THE HILLS TIMES Vol .No. III Issue No. 01 RNI-ASSENG/2023/86488 GUWAHATI, SUNDAY, MARCH 8, 2026 PAGES 12 PRICE ₹ 8

EMPOWERING THE WOMEN OF ASSAM

59+ lakh tap water connections and **51+ lakh** Ujjwala gas connections transforming everyday life with dignity, health and smoke-free kitchens

Over **3.6 lakh** Self-Help Groups (SHGs) empowering **41+ lakh** households, building grassroots prosperity

Future of nearly **9.3 lakh** daughters secured through Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana

5.5+ lakh Lakhpati Didis strengthening women-led enterprises

Nearly **4.2 lakh** women-led MSMEs powering economic participation

900+ women-led startups shaping innovation and job creation

56,000+ Anganwadi workers trained under Poshan Bhi Padhai Bhi, strengthening early childhood nutrition and foundational care

DEVELOPED ASSAM 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 46101/13/0030/2526

Page 2 March 08_Normal Pages 07-03-2026 22:05 Page 1

India got best trade deal with US among competing nations: Goyal

NEW DELHI, March 7: India has secured the best trade deal with the US compared to its competing nations, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said on Saturday, noting that the two countries share a "very powerful" relationship.

He said that the US is the world's largest economy - USD 30 trillion - and nobody can wish it away.

"It has been a fantastic journey. We have the best of relations. You would have observed that through the last year, President Donald Trump has always had the best things to say about India as a country, and about Prime Minister (Narendra) Modi. We have fantastic relations with our counterparts there.

"Even within your family, sometimes you can have one or two misunderstandings. It's a part of the course. I think it's a very, very powerful relationship that the US and India share. And we got the best deal amongst all the nations with whom we compete," Goyal said when asked about the trade relations with the US.

He was speaking at Raisina Dialogue 2026 here.

The minister added that India and the US are strategic partners, and the two are the largest democracies in the world.

"We have a large responsibility cast on both our nations. They are the world's largest economy, USD 30 trillion economy, nobody can wish them away," he said.

He said that ultimately a trade deal is about preference over competitors.

"What's a trade deal? You are trying to get a preference or a preferential access for yourself, your goods, your services, compared to your competitor. And we got the best deal amongst all the competing nations. I mean whether it's in our neighbourhood Pakistan or Bangladesh. If we look at the Asian region, we got the best deal amongst all of the competitors..." Goyal said.

He added that the India-US relationship is strong, multi-dimensional, and not only about trade as there is a huge technology overlay on it. "There's a huge critical minerals partnership, there's a defense partnership, there's a huge amount of investments that flow into India from the US. So it's a partnership of two countries which is going to define the future," he said.

These remarks are important as the two countries have finalised the framework for the first phase of the bilateral trade agreement. Under the deal, the US had announced to reduce reciprocal tariffs on India to 18 per cent.

However, following the US Supreme Court striking down the tariffs, Trump imposed 10 per cent tariffs on all countries from February 24 for 150 days.

A meeting between chief negotiators of the two countries to finalise the legal text for the agreement has been postponed.

Under the deal, India will eliminate or reduce tariffs on all US industrial goods and a wide range of American food and agricultural products, including dried distillers' grains (DDGs), red sorghum for animal feed, tree nuts, fresh and processed fruit, soybean oil, wine and spirits, and additional products.

India has also stated that it intends to purchase USD 500 billion of US energy products, aircraft and aircraft parts, precious metals, technology products, and coking coal over the next five years.

Talking about the nine free trade agreements (FTAs) that the Modi government has finalised, Goyal said the government has protected national interests, and has opened doors for Indian businesses.

"These nine free trade agreements, I can say on record with all the courage that I have on my command with all the responsibility that in not a single trade deal, has India compromised on any sensitivity of any of our stakeholders," he said.

Opposition parties have alleged that the government has compromised the interests of farmers in the India-US trade pact.

He added that opening of the auto sector in some FTAs will provide choices to consumers in the country and create jobs. India has agreed to provide duty concessions in the sector under its trade pacts with the UK and European Union.

"Demand for this industry is growing at an average of 8 per cent. So you can imagine how much more scope we have to create jobs," he said.

Goyal added that auto firms in the FTA partners may initially export cars to India to test the domestic market here, but once they "find the sweet spot of what sells in India, ultimately, they will have to manufacture in India".

