a way to overcome that divide.

Bridges across the river have already connected the two banks from above, carrying a message of unity. The construction of a tunnel beneath the river introduces a new dimension to this connectivity. It demonstrates that technological progress can work in harmony with nature rather than in opposition to it. The project also aligns with the broader goal of integrating the Northeast more actively into India's economic landscape. Improved internal connectivity could strengthen links with neighbouring states such as Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland, opening new opportunities in industry, tourism and trade.

Ultimately, the true success of this project will not be measured solely by engineering achievement. Its real value will lie in the positive changes it brings to the lives of ordinary people in Assam. If the tunnel ensures safer and faster travel, reduces distances between rural and urban areas, stimulates economic activity and strengthens the Northeast's integration with the rest of the country, it will indeed stand as a historic milestone.

Rising beneath the powerful currents of the Brahmaputra, this tunnel will represent far more than concrete, steel and machinery. It will stand as a symbol of vision, courage and technological progress. By transforming geographical barriers into pathways of connection, it may open a new chapter in Assam's journey towards a more connected, prosperous and forward-looking future.

Health Care Can't Be the Only Job in Town; but It Is

By: **Conor Sen**

The two main drivers of US economic growth right now — artificial intelligence and an aging population — are combining to make health care the most appealing career option for job seekers. The sector bucked the hiring caution that infected so many other industries last year, becoming the biggest job creator. But what happens when health care openings start drying up, too?

The economy is unbalanced at the moment. Half of the 2.2% gain in inflation-adjusted gross domestic product in 2025 came from health care and two drivers of the AI economy, information processing equipment and software. Their combined contribution was a record outside of the pandemic bounce-back year of 2021.

Two Sectors Are Driving Economic Growth

Share of real GDP growth attributable to health care and AI

This narrow growth profile is hard on workers, particularly when AI is seen more as a threat than a labor-market accelerator. As investments in the technology have surged, worker confidence has cratered. Young people, especially, feel

like the traditional paths to success are no longer available to them. Who's to say that the job you land or hope to land won't someday soon be displaced by a bot?

No sector is being transformed faster than software, where AI agents are taking on roles that young professionals may have filled. The technology industry is pouring hundreds of billions of dollars into building data centers and importing semiconductors from Taiwan and memory chips from South Korea, but doesn't seem to require many more white-collar workers.

Instead, employment for early-career software developers declined nearly 20% from a 2022 peak, Stanford University researchers found in "Canaries in the Coal Mine? Six Facts About the Recent Effects of Artificial Intelligence." There were also fewer opportunities for younger workers in areas such as marketing and sales. More broadly, the information, professional and business-services sectors shed some 173,000 jobs in 2025.

In contrast, health care is a labor-intensive industry that's become more central to the economy as baby boomers retire; a more sober analysis from Goldman Sachs

Group Inc. estimates that AI could potentially automate 25% of all work hours, displacing 6% to 7% of jobs over a decade. AI will also create jobs, though there's considerable uncertainty around where the new opportunities will lie.

Perhaps robots will one day replace doctors and surgeons, nurses and other caregivers, too, but that kind of disruption seems further away for health care than many other industries. A bigger threat for now is that health care hiring just naturally slows. Last year's trend was driven in part by the industry playing catchup on staffing after struggling to hire during the job boom of 2021 and 2022. Health-care employment lagged through some combination of not being seen as attractive and because sectors like technology recruited aggressively. That dynamic flipped in 2025 when most industries weren't in a hiring mood, but health care employers still had help-wanted signs out.

The Health Field Remains a Dependable Employer

Change in health care employment from a year ago

Labor market anxiety was on full display last week when markets dropped on a Citirini Research report outlining an extreme scenario where AI disrupted every manner of knowledge jobs faster than the economy and policymakers could manage the transition. It didn't help that Jack Dorsey's Block Inc. then announced it was laying off nearly half its employees in a pivot to AI.

Such predictions of doom go too far. A more sober analysis from Goldman Sachs

steadily since a 2022 peak. If the labor market this year resembles last year's, health care would again account for most of the job growth in the country and employers should start to get pickier.

What sectors stand ready to pick up the slack? The most promising should be the white-collar grouping of professional and business services employment, which has been showing signs of improvement after three years of job shedding. There's hope that employers will feel better about the future following last year's business-

friendly tax bill. But a meaningful pickup in 2026 seems unlikely given the uncertainties that abound, including AI. Corporate executives are very much in the mood to do more with less — AI was brought up by executives at more than half of S&P 500 companies this earnings season with respect to productivity and efficiency, a Goldman analysis found. For now, it's still health care to the rescue of a weak and uncertain labor market. (Courtesy: **Bloomberg**)



Apex Bank Recruitment 2026 – 150 Assistant Posts, Online Apply

Last Date: 19/04/2026.

The Assam Co-Operative Apex Bank Limited has released an employment notification for the recruitment of 150 Assistant Posts in the Bank. Minimum educational qualification for this post is Graduate in any discipline and last date submission of application is 19th April 2026.

Apex Bank Recruitment 2026

Name of post: Assistant
No of posts: 150 posts
Pay: Rs. 18730/- to 68040/- + GP: Rs. 4400/- along with other admissible allowances
Age Limit: Age of the candidates must be between 21 to 38 years as on 1st January 2026.

Educational Qualification: Candidates must be a Graduate in any discipline from a recognized university with minimum 45% marks and good knowledge of computer.

A candidate mandatorily has to submit a Computer proficiency certificate while applying.

Other Criteria of Apex Bank Recruitment

Nationality: The applicant must be Indian National.

Local language proficiency: The candidates must be well conversant with the local language.

Application Fee: While applying for Assistant posts under Assam Co-Operative Apex Bank Limited, a candidate has to pay an application fee of Rs 750/-. The mode of payment of application fee is online only.

How to Apply for Apex Bank Recruitment?

Interested and eligible candidates may submit their online applications here for these posts by following below mentioned steps.

Scroll down, go to Important Web-Links section .
Click on the "Online Application Form" and complete the registration process .
In the next stage, click on "Online Application Form" Link and Login.
Fill your all personal and educational details and upload necessary documents.
Make payment of application fee as per your category and submit the form.

Important Dates of Assam Co-Operative Apex Bank Limited Recruitment 2026

Starting date of submission of application: 20th March 2026
Last date of submission of application: 19th April 2026

Selection Process of Apex Bank Assistant Posts

Selection process will comprise of written examination and personal interview.

Although no syllabus is circulated along with the official notification yet; we hereby enlisted the syllabus for the recruitment process of 2024 for the same post to get a basic idea about the written exam. However, candidates are strictly advised to wait for the official notification in this regard.

Name of exam: Written exam

Exam date: To be updated

Total marks: 100 marks

Total no. of questions: 100 nos.

Medium of exam: English

Duration of exam: 100 Minutes

Negative marking: Not mentioned

| Sl No | Subject | No of questions |
|-------|--------------------------------------|-----------------|
| 1 | General/ Financial Awareness | 20 |
| 2 | General English/ English Language | 20 |
| 3 | Reasoning Ability/ Computer Aptitude | 30 |
| 4 | Numerical Ability | 30 |

NLUJAA Guwahati Recruitment 2026 – 9 Faculty Posts

Last Date: 30/04/2026.

The National Law University and Judicial Academy, Assam has released an employment notification for the recruitment of 9 Faculty Posts in the cadre of Professor, Associate Professor and Assistant Professor. Interested and eligible candidates may apply online here.

NLUJAA Guwahati Recruitment 2026

1. Professor of Law

No of posts: 2, (UR: 2)

Scale of Pay: As per 7CPC (Academic Level 14 with rationalized entry pay of Rs. 1,44,200/-)

2. Associate Professor of Law

No of posts: 4, (SC: 1, UR: 3)

Scale of Pay: As per 7CPC (Academic Level 13A with rationalized entry pay of Rs. 1,31,400/-)

3. Assistant Professor of Law

No of posts: 2, (UR: 1, UR/PWD: 1)

Scale of Pay: As per 7CPC (Academic Level 10 with rationalized entry pay of Rs. 57,700/-)

4. Assistant Professor of Political Science

No of posts: 1, (UR: 1)

Scale of Pay: As per 7CPC (Academic Level 10 with rationalized entry pay of Rs. 57,700/-)

Eligibility Criteria: As per university rules. Pl refer to official notification given below.

Application Fee: Candidates have to pay an application fee of ₹2,500/-

(₹1,500/- for SC/ST/PwD candidates) through online mode while applying for these posts.

How to Apply for NLUJAA Guwahati Recruitment ?

Interested and eligible candidates may submit their online applications here for these posts by following below mentioned steps.

Scroll down, go to Important Web-Links section .
Click on the "Online Application Form" and complete the registration process .
In the next stage, click on "Online Application Form" Link and Login.
Fill your all personal and educational details and upload necessary documents.
Make payment of application fee as per your category and submit the form.

Application form duly filled in all respect by the candidate must be supported by attested copies of all certificates, Mark Sheets, evidence of teaching/research experience and production of LL.M./ M.A./ M.Phil/ Ph.D./ NET certificates, copies of reprints of published articles, certificate containing the record of date of birth, etc.

Important Dates of NLUJAA Assam Vacancy 2026

Starting date of submission of application: 11th March 2026

Last date of submission of application: 30th April 2026

BTC Kokrajhar Recruitment 2026 – 157 Forester & Forest Guard Posts, Online Apply

Last Date: 15/03/2026.

Central Selection Board (CSB), Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC), Kokrajhar, Assam has released an advertisement for the recruitment of 157 Forester & Forest Guard Posts under Forest Department, BTC . Interested and eligible candidates may apply online for these posts.

BTC Kokrajhar Recruitment 2026

1. Forester - I

No of posts: 47 posts

Scale of pay: P.B-2 ₹14,000 – ₹49,000 and GP: ₹6,200

Educational Qualification: Candidates must be a graduate in any discipline from a recognised institution or equivalent.

2. Forest Guard

No of posts: 110 posts

Scale of pay: P.B-2 ₹14,000 – ₹49,000 and GP: ₹5,600

Educational Qualification: Candidates must be minimum HS / 10+2 exam passed or equivalent.

Other Criteria of BTR Recruitment

Residence-ship: Candidates must be resident of Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) area. Candidates belonging to newly added 60 villages from Biswanath and Sonitpur districts under BTC's Udalguri District under BTC area are also eligible to apply for above mentioned posts.

Employment Exchange Registration: The candidate must have registered their names in any employment exchange of Assam.

Age Limit: A candidate must not be less than 18 years of age and not more than 40 years as on 1st January 2026.

Age Relaxation: The Category-wise age relaxation for different categories are as mentioned below:

OBC/ MOBC: 3 years
SC/ST(P)/ST(H): 5 years

Medical Standards:

a) Candidates must not have squint eyes and should possess high colour vision.
b) The distant vision should be at least 6/6 for one eye and not poorer than 6/9 for the other without correction. Near vision should be normal for both these posts.

Physical Standard

Here is the physical standards required for both Forester & Forest Guard Posts.

| Parameter | Male | Female |
|------------------|--------|--------|
| Height (General) | 163 cm | 153 cm |
| Height [ST(P)] | 153 cm | 145 cm |
| Chest – Normal | 79 cm | - |
| Chest – Expanded | 84 cm | - |

Application Fee

Category-wise application fee is as under. Application fee is to be paid through online mode - UPI, Credit/Debit card, or Net Banking only.

| Category | Fee |
|---------------|-----------|
| UR/ OBC/ MOBC | Rs. 150/- |
| SC/ ST Rs. | 100/- |

How to Apply for BTC Recruitment ?

Interested and eligible candidates may apply online for these posts by visiting at official recruitment portal of BTC. They may follow below mentioned steps .

Scroll down, go to Important Web-Links section .
Click on Online Application Form link .
A new webpage will be opened.
Enter all your personal and educational details as required .
Upload your passport sized photograph and signature and other required documents.
At the end, pay the application fee as per your category and click on submit button .
Don't forget to take a print of submitted application form .
Documents to be Uploaded
Following documents are to be uploaded along with online application form.

1. All educational testimonials/certificates/ marksheets in support educational qualifications.
2. Age proof certificate.
3. A permanent BTC residential certificate from competent authority in respect of

general category candidates and caste certificate need to be uploaded in case of SC/ ST/ OBC/ MOBC category candidates.

4. Candidates belonging to 60 nos. of newly added villages are to upload any one of Aadhaar Card/ Voter ID/ Caste certificate including PRC from respective circle officer.

5. Recent passport size photograph of 20 to 100 KB and signature of 10 to 50 KB in .jpg/ .jpeg format.

Important Dates of BTC Forester & Forest Guard Recruitment 2026

Starting date of application submission: 23rd February 2026

Last date of application submission: 15th March 2026, 12:00 midnight

Selection Process

The selection process of BTC Forester & Forest Guard Recruitment 2026 consists of following three (3) stages.

Physical Test: The physical test comprises of 26 KM walking for male and 16 KM walking for female candidates to be completed within 4 hours. This will be followed by a medical examination.

Written Examination: A 100 marks test of multiple choice answers with 3 hours duration will be held. There is no negative marking.

Viva-Voce: All qualified candidates in the written examination will have to appear in a viva-voce test of 20 marks.

Written Exam Syllabus

The syllabus of the written examination for the posts of 157 Forester & Forest Guard Posts under BTC area is as mentioned below.

| Post | Subjects | Standard |
|--------------|--|------------------|
| Forester-I | General English, General Knowledge | Higher Secondary |
| | (with special emphasis on BTC area and Reasoning Assam), Logical and Aptitude, Arithmetic | |
| Forest Guard | General English, General Knowledge (with special emphasis on BTC area and Assam), Logical Reasoning and Aptitude, Arithmetic | HSLC |

UPSC CMS Examination 2026 – 1358 Vacancy, Apply Online

Last Date: 31/03/2026.

Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) has released an employment notification for the recruitment of 1358 Assistant Divisional Medical Officer, General Duty Medical Officer & Other posts through Combined Medical Services (CMS) Examination 2026. Interested and eligible candidates may apply online here.

UPSC CMS Examination 2026

Name of exam: Combined Medical Services Examination 2026

No of posts: 1358 posts

Category-wise vacancy:

General Duty Medical Officers Sub-cadre of Central Health Service: 864
Assistant Divisional Medical Officer in the Railways: 450
GDMO (New Delhi Municipal Council): 14
General Duty Medical Gr.-II (Municipal Corporation of Delhi): 30

Name of organization: Union Public Service Commission

Age Limit

A candidate for this examination must not have attained the age of 32 years as on 1st August, 2026 i.e. the candidate must have been born not earlier than 2nd August, 1994. However, for Medical Officers Grade in General Duty Medical Officers Sub-cadre of Central Health Services, the upper age limit must not exceed 35 (thirty-five years) as on 1st August, 2026.

Age Relaxation: The category-wise age relaxation is as mentioned below.

SC/ST: 5 years

OBC: 3 years

PWD: 10 years

Educational Qualification

Candidate should have passed both the written and practical parts of the final M.B.B.S. Examination.

Physical and Medical Standards: Candidates must be physically and medically fit according to the physical/ medical standards for the Combined Medical Services Examination, 2024 as per regulations.

Application Fee

Candidates (Except Female/SC/ST/PwBD candidates who are exempted from payment of fee) are required to pay of fee of Rs. 200/- (Rupees Two Hundred only) either by depositing the money in any Branch of SBI by cash or by using net banking facility of State Bank of India or by using Visa/ Master/ RuPay Credit/ Debit Card/ UPI Payment or by using Internet Banking of SBI.

How to Apply for UPSC Recruitment?