It will be difficult for expensive European cars to compete with Indian companies here. "Initially they can sell, say, 5,000 cars or 10,000 cars, to test the market, find the distraction -- and then come and manufacture here," he said. He said the approach has been to create the worldwide web of trade partnerships through these FTAs. (PTI)

Govt provides certain relaxations to exporters to meet obligations

NEW DELHI, March 7: The government has granted certain relaxations to exporters in fulfilling their export obligations, as the trading community is facing difficulties in the movement of goods due to the ongoing West Asia crisis, according to a notification.

"In view of the prevailing geo-political developments affecting international shipping routes and global supply chains, and with a view to facilitating exporters, the export obligation (EO) period/block wise EO period in respect of specified advance authorisations and EPCG authorisations expiring between March 1, 2026 and May 31, 2026 has been automatically extended up to August 31, 2026 without payment of composition fee," the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) has said in a public notice.

Under the Export Promotion Capital Goods (EPCG) scheme, domestic firms are allowed to import duty-free machines but they have to meet certain export obligations against that.

This relaxation is in addition to the existing facility already available under foreign trade policy upon payment of composition fees, it said.

Exporters were demanding these extensions to meet their obligations.

The exporting community was earlier grappling with high US tariffs and is facing challenges from the West Asian crisis triggered by the joint attack of the US and Israel on Iran last month. The conflict has led to disruptions in the movement of ships.

The conflict has also pushed up sea and air freight rates, while insurance premiums are also rising. If the situation persists, it could affect the price competitiveness of Indian goods in global markets. (PTI)

This is not merely the inauguration of a plant- it is the emergence of India as a serious, credible: Chandak

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 7: The India Electronics and Semiconductor Association (IESA) congratulates the Government of India and Micron Technology on the historic inauguration of Micron's state-of-the-art ATMP (Assembly, Testing, Marking and Packaging) facility in Sanand, Gujarat, by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Terming the event a defining milestone in India's semiconductor journey, Ashok Chandak, President, IESA said: It was a privilege to witness history on the ground. The Prime Minister's triple cadence said it all — 'India is ready, India is reliable, and India delivers' — a powerful declaration of the nation's confidence in building a world-class chip ecosystem. The commissioning of Micron's ATMP plant marks the successful translation of India's semiconductor policy intent into execution and manufacturing readiness. It reflects the strong commitment of the Government of India, MeitY, the India Semiconductor Mission, the Government of Gujarat, and the confidence of our valued member company Micron in India's design and manufacturing capabilities. Micron's landmark investment of ₹22,516 crore (approximately USD 2.75 billion) represents one of the largest commitments by a global semiconductor leader in India's manufacturing landscape in addition to their design Centers in India.

The facility will manufacture DRAM, NAND, and Solid-State Drive (SSD) products — critical memory components that power AI systems, high-performance computing, smartphones, data centers, automotive electronics, and next-generation digital infrastructure. Memory manufacturing is strategically significant, as only a handful of nations possess this capability. With global demand rising sharply - particularly driven by AI workloads — and short-term supply pressures continuing, India establishing memory manufacturing presence in addition to design Centers of Micron is both timely and transformative. India's semiconductor strength will rise manifold with this memory plant and existing memory chip design Centers of Micron and the upcoming Chip OSAT facilities slated to open during this year, further deepening our design led manufacturing base and export potential.

The Sanand facility is expected to generate approximately 5,000 direct jobs and over 15,000 indirect employment opportunities, nurturing a skilled semiconductor workforce. Beyond employment, it will catalyze ecosystem development across advanced packaging, materials, equipment, logistics, design, and fabless innovation — strengthening India's position as a trusted global partner in the semiconductor supply chain.

Bharti Airtel and CK-12 Foundation LaunchOne of India's most comprehensive AI-Integration

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 7: In a significant step towards accelerating AI adoption in India's education ecosystem, Bharti Airtel Foundation has partnered with the CK-12 Foundation, a global nonprofit, to integrate 45+ AI-enabled teaching toolsacross all K-12 teachers into TheTeacherApp, a free for life digital learning platform currently used by over 2 lakh educatorsnationwide. Designed to address real classroom needs, the AI-enabledThe TeacherApp will support everyday classroom practice, enabling teachers to save time, enrich instruction, and address diverseteaching requirement with tools that are safe, contextual, and fully aligned with India's evolving education landscape.

Anchored in National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047,the partnership marks a shift from digital access to a more meaningful digital engagement for teachers. While TheTeacherApp has long supported educators through training and learning resources, its new AI-enabled version embeds an assistive layer directly into teachingworkflows, providing real time, classroom aligned support and seamless access to relevant content across all grades, all subjects.

Speaking on the occasion, Dharmendra Pradhan, Minister of Education of India, said, "The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has given us a clear roadmap to transform education, and our focus remains on supporting teachers every step of the way. Teachers need quality resources that meet the diverse needs of every learner at every grade level, and today AI is no longer a luxury - it is a necessity. This initiative marks a transformative step in leveraging technology to empower our educators. Having been part of TheTeacherApp's launch in 2024, it is inspiring to witness this next step supporting the integration of AI into the classrooms across India."

Speaking on the partnership, Rakesh Bharti Mittal, Vice-Chairman of Bharti Enterprises and Co-Chairman of the Bharti Airtel Foundation, said, "Teachers are the architects of India's future, and NEP 2020 rightly places them at the center of our nation's educational transformation. In just 15 months since its launch in 2024, TheTeacherApp has engaged over 2 lakh + educators with hundreds of hours of quality content and learning experiences, reflecting a strong demand among teachers for continuous growth. Today, with our collaboration with CK 12, we are expandingthe teacher's toolkit by embedding intelligent classroom resources so that educators can spend less time on preparation and more on inspiring young minds. At a time when India is embracingViksit Bharat@2047, this initiative reflects how thoughtfully integrated AI can strengthen teachers' ability to reach every learner and support the country's long-term goal of equitable, future-ready education."

AFFIDAVIT

I, Shri Achalal Chouhan, age about 52 years, S/o Lt. Raghunath Chouhan, an inhabitant of village: Jengkha No. 2, P.O: Jengkha, P.S. Kheroni, district, West Karbi Anglong, Assam, do hereby solemnly affirm and declare before the Notary Public, West Karbi Anglong, at Hamren Court on this day the 21 May, 2025, that, my name and surname is inadvertently recorded as Akshaylal Chauhan instead of correct name and surname as Achalal Chouhan which is correctly recorded in my Voter ID Card/ PAN Card bearing No. CALPC2145M.

NAME CORRECTION

I, Joysankar Chauhan son of Awadesh Chauhan resident of Pub Silputa , Bakulia would like mention that my name and father name is wrongly recorded in my Aadhar card as Joysangkar Chauhan and father name as Adhesh Chauhan but the correct name is Joysankar Chauhan and Awadesh Chauhan.

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM
DIRECTORATE CUM ADDITIONAL CHIEF ENGINEER, P.W.D. (R&B), HILLS, ASSAM. DIPHU.

No.ACEH/CS/AAP/96/2025-26/03 Dated.07/03/2026.

PRESS NOTICE

Director-Cum-Additional Chief Engineer. PWD (R&B). Hills Assam. Diphu on behalf of the Governor of Assam, invites Bids from registered Contractors Roads for the work "Construction of Road from Dikreng Longkam Tisso to Mon Sing Teron via Sarpo Rongpi under AAP for the year 2025-26" under the E.E., PWD, Diphu Roads Division, Diphu. The details may be seen in the office of the undersigned during office hours.

Sd/-
Director cum Additional Chief Engineer
PWD (R&B). Hills, Assam, Diphu.

Memo No. ACEH/CS/AAP/96/2025-26/03-(A) Dated.07/03/2026.

Contd. from Page 3...

Iran war effect: LPG price

about USD 25.40 per million British thermal units (MMBtu) -- a three-year high and more than double of last week's levels of around USD 10 per mmBtu amid fears of supply disruptions and halted exports from Qatar.

LPG markets have also tightened as shipments from key Gulf exporters face logistical disruptions, pushing international propane and butane benchmarks higher and raising concerns over supply availability for major importers such as India. In Mumbai, non-subsidised LPG now costs ₹ 912.50, ₹ 939 in Kolkata, and ₹ 928.50 in Chennai, according to the IOC website.

Rates differ from state to state depending on the incidence of local sales tax or VAT.

The Strait of Hormuz is also a critical conduit for India's energy imports, with roughly half of the crude oil the country buys from overseas transiting through the narrow waterway. In addition, nearly 40 per cent of India's natural gas imports, largely in the form of LNG from Gulf suppliers like Qatar and the UAE, also pass through the strait.

For LPG, the strait is more important. India consumed 31.3 million tonne of LPG in 2024-25, of which only 12.8 million tonne were produced domestically, with the remainder imported. Of the imported quantity, 85-90 per cent come from countries like Saudi Arabia that rely on the Strait of Hormuz for transit.

The Strait has been effectively blocked following a week-old escalation in the region, after US and Israeli strikes on Iran prompted Tehran to retaliate against US bases in neighbouring countries.