Interested and eligible candidates may apply online for these vacancies through online mode by visiting official UPSC Recruitment Portal. Candidates may follow below mentioned steps to apply for UPSC CMS Recruitment.
Scroll down, go to Important Web-Links section.
Click on the "Online Application Form" and register yourself.
Next again click on "Online Application Form" and Log in.
Fill your all personal and educational details and upload necessary documents.

Make payment of application fee as per your category and submit the form.
At the end, take a print out of the application form.

Important Dates of UPSC CMS Recruitment 2026

Starting date of submission of online application: 11th March 2026

Last date of submission of online application: 31st March 2026

Date of Examination: 2nd August 2026

Modi launches connectivity and electrification projects worth ₹ 5,890 crore

PM flags off new trains, lays foundation for key railway projects in Assam



HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, March 13: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday dedicated and laid the foundation stone for several railway infrastructure projects in Kokrajhar and Guwahati, aimed at strengthening connectivity and boosting economic growth in the Northeast.

Bharat Express, the Guwahati–New Jalpaiguri Express and the Narangi–Agartala Express via video conferencing from Guwahati. He said the new train services will enhance connectivity, promote trade and tourism and benefit students and patients by improving access to larger markets and services.

stone for a new railway Wagon POH Workshop at Bashbari in Kokrajhar worth ₹ 256 crore. The facility is expected to strengthen rolling stock maintenance, improve operational efficiency and generate employment opportunities in the region.

Later in Guwahati, the Prime Minister dedicated three major railway electrification projects to the nation. These include the Rangiya–Mukongselek (558 km), Chaparmukh–Dibrugarh (571 km) and Badarpur–Silchar (315 km) sections. He also laid the foundation stone for the Furkating–Tinsukia double line project spanning 194 km.

The projects with a total investment of ₹ 5,890 crore are expected to significantly improve railway infrastructure in the Northeast, while promoting economic growth, tourism and regional integration.

Gayatri Devidas Hyalinge appointed new DC

HT Correspondent
HAFLONG, March 13: In a significant administrative reshuffle affecting the hill district of Dima Hasao, the Government of Assam has transferred the current District Commissioner and appointed a new officer to lead the district administration.

According to an official notification issued on Friday by order of the Governor, Munindra Nath Ngatey, ACS (DR1997), who has been serving as the District Commissioner of Dima Hasao has been transferred in the interest of public service. He has been posted as Additional Secretary to the Government of Assam in the Health & Family Welfare Department.

Meanwhile, Gayatri Devidas Hyalinge, IAS (RR2019), who was serving as Joint Secretary to the Government of Assam in the Finance Department has been appointed as the new District Commissioner of Dima Hasao.

The transfer and posting have been made in the interest of public service and will take effect as per the official order issued by the Governor.

DC Aranyak Saikia reviews poll personnel training

HT Bureau
DIPHU, March 13: The District Commissioner of Karbi Anglong, Aranyak Saikia, IAS, on Friday visited the training venues of polling personnel organised in preparation for the upcoming Assembly Election 2026.

During the visit, the DC interacted with the trainees and encouraged them to actively participate in the training sessions, clear their doubts and make full use of the guidance provided by the Master Trainers. Emphasising the importance of proper training, he stated that well-prepared polling personnel play a crucial role in ensuring the free, fair and smooth conduct of the election process.

Officials from the Manpower Cell, Postal Ballot Cell and I-Card Cell were also present and provided detailed briefings to the trainees regarding their respective roles and responsibilities during the election process.

NABARD organised International Women's Day 2026

HT Correspondent
NAGAON, March 13: National Bank for Agriculture & Rural Development (NABARD) DDM Office for Nagaon & Hojai districts had organised the International Women's Day 2026 (IWD-2026) event on March 12 and 13, 2026, respectively, with the theme "Give to Gain: Celebrating the International Year of Woman Farmer".

The events were organised by the NABARD, DDM, Rajendar Perna in the Conference Hall of respective DC Offices. During the event in Nagaon district, the women achievers from various fields including farmers, bankers, entrepreneurs, teachers, artists, advocates, SHG members, BoDs of FPOs etc. were felicitated at the hands of the DC, Nagaon, Devasish Sarma.

Addressing the participants, the DC, Nagaon Sarma spoke about the Gross Family Product (GFP) and the importance of home maker women in the growth of GFP. He highlighted that Goddess Kamakha is being worshiped in the Kamakha Devi temple indicating deep respect for the feminine power in Assam. He then emphasised that on the same lines, the women from every walk of life should be equally respected and supported for the overall development of the society as well as the nation. The event was also attended by the Asst. DC, LDM, KVK Head, DAO, SDFDO, RUDSETI-Director etc. Thereafter, few of the women achievers have also shared their views, experience and gratitude.

Similarly, during the event in Hojai district, the women achievers including farmers, bankers, entrepreneurs, administration staff, ASRLM, VWC member, Cooperation Dept. staff, SHG members, BoDs of FPOs etc. were felicitated at the hands of the DC, Hojai, Bidyut Bikash Bhagawati. Guiding the participants, the DC, Hojai Bhagawati spoke about the initiatives of the Govt of India, Govt of Assam and organisations like NABARD for the betterment of lives of women in rural areas through implementation of various support schemes, incentives for establishing individual enterprises, marketing etc.

Protesters shut Pankaj Jain's shop in Diphu

HT Bureau
DIPHU, March 13: The Karbi Anglong district headquarters witnessed a volatile scene on Thursday evening as agitators forcibly closed the garment shop of local businessman Pankaj Jain. The incident, which triggered a heated confrontation and required police intervention, stems from allegations that Jain exerted undue influence over a government medical office.

At approximately 5:00 PM on Thursday, a group of protesters descended upon Jain's establishment. The situation escalated rapidly into a "tense exchange" between the agitators and Jain's family members.

Protesters compelled the shop to shut down immediately. Reports suggest the scene turned violent with allegations that Jain's relatives were manhandled. Local police arrived on the scene to de-escalate the conflict and restore order.

The protest is the culmination of a week-long outcry from social organisations and opposition parties, including the KNYC, KNO, KSYC, AIKSU and APHLC. The groups allege that on March 2, Jain "highhandedly" locked the room of the Media Officer at the office of the Additional Chief Medical and Health Officer (Family Welfare) in Rongkhehal.

Leaders claim Jain has become a "shadow authority," dictating operations within the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) health department. Shersing Bey of the APHLC alleged that Jain has in-

fluence over departmental postings and transfers. Activists are calling for the immediate cancellation of Jain's trading licenses (including MK Traders and NK Traders) and his permanent debarment from doing business in the district.

While the protesters maintain that Jain locked the office, a different narrative emerged from within the health department.

"I have no knowledge of Jain closing the room. The Joint Director of Health Services, Dr Borsing Rongpi, had actually instructed that the room be temporarily closed for renovation work," said Sonsing Hanse, UDA at the health office.

Jain's wife, Malin Kropi, also defended her husband, stating that a mob of 30 to 40 people attacked their shop without explanation. She confirmed that an FIR has been filed against several protest leaders—including Angotong Engti Kathar and Litsong Rongphar for the alleged assault on her father-in-law and brother.

The agitation has also pivoted toward broader policy issues. Leader Litsong Rongphar used the platform to demand that the KAAC enact laws to strip Scheduled Tribe (ST) benefits from tribal women who marry non-tribals. Furthermore, the APHLC filed a formal FIR on March 10 seeking Jain's arrest, following a memorandum submitted to the KAAC Joint Secretary.

ABSU president Dipen Boro resigns

HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, March 13: Dipen Boro, the president of All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) has resigned from the presidential post of the students union on Friday.

Boro, who has been associated with the students union for 25 years holding several positions including district president of Udalguri district and president of the central ABSU till date.

A special session of the ABSU was held at the auditorium hall of Udalguri College on Friday.

During the session, delegates from different district committee, unit committee and state committee of the students union participated.

In the session, Dipen Boro tendered his resignation as president of the students union and the house accordingly accepted the resignation of Dipen Boro.

Existing vice president of the ABSU, Khwrwmdao Wary has been inducted as president (in-charge) of the students union.

During the session, the students union extended farewell to outgoing president Dipen Boro.

"During this journey, I contributed towards several important initiatives and developments, including the implementation process of the BTR Accord, the inclusion of villages from Biswanath and Sonitpur districts into the BTR, the provincialisation of colleges, addressing issues related to the National Democratic Front of Bodoland groups and supporting the process through which 21 traditional items of the Bodo community received recognition under the Geographical Indication (GI) tag, thereby preserving and promoting the cultural heritage of our people. As I prepare to step down from this responsibility, I do so with deep humility, gratitude and pride" he said.

Boro has expressed his heartfelt gratitude to every member, leader, supporter and well-wisher of the students union, who stood with him throughout this journey.

ATTSA Demow felicitated outgoing Revenue Circle Officer

HT Correspondent
DEMOW, March 13: Ankan Jyoti Phukan, who was the Demow Revenue Circle Officer was transferred from Demow. Regarding it the Assam Tea Tribes Students Association (ATTSA), Demow Branch felicitated outgoing Demow Revenue Circle Officer Ankan Jyoti Phukan with a phulam gamosa and citation at his Office on Thursday. In the programme, Digantha Tassa, executive member of ATTSA, Central Committee, Biswanath Nag, President, Amon Mirinda, Secretary of ATTSA, Demow Branch, Priya Sahu, ATTWA leader, among others were present.

Five students from AMRS tops in national level NSE in Junior Science

HT Correspondent
NAGAON, March 13: Five students from Ajmal Modern Residential School, Hojai stand as the Assam State Topper in the National Standard Examination (NSE) in Junior Science, conducted by the Indian Association of Physics Teachers (IAPT). The toppers are Tanbi Das (Class - IX), Arham Azmain (Class - VIII), Anjan Fayik (Class - IX), Rejakul Hoque (Class - IX) and Shaheen Tanbeer (Class - IX) as they have placed themselves among top among 1653 candidates from Assam at the National Standard Examination in Junior Science 2025 conducted on, November 23, 2025 at 1705 centres in India and Overseas with a total enrolment of 52856 candidates.

"These astounding achievements of the students of AMRS in National Standard Examination in Junior Sci-

ence 2025 have made us supremely proud. We congratulate all the successful students, their parents, the NSEJS coordinator of AMRS N K Tipu and our dedicated teaching staff for their invaluable contributions in bringing such invaluable laurels and accolades to our institution" said Areef Ahmed, Principal, Ajmal Modern Residential School (AMRS), Hojai. Maulana Badruddin Ajmal and Sirajuddin Ajmal, the Managing Trustees of Ajmal Foundation along with Dr Khasrul Islam, Director, Ajmal Foundation; Dr MRH Azad, General Manager, Ajmal Foundation and Abdul Kadir, Project Head, Ajmal Super 40 have extended their cordial greetings and best wishes to all the successful students, parents, teachers, NSEJS coordinator N K Tipu and the Principal, Areef Ahmed for shaping such outstanding breakthroughs in AMRS, Hojai.

2 women killed in road accident at Teok

HT Correspondent
JORHAT, March 13: Two women were killed on the spot in a tragic road accident that occurred on the National Highway at Baduli Pukhuri in Teok on Friday afternoon.

According to reports, the two women were travelling on a scooter from Teok towards Jorhat when a truck coming from the same direction rammed into their vehicle from behind, resulting in the horrific accident. After hitting the scooter, the truck fled the scene.

The impact of the collision threw the scooter and its riders onto the road, leaving both women critically injured. They succumbed to their injuries on the spot.

The deceased have been identified as Kusum Gowala and her sister Junmoni Gowala, residents of Umabari Tea Garden in Teok.

Meanwhile, Teok police reached the accident site and launched an investigation. The bodies were sent to Jorhat Medical College and Hospital for post-mortem examination.

NCHAC holds interim budget session for FY 2026-27

Interim provision to cover salary expenditure for three months



HT Correspondent
HAFLONG, March 13: The North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council (NCHAC) held its Interim Budget Session for the financial year 2026-27 on Friday at the NCHAC Session Hall. The Interim Budget was presented by Donpaignon Thaoson, Executive Member in-charge of Finance.

In his budget speech, Thaoson highlighted the necessity of the interim measure to defray essential salary expenditures for the Council Normal Sector. The provision covers a period of three months, beginning April 1, 2026 and extending through the start of the 2026-27 financial year.

Addressing the House, Thaoson

noted that while the interim budget ensures immediate financial obligations are met, a full budget for the 2026-27 financial year will be introduced in the subsequent Council Budget Session.

Chairman Mohet Hojai, who summoned the session of the Thirteenth NC Hills Autonomous Council, further clarified that the comprehensive discussion and placement of the full budget will take place after the upcoming Assembly elections.

The session saw active participation from the Members of the Autonomous Council (MACs), reflecting the council's commitment to fiscal responsibility during the election period.

BJYM holds Yuva Sammelan at Langsodo playground



HT Correspondent
DONGKAMUKAM, March 13: Hundreds of youths and students from the Rongkhang and Amri constituencies gathered at Langsodo playground on Friday for a one-day Yuva Sammelan (Youth Conference) organised by the Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha (BJYM) of West Karbi Anglong.

The Chief Executive Member (CEM) of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), Dr Tuliram Ronghang, attended as the chief guest. Addressing the large crowd, he announced a significant welfare initiative.

Thousands of unemployed youths across Karbi Anglong and

West Karbi Anglong will receive a one-time financial grant following the upcoming Legislative Assembly election. Dr Ronghang highlighted the BJP's track record, noting that students from LP to post-graduate levels now benefit from free admission, uniforms, textbooks and sanitary supplies. He emphasised that government appointments are now strictly merit-based, contrasting this with the previous Congress regime, which he claimed was marred by corruption that favoured the wealthy.

"The future of our youth is bright, but only under a BJP government," Dr Ronghang stated,

urging first-time voters to support the BJP in the upcoming polls.

The event featured several prominent speakers who framed the local youth movement within the context of national progress.

Rohit Chouhan (BJYM National GS) stated that "youth power is the nation's power" and credited PM Modi for building the nation's infrastructure and technology. Bibek Sahu (MP, Madhya Pradesh) briefed the gathering on regional development and party synergy. Rakesh Das (president, BJYM Assam) acknowledged the contributions of CM Himanta Biswa Sarma toward youth welfare.

The conference was presided over by BJYM West Karbi Anglong president Anondo Ronghang. Other notable attendees included MLA Rupsing Teron; Executive Members (EMs) Mongolsing Timung, DU Maslai and Prabhat Taru; MAC (Member of Autonomous Council) Headings Rongphar and president of BJP, West Karbi Anglong District Committee and KAAC Board chairman Radip Ronghang.

The massive turnout from the 111-Rongkhang and 112-Amri constituencies signals a high level of engagement as the region prepares for the legislative elections.

Animal health camp held at Panbessa

HT Correspondent
SIVASAGAR, March 13: An Amega Animal Health Camp was organised by the Department of Animal Husbandry and Veterinary in association with the local Panchayat at Panbessa on Thursday.

Livestock were given free vaccination against serious diseases like Lumpy Skin Disease (LSD) and Goat Pox, along with medicines during the camp. Aadhaar seeding was carried out during the camp for livestock registration.

6th Adingiri Rashtriya Natya Utsav 2026 flagged off at Adingiri Hills

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, March 13: The 6th Adingiri Rashtriya Natya Utsav 2026 was officially flagged off on Friday at the scenic Adingiri Hills, transforming the picturesque landscape into a vibrant hub of theatre and cultural expression. The festival was formally inaugurated with the ribbon cutting ceremony by Festival Committee president Durga Khatiwoda and noted social worker Binoy Kalita, marking the opening of this year's edition.