To augment domestic supplies, the government on Friday invoked sparingly used emergency powers to direct oil refineries to ramp up LPG production. (PTI)

'Every species thrives

The Rani Reserve Forest, located on the outskirts of Guwahati, is known for its dense forest cover and rich wildlife. It serves as a natural habitat for several species of animals and birds, playing a crucial role in maintaining the ecological balance of the region, officials said.

Wildlife experts have pointed out that sightings of animals such as black bears, which feature in IUCN's 'vulnerable' category, in their natural environment indicate a healthy forest ecosystem and adequate protection measures, which allow wildlife to thrive without disturbance. (PTI)

'Foreigner' woman gets

The Citizenship Amendment Act, passed by Parliament on December 11, 2019, triggered widespread protests across the country, particularly in Assam. The Act allows Hindu, Christian, Buddhist, Sikh, Jain and Parsi migrants from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan who entered India between March 25, 1971 and December 31, 2014 to apply for Indian citizenship. Before Das, four Bangladeshi nationals living in Assam were granted Indian citizenship under the CAA. (PTI)

NE not defined by distance

challenges, Radhakrishnan expressed grave concern over the "menace of drug abuse" among the youth.

He called for a disciplined and purposeful lifestyle, urging the graduating students to lead the fight against substance abuse in their communities.

He advised the responsible use of social media and urged the youth to harness digital tools for social good rather than falling prey to their distractions. Radhakrishnan also lauded Mizoram's environmental consciousness and the university's initiative to operate substantially on solar energy.

The event was also attended by Mizoram Governor and Chief Rector of MZU, Vijay Kumar Singh, Chief Minister Lalduhoma and Vice Chancellor Professor Dibakar Chandra Deka. (PTI)

'India to work closely with

towards a landslide victory in Nepal's first general elections since the violent Gen Z protests last year, shattering the dominance of the established political parties.

The RSP, which was formed in 2022 by Ravi Lamichhane, has won 39 of the 50 seats declared so far, including a clean sweep in the 10 constituencies of Kathmandu district, and is leading in 80 others, according to the Election Commission of Nepal.

The RSP, which has projected Balendra Shah as its prime ministerial candidate and organised its first election campaign at Janakpur in Madhesh, is heading towards a clean sweep of the province. (PTI)

Congress's appeasement politics

Congress of spending all its energy in protecting them.

The Centre will expel every single infiltrator from the country, from Kedarnath to Kanyakumari, he asserted. Shah congratulated 162 refugees from Afghanistan and Pakistan who received Indian citizenship certificates at the event. "This is the proof of our resolve to give shelter to the victims of religious harassment." The minister said that the Universal Civil Code (UCC) will become instrumental in stemming the "demographic change" in the country. "The high-power demography mission brought by the Modi government will soon begin its work." In 2025, Uttarakhand became the first in the country to implement the UCC, which ordains the same civil laws across religions.

The BJP leader accused Rahul Gandhi of seeing "negative" in everything, including the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) currently underway across states to rid the voter lists of infiltrators.

He said, "The BJP strongly supports the SIR being carried out by the Election Commission."

Shah listed the abolition of Article 370 of the Constitution, the enactment of the CAA, and the construction of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya as among the "historic" feats of the Modi government.

He termed the new Indian Judicial Code (BNS) as the most modern and scientific judicial code in the world. Shah claimed that the BJP would continue its winning streak and would form governments in West Bengal and Tamil Nadu in 2026, and in Uttarakhand in 2027.

The home minister said that between 2004 and 2014, Uttarakhand received only ₹ 54,000 crore from the central government, while the Modi government provided the state with ₹ 1,87,000 crore.

He mentioned several other projects, including the All-Weather Char Dham Road Project and the Delhi-Dehradun Expressway, as the achievements of the BJP-led state-Centre. During his visit, the minister inaugurated and laid the foundation stone of various projects worth ₹ 1,129.91 crore. (PTI)

Base of three dairy

government and the National Dairy Development Board (NDDB) — to plan, implement and expand cooperative dairying activities across the State.

Speaking on the occasion, the Minister Krishnendu Paul, Minister, said that the beginning of setting up of new dairy plants at Jorhat, Dibrugarh and Dhemaji marks another important milestone in the implementation of the Assam Dairy Development Plan under the visionary leadership of Chief Minister Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma. "Our objective is to build a strong, farmer-centric dairy ecosystem across the state by expanding organised milk procurement and modern processing infrastructure," Paul added.