Organised by Abhigyann, the three-day festival will continue from March 13 to 15, 2026 at AbhigyannNatya Kshetra in Sankardev Nagar, Maligaon.

Set against the natural beauty of the hills, the festival celebrates the growing concept of theatre tourism, offering audiences a unique experience where powerful



stage performances blend seamlessly with nature. Along with theatrical productions, the festival also features hands on sessions,

panel discussions and master-classes conducted by renowned national personalities from the theatre fraternity.

The sixth edition brings together an impressive lineup of theatre groups from Assam and West Bengal. Eminent directors including

Himanshu Prasad Das, Manimala Das, Mukul Oedipus and Ronghang Choudhury from Assam, along with Avik Bhattacharya and Arpan Chakraborty from West Bengal will present their latest productions during the festival.

The plays scheduled for this year's festival include Kordoi Xirira Paharor Xadhu by Dengrali Creators Hub Sonapur, A Stupid Common Man by Abhigyann Guwahati, AgadomBaghadoom by Family Performers Troupe Kolkata, A BPL Love Story by Guernica Mirza, Tamasha – The Darkening Light by August Theatre, Kolkata and JaltiBurhirJalfai by SUNAG, Nalbari.

The Adingiri Rashtriya Natya Utsav continues to strengthen its reputation as a distinctive cultural platform that celebrates theatre, creativity and the natural heritage of Assam.

Nand Kishore Yadav sworn in as new governor of Nagaland

Takes oath at Lok Bhavan in presence of CM Neiphiu Rio



HT Correspondent

KOHIMA, March 13: Nand Kishore Yadav was sworn in as the new governor of Nagaland at a programme in Lok Bhavan on Friday.

The oath of office was administered by Justice Ashutosh Kumar of the Gauhati High Court in the presence of Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio and Assembly Speaker Sharingain Longkumer.

Yadav was appointed as the 23rd governor of the state on March 5.

He succeeded Ajay Kumar Bhalla, who had been holding the additional charge as governor of Nagaland and continues to serve as the governor of Manipur.

The ceremony was also attended by state ministers, MLAs, representatives of tribal organisations, senior bureaucrats and officers from the police and security forces.

Following the swearing-in

ceremony, the Governor interacted with the CM and members of the state cabinet.

In his address to the people of the state on assuming office, Yadav said Nagaland occupies a special place in the rich and diverse fabric of India.

"The state is known for its vibrant cultural heritage, strong community values and the warmth and resilience of its people. The traditions and spirit of the Naga people are a source of pride not only for the state but for the entire nation," he said.

Asserting that India is undergoing a period of remarkable transformation, Yadav said the Northeastern region has witnessed renewed focus and investment in recent years, particularly in connectivity, infrastructure and economic development.

These initiatives are expanding opportunities and integrating the region more closely with the national growth story while pre-

serving its unique identity and traditions, he said.

"Nagaland too has been steadily progressing across various sectors such as infrastructure, education, agriculture, tourism, digital connectivity and entrepreneurship," he said, adding that these developments are creating new possibilities for economic growth and improving the quality of life for the people.

He said creating meaningful opportunities for educated youth remains an important priority.

"With the right skills, innovation and institutional support, these sectors can generate employment and encourage our youth to become creators of opportunities," he said.

Affirming that the aspirations of the people for lasting peace, stability and development remain paramount, Yadav said, "Peace and harmony provide the foundation for sustainable progress, and with collective effort and mutual understanding, Nagaland will continue to move forward on the path of prosperity."

Yadav said he would strive to uphold the Constitution as Nagaland governor and work in close cooperation with the state government and all sections of society to promote good governance, inclusive development and the welfare of the people.

"I look forward to working together with the people of Nagaland to strengthen peace, encourage development and preserve the unique cultural heritage of this wonderful State," he said.

Meghalaya CM says NPP will resolve ST certificate issue, calls for unity amid Garo Hills unrest

TURA, March 13: Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma on Friday said the ruling National People's Party (NPP) will resolve issues related to ST certificates and continue to serve the people, while calling for unity and brotherhood among communities in the wake of the recent unrest in Garo Hills region that left two persons dead.

Addressing party leaders and supporters here, Sangma said the NPP would remain committed to the principles of its founder, P A Sangma and continue working for the welfare of the people.

"The NPP will resolve the ST certificate issue. We will continue to serve the people with dedication and commitment," the chief minister said in Tura, the headquarters of West Garo Hills district.

Two persons were killed in police firing at Chibinang in West Garo Hills on early Tuesday during clashes that erupted amid protests by sections of the tribal Garo community against the attempt of non-Garo candidates in the filing of nominations for the Garo Hills Autonomous District Council (GHADC) election.

Several incidents of arson, assault on civilians and the gathering of large crowds were reported in Tura and other locations across the region, comprising five districts.

The Meghalaya High Court on Tuesday struck down a notification making Scheduled Tribe certificates compulsory for filing nominations for the GHADC polls that led to the violence.

The notification sought to bar non-tribals from contesting the



GHADC elections in a departure from the practice that continued for over seven decades.

He urged party workers and supporters to remain united and further strengthen the party.

"No one can weaken the morale of the NPP. Let us stand united and work together to further strengthen the party," Sangma said.

Appealing for peace and harmony, he also stressed the impor-

tant of forgiveness and unity among communities.

"As Christians, we are taught to love and forgive. At this moment, we must come together as one and promote unity and brotherhood," he said.

The chief minister also lauded the police, district administration and other officials for maintaining law and order during the recent violence in Tura.

"I would like to thank the police and officials who worked tirelessly to ensure that the situation was brought under control," he said.

Sangma also expressed gratitude to the residents of Tura for standing united and helping restore normalcy.

"The people of Tura came together to clean up debris and help restore the town. This unity shows the strength and resilience of our people," he said.

He further thanked religious leaders and community organisations for appealing for calm and helping maintain peace.

Security has since been tightened in the town, while the administration continues to monitor the situation to ensure peace and normalcy. (PTI)

Nagaland govt says LPG stock sufficient, urges public not to panic

KOHIMA, March 13: The Nagaland government assured people that there is no shortage of domestic LPG in Nagaland, urging consumers not to panic or indulge in unnecessary hoarding.

The assurance after a meeting to assess the availability of LPG and other petroleum products in the state, according to an official statement issued here on Friday.

Thursday's meeting was attended by Deputy Commissioners of Kohima, Dimapur and Chumoukedima districts, officials of the Food & Civil Supplies Department and representatives from Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs).

After reviewing the current stock status, the department stated that sufficient domestic LPG stock is



available in the market and supply across the state remains stable.

In view of this, the department appealed to consumers not to create artificial scarcity by panic buying or hoarding LPG cylinders.

The department also cautioned distributors, retailers and individuals that black marketing, overpricing or unauthorised sale of domestic

LPG is illegal and punishable under the relevant provisions of law, warning that strict action will be taken against anyone found involved in such activities.

Seeking cooperation from the public to ensure orderly distribution, the department further informed that booking of domestic LPG is done purely through a digital booking system, while delivery is carried out through the Delivery Authentication Code (DAC) system.

It added that refill booking is permitted only after a gap of 25 days, a measure introduced to prevent hoarding and other unfair practices and to ensure smooth and equitable distribution of LPG to all consumers. (PTI)

BJP urges Meghalaya Guv to convene GHADC session for resolution against non-tribals contesting polls



SHILLONG, March 13: The Meghalaya unit of the BJP on Friday urged Governor C H Vijayashankar to convene a special session of the Garo Hills Autonomous District Council (GHADC) to pass a resolution barring non-tribals from contesting or participating in the council election.

A delegation led by state BJP president Rikman G Momin submitted a memorandum to the governor seeking urgent intervention to safeguard the rights and identity of indigenous tribal communities.

"The purpose of this session is to deliberate on and pass a resolution that bars non-tribals from participating in or contesting GHADC elections, thereby ensuring that the council remains a true custodian of tribal identity, culture and rights," Momin said.

The BJP leader said the GHADC, constituted under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution was created to protect the social, cultural and political rights of tribal communities in Meghalaya.

"Allowing non-tribals to contest or participate in its electoral process undermines the very spirit of the Sixth Schedule and dilutes the constitutional safe-

guards meant for indigenous people," he said.

The party also proposed that the resolution be given statutory backing by amending sub-clause 1(a) of Rule 128 of the Assam and Meghalaya Autonomous District Council Rules, 1951.

Under the proposed amendment, a candidate or voter must be "a citizen of India and a Scheduled Tribe of Meghalaya as per the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950", the memorandum stated.

"This measure will not only uphold the sanctity of the Sixth Schedule but also reinforce the constitutional commitment to protect the rights and identity of the tribal communities of Meghalaya," Momin said.

The BJP expressed hope that the governor would take appropriate steps to safeguard the interests of indigenous people and ensure that the GHADC continues to function as a representative institution of the tribal population.

The demand comes in the wake of recent violence in parts of Tura in West Garo Hills district following protests over the issue of the eligibility of candidates in the GHADC polls.

The unrest saw incidents of arson, vandalism and clashes in parts of the town, resulting in the death of at least two persons and injuries to several others, while a number of shops, establishments and vehicles were damaged.

Following the violence, the district administration imposed curfew in Tura and the surrounding areas to prevent further escalation of the situation.

In view of the prevailing law and order situation, Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma announced the postponement of the GHADC elections that were scheduled to be held this coming April 10. (PTI)

Assam man arrested for duping Arunachal woman in online fraud

ITANAGAR, March 13: Arunachal Pradesh Police arrested a man from Assam for allegedly cheating a woman by posing as a retailer offering iron rods at unusually low prices in an online fraud case, officials said on Friday.

The accused, identified as Soribuddin Ahmed was arrested from Kutubpur in Bihpuria in Assam on Thursday by a team from Papu Hills police station, they said.

Naharlagun ICR SP Nyelam Nega said the woman had paid Rs 90,000 as an advance to a person, who had promised to supply iron rods at a low price but failed to deliver the goods.

Following this, she lodged a police complaint, and the arrest was made, he said.

Urging people to avoid making advance payments to unknown sellers, the SP said cyber fraud should be reported immediately to the national helpline 1930.

Nega also noted that cases of online fraud are on the rise in the Itanagar Capital Region (ICR), with fraudsters often posing as traders offering cheap deals to lure victims. (PTI)

Curfew relaxed in violence-affected areas of Meghalaya

SHILLONG, March 13: Curfew was partially relaxed in the two unrest-hit districts of Meghalaya on Friday to enable people to purchase essential commodities, officials said.

The curfew was relaxed in West Garo Hills district for four hours, from 9 AM to 1 PM, they said.

In neighbouring East Garo Hills district, Deputy Commissioner RP Marak ordered a longer relaxation of the restrictions, from 8 AM to 5 PM, they added.

Clashes broke out between tribal and non-tribal groups earlier this week during the nomination process for the Garo Hills Autonomous District Council (GHADC) elections, leaving two persons dead in police firing and several properties damaged,

officials said.

Incidents of arson, vandalism and looting were reported in parts of Tura town, prompting the authorities to impose curfew and deploy the Army to prevent further escalation, they said.

Following the violence, the state government postponed the GHADC elections, which were scheduled on April 10.

Officials said the situation in the affected areas remained tense but under control with security forces maintaining a close vigil.

During the curfew relaxation period, residents have been advised to maintain peace and refrain from any activities that may disturb public tranquillity, they said. (PTI)

Tripura gov highlights investment push, connectivity in Assembly address

Stresses inclusive growth, connectivity and global investment initiatives

AGARTALA, March 13: Tripura Governor N Indrasena Reddy on Friday stressed the need to transform challenges into opportunities to foster inclusive growth in key sectors such as agriculture, industry and information technology.

Addressing the first day of the Budget session of the Assembly, the governor said the vision of a resurgent Tripura was reflected in initiatives like development of satellite townships, promotion of spiritual tourism at the Tripureswari Temple and an economic conclave aimed at attracting global investment.

"The government hosted the Destination Tripura, a business conclave in 2025, attracting over 120 investors who signed 87 MoUs worth approximately Rs 3,800 crore across education, tourism, healthcare and IT sectors," he said.

Reddy said the state government also organised the first-ever Prabashi Tripurabashi Summit virtually, engaging over 60 NRIs



for ideas on infrastructure, investment and innovation.

"With unwavering resolve, we shall transform challenges into opportunities, fostering inclusive growth in agriculture, industries and digital empowerment, ensuring that the state becomes a shining beacon of development," he said.

Highlighting improvements in connectivity, the governor said railway track electrification had been completed up to Sabroom, marking a significant milestone in rail infrastructure. He also

said a comprehensive plan had been prepared to four-lane the National Highway 8 stretch from Mungiakami in Khowai district to Agartala to boost road connectivity.

The governor also mentioned the government's plan to establish homeopathic and ayurvedic medical colleges and set up three universities, including a medical and technical varsity.

"Tripura has secured the top rank based on parameters set by NITI Aayog and the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade

for strategic reforms aimed at improving ease of doing business," he said.

Lauding the state's tax performance, Reddy said Tripura recorded robust collections in 2025-26 till October 2025 with GST revenue at Rs 994.23 crore, VAT at Rs 281.40 crore, excise duty at Rs 271.48 crore and professional tax at Rs 26.85 crore.

"It reflects strong economic activity and compliance," he said, adding that the state has set up the Institute of Tax Administration and Research, Tripura, for tax research and training related to GST and other levies.

Reacting to the governor's speech, senior Congress MLA Sudip Roy Barman expressed shock over Reddy's silence on the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAACD).

"The council consists of around 70 per cent of the state's total geographical area, but there was no mention of it in his marathon speech," he said. (PTI)

Meghalaya's Muslim forum writes to CM, alleges mosque attacked during Garo Hills violence

SHILLONG, March 13: The Shillong Muslim Forum on Friday expressed concern over the reported attack on a mosque in Tura during the recent unrest in West Garo Hills and appealed to Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma to protect religious institutions and maintain communal harmony.

In a letter to Sangma, the Forum said it was deeply concerned over reports of damage to places of worship and other incidents of violence and destruction of property during the tension in the district.

The organisation referred to the reported vandalism of the Tura Jama Masjid as well as the burning of offices and establishments in the affected areas, stating that those unfortunate incidents disturbed the longstanding peace and harmony that communities in Meghalaya have shared for generations.

Tura is the headquarters of West Garo Hills district.

Two persons were killed in police firing at Chibinang in West Garo Hills on early Tuesday during clashes that erupted amid protests by sections of the tribal Garo community against the attempt of non-Garo candidates in the filing of nominations for the Garo Hills Autonomous District Council (GHADC) election. Several incidents of arson, assault on civilians and the gathering of large crowds were reported in Tura and other locations across the region, comprising five districts.

The Meghalaya High Court, on Tuesday, struck down a notification making Scheduled Tribe certificates compulsory for filing nominations for the GHADC polls that led to the violence. The notification sought to bar non-tribals from contesting the GHADC elections in a departure from the practice that continued for over seven decades.

The Forum condemned all forms of violence and vandalism

against places of worship, community institutions and public property, irrespective of the community or organisation involved.

It said its appeal arises purely from the concern for the protection of religious institutions and the safety and harmony of all communities living in the state.

"As members of a minority community who have lived in Meghalaya for generations, Muslims in Shillong deeply value peaceful coexistence and mutual respect with tribal communities," the Forum said in its communication to the CM.

The letter also acknowledged the concerns of indigenous communities regarding illegal immigration and said that genuine non-tribal Muslims who have long been part of Meghalaya's social fabric support lawful efforts to safeguard the rights, identity and interests of the indigenous people of the state.

The Forum also expressed concern over a recent public statement by leaders of the Hynniewtrep Youth Council who objected to "sacred expressions" like "Allahu Akbar" (God is the Greatest) that Muslims use during daily prayers and religious observances.