He said that new dairy plants at Jorhat, Dibrugarh and Dhemaji will help integrate local dairy farmers into organised procurement networks, create stable income opportunities and ensure the availability of hygienically processed milk for consumers. On February 25 at a programme held at Mariani the Chief Minister had announced installing of a big milk processing unit at a cost of ₹ 200 crore.

Sarma had said that the proposed plant would financially benefit people of Mariani as the Government would assist them in taking up dairy farming and then through cooperative societies the milk would be collected and supplied to the plant.

Assam feminist collective

in climate-resilient livelihoods, particularly for vulnerable communities, she said.

The manifesto also called for greater public investment in education, improved school infrastructure, and stronger support for community participation in school governance.

Women's work continues to remain undervalued and insecure across sectors such as agriculture, domestic work, tea plantations, and public service work such as Anganwadi and ASHA services.

The manifesto calls for recognising women as workers and farmers, and providing dignified wages, social protection and safe working conditions.

The collective urged all political parties and candidates contesting the elections to incorporate these demands into their election manifestos and policy commitments.

"We also urge political parties to promote leadership and opportunities to participate in electoral processes and commit themselves to concrete actions for gender justice," another collective member, Rashmirekha Borah, said.

A just and inclusive Assam cannot be built without addressing the rights, safety, livelihoods, education, health and leadership of women and gender-diverse persons, she added. (PTI)

Pezeshkian dumps Trump's

a wave of missiles and drones had disrupted flights at Dubai International Airport, targeted a major Saudi oil facility and sent people fleeing for cover multiple times in Bahrain.

Pezeshkian also kept up his criticism of Trump's call for Iran to unconditionally surrender to America. "That's a dream that they should take to their grave," he said.

Pezeshkian's statement on Saturday said Iran's three-man leadership council had been in touch with the armed forces over the attacks.

"I should apologise to the neighbouring countries that were attacked by Iran, on my own behalf," the president said. "From now on, they should not attack neighbouring countries or fire missiles at them, unless we are attacked by those countries. I think we should solve this through diplomacy."

Gen. Abolfazl Shekarchi, Iran's armed forces spokesman, then added more confusion by saying after Pezeshkian that Tehran has "not hit countries that did not provide space for America to invade our country."

The American strikes haven't been coming from the Gulf Arab states, now under attack.

Likely in response to the ongoing political confusion, on Saturday, a prominent cleric in Iran, Ayatollah Nasser Makarem Shirazi, urged the country's Assembly of Experts to act quickly to name a new supreme leader. Buildings associated with the 88-cleric panel have been hit by airstrikes in the war, likely slowing any meeting of the group.

"The timely realisation of this important matter will lead to national authority and the best possible organisation of affairs," Shirazi said in a statement.

There was no foreseeable end to the fighting. Trump's administration approved a new USD 151 million arms sale to Israel after Trump said he would not negotiate with Iran without its "unconditional surrender", and US officials warned of a forthcoming bombing campaign they said would be the most intense yet in the weeklong conflict.

Iran's UN ambassador said the country would "take all necessary measures" to defend itself. (AP)

Page 3 March 08_Normal Pages 07-03-2026 22:00 Page 1

27 YEARS OF DEDICATED JOURNALISM
www.thehillstimes.in
THE HILLS TIMES
PUBLISHED SIMULTANEOUSLY FROM GUWAHATI & DIPHU
Voice of the hills people

Govt says impact just 20 paise/person/day ● Petrol or diesel price hike ruled out

Iran war effect: LPG price hiked by ₹ 60

NEW DELHI, March 7: Domestic cooking gas LPG price was hiked on Saturday by a steep ₹ 60 per cylinder, the second increase in rate in less than a year, as the spike in global energy rates following the West Asia crisis weighed on the world's third largest energy consumer.

Top government sources, however, were quick to state that an increase in petrol and diesel prices is not in the offing as state-owned oil firms have enough financial muscle to absorb the warranted increase.

Non-subsidised LPG -- the one that common households use in kitchens -- will now cost ₹913 per 14.2-kg cylinder in Delhi as against ₹ 853 previously, according to the Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) website.

Ujjwala Yojana beneficiaries -- the over 10 crore poor who have got free LPG connections since 2016 -- will also have to bear the same amount of price increase. They will now pay ₹ 613 per 14.2 kg cylinder after accounting

for a subsidy of ₹ 300 per bottle they get for up to 12 refills in a year. Top government sources said the increase was necessitated because of a spike in global energy prices. Despite the increase, the price is less than the R₹ 1,050 per 14.2-kg cylinder rate required to breakeven at cost.

They said considering an average consumption of 4-5 cylinders per year per household, the increase translates to 80 paisa per day for a family of four or just 20 paisa per person.

Even at the increased prices, LPG in India is cheaper than most countries in the world, they said adding cooking costs ₹ 1,207 per bottle in Katmandhu, ₹ 1,241 in Sri Lanka and ₹ 1,046 in Pakistan.

Sources ruled out any immediate increase in petrol and diesel price as three fuel marketing companies - Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL) and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL) with bumper profits in earlier this year - had enough financial muscle to absorb such impact.

Retail petrol and diesel prices have been on a freeze since April 2022, with fuel retailers absorbing losses when crude prices are high and making profits when rates are low.

The LPG price rise of Saturday is the second increase in rate in 11 months. The price was last hiked by ₹ 50 in April last year.

Alongside, the price of commercial LPG - the one used by establishments such as hotels and restaurants - was increased by ₹ 114.5 per 19-kg cylinder. It now costs ₹ 1,883 in Delhi. This increase comes on top of ₹ 28 per 19-kg cylinder raise effected on March 1. Commercial LPG rate has risen by ₹ 302.50 this year.

Officials said the increase follows a steep rise in global energy prices since the US and Israel attack on Iran last weekend triggered a wider military conflict in the oil and gas-rich Middle East.

The conflict has led to a near halt in tanker movement through the Strait of Hormuz -- the narrow but critical sea lane between Iran and Oman used by Middle Eastern producers to export oil and gas to global markets. The disruption has sharply curtailed energy shipments from the region, triggering a spike in global oil and gas prices.

Since the conflict broke out on February 28, the US crude soared 35.63 per cent for the biggest weekly gain in the history of futures contract dating back to 1983. West Texas Intermediate (WTI) futures closed at USD 90.90 per barrel. Brent jumped about 28 per cent for its biggest weekly gain since April 2020, to settle at USD 92.69 per barrel.

Asian spot prices for liquefied natural gas (LNG) have also jumped to *(CONTD. ON PAGE-2)*

'Every species thrives in Assam now'

Spotting of black bear in natural habitat shows Assam's robust wildlife conservation efforts: CM

GUWAHATI, March 7: A black bear has been spotted roaming freely in a natural habitat at the Rani Reserve Forest in Assam's Kamrup district, "signifying the robustness" of wildlife conservation efforts, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Saturday.

The sighting was captured on camera by journalist Jon Rabha. Sarma shared the video on social media.

''In Assam, every species thrives. In Rani Reserve Forest, a black bear was spotted recently in a non-captive environment, signifying the robustness of our wildlife conservation efforts,'' the CM said in a post on X. *(CONTD. ON PAGE-2)*

'Foreigner' woman gets citizenship under CAA

GUWAHATI, March 7: A woman, who spent two years in detention after being declared a foreigner, has been granted Indian citizenship under the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) in Assam's Cachar district, her lawyer said.

The woman, identified as 59-year-old Depali Das, a resident of the Hawaithang area under the Dholai assembly constituency, was declared an illegal migrant by a Foreigners' Tribunal (FT) in February 2019.

Depali is the first declared foreigner in Assam who had once been lodged in a detention centre and later released on bail to receive Indian citizenship under the CAA.

The police detained her after the tribunal's order and sent her to the Silchar detention centre on May 10, the same year, where she remained for nearly two years before being released on bail on May 17, 2021, following a Supreme Court order, her lawyer Dharmananda Deb said.

Depali was originally a resident of Dippur village under Dhirai police station in Bangladesh's Sylhet district and had married Abhimanyu Das of Parai village under Baniachong police station in Habiganj district in 1987, he said.

A year later, in 1988, the couple entered India and moved to Cachar district, where they have been living since then.

Her citizenship came under scrutiny in 2013 when police initiated an inquiry against her, and a chargesheet was submitted by the police on July 2, 2013, stating that Depali was a resident of Baniachong in Bangladesh and had entered India illegally after March 1971, Deb said.

"The chargesheet later proved crucial in her application for Indian citizenship under the CAA because the applicant must provide documentary evidence showing migration from Bangladesh, Pakistan or Afghanistan," he said.

"In most cases, applicants fail to produce such documents, but in Depali's case, the chargesheet submitted by the police officer in 2013 clearly mentioned that she was from Bangladesh. The authorities accepted this document as valid proof," he added.