Like every religion which has its own sacred expressions in different languages and traditions the phrase holds deep spiritual significance for Muslims, the organisation noted, while condemning the misuse of any religious expression in acts of violence or wrongdoing.

The Forum appealed to the government to ensure the protection of all places of worship and community institutions and to take appropriate steps to restore peace and normalcy in the region. (PTI)

No.KDB/BTC/15thFC/NIT/2025-26/

Dated Kokrajhar the 13th Mar, 2026

NOTICE INVITING TENDER

Sealed tenders affixing a non-refundable Court Fee Stamp of Rs. 8.25 (Rupees Eight & Twenty-Five Paise) only with a validity period of 180 (one hundred eighty) days. Which will subsequently be converted and drawn up in the APWD's printed I-2 forms are invited from the registered contractors of Class-II and Class-I (A, B & C) category of Assam PWD (Roads & Building) and BTC, according to their eligibility for submitting tenders for the following work under 15th Finance Commission fund for the year 2024-25 during 2025-26. The tenders will be received by the undersigned up to 2.00 P.M. on 31.03.2026 and will be opened on the same date & place at 2.30 P.M.

Against the scheme shown below:-

| Sl. No. | Name of Scheme | Estimated Amount | Earnest Money | Cost of Tender | Time for completion |
|---------|--|------------------|----------------------------|----------------|---------------------|
| 1 | Const. of Boundary wall of Haloadal VCDC office building (ID-1145) | 10,00,000.00 | (ST, SC, OBC- 1% & Gen-2%) | 300/- | 3 months |
| 2 | Const. of Community Toilet at Bishmuri Anchalik ABSU Office | 11,00,000.00 | (ST, SC, OBC- 1% & Gen-2%) | 330/- | 3 months |

Details NIT may be seen in all working days in the office of the undersigned. Tender paper will be issued to the contractors or their authorized agent from 13-03-2026 to 05-04-2026 in the office of the undersigned on payment of cost of Tender paper in the form of demand draft/Banker Cheque from any Nationalized Bank, duly pledged in favour of Principal Secretary, BTC, Kokrajhar, payable at Kokrajhar.

IPR(BTC)/C/2025-26/4468

Sd/-
Block Development Officer,
Kokrajhar Dev. Block, Titaguri

Economic Stabilization Fund to help deal with unanticipated crisis: Sitharaman

NEW DELHI, March 13: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Friday said the Rs 1 lakh crore Economic Stabilization Fund will help in dealing with the impact of an unanticipated crisis like the ongoing conflict in West Asia.

Replying to a debate on the second batch of supplementary demands for grants in the Lok Sabha, Sitharaman lashed out at the Opposition for disrupting the House proceedings and said instead of standing together in the interest of the nation and giving confidence to the people, they are taking "irresponsible positions".

Opposition members trooped into the well of Lok Sabha, shouting slogans throughout the minister's reply to the debate. Later, the supplementary demands for grants entailing an additional outgo of ₹ 2.01 lakh crore were approved by the House by a voice vote.

"It is ironic that even while I am speaking about how the Government is preparing itself to face unexpected events, including supply chain disruptions and issues related to LPG, the Opposition is not willing to listen to the reply. Instead, they prefer to pursue their own agenda," she said.

The second batch of supplementary demands for grants provides for inter-account transfers of ₹ 1 lakh crore for the creation of an Economic Stabilization Fund. As per the document, the net cash outgo towards this fund will be ₹ 57,381.84 crore, and the remaining amount will come from savings.

Sitharaman said the government has strengthened its macroeconomic framework, which has



helped India to absorb the economic shocks of various natures without deviating from the fiscal consolidation roadmap.

"The Economic Stabilization Fund will provide fiscal headroom to allow India to respond to global headwinds such as the recent crisis, unanticipated supply chain disruptions, unexpected shocks to sub-sectors in Indian economy and any other event that may have significant fiscal implications. So in anticipation of what cannot be anticipated, we are coming up with Economic Stabilization Fund," she said.

She also said that the additional expenditure will not impact the fiscal deficit for the financial year 2025-26, which will remain within the Revised Estimates (RE).

In the RE of 2025-26, the fiscal deficit has been estimated at par with the Budget Estimates of 2025-26 at 4.4 per cent of GDP.

come into the Well of the House and shout slogans," Sitharaman said.

The minister said ₹ 95,000 crore has been allocated under the VB-G RAM G scheme for 2026-27. Besides, the second batch of supplementary demands for grants provides ₹ 30,000 crore to clear the MGNREGA dues up to March 31, 2026.

The second batch of supplementary demands for grants provides for spending a gross of ₹ 2.81 lakh crore extra in the current fiscal year. With additional receipts of ₹ 80,000 crore estimated in the supplementary, the net additional cash spending will be ₹ 2.01 lakh crore.

It includes grants for spending towards setting up an Economic Stabilisation Fund of ₹ 1 lakh crore. Also, Parliament's nod has been sought for an extra spending of ₹ 19,230 crore towards fertilisers' subsidy and ₹ 23,641 crore for subsidies under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY). Other major expenditure heads include ₹ 41,822 crore for the defence ministry.

Sitharaman said there will be no shortage of fertilisers for farmers, and adequate provision has been made in the supplementary demands for grants.

In the Revised Estimates for the current fiscal year, the government had cut total expenditure to ₹ 49.65 lakh crore, from ₹ 50.65 lakh crore in the BE.

Till January, the government had spent ₹ 36.90 lakh crore, according to Controller General of Accounts (CGA) data. (PTI)

Rejecting the opposition charge that bringing supplementary demands for grants shows "poor budgeting" by the government, Sitharaman said the argument is based on "flawed logic" and asked whether the government should not have brought the Economic Stabilisation Fund in times of unforeseen challenges.

"Does the Opposition want the government not to make any provision for a developing emergency situation?" the minister asked.

She said that when the world is facing a crisis, it is necessary for all political parties to rise above party lines and support the government in dealing with the challenges coming from abroad.

"We must come together for the benefit of the country and speak in a way that gives hope and confidence to the people... It is unfortunate that some in the Opposition believe that their only role is to

Bill seeking precise definition of 'transgender', graded punishment for crimes introduced in LS

NEW DELHI, March 13: A bill seeking to give a precise definition of the term "transgender" and provide graded punishments that reflect the gravity of the harm inflicted upon such persons was introduced in Lok Sabha on Friday. It also underlines that a transgender person "shall not include, nor shall ever have been so included, persons with different sexual orientations and self-perceived sexual identities".

The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Bill was introduced by Social Justice and Empowerment Minister Virendra Kumar. It notes that it is imperative to give a precise definition for proper and definitive identification and protection of transgender persons, to whom the benefits of the present law must reach. The protection and benefits that are provided under the present 2019 law are vast in nature, and therefore, care has to be taken that "such identification cannot be extended based on any acquirable characteristics or personal choice or claimed self-perceived identity of an individual". The bill also contains provisions for "designation of an authority" which will have the option to seek "expert advice" if required. A new clause defines "authority" as a medical board headed by a chief medical officer or a deputy chief medical officer appointed by the central government, state government or a Union territory administration. The bill noted that over the course of time, during the implementation of transgender protection law, "certain doubts and difficulties have arisen and are likely to arise" regarding the "expansion of the definition" of transgender persons. It inserts a new sub clause to define a transgender person as the one having socio-cultural identities as 'kinner', 'hijra', 'aravani' and 'jogta', or eunuch, or a person with intersex variations or a person who, at birth, has a congenital variation in one or more sex characteristics as compared to male or female development will be defined as a transgender.

Also, any person or child who has been, by force, allurements, inducement, deceit or undue influence, either with or without consent, compelled to assume, adopt, or outwardly present a transgender identity, by mutilation, emasculation, castration, amputation, or any surgical, chemical, or hormonal procedure or otherwise will be included in the definition. "Provided that it shall not include, nor shall ever have been so included, persons with different sexual orientations and self-perceived sexual identities," it underlined. It said the present law prohibits discrimination and abuse against transgender persons but its penal provision addresses only general wrongs and criminal offences and prescribes a maximum of two years' imprisonment. It does not adequately address offences of "exceptional gravity" that have been documented in practice. The abduction of adults and children, the infliction of reversible or irreversible bodily harm upon them through mutilation, emasculation, castration, hormone therapies or other similar therapies or chemical alteration, and their forced assumption of a transgender identity are covered under scattered provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 and the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015. (PTI)

Oppn MPs submit notices in both Houses seeking motion for removal of CEC Gyanesh Kumar

NEW DELHI, March 13: Opposition MPs have submitted notices in both Houses of Parliament seeking a motion for the removal of Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Gyanesh Kumar, sources said on Friday.

According to a source, 130 Lok Sabha MPs and 63 Rajya Sabha MPs have signed the notice.

The signatories include members from all the INDIA bloc parties, including the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), which is no longer formally a part of the opposition alliance, the source said.

Some Independent MPs have also signed the notice while several others have evinced interest in joining the initiative, the source added.

This is the first time a notice has been moved seeking the removal of the CEC.

According to sources, the notice lists seven charges against Kumar, including alleged "partisan and discriminatory conduct in office", "deliberate obstruction of investigation of electoral fraud" and "mass disenfranchisement".

The opposition parties have accused the CEC of aiding the ruling BJP on several occasions, especially with the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, which they alleged aims to help the saffron party at the Centre.

The process for removing the CEC is similar to that for the removal of a Supreme Court or a high court judge, meaning an impeachment can be effected only on the ground of "proven misbehaviour or incapacity".

In a blogpost published on Friday, TMC Rajya Sabha leader Derek O'Brien said the term "proven misbehaviour" has been interpreted to include deliberate abuse of powers, partisan exercise of constitutional functions favouring one political formation over others and actions that undermine public confidence in the independence and impartiality of the CEC, amongst other attributes.

He pointed out that in the last 75 years, India has had 25 CECs and "neither House of Parliament has ever brought a removal motion against the CEC".

Calling submitting the notices in both Houses a "strong messaging", O'Brien said members of the opposition are using "every constitutional tool available to protect the sanctity of India's glorious institutions". (PTI)

Namami Gange failed to deliver expected results in Uttarakhand: CAG report

DEHRADUN, March 13: A report by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) has said that the Centre's 'Namami Gange' programme has failed to deliver the desired results in Uttarakhand due to the failure of the state's implementing agencies.

It said that under the flagship programme, launched over a decade ago to clean Ganga river, the Centre had provided Rs 1,000 crore between 2018 and 2023 (the auditing period) for the effective implementation of the project in the state.

However, the report, presented during the ongoing state's budget session, notes several irregularities found in this project, including defective designs of sewage treatment plants (STPs), poor maintenance of infrastructure, failure to tap drains discharging into the Ganga, and the dumping of waste near rivers and smaller streams.

The CAG observed that the detailed project report (DPR) for Forestry Interventions for the Ganga (FIG) included a budgetary provision of Rs 885.91 crore and a plantation target of 54,855.43 hectares.

However, contrary to this, only Rs 144.27 crore—amounting to just 16 per cent of the allocated funds—was actually utilised. Consequently, physical progress remained sluggish, and the scheme failed to achieve the specific objectives related to the rejuvenation of the Ganga.

Of the 44 STPs inspected by the CAG in 2023, only three to five were found to be compliant with the norms set by the National Green Tribunal (NGT), while merely six to twelve were found to be in compliance with the standards of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF) and other relevant criteria. The report states that this reveals widespread non-compliance and a substandard level of sewage treatment.

Of these 44 STPs, the majority demonstrated gross non-compliance with the norms of both the MoEF and the NGT across all three quarters of 2023, with levels of Biochemical Oxygen Demand (BOD), Total Suspended Solids (TSS), and Faecal Coliform far exceeding the permissible limits.

The report also notes that in Chamoli, Rudrapur, Tehri, and Uttarkashi districts, cremation ghats were constructed at 11 locations without assessing local needs or cultural practices; consequently, these facilities are neither being utilised nor maintained, while funeral pyres continue to be lit along the riverbanks.

According to the report, in 2011, the then State

River Conservation Authority set a target to prevent untreated urban wastewater and industrial effluents from entering the Ganga by 2020; yet, state government officials have failed to formulate a plan even 13 years later.

The report further states that District Ganga Plans were not formulated in any of the districts within the Ganga basin, resulting in the poor management of sewage-related issues and a failure to achieve the 2020 target.

According to the report, one of the key objectives of the 'Namami Ganga' was to involve local communities in the planning of sustainable infrastructure. However, an audit revealed that state government officials and implementing agencies failed to engage local residents, leading to improper utilisation (or complete non-utilisation) of the sewage infrastructure.

The report observes that, despite bearing the responsibility for sanitation in the towns situated along the banks of the Ganga, the state government did not allocate funds from its own resources toward the sewage infrastructure in these areas.

The state neither constructed STPs nor provided sewer connections to households. Furthermore, initiatives such as those funded by the German Development Bank (KfW) remained limited solely to Haridwar and Rishikesh.

According to the report, not a single household was connected to any of the 21 STPs constructed across seven riparian cities along the Ganges (two in Nandprayag, five in Karnaprayag, six in Rudraprayag, two in Kirtinagar, one in Chamoli, three each in Srinagar and Shrikot, and two in Joshimath).

The report states that during the audit, only partial sewage connectivity was observed in households; specifically, in Haridwar (69 per cent), Rishikesh (29 per cent), Srinagar (12 per cent), Uttarkashi (9 per cent), and Chamoli (6 per cent). The primary reasons cited for this were a shortage of sewer lines and inadequate treatment capacity.

Additionally, the STPs in Haridwar and Rishikesh are grappling with the problem of overloading—that is, receiving sewage volumes exceeding their designed capacity.

Conversely, the STPs in Devprayag and Joshimath are operating significantly below their capacity due to insufficient sewage inflow. As a result of these issues, the intended objective of the STPs has been undermined. (PTI)

KARBI ANGLONG AUTONOMOUS COUNCIL

DEPARTMENT OF SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER, S.E. WORKS,

KAAC SECRETARIAT

DIPHU-782460

No. KAAC/SE-W-104 (Pt)/2025-26/242

Dtd. 25/02/2026.

TENDER NOTICE

Sealed tender affixing non refundable KAAC court fee stamp (receipt) Rs. 10.00 (Rupees Ten) only eventually to be drawn up in form are hereby invited from KAAC registered contractor/reputed firms of works department and will be received by the undersigned up to 4 P.M. on 17/03/2026, and will be opened on the same date, place and the hours in presence of the tenderer or their authorized agent if any.

If the day of the opening of tender happens to be a holiday/non-working days, the tender will be opened in the next day. The undersigned has the right to accept, reject any tender without any assigning reason thereof and will not be bound to accept the lowest tender quoted rate.

| Sl No | Name of Works | Tender Amount (Rs) | A/A Amount(Rs) | Earnest Money | Time allowed for completion |
|-------|--|--------------------|------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1 | Construction of road from Bisarpo to Dikrutso water falls via Langtor-tor under Korkanthi Constituency | Rs. 88,50,000.00 | Rs. 88,50,000.00 | ST/SC/OBC 1% General 2% | 120 days |

Terms & Condition

N.B

- The rate to be quoted as % (Percent) above below as per schedule rate for building/sanitary works for all division under CPWD-2020-21.
- Earnest money should be deposited in favour of the undersigned in the form of call deposit/bank draft & should be attached with the tender without which no tender will be accepted.
- The Contractor shall repair/re-Construction if the works executed failed due inferior quality of works, The KAAC Authority will take legal action if the contractor refuse to repair/re-construction the woks.
- The work must be carried on as directed by the EE (W), Branch Secretariat, Hamren.
- The following up to date documents should be enclosed with the tender
 - Professional Tax Clearance Certificate.
 - Sale Tax Clearance Certificate/GST
 - Council Registration
 - Call Deposit
 - Council receipt
 - Caste Certificate
 - Pan Card/Adhaar Card
 - Account number
 - Payment will be made subject to availabilities of fund
 - The undersigned is not bound to accept the lowest quoted rate.

Sd/-
Superintending Engineer (SE), Works,
Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council,
DIPHU

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM

OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER,

P.W.D. (R&B), DIPHU CIRCLE-1, DIPHU

No. DPU/KAAC_(AAP)/02/2025-26/2315

Dated: 12.03.2026

PRESS NOTICE INVITING BID

The Superintending Engineer PWD(R&B), Diphu Circle-1, Diphu on behalf of Governor of Assam invites Bid for 2(two) no. of schemes in Karbi Anglong district for Improvement of road under AAP for the year 2025-26 amounting to Rs. 3,99,05,000.00 (Approx) from approved & eligible contractors registered with PWRD, Assam. Details may be seen at website www.assamtenders.gov.in and also in the office of the undersigned during office hours from 13.03.2026 to 02.04.2026. The last Date / Time for receipt of bid will be upto 2.00 PM on 02.04.2026.

Sd/-

Superintending Engineer, P.W.D(R&B)
Diphu Circle-1, Diphu

Memo No. DPU/KAAC_(AAP)/02/2025-26/ 2315-(A)

Dated: 12.03.2026

Gas 'crunch' hits people all across India; Union advises against 'panic booking'

NEW DELHI, March 13: Panic reigned in the streets on Friday as a scramble for domestic gas made people queue up across states, eateries shut shop, and reports of hoarding made rounds, even as the Centre insisted there was no shortage of LPG in the country.

The Centre on Friday said uninterrupted LPG supply to households has been ensured, and there is no need for panic booking for cylinders.

Briefing the media, Sujata Sharma, Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, said the domestic production of LPG has already increased by 30 per cent since March 5.

"There is no need for panic booking, and there has been no dry out at any LPG dealer," Sharma added.

LPG bookings have surged to 75.7 lakh against an average of 55.7 lakh in the pre-war period, "showing panic booking", she said.

All the same, long queues were witnessed outside LPG distribution centres across Bihar despite the district administrations claiming there was no shortage of domestic gas cylinders.

People turned up in large numbers at distribution agencies in Patna, Bhagalpur, Rohtas, Katihar and other districts.

The West Asia conflict has im-

pacted the supply of crude oil and petroleum products, following the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, a narrow passage of water between Iran and Oman.

In Delhi, the gas crunch sent small-scale traders into financial distress.

Nareesh Chawla, who operates a fast-food stall near PVR Saket, said a single establishment often supports several workers and their families.

"One small shop supports eight to 10 livelihoods. I employ three to four workers who have migrated from villages. Many of us have taken loans to run these stalls. If this continues, 30 per cent of street vendors will lose their means of survival," he said.

In the city's Adarsh Nagar, a food vendor named Vicky said he paid around ₹ 4,000 for a small cylinder. Many vendors said they are now dipping into savings or taking loans to manage daily household expenses.

The Madhya Pradesh Hotel Association (MPHA) advised eateries to ditch gas-cooked rotis for traditional wood-fired "tandoors" and "crisis menus" to keep their businesses running.

The association issued an advisory asking establishments to prioritise dishes that require lower gas usage or shorter cooking cycles.



Kerala Hotel and Restaurant Association (KHRA) told PTI that around 40 per cent of restaurants in the state were on the verge of closing down.

"Till Thursday, around 20 per cent of restaurants had closed. The number will increase to 40 per cent by Friday as LPG stocks will run out soon," he said.

Kolkata's super-speciality Desun Hospital introduced temporary menu changes to cope with the limited availability of cooking gas.

"The ongoing disruption in gas supply has affected several institutions, including hospital kitchens that depend on a steady fuel supply for preparing patient meals. At Desun Hospital, we have tem-

porarily restricted our menu to vegetarian and egg-based meals since non-vegetarian preparations generally require more fuel and longer cooking time," said hospital chairman Sajal Dutta. In the rest of the state, people stood with empty LPG cylinders outside gas agency centres - from Kakdwip in the south to Siliguri in the north - claiming that they were not being able to make bookings online.

Protests and road blockades occurred in several parts of Odisha on Friday, with consumers complaining about delays in receiving refilled cooking gas cylinders.

Long queues were seen outside LPG distribution centres across the state as people waited for refills,

often days after booking.

In the state's Jajpur town, residents blocked a road by placing empty LPG cylinders after a local distributor shut its office, displaying a "No Stock Today" notice.

In Keonjhar district, residents blocked the Keonjhar-Sanaghara road over the scarcity of LPG cylinders, disrupting vehicular movement for some time.

In Bengaluru, a housing society body advised residents against mass booking of gas cylinders.

Bangalore Apartments' Federation (BAF) strongly advised residents not to book multiple cylinders unnecessarily, stating that panic booking creates artificial shortages. The Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Committee on Friday sought the petroleum minister's help in ensuring a steady supply of LPG cylinders for 'langar' (community kitchen) service.

In a letter to Union Petroleum Minister Hardeep Singh Puri, the DSGMC said the war in West Asia has affected the langar service across gurdwaras for want of LPG because its supply has been "stopped" by the gas agencies.

In Rajasthan's Kota, a shortage of domestic and commercial LPG cylinders sent panic in the coaching hub with the presence of around 4,000 hostels and over 500 mess facilities. (PTI)

Uttar Pradesh will set new benchmarks in field of education: Rajnath



LUCKNOW, March 13: Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Friday said that Uttar Pradesh will set new benchmarks in the field of education in the years to come, as the state's focus is to create an ecosystem where children can develop and flourish within a positive learning environment. Speaking at the inauguration of the main building at the City Montessori School Golf City campus in Lucknow, Singh said, "Educational institutions here will emerge as centres of attraction not only for students within the state, but also for students across the entire nation."

He said the focus within the state is not merely on opening schools and colleges. Rather, an endeavour is underway to create an ecosystem wherein children can develop and flourish within a positive learning environment, alongside their academic studies.

"I am confident that, thanks to such concerted efforts, Uttar Pradesh will set new benchmarks in the field of education in the years to come," Singh added. The Lucknow MP said that Uttar Pradesh is moving ahead with a comprehensive vision. "Over the past few years, we have all witnessed the state making significant strides across all sectors. In the realms of infrastructure, investment, industry, and education, Uttar Pradesh has gained a new momentum," Singh said.

He also said that when the identity of a city extends beyond its streets and buildings and is defined by its educational and cultural institutions, that city is truly shaping the future of society.

Citing Savitribai Phule and Jyotiba Phule, he said that these visionaries extended education to the marginalised sections of society; that is, to those situated at the very lowest rung of the social ladder.

"They demonstrated that education is the most effective instrument for fostering equality and awareness within society," he said.

The minister said, "India, true to its very name, has always remained engaged in the pursuit of knowledge. If you look at its history, from ancient times right up to the present day, India has remained steadfastly dedicated to this quest for knowledge."

Within India's knowledge traditions, education was never regarded merely as a means to acquire information; rather, it was considered a vital medium for character formation, he said.

He added that when great universities such as Takshashila, Nalanda, and Vikramshila flourished, students would travel from distant corners of the world to India to study at these esteemed educational institutions. "You have likely heard the names of Fa-Hien and Hiuen Tsang. These individuals, too, came to India. They undertook this journey because, in this land, education encompasses not only the acquisition of knowledge but also the inculcation of 'Jeevan Mulya' (life values). That is precisely why they came to India. And in that era, India was perceived by the world not merely as a geographical unit, but was renowned as a global epicentre of knowledge and culture," Singh said.

Singh, on this occasion, also said that Dr M S Swaminathan played a pivotal role in making the nation self-reliant in the realm of food grains through the application of agricultural science. Dr Verghese Kurien, through White Revolution, propelled India to one of the world's largest milk-producing nations. (PTI)

CBI questions Anil Ambani's son in ₹ 228-crore bank fraud case

NEW DELHI, March 13: The CBI on Friday questioned Anil Ambani's son Jai Anmol Ambani for nearly six and a half hours in a Rs 228-crore Union Bank of India fraud case, officials said.

Jai Anmol, the former director of Reliance Home Finance Limited (RHFL), has been called again on Saturday for questioning, they said. The agency questioned him at its headquarters here in connection with an alleged bank fraud case in which he was booked along with RHFL's former CEO and ex-whole-time director Ravindra Sudhakar, among others, they said.

No immediate reaction was available from the company.

"The CBI summoned Jai Anmol Anil Ambani for interrogation today at CBI head office at Delhi. The accused Jai Anmol Anil Ambani appeared before the investigating officer today and was examined for about 6.5 hours," a CBI spokesperson said in a statement on Friday.

"For further examination, the accused has been directed to appear before the investigating officer tomorrow as well," she said. On December 9, 2025, the agency conducted searches at the residence of Jai Anmol after registering an FIR against him and others. The

CBI had acted on a complaint from the Union Bank of India (erstwhile Andhra Bank) alleging that the company did not repay the credit availed from the bank, which turned the account into a non-performing asset (NPA) in 2019.

The CBI registered a criminal case against RHFL - a Reliance ADA Group company -- its promoters/directors and unknown bank officials, on the basis of a complaint of Union Bank of India on allegations of criminal conspiracy, cheating and criminal misconduct and thereby causing wrongful loss of Rs 228.06 crores to the bank, the spokesperson said.

"The account of Reliance Home Finance Ltd. was declared NPA on September 30, 2019 and as fraud on October 10, 2024 by the Union Bank of India..." she said.

RHFL had availed loans to the tune of Rs 5,572.35 crore from 18 banks, financial institutions, non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) and corporate bodies, including Union Bank of India, the spokesperson said.

"A thorough investigation is being conducted into the allegations of defrauding all the banks/FIs (financial institutions), etc. by the accused company," she said. (PTI)

Ethanol plant GM, AGM shot dead in UP's Budaun

BUDAUN (UP), March 13: Two senior officials of an ethanol plant here were shot dead on Thursday, with police arresting a blacklisted vendor in connection with the killings, officials said.

The incident took place at a Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited (HPCL) plant in Sejni village under Musajhag police station limits, they said.

The deceased have been identified as Sudhir Kumar Gupta (58), a general manager (GM) at the facility, and Harshit Mishra (34), assistant general manager.

Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Brijesh Kumar Singh said the alleged shooter, Ajay Pratap Singh alias Ramu, a local, who was earlier a vendor at the plant, has been arrested.

Officials said the deceased Gupta had recently terminated some employees and blacklisted vendors whose work was not satisfactory. Singh was among those removed.

Since the termination, Singh had been upset with the general manager and had threatened him on several occasions, they said.

He even attacked Gupta's car once, following which a case was registered against him at Dataganj Kotwali police station.

According to preliminary information, Singh came to the factory around 2 pm on Thursday and managed to cross the security gate before entering a conference room where Gupta was present.

He allegedly opened fire at him, and when Mishra intervened, he too was shot. Both died on the spot, officials said.

HPCL Regional Manager (Bareilly) Devanand said according to the earlier FIR lodged by GM Gupta, the first major incident took place on January 13 when the accused allegedly forced his way into a contractor's car and entered the HPCL plant premises. He then went straight to the conference room where officials were holding a meeting at the time.

Officials said the January 13 events bore a chilling similarity with Thursday's incident, as the accused had barged into the same conference hall on that day too.

On Thursday, he allegedly burst into the room and began firing indiscriminately, killing the two officials before calmly walking out of the premises. None present at the spot dared to stop or apprehend him, witnesses said.

Earlier, the accused had openly threatened the officials, claiming links with a gang in Noida. To intimidate them, he even showed several knife marks on his body, the official said.

According to the earlier FIR, the accused had also stopped the deceased car as he was leaving the plant, and threatened them.

On January 14, the accused allegedly entered the plant premises again. He walked into the office of the location incharge and began screaming at the officials, issuing various threats.

When the officials stepped out to lodge a complaint, the accused allegedly tried to block their vehicle and chased them for nearly 5 km. Sources said despite the seriousness of the incidents on January 13 and 14, a case was not registered immediately based on the complaint by plant officials.

According to HPCL officials, the FIR was eventually registered on February 4, reportedly after the intervention of the district magistrate.

Plant sources said initially no officer was willing to come forward to lodge the FIR. Later, Deputy General Manager Sudhir Kumar Gupta himself approached the police station as complainant and got the FIR registered.

Regional Manager Devanand told PTI over the phone that the police had been informed about the entire chain of events over the past few months.

"This plant does not come directly under my jurisdiction, but we all work in the same company and the officials had informed me and other seniors about these incidents," he said.

He further said Gupta had already applied for voluntary retirement and had also been transferred from the plant. "March 31 was his last working day; he still had about two years of service left," Devanand said. (PTI)

SC refuses to entertain PIL seeking menstrual leave policy across country

NEW DELHI, March 13: The Supreme Court on Friday refused to entertain a PIL seeking a nationwide policy providing paid menstrual leave for women students and workers, observing no one would give them jobs in such a scenario and that such a provision would unintentionally reinforce gender stereotypes.

The top court, however, asked the Centre and competent authorities to consider the representation of the PIL petitioner and examine the possibility of framing a policy on menstrual leave after consulting all relevant stakeholders.

A bench comprising Chief Justice of India Surya Kant and Justice Joymalaya Bagchi observed that while the intent behind the petition might be welfare-oriented, the practical reality of the job market could lead to "counter-productive" outcomes for women.

"These pleas are made to create fear, to call women inferior, that menstruation is something bad

happening to them... this is an affirmative right... but think about the employer who needs to give paid leave," the bench observed.

Senior advocate MR Shamsad, appearing for the petitioner, said the Karnataka government has formulated a policy to allow menstrual leave and some private organisations are also providing this facility.

"Voluntarily they are giving, then it is excellent. That is a very good thing. But the moment you introduce it as a compulsory condition in law, you do not know the damage it will do to the career of women. Nobody will give them responsibilities, even in judicial services, a normal trial will not be assigned to them," the CJ said.

During the hearing, the bench highlighted the risk of "unintended consequences", suggesting that a mandatory leave policy might discourage private employers from hiring women.

"The moment you introduce it

as a compulsory condition in law, you do not know the damage it will do to the career of women," CJ Kant remarked.

"Nobody will give them responsibilities... This can be harmful to their growth," the bench added.

Justice Bagchi echoed these concerns from a business perspective, noting that affirmative action is constitutionally recognised but must be balanced against market realities.

"Look at the practical reality in the job market. The more unattractive the human resource, the less is the possibility of assumption in the market. Will any employer be happy with the competing claims of other genders," Justice Bagchi asked.

The bench was hearing a PIL filed by Shailendra Mani Tripathi.

At the outset, the bench raised the issue of locus of the PIL petitioner and pointed out that no woman herself has approached the court. (PTI)

Odisha Congress moves 8 MLAs to Karnataka amid fears of cross-voting in Rajya Sabha polls

BHUBANESWAR/ BENGALURU, March 13: The opposition Congress in Odisha has moved eight of its MLAs to Karnataka amid apprehensions of cross-voting in the March 16 Rajya Sabha elections, party leaders said on Friday.

The state's main opposition BJD, on the other hand, has asked all its legislators to attend "priority" meetings at the residence of party chief Naveen Patnaik every evening from Friday to Sunday, according to a statement.

The Congress had summoned all its 14 MLAs to the state capital Bhubaneswar on Thursday night, and then moved eight of them, including Chief Whip CS Raazen Ekka, to a resort on the outskirts of Bengaluru, the leaders said.