After her release on bail in 2021, she wanted to apply for citizenship under the CAA and had approached Deb for legal assistance once the rules of the Act were notified in 2024.

Her first hearing took place on February 24 last year at the office of the Superintendent of Post Offices in Silchar, which is designated to process such applications. Two more hearings were held subsequently, after which all her documents were submitted online to the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA).

"She was called to the office of the Superintendent of Post Offices in Silchar for a final appearance on May 25 last year after the field verification by Home Ministry officials, and on March 6, she received her Indian citizenship certificate," social activist Kamal Chakraborty said.

Her three children, a son and three daughters, can now rely on their mother's citizenship certificate if their own citizenship is ever questioned in the future, since all the children were born in India, he added. *(CONTD. ON PAGE-2)*

NE not defined by distance from Delhi any more: VP

Radhakrishnan attends 20th convocation of MZU

AIZAWL, March 7: Vice President C P Radhakrishnan on Saturday asserted that the Northeast is no longer defined by its geographical distance from the national capital, but by its proximity to new economic opportunities.

Addressing the 20th convocation of the Mizoram University (MZU) here, the Vice President noted the shift in the region's development narrative over the last decade and credited the Centre's focus on the 'Act East' policy.

He said that infrastructure milestones, such as the recently inaugurated Bairabi-Sairang railway line, alongside central schemes such as UDAN (regional connectivity) and PM-DevINE, are successfully integrating the region into the national mainstream.

Congratulating the graduating students, Radhakrishnan urged them to view themselves as the "architects of Viksit Bharat (developed India)".

He remarked that the university, situated in the scenic hills of Aizawl, stands as a testament to the transformative power of education when rooted in peace and purpose.

"The youth of the Northeast must look beyond seeking employment and instead focus on creating it," the Vice President said. He identified tourism, bamboo-based industries, organic agriculture, handicrafts, and digital services as key sectors where the region holds a competitive global advantage. Addressing social *(CONTD. ON PAGE-2)*

'India to work closely with new govt'

NEW DELHI, March 7: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday congratulated the people and government of Nepal for the successful conduct of elections in the Himalayan nation, and said the historic milestone is a proud moment in Nepal's democratic journey.

Modi also said that as a close friend and neighbour, India remains steadfast in its commitment to working closely with the people of Nepal and its new government to scale new heights of shared peace, progress and prosperity.

"I warmly congratulate the people and government of Nepal on the successful and peaceful conduct of elections. It is heartening to see my Nepali sisters and brothers exercise their democratic rights so vibrantly. This historic milestone is a proud moment in Nepal's democratic journey," Modi said in a post on X.

Rapper-turned-politician Balendra Shah's Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) was on Saturday heading *(CONTD. ON PAGE-2)*

Pezeshkian dumps Trump's surrender demand

Iran's president apologises for strikes on Gulf neighbours as missiles, drones still pound their cities

DUBAI, March 7: Iran's president Masoud Pezeshkian apologised on Saturday for attacks on regional countries even as its missiles and drones flew toward Gulf Arab states, indicating that Tehran's political leadership could not exercise full command over Iran's armed forces.

He also rejected US President Donald Trump's repeated demands for surrender.

Pezeshkian, one member of a tripartite leadership council overseeing Iran since a Feb. 28 airstrike started the war and killed Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, delivered the defiant message exactly one week into a conflict that has spread across the region, rattled global markets and air travel and left Iran's own leadership greatly weakened by hundreds of Israeli and American airstrikes.

The message, seemingly filmed in a hurry without professional broadcast equipment, again underlined the limited powers being exercised by theocracy's leaders over its paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, which controls the ballistic missiles targeting Israel and others. It answered only to Khamenei and now appears to be picking its own targets as the conflict widens. Shortly after Pezeshkian's message, Trump warned in a social media post on Saturday that more Iranian officials would become targets in the war, writing: "Today Iran will be hit very hard!"

In his comments on his Truth Social website, Trump noted the apology by Pezeshkian.

"Under serious consideration for complete destruction and certain death, because of Iran's bad behaviour, are areas and groups of people that were not considered for targeting up until this moment in time," Trump wrote, without elaborating.

While the Iranian president attempted to assuage growing Gulf Arab anger over the attacks, just hours earlier, *(CONTD. ON PAGE-2)*

Congress's appeasement politics denied citizenship to Hindu refugees: Shah

HARIDWAR, March 7: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Saturday said it was the Congress's "politics of appeasement" that denied citizenship to Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, and Jain refugees.