Congress legislature party leader Rama Chandra Kadam said, "Yes, eight of our MLAs have gone to Bengaluru so that they can be shielded from horse-trading attempts by the BJP. Our MLAs will remain united."

Another party leader said, "They are scheduled to return to Bhubaneswar on Monday and will go directly to the assembly to cast their votes in favour of Dattaswar Hota."

Among the MLAs who have been moved to the Congress-ruled southern state are Prafulla Pradhan, Mangu Khila, Ashok Das, Pavitra Saunta, Rajan Ekka

and Kadra Appala Swamy, he added.

Congress leaders indicated that more legislators could join the group soon. "Four more MLAs are expected to arrive in Bengaluru by Saturday morning," a Congress leader in Karnataka said. Senior Congress leaders in the southern state are understood to have coordinated the arrangements for the Odisha MLAs.

According to party insiders, Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar oversaw the logistical arrangements for their stay.

The MLAs are currently staying at a resort in an amusement park, located about 35 km from Bengaluru, party leaders said. Six MLAs of the party are at present in Bhubaneswar to attend the ongoing budget session of the assembly.

Congress MLA Sofia Firdous said, "I do not know about party MLAs going to Bengaluru. I need not go to any place."

A total of four Rajya Sabha seats from the state are going to the polls, and five candidates are in the fray. According to the tally in the 147-member assembly, the BJD is certain of one seat, while the ruling BJP is sure about two seats. Neither party has the required 30 first-preference votes for the fourth seat.

The ruling BJP has 79 MLAs and the support of three Independents, totalling 82, which is eight short of the number required for electing three MPs. (PTI)

Cash-for-query: SC stays Delhi HC order on Lokpal sanction for CBI to try Moitra

NEW DELHI, March 13: The Supreme Court on Friday stayed a part of the December 19, 2025 order of the Delhi High Court permitting the Lokpal to consider granting sanction to the CBI to file a charge sheet against Trinamool Congress MP Mahua Moitra in the alleged cash-for-query scam.

A bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalaya Bagchi issued notices to Moitra, the CBI and BJP MP and complainant Nishikant Dubey on the Lokpal's plea against the high court's decision.

The Lokpal had challenged the high court's judgement that had held that separate sanctions for the filing of a charge sheet and initiating prosecution are not contemplated by the Lokpal and Lok Ayuktas Act, 2013.

On December 19 last year, the high court had set aside an order of

the Lokpal granting sanction to the CBI to file a charge sheet against Moitra in the alleged cash-for-query scam.

"The learned Lokpal is requested to accord its consideration for grant of sanction under Section 20 of the Lokpal Act, strictly in accordance with provisions thereof as construed hereinabove, within a period of one month from today," the high court, however, had said in para 89 of that judgement.

The CJ-led bench stayed the para 89 of the high court judgement while issuing notices on a batch of pleas related to power and procedures enumerated under section 20 of the Lokpal Act.

The high court passed the verdict on a plea by Moitra challenging the November 12, 2025 order of the Lokpal granting sanction to the CBI to file the charge sheet against her in connection with the



alleged cash for query scam.

Holding that Section 20 of the Lokpal Act did not contemplate the separate grant of a sanction for filing of a charge sheet, and the sanction is granted only in a composite manner for prosecution, the high court had quashed the sanction granted by the Lokpal to the CBI

to file a charge sheet against Moitra in the case.

The ombudsman moved the apex court challenging the interpretation given by the high court.

Senior advocate Ranjit Kumar appearing for the Lokpal, submitted that the ombudsman was aggrieved with the interpretation

given to the Lokpal Act by the high court, and was not concerned with any particular individual.

Solicitor General Mehta, appearing for the CBI, said the probe agency supported the interpretation given by the high court.

He also added that the respondent TMC MP needs to be investigated.

The law officer said the question was whether two rounds of sanctions were contemplated, one for filing of the charge sheet and the second for initiating prosecution.

"Solicitor, if you see the provisions (Section 20(7)(a) and 20(8)), apparently they overlap. But there are fine distinctions between the filing of a charge sheet and the conduct of prosecution. And when the conduct of prosecution comes into play, see the history of Lokpal Act. The Lokpal Act is to create public confidence in the enquiry

into and prosecution of public servants who are highly placed, where there's a real or perceptible fear that he/she may disable the investigating and prosecution agencies from conducting their duties..." Justice Bagchi said.

Justice Bagchi said Lokpal may withhold the prosecution from the investigating agency and may direct prosecution through its agency. "Let's examine the interplay of the sections in light of BNSS and the Prevention of Corruption Act," she said.

The high court, while setting aside the order of the Lokpal granting sanction to the CBI to file a charge sheet against Moitra, had said there was a "clear departure" from the procedure expressly mandated under the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, and the Lokpal had erred in its understanding and interpretation of the provisions of

the Act.

The court asked the Lokpal to accord its consideration for grant of sanction under Section 20 of the Lokpal Act, strictly in accordance with the provisions within a month.

The cash-for-query scam pertains to the allegation that Moitra asked questions in the House in exchange for cash and gifts from a businessman.

The court passed the verdict on a plea by Moitra challenging the November 12 order of the Lokpal granting sanction to the CBI to file the charge sheet against her in connection with the alleged cash for query scam.

The CBI in July last year submitted its report to the Lokpal in connection with the cash-for-query scam case involving Moitra and businessman Darshan Hiranandani. (PTI)

Filmmaker Imtiaz Ali's next feature film with actor-singer Diljit Dosanjh has been titled "Main Vaapas Aaunga", the makers said on Friday while sharing the official teaser of the movie, which promises a story of love and longing.

The film, which also stars Sharvari, Vedang Raina and veteran actor Naseeruddin Shah, is being billed as an exciting cinematic experience, filled with a contemporary and witty narrative that explores the depth of human connection, the makers said in a statement.

The film, set against the backdrop of the Partition of India, follows a young man (Raina) who falls in love with a woman (Sharvari) in the pre-Partition era -- a story that unfolds across two timelines, with Shah essaying the older version of the character and Dosanjh playing his grandson.

The teaser, set to Dosanjh's evocative vocals, offers a poignant glimpse into the narrative which the makers have described as both intimate and expansive -- not just of a boy and a girl, but of a country.

Ali said the film is rooted entirely in real-life accounts from the Partition period.

"Can love really be lost? Can home be taken away from

someone's heart? The biggest story of the century is migration. I feel privileged to get the chance to tell such a story on celluloid. This tale of fiction derives almost entirely from stories of people during the Partition.

"The past is always present. And decades later, when all incidents of woe have been spoken of, what remains is the early feeling of love that was too personal to share. The nostalgia of who we love and where we belong lives with us forever. This personal treasure sustains us and defines the quality of our lives," the director said.

The movie marks the second collaboration between Ali and Dosanjh after their 2024 widely-loved Netflix film "Amar Singh Chamkila".

It also reunites the director with composer AR Rahman and lyricist Irshad Kamil after they delivered a melodious soundtrack for films like "Amar Singh Chamkila", "Rockstar", "Tamasha", and "Highway".

The film, which will make its debut in theatres on June 12, is produced by Sameer Nair and Deepak Segal of Applause Entertainment and Mohit Choudhary and Shibusish Sarkar of Window Seat Films. (PTI)

Imtiaz Ali's next film with Diljit Dosanjh is titled 'Main Vaapas Aaunga'



Cocktail 2 set for June 2026 release; First look to arrive on March 18

The creators of Cocktail 2 have officially revealed the release date for the highly awaited film, which features a star-studded lineup including Shahid Kapoor, Rashmika Mandanna, and Kriti Sanon. Directed by Homi Adajania and produced by Maddock Films, the film is set to premiere in theatres on June 19, 2026.

Rashmika Mandanna recently posted film posters on her social media, giving fans a sneak peek into the stylish and vibrant universe of Cocktail 2. The images suggest a contemporary, glamorous backdrop, preserving the essence of the original Cocktail that mixed romance, friendship, and drama.

The buzz surrounding the project has been growing steadily since the team finished filming earlier this year. In January, director Homi Adajania marked the end of shooting by sharing behind-the-scenes highlights from the wrap party, offering fans a glimpse of the bond among the cast and crew.

To heighten the excitement, the creators have organized a special reveal for audiences. The first official teaser of the film will be shown exclusively in theatres on March 18, allowing moviegoers to catch the initial glimpse of the story on the big screen.

With a well-known cast, a chic setting, and a director celebrated for crafting memorable characters and sharp narratives, Cocktail 2 is already creating a buzz among film enthusiasts and is anticipated to be one of the major Bollywood releases of 2026. (PTI)

Akshay Oberoi starts shooting for 'Love Lottery'



Actor Akshay Oberoi has started shooting for his upcoming Bollywood romantic thriller Love Lottery in the scenic city of Dehradun, Uttarakhand. The film, directed by Arvind Pandey and produced by Kuldeep Bhargava 'Tushar' under the banner of Cinema Ganj Films, went on the floor in March. Akshay recently shared a few glimpses from the sets, giving fans a look at the early days of the shoot and the beautiful surroundings where the film is being shot.

Akshay Oberoi's Upcoming Film Love Lottery

Love Lottery is an intense courtroom drama that mixes romance and suspense. The film also stars Heli Daruwala along with a strong supporting cast including Kabir and Duhan Singh and Vijyant Kohli who play important roles in the story. The screenplay has been written by Ankur Khatri.

Akshay Oberoi On Starting Shoot For Love Lottery

Talking about beginning the shoot in

Dehradun, Akshay shared that the experience has been refreshing and exciting for him. "Starting the shoot for Love Lottery in Dehradun has been a really nice experience. The city has a calm and beautiful vibe, and it feels great to begin this journey here. We've just started filming, but the energy on set has been amazing. I'm excited to work with Arvind Pandey and such a talented cast, and I can't wait for the audience to see what we're creating."

With the shoot now underway, Love Lottery promises to bring together romance, drama and courtroom tension, making it an interesting project to look forward to.

Earlier, director Arvind Pandey said, "The film will be shot in Uttarakhand in a start-to-end schedule. It's a suspense thriller blended with a courtroom drama and dramatic romance. The film's working title is Love Lottery, but we are yet to lock it and will be announcing it soon." Apart from directing, Pandey has also penned the lyrics for the film and is co-composing the music with Varun Mishra. (Agencies)

KPop Demon Hunters Sequel Greenlit By Netflix After Golden Globes Win

Netflix has inked a deal with director duo Maggie Kang and Chris Appelhans for the sequel to their 2025 blockbuster movie Kpop Demon Hunters.

The follow-up film will be the first project out of Netflix's exclusive multiyear writing and directing partnership with Kang and Appelhans across animation, the streaming giant said in a statement.

"I feel immense pride as a Korean filmmaker that the audience wants more from this Korean story and our Korean characters. There's so much more to this world we have built, and I'm excited to show you. This is only the beginning," Kang said.

Added Appelhans, "These characters are like family to us, their world has become our second home. We're excited to write their next chapter, challenge them, and watch them evolve -- and continue pushing the boundaries of how music, animation, and story can come together." The animated musical fantasy film was produced by Sony Pictures Animation and became a major global hit after it released on Netflix.

Combining elements of K-pop music, action, and Korean mythology, the story follows Rumi, Mira, and Zoey, part of the globally famous K-pop girl group called HUNTR/X, who secretly live double lives as demon hunters.

While performing concerts and maintaining their celebrity status, the trio uses the power of music and teamwork to protect the world from supernatural forces. Together, they must face their

biggest enemy yet -- an irresistible rival boy band, Saja Boys, who are demons in disguise.

The movie, which broke streaming records while its soundtrack produced chart-topping songs such as Golden, is currently nominated for two Oscars -- Best Animated Feature and Best Original Song.

Netflix Chief Content Officer Bela Bajaria said the company is incredibly proud to "deepen our partnership with Kang and Appelhans as well as Sony Pictures Animation." "With 'KPop Demon Hunters', Maggie and Chris didn't just reach audiences, they ignited a global fandom that crossed languages, generations, and genres," she added. (PTI)



Did You Know Typhoon Family Star Kim Min-Ha Lent Her Voice To Priyanka Mohan In Made In Korea?



Shenba, a young woman from a small town in Tamil Nadu who has always dreamed of South Korea, thanks to K-dramas and culture.

When she finally arrives in Seoul, things get tough with loneliness, surprises, and everyday struggles in a new place. Park Hye-jin plays a key supporting role, joined by actors like Si-hun Baek, Rishikanth, Ha-Ram Jo, and Jae-hyeon Jang. The film shows how friendship, courage, and self-discovery can bridge big differences.

Fans are in awe of this discovery. One user wrote, "OMGGGG, Reallyyyy??? I cannot believee this happened. Love it!" Another user wrote, "Wait what in the world? Minha Kim's voice in an Indian show? This is crazy!"

If you have not watched it yet, you can catch it on Netflix, as it was released on March 12, 2026 and has received positive responses from audiences and critics alike. Viewers love the adventure, laughs, and messages about chasing dreams even when life gets hard. Now, Kim Min-ha's dubbing has pulled in more Korean fans.

What do you think? Let us know! (PTI)

Netflix's Made in Korea is trending worldwide right now, and people everywhere are buzzing about its mix of cultures and storyline. Now, recent reports claim that Korean actress Kim Min-ha, known from shows like Pachinko, Light Shop, and Typhoon Family, has joined the Korean dubbing team. She lends her voice to Shenba, the main character originally played by Priyanka Arul Mohan on screen. Read on to know more about it and see how fans are reacting!

According to reports, in a statement, Kim Min-ha shared how much she loved the idea of dubbing and dreamt about it for years, so getting to bring

a character to life with her voice felt like a big honour. At first, acting without showing her face or moving her body seemed strange and tricky, but that challenge made the whole experience more fun and personal. She really hopes audiences feel the same warmth and inspiration from Shenba's path that she discovered while recording the lines.

For the unversed, Made in Korea is a light-hearted yet touching 2026 comedy-drama that brings India and South Korea together. Director and writer Ra. Karthik crafted the story, with Sreemidhi Sagar producing under Rise East Entertainment. Priyanka Arul Mohan plays the character of

Ram Gopal Varma confirms Sarkar 4, filming begins next month



National Award-winning filmmaker-producer Ram Gopal Varma is set to start the filming for the next installment of his political crime franchise, Sarkar 4, next month. The director shared the update while speaking on the opening day of the Red Lorry Film Festival.

The director was present at the festival for a special screening of his cult-classic Shiva. Revisiting the film, the director spoke about the inspirations behind it, noting that legendary filmmaker Steven Spielberg influenced his visual approach.

Talking about the film, he said, "Certainly, some of the shots in Shiva were inspired by Spielberg's style of shot-taking". He also acknowledged that the film drew thematic inspiration from The Way of the Dragon, starring martial arts icon Bruce Lee.

He shared that the idea came from adapting the core premise of that film into a completely different setting.

Speaking about upcoming projects, he confirmed that alongside Sarkar 4, he is also working on another film titled Syndicate. He said, "My film Syndicate will wash all my sins". (PTI)



Diljit Dosanjh teams up with Sia and David Guetta for new track 'Ranjha'

Punjabi actor-singer Diljit Dosanjh has joined forces with Australian singer Sia and EDM producer David Guetta for a new single, titled "Ranjha".

Released by Warner Music India, the track blends Punjabi folk sensibilities with international pop hooks and electronic dance music production.

Dosanjh, who rose to global recognition with songs like "Goat", "Born To Shine", and "Lover", continues to build an international profile with the release.

Sia, known for chart hits including "Cheap Thrills" and "Chandelier", and Guetta, whose production credits span era-defining dance tracks like "Titanium", "When Love Takes Over", "Without You" and "Memories", complete the trio.

"Ranjha" carries that Punjabi heart but opens up to the world in a big way. Working with Sia again felt natural, and having David bring his energy just took it somewhere new. It's one of those songs that makes you move but also feel something," Dosanjh said.

Guetta said the collaboration came together around a shared instinct for rhythm and melody.

"This track has melody, rhythm, and attitude -- everything I'm drawn to as a producer. We wanted to make something people could just press play on and feel instantly," he said. "Ranjha" is now available on all major streaming platforms. (PTI)

Lavanya plays steady golf to win 5th leg of Hero Women's Pro Tour



GURUGRAM, March 13: Amateur Lavanya Gupta held her nerve to play steady golf, carding a total of 1-over 217 to win the fifth leg of the Hero Women's Pro Golf Tour at the DLF Golf & Country Club here on Friday.

On the final day, Lavanya carded 2-over 74, which equalled the second-best card of the day for rounds of 71-72-74.

It helped her win the event by five shots over Durga Nittur (75-70-77) and Jasmine Shekar (70-74-78), who were tied second at 6-over 222.

Amandeep Drall (75) was sole fourth at 224 and Sneha Singh (77) was fifth at 227.

Mahreen Bhatia, the last amateur to win on the Hero Women's Pro Golf Tour before Lavanya, was sixth with a final round of 78 and a total of 228.

Mahreen's win had come in the 15th and

final leg of the 2025 season at Jaypee Wishtown Golf Course.

Lavanya opened the final day with a string of pars on her first six holes before she bogeyed the seventh and birdied the eighth.

She double bogeyed the 10th and then parred the last eight holes.

Durga had one birdie and one bogey on the front nine and then had one double bogey and three bogeys on the back nine.

Jasmine, too, had one birdie and one bogey on the front which was followed by a double bogey and four bogeys on the back nine.

Neha Tripathi (74) was seventh and Manat Brar (82) was eighth, as four players Lavanya Jadon (78), Anvvi Dahhiya (78), amateur Aradhana Manikandan (81) and Saanvi Somu (83) were tied for the ninth place.

Among the big names on the WGAI, Tvesa Malik, a winner this season carded 80 and was Tied-15th, while Ridhima Dilawari, another winner in 2026, was tied-19th with a final round of 77.

The course played tough as only one player recorded an under-par score and that was Anvitha Narender, who shot 1-under 71, but finished Tied-16th.

This week a total of 57 entries were received for the ₹18 lakh event.

Ridhima Dilawari continues to lead the Order of Merit with earnings of ₹ 7,61,667, while Jasmine Shekar is second with ₹ 5,68,333 and Sneha Singh has picked up ₹ 4,86,000.

The next event, which will be the sixth leg of the Tour, will be held at Jaypee Wishtown Golf Course, Noida, from March 17 to 20, 2026. (PTI)

AIU says new tech will allow two-way communication with anonymous informers

NEW DELHI, March 13: The Athletics Integrity Unit (AIU) on Friday said it would now be able to carry out two-way communication with anonymous informers of doping and other ethical violations in the sport while preserving their confidentiality through an enhanced intelligence gathering tool.

The AIU is an independent body created by the World Athletics that manages all integrity issues - both doping and non-doping.

Its responsibilities include anti-doping measures, pursuit of individuals engaged in age or competition results manipulation, investigating fraudulent behaviour with regards to transfers of allegiance, and detecting misconduct such as bribery and breaches of betting rules.

The two-way communication with anonymous informers, who can reach out through even WhatsApp for filing complaints or giving tipoffs, will allow the investigators to clarify and review inputs on any violations. The anonymous informers could not be reached for follow-up queries earlier by the investigators.

"Report Integrity Concerns" link on the AIU's website allows informers to give inputs. They can also scan the relevant QR codes to open anonymous WhatsApp or email on someone's device.

The AIU assesses incoming information for reliability, considers it against other information and acts decisively when appropriate.

"Now with three different reporting mechanisms, all of which enable ongoing two-way communication with our intelligence experts, we are striving to make the act of reporting concerns to us more accessible to the community we serve," explained AIU Head of Investigations and Intelligence, Michael King, in a statement.

"The key part of this tool is our ability to communicate anonymously with people in a two-way fashion. When someone has a concern, and they report to us, but they want to remain anonymous, we can still communicate and write to each other to seek clarifying information and provide feedback.

"The only people who have access to this tool are trained professionals with years of experience managing confidential information from people like this." David Chadwick, the Founder and CEO of RealResponse, the company providing the AIU's new reporting tool, endorsed King's view.

"When people feel safe to speak up, the integrity of sport gets stronger. Two-way anonymous communication allows investigators to move beyond a single report and have meaningful dialogue that leads to better information and better outcomes," said Chadwick.

King noted the ability to check information provided through reporting avenues will bolster intelligence-gathering, adding that the AIU depends significantly on the "trust and goodwill of the athletics community".

"These tools are critical to us doing our job and helping the athletics community. We work tirelessly to try and protect athletes, protect the community...(from) all ranges of integrity threats," he said. (PTI)

Goa to host next Ultimate Table Tennis event in July

NEW DELHI, March 13: Goa will host the seventh season of franchise-based Ultimate Table Tennis (UTT) event in July at the Shyama Prasad Mukherjee Indoor Stadium, the organisers said on Friday.

Organised by 11Sports Pvt. Ltd. under the aegis of the Table Tennis Federation of India (TTFI), UTT has grown into one of the country's most prominent sporting properties since its launch in 2017, the organisers said in a statement.

Speaking about the upcoming season, UTT co-promoter Vita Dani said, "Ultimate Table Tennis has steadily become a key pillar in India's table tennis ecosystem.

Over the years, we've seen the standard of the sport rise across every level, from grassroots programmes to international competition.

"The league has created more exposure, stronger competition, and greater belief among Indian players. Our focus remains on building a world-class league that inspires young athletes, engages fans, and supports the long-term development of the sport."

Since its inception, UTT has hosted six seasons. The competition has seen legendary players like Achanta Sharath Kamal continue to lead from the front, while also providing a stage for the next generation of Indian stars — including Diya Chitale, Manav Thakkar, and Manush Shah — to grow and compete against some of the world's best.

UTT has coincided with a period of progress for Indian table tennis. At the most recent Olympic Games, both the Indian men's and women's teams qualified for the first time, while Indian paddlers have since continued to make their mark across international events on the global circuit.

Details regarding the player auction and the full roster of participants for Season 7 will be announced in the coming weeks. (PTI)

Diksha, Vani, Avani make cut in Australian Women's Open

ADELAIDE, March 13: Diksha Dagar, Vani Kapoor and Avani Prashanth made the halfway cut at the Women's Australian Open, while two other Indians, Hitaashree Bakshi and Pranavi Urs missed the cut here on Friday.

Diksha, who was the top Indian last week also, shot 2-over 74 and was now 2-over for two rounds.

Vani added 2-over 74 to her first round 72. She was also 2-over for 36 holes and the duo was tied-31st.

Avani, who missed the cut in her last two starts, shot 77 on the first day and added 72 to make the cut on the line at 5-over.

She was tied-60th, as 67 players made the cut.

Hitaashree (77-74) and Pranavi (78-75) missed the cut.

Celine Herbin will take a one-shot lead into the weekend after carding a second round 69 (-3) at a testing Kooyonga Golf Club to move to six-under par.

Major winner Hannah Green, sits just one back in a tie for second alongside compatriot Kirsten Rudgeley and France's Agathe Laisne — a recent winner at the Ford Women's NSW Open.

The two-time Ladies European Tour (LET) winner Herbin as she came alive on her back-nine, the course's front-nine, following 10 consecutive pars.

After the turn, Herbin posted birdies at the 2nd, 4th, 5th and 6th to soar into a two shot lead before she handed two shots back to the field with a double bogey on the 8th.

But with the Adelaide heat cooling down, the 43-year-old made a clutch birdie at the par-5 9th thanks to a wonderful third shot.

She leads a bunched field by a single shot



heading into the weekend in Australia.

One of the chasers, seven-time LPGA winner Green, carded five birdies in her final 10 holes to recover from a double-bogey at the

7th and post a 69 (-3).

There has not been an Aussie winner of the Women's Australian Open since Karrie Webb lifted the famous trophy in 2014. (PTI)

Kemp FC eyes strong start in IWL 2

BENGALURU, March 13: Kemp Football Club will begin its Indian Women's League 2 campaign against Suruchi Sangha FC of Kolkata on March 25 as the Bengaluru-based side aims for promotion to the top tier.

Formed only four years ago, Kemp FC has quickly emerged as one of the most promising teams in Karnataka's women's football circuit. Ahead of the season, the club also announced support from VST Group.

With an impressive win rate of around 80 per cent and a structured development pathway for more than 120 young players, the club has progressed through the KSFA league system and now enters IWL 2 among the favourites to move up.

"Our focus remains firmly on football and on building a pathway for young women to compete at the highest level," said Kathleen, President of Kemp FC.

"In just three seasons we have built a com-



petitive squad, invested in coaching and sports science, and created a strong pipeline of talent. IWL 2 is an important step in our journey and the players are ready for the challenge."

Kemp FC's programme combines elite coaching, mental conditioning and performance analysis as part of its long-term vision to compete at the highest level of women's club football.

"Sport builds confidence, resilience and a sense of purpose, and we are pleased to encourage young women pursuing football," said Arun Surendra, Chairman and Group Managing Director of VST Group.

"It is important that young women today have the encouragement and the platform to pursue sport seriously, and we are proud to play a small role in that journey." (PTI)

KKR rope in Zimbabwe's Blessing Muzarabani for IPL 2026

KOLKATA, March 13: Three-time champions Kolkata Knight Riders on Friday announced the signing of lanky Zimbabwe pacer Blessing Muzarabani ahead of the Indian Premier League season, with the fast bowler pulling out of the Pakistan Super League, which will run concurrently.

The right-arm pacer Muzarabani was among the prominent bowlers in the recently-concluded T20 World Cup, finishing as the joint third-highest wicket-taker with 13 scalps as Zimbabwe made it to the Super Eights stage.

"KKR have signed Zimbabwe fast bowler Blessing Muzarabani to join the squad for the upcoming Indian Premier League 2026 season," KKR said in a statement.

"The 6 ft 8" right-arm quick has emerged as one

of Zimbabwe's leading pace bowlers in the shortest format, known for his steep bounce and ability to strike in key phases of the innings."

"Muzarabani brings significant T20 experience, having claimed over 90 wickets in more than 80 T20 Internationals at an average of around 21, with best figures of 3/8. His pace and consistency across global leagues and international cricket add further depth to KKR's pace attack heading into the season."

The addition of Muzarabani to Kolkata Knight Riders' bowling ranks follows the exit of Bangladesh left-arm pacer Mustafizur Rahman, who was released by the franchise last December.

Muzarabani is expected to arrive in Kolkata on March 17. (PTI)

Grassroots push and sports tourism key priorities, says Raksha Khadse

NEW DELHI, March 13: Union Minister of State for Youth Affairs and Sports Raksha Khadse on Friday said strengthening grassroots development and promoting sports tourism are among the government's key priorities as she inaugurated the Annual Convention of the Sports Journalists Federation of India (SJFI) and unveiled the JK Bose Memorial Trophy.

The trophy was unveiled in the presence of SJFI president Saraju Chakraborty and Delhi Sports Journalists Association chief Abhishek Tripathi during the golden jubilee convention of the federation.

Addressing the gathering, Sports Secretary Hari Ranjan Rao said Indian sports has reached a crucial stage of growth and structural changes in governance are expected soon.

"National Sports Board (NSB) and National Sports Tribunal (NST) will take shape next month, and certain governance practices will become the norm," Rao said.

He added that the country's sporting ecosystem is entering a



decisive phase.

"Indian sports has reached an inflection point. A lot of good things will happen in the days to come," he said.

Khadse emphasised that new initiatives under the Khelo India Mission are aimed at widening the base of participation and strengthening the grassroots structure.

"New policies under the Khelo India Mission are an endeavour to reach the grassroots," she said.

The minister added that both traditional Indian games and Olympic

sports remain a major focus area for the government.

"Traditional Indian games and Olympic sports are our priority. District, state and national levels should have a proper structure so that talent can progress through the system," she said.

Highlighting the economic potential of sport, Khadse said the government is also keen to develop sports tourism as a growth driver.

"We want to improve sports tourism, which can contribute to economic growth. The youth of India will have a lot of career opportunities due to the advent of sports science," she said.

She further underlined that India intends to leverage sport as a strategic tool on the global stage.

"India will try to surge ahead using sports as a soft power," Khadse added.

The convention marks the golden jubilee of the SJFI, which represents sports journalists across the country and has played a significant role in chronicling the growth of Indian sport over the past five decades. (PTI)

Bhullar rallies from four behind to win IGPL Chandigarh

CHANDIGARH, March 13: Gaganjeet Bhullar returned a bogey-free four-under 68 in the final round to successfully defend his title at the IGPL Invitational Chandigarh, rallying from four shots behind to register his fourth IGPL win in just six appearances.

Bhullar, who shot 68 and 69 in the first two rounds, signed off with another 68, highlighted by three birdies in four holes between the 13th and 16th on the back nine.

His three-day total of 11-under featured just one bogey, which came in the second round, as he displayed remarkable consistency and precision throughout.

Bhullar finished three shots clear of Varun Parikh (70), while Sachin Baisoya (68) was third alongside Manav Shah (70) at seven-under. Both Parikh and Shah are debutants and were pleased with their start in the event.

"A win is always most satisfying, and I try to stay focused at all times," said Bhullar, who was surrounded by his friends and fans as he completed the win on the 18th green at the Chandigarh Golf Club.

"I love this course, this is my home course," said Bhullar, who last year won

the first two IGPL events and later added a third title.

Bhullar, who played only five IGPL events in 2025, was third on the Order of Merit behind Pukhraj Singh Gill and Aman Raj.

Debutant Parikh, who revealed that Bhullar helped him make the decision to come to the IGPL, was second with a par on the final hole. He shot 71-67-70 to be 8-under and three behind the winner.

Overnight leader Raj (77) had a rough final day and slipped to fifth at 6-under, while Varun Chopra (67) was sixth at 5-under.

Three players, last year's IGPL Order of Merit champion, Gill (73), Karandeep Kochhar (71) and Kapil Kumar (73), were tied for the seventh place. All three are winners from the 2025 season.

Reflecting on his game, Bhullar said, "While I am very happy with my game, I feel I can score much better, but the key is also to keep bogeys to a minimum."

A mix of youth and experience with six-time Asian Tour winner, SSP Chawrasia (70), Harendra Gupta (69), Veer Ganapathy (69) and left-hander Kartik Sharma (72) rounded off the top-10. (PTI)



Russell and Mercedes dominate again in qualifying for F1's China sprint

SHANGHAI, March 13: George Russell praised his Mercedes as a "joy to drive" as he took pole for the sprint race at the Chinese Grand Prix on Friday to continue his team's dominant start to the new era of Formula 1.

Russell is the driver to beat in Shanghai after his dominant win in Australia last week. With teammate Kimi Antonelli qualifying second and no other team close, Mercedes is on target for another 1-2 finish in Saturday's sprint, which is followed by qualifying for Sunday's Grand Prix.

"The car has been feeling amazing," Russell said. "The engine is performing really well and today it was a real joy to drive."

Lando Norris was 0.621 of a second adrift, a vast gap in F1 terms, in third for McLaren. Only Lewis Hamilton of Ferrari in fourth and Norris' teammate Oscar Piastri in fifth got within a second of Russell's time.

Hamilton might be the biggest threat to the Mercedes pair because the Ferrari is quick off the line, which allowed teammate Charles Leclerc to jump into the lead in Australia last week before a strategy error ended his victory hopes. Russell suggested Mercedes has improved its sluggish starts, though.

Verstappen, the most prominent critic of the new regulations, had another tough qualifying session in eighth, though not as bad as the crash which left him at the back of the grid in Australia last week.

Ferrari debuts Macarena Russell and Mercedes led the way in Friday's sole practice



session, as Ferrari failed to find a significant advantage from its unique rear wing which rotates upside-down for more speed on the straights.

Leclerc had the fifth quickest time (1:33.599) followed by Lewis Hamilton (1:34.129).

Hamilton touched tires with Norris in practice and also spun as he lost control on

another lap.

Dubbed the "flip-flop" or "Macarena," it was used briefly in testing, dropped for Australia, and is the sort of innovation which could help Leclerc and Hamilton compete with Mercedes. It could also disrupt the airflow and hinder cars following close behind.

Changes on the way F1's governing body, the FIA, could take stock of how the racing

is going and make changes, potentially even in time for the Japanese Grand Prix later this month.

One gripe so far has been the lack of control by drivers of when the electrical power kicks in and how much is used.

They can't stop the power being deployed in typical straight-line driving and can only add an extra boost, which in Australia resulted in cars finishing the formation lap with an empty battery and lacking pace at the start. That's "not a lot of fun and also quite dangerous," Verstappen said Thursday.

A related issue ended home hero Oscar Piastri's race before it began in Australia, when the extra power kicked in unexpectedly and tipped him into the barriers before he even reached the grid.

If F1 can't race next month in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, which remain on the schedule for now despite the Iran war, it would leave a five-week gap in the calendar, which teams could use to refine any changes.

Zhou a boost for Cadillac There hasn't been a Chinese driver on the F1 grid since Zhou Guanyu left Sauber at the end of 2024, but he's still a big celebrity in his home country. As reserve driver for Cadillac, he could give the new team extra recognition in a key market after its solid but unspectacular debut in Australia.

It was a tough day for Cadillac as Valtteri Bottas was 21st in sprint qualifying, slower than even the unreliable Aston Martins, while Sergio Perez couldn't start because of a problem with his fuel system. (AP)

Iran soccer team pushes back on Trump comments



GENEVA, March 13: Pushing back on U.S. President Donald Trump's comments, Iran's national soccer team says "no one can exclude" it from playing in the men's World Cup in the United States.

Instead, a post on the team's official Instagram account Thursday suggested maybe the U.S. team should be excluded after Trump indicated that the host country couldn't guarantee the safety of the Iranian players.

Trump wrote in a social media post Thursday that the Iranian team was welcome at the World Cup despite the ongoing war with Iran but that "I really don't believe it is appropriate that they be there, for their own life and safety." Iran is set to play all three of its World Cup group games in the U.S., which is co-hosting the tournament with Mexico and Canada.

The regional war has put doubt on Iran's ability to fulfil its World Cup entry, and sports minister Ahmad Donyamali told state TV this week the current circumstances meant it was not possible to play.

But the Iran team's riposte on Instagram confirmed it still wants to participate, and pointed out that the tournament is run by FIFA — not Trump or the U.S.

"The World Cup is a historic and international event and its governing body is FIFA — not

any individual, country," the post said. "Certainly, no one can exclude Iran's national team from the World Cup; the only country that could be excluded is one that merely carries the title of host" yet lacks the ability to provide security for the teams participating in this global event."

Iran is scheduled to play in Inglewood, California, against New Zealand on June 15 and Belgium on June 21, before finishing group play in Seattle against Egypt on June 26.

Mixed messages Trump's mixed messages on the subject include saying last week "I really don't care" if Iran plays, then assuring FIFA President Gianni Infantino at the White House on Tuesday that Iran's team was welcome.

Iran is a power in Asian soccer, ranked No. 20 in the world by FIFA and has qualified for its fourth straight World Cup edition.

Iran's soccer federation has planned to use a tournament base camp in Arizona, at the Kino Sports Complex in Tucson.

Before the World Cup, Iranian soccer officials are due to attend FIFA's annual congress on April 30 in Vancouver. The Iranian federation was unable to attend meetings in Atlanta last week to help teams prepare for the 48-nation tournament. (AP)

5 Indian youth boxers assured of medals at World Boxing Futures Cup

BANGKOK, March 13: Five Indian boxers assured themselves of podium finishes at the World Boxing Futures Cup after a series of impressive quarterfinals wins here on Friday.

India's medal hopes were strengthened with victories from Gunjan (48kg), Joyshree Devi (54kg), Ambekar Meetei (50kg), Chandrika Pujari (51kg) and Radhamani Longjam (57kg), all of whom advanced to the semifinals, thereby assuring the country five medals at the tournament.

In the morning session, Gunjan secured a convincing 5-0 unanimous decision victory over Azerbaijan's Gular Huseynova, while Joyshree Devi produced a dominant display to defeat Japan's Yura Kanemaru by Referee Stopped Contest (RSC) in the first round.

Ambekar Meetei also progressed with a 4-1 victory over Japan's Akira Uekubo in the men's 50kg category.

The evening session saw two more Indian boxers advance, with Chandrika Pujari (51kg) defeating Spain's Andrea Buelga Garcia by RSC in the second round, while Radhamani Longjam (57kg) registered a 4-1 win over England's Siobhan Haley. Meanwhile, Sahil Dubhan (60kg) went down 1-4 to France's David Harutyunyan in his last eight bout. (PTI)

Wrexham celebrity owners on commentary duty

WREXHAM (WALES), March 13: Wrexham's celebrity owners are swapping the boardroom for the commentary booth to mark five years since their game-changing takeover of the Welsh soccer club.

Ryan Reynolds and Rob Mac, who was formerly called Rob McElhenney, will take the mic for Wrexham's home match against fellow Welsh team Swansea in the Championship on Friday. They will be calling the game on British broadcaster Sky Sports and will be joined by guests throughout.

"As with our decision to take over Wrexham five years ago, we genuinely have no idea how this is going to go," Reynolds and Mac said, "but we will give it our best."

"Neither of us have called a sporting event of any variety, let alone a sport we basically learned the rules of five years ago."

The Hollywood pair finalized their purchase of Wrexham for \$2.5 million in February 2021, when the club was in the non-league fifth tier of the English game. Wrexham, which has become the subject of a fly-on-the-wall documentary — "Welcome to Wrexham" — that has given the team and city global notoriety, has achieved three straight promotions and is one more away from playing in the Premier League.

Wrexham is in sixth place, which represents the final play-off spot, with 10 games remaining. (AP)

It doesn't concern us; it's not IPL: Shukla on Sunrisers Leeds' signing of Abrar

NEW DELHI, March 13: The BCCI vice-president Rajeev Shukla on Friday downplayed the acquisition of Pakistan spinner Abrar Ahmed by Sunrisers Leeds during The Hundred auction, saying the development in an "overseas league" is beyond the board's ambit.

The Sunrisers Leeds, owned by Chennai-based media conglomerate Sun Group, on Thursday signed Pakistan mystery spinner Abrar Ahmed during The Hundred player auction, making him the first Pakistani cricketer to be picked by an Indian-owned franchise in the tournament.



"It doesn't concern us. It's not the IPL. What happens in The Hundred or other overseas leagues, we have nothing to do with it," Shukla told PTI. The franchise paid GBP 190,000 (approximately ₹ 2.34

crore) for Abrar after a bidding contest with Trent Rockets. The tournament will be held from July 21 to August 16.

Sunrisers Leeds faced backlash following Abrar's signing, with the team's X account suspended briefly. IPL franchises have not signed any Pakistani player since 2009 due to strained diplomatic relations between the two countries.

The Sun Group, which also owns Sunrisers Hyderabad in the IPL, completed a full takeover of the erstwhile Northern Superchargers last year, acquiring a 49 per cent stake from the ECB and

the remaining 51 per cent from county club Yorkshire for around GBP 100 million.

Sunrisers CEO Kavya Maran attended the Thursday's auction and raised the paddle during the bidding. The group also owns Sunrisers Eastern Cape in SA20 but does not have a Pakistan player in its squad.

Abrar was the second Pakistan cricketer sold in the auction after mystery spinner Usman Tariq, who was picked by Birmingham Phoenix for GBP 140,000 (approximately ₹ 1.72 crore). However, Phoenix have no IPL connection. (PTI)

Shooters Samrat & Suruchi added to TOPS core group along with runner Gulveer, para-shuttler Pramod

NEW DELHI, March 13: Rising pistol shooters Samrat Rana and Suruchi Singh, Asian gold-winning long-distance runner Gulveer Singh and world champion para-shuttler Pramod Bhagat are among eight athletes who have been added to the Target Olympic Podium Scheme's (TOPS) Core group following a recent assessment of performances.

Badminton star H S Prannoy, former Asian gold-winning rifle shooter Divyansh Singh Panwar and wrestler Deepak Punia were among the major names dropped from the core group for failing to meet "the requisite parameters of performance", according to a well-placed source.

The rejig of the list was undertaken at the 169th meeting of the Mission Olympic Cell (MOC), headed by TOPS CEO N S Johal, here.

While Samrat became a world champion last year in both the individual and team 10m air pistol events, Suruchi too enjoyed a fantastic run on the circuit, bagging four consecutive World Cup gold medals.

Pramod, on the other hand, clinched his sixth world title earlier this year. The 37-year-old, whose left leg was disabled by polio, is a former Olympic gold-medallist

and returned to competition last year after serving an 18-month suspension for the anti-doping violation of missing three consecutive tests.

Another shooter who has been added to the list is this year's Asian silver medal-winner rifle-man Niraj Kumar. Former Asian gold-winner Shiva Narwal was, however, left out of the core group that continues to be 56-strong after the most recent omissions and additions.

It was a deserved elevation from developmental to core for Gulveer after his path-breaking performances last year. He is also a national record holder in both the 5000m and 10,000m events.

He had scripted history by bagging top honours in the Asian Championships last year in both the competitions.

Also elevated from developmental to core were the badminton mixed doubles duo of Tanisha Crasto and Dhruv Kapila, along with boxer Jaismine Lamboria, who won the 57kg featherweight category gold at the world championships last year.

TOPS Core athletes get an allowance of ₹ 50,000. They are also USD 25 per day during the period of training and competition overseas. (PTI)

Former AIFF general secretary Kushal Das dies

NEW DELHI, March 13: Veteran administrator and former All India Football Federation (AIFF) general secretary Kushal Das, who played a significant role in organising the 2017 FIFA U-17 World Cup in the country, died here on Friday.

He was 66.

Das is survived by his wife and two sons.

He held the position of AIFF general secretary for 12 years before resigning in 2022 due to unspecified health reasons.

Before entering football administration in 2010, Das had served as Chief Financial Officer of the International Cricket Council (ICC) and International Management Group (IMG) India. He breathed his last at a private hospital in the capital, according to Shaji Prabhakaran, another long-time football administrator who succeeded Das as the AIFF's full-time secretary general in 2022 after former I-League CEO Sunando Dhar served as the acting General S for a brief while.

"Former AIFF General Secretary Kushal Das passed away this morning at a private hospital in Delhi. Sending my deepest sympathies and prayers to his family and loved ones during this incredibly difficult time. Om Shanti," Prabhakaran wrote on his 'X' handle.

Later, the AIFF issued a statement condoling the death of its former top official.

AIFF president Kalyan Chaubey said, "Kushal Das played an important role in the administration and development of Indian football during his tenure as General Secretary of the AIFF."

"His efforts towards Indian football will always be remembered. On behalf of the entire Indian football fraternity, I extend my heartfelt condolences to his family and loved ones in this difficult time. May his soul rest in peace."



A chartered accountant by profession, Das brought extensive experience in sports management and administration to Indian football.

In his early professional years, he worked with several international organisations, including PwC, GSK, and Shell.

In 1996, he joined IMG as Chief Financial Officer when the global sports marketing and television production company entered the Indian market.

AIFF deputy secretary general M. Satyanarayan said, "It is indeed sad to hear of Mr Das's demise. He was one of the longest-serving General Secretaries of the AIFF, serving for over 12 years. During his tenure, the administration at Football House saw many changes and several new departments were created."

"I had personally reached out to him on numerous occasions, and his demise leaves a huge

void in sports administration."

Das later served as the chief financial officer of the ICC in Dubai, further strengthening his credentials in international sports administration.

During his tenure, the Indian national team qualified for three AFC Asian Cup tournaments besides the country hosting the prestigious FIFA U-17 World Cup for the first time in 2017, which he described as "game changer" for Indian football at the time.

The event set a record for the most-attended FIFA youth World Cup in history. He also secured hosting rights for the 2022 AFC Women's Asian Cup and the 2022 FIFA U-17 Women's World Cup.

Das also played a key role in bringing Football Sports Development Limited (FSDL) as a marketing partner of AIFF in 2010, which led to the launch of the Indian Super League (ISL). He often credited this partnership with saving the AIFF from financial crisis after previous broadcasters moved on.

Under his guidance, the AIFF launched the Golden Baby Leagues and a structured youth development system, including age-group leagues that forced clubs and academies to focus on long-term player pipelines.

Das's tenure in the AIFF coincided with Praful Patel's reign as its president, and the former had sent his resignation to the Committee of Administrators which was then running Indian football after the Patel-led dispensation was ousted by the Supreme Court for not holding elections on time.

Das was re-appointed as AIFF's general secretary for a second term of another three years in 2013.

Das completed his BSc in Mathematics at the St. Stephen's College in Delhi. (PTI)

Sharp increase in Indian women's participation in cricket: New study

NEW DELHI, March 13: Women's cricket in India has grown exponentially with participation doubling across 14 states since 2020, according to a study commissioned by the BBC and Collective Newsroom.

The survey, which covered over 10,000 women, has found that the share of women who say they play cricket has risen from five per cent in 2020 to 10 per cent now. The participation of young women is growing even faster as 16 per cent of those aged 15 to 24 say they play cricket compared with six per cent in 2020.

"The research also finds that one in four young women aged 15 to 24 have considered sport as a career option," according to the study.

The Indian women's cricket team has been on a high recently, winning its maiden ODI World Cup and defeating Australia in a bilateral three-match T20I

series for the first time in a decade, a surge that could also be contributing to the sport's growing popularity.

Cricket has overtaken traditional sport kabaddi, which has long been a favourite in India's hinterlands, by a huge margin.

"Cricket has also strengthened its position as the most played sport among women in the states surveyed. In 2020 it only narrowly edged past kabaddi, but the new figures suggest it is now firmly ahead."

"Participation has increased across most regions. All but two of the states surveyed report a rise in the number of women playing cricket. In Uttar Pradesh, levels of participation have increased 10-fold, from one per cent to 10 per cent. The gender gap in cricket participation across the states covered has also narrowed."

The study also shows that for every woman who plays cricket, three men play the sport, compared with a ratio of one to



five in 2020. As for career interest, 26 per cent of young women aged 15 to 24 say they have considered a career in sport, up from 16

per cent in 2020, with the highest levels reported in Tamil Nadu (27 per cent), Madhya Pradesh (19 per cent), and Meghalaya (19 per cent), the study said.

The participation in badminton has also risen among the women surveyed, especially in Punjab, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.

However, more women could get drawn towards sport if their safety concerns are properly addressed, the report says.

"13 per cent of women who do not play any sport cite safety concerns as a barrier," Rupa Jha, the Editor in Chief and co-founder of Collective Newsroom, said. "The findings show both progress and continuing barriers. While participation and viewership are rising fast, stereotypes and practical challenges remain."

"We hope this data will prompt further discussion and action to support women athletes." (PTI)