He said that the Narendra Modi government will grant Indian citizenship to these refugees from Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, irrespective of the Congress's opposition.

Shah made the remarks while addressing the 'Jan Jan Ki Sarkar, Chaar Saal Bemisal' programme held at Bairagi Camp here to mark four years of Pushkar Singh Dhami's government in the state.

"I want to say that Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, and Jain refugees from Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Afghanistan have as much right to this country as Narendra Modi," Shah said.

"Rahul Baba, protest as much as you want. We will grant citizenship; you cannot stop us," he said, referring to the former Congress president. The home minister said the government removed encroachment by over 10,000 illegal migrants in Uttarakhand, and accused the *(CONTD. ON PAGE-2)*

Assam feminist collective releases 'manifesto' urging parties to ensure gender justice

GUWAHATI, March 7: A feminist collective in Assam on Saturday released a 'manifesto' ahead of the assembly elections, urging all political parties to commit to a clear agenda for gender justice, equality and inclusive development.

The feminist manifesto represents the collective voices, concerns, and aspirations of women, girls and gender-diverse persons across Assam, a spokesperson of the 'Assam Feminist Manifesto Collective', Anurita Pathak Hazarika, said at a press conference here on the eve of International Women's Day.

The manifesto has been prepared by women from across the state in consultation with grassroots women and community organisations, including stakeholders like women farmers, vendors, informal workers, weavers, survivors of violence, micro-entrepreneurs, people with

disabilities, as well as those from marginalised and indigenous communities, she said.

"Assam is home to around 1.8 crore women who are equal citizens and rights holders, and as the state prepares to elect a new government in 2026, we believe that this democratic moment must centre around the rights, dignity, and leadership of women in shaping Assam's future," Hazarika said.

Despite the introduction of numerous schemes for women's welfare, structural inequalities continue to persist, and the gap between policies and women's lived realities remains wide -- particularly for women from marginalised communities such as tea garden workers, those living in 'chars' (riverine islands), women with disabilities, and women with diverse gender and sexual identities, she added.

Women continue to face violence and insecurity in homes, workplaces, digital and public spaces and the manifesto calls for stronger implementation of existing laws, accessible survivor support services, safe public infrastructure, and accountability mechanisms that ensure timely justice and safety for women, another collective member, Gita Bhattacharya, said.

Assam is among the most climate-vulnerable regions in India, facing recurrent floods, riverbank erosion, and displacement, with women bearing a disproportionate burden of these crises.

The manifesto demands women's leadership in climate governance, gender-responsive disaster response systems, and investment *(CONTD. ON PAGE-2)*

Base of three dairy processing plants laid

Union minister hails expansion of Purabi Dairy to Upper Assam

By: Smita Bhattacharyya

JORHAT, March 7: In a major development towards strengthening the cooperative dairy scenario of Assam, the foundation stone and bhumi pujan ceremonies of three new dairy processing plants of Purabi Dairy at Jorhat, Dibrugarh and Dhemaji was carried out today at a programme held at Teok Koliapani area of Jorhat district.

A pre-recorded video message of Union Minister of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying, of Ranjan Singh (alias Lalan Singh), was played at the event attended by the state Minister of Animal Husbandry and Dairy Development Krishnendu Paul, and Mariani MLA Rupjyoti Kurmi amongst others.

The Union Minister stated that the expansion of Purabi Dairy's infrastructure into Upper Assam reflects the Central Government's commitment to strengthening India's cooperative dairy movement and empowering rural producers.

The proposed 100 TLPD (Thousand Liters Per Day). capacity milk processing plant at Teok, Kaliapani, shall be established by 'East Assam Milk Producers' Cooperative Union Limited (EAMUL) under the Central Sector Scheme 'National Programme for Dairy Development (NPDD).

The two plants at Dibrugarh and Dhemaji are being established by the State Government's department of Animal Husbandry and Veterinary (AH&V) under RIDF-XXXI to be operated by North East Dairy and Foods Limited (NEDFL) as Purabi Dairy. It is to be mentioned here that the NEDFL is a joint venture of the Assam *(CONTD. ON PAGE-2)*

Page 4 March 08_Normal Pages 07-03-2026 20:24 Page 1

International Women's Day: Honouring Women

By: Satyabrat Borah

Every year on the eighth day of March, people around the world pause to recognize the strength, resilience, and contributions of women. The day known as International Women's Day is not simply a date on the calendar or an occasion marked by social media posts and public events. It carries a deeper meaning rooted in history, struggle, hope, and reflection. It is a moment when societies across continents are invited to think about the place of women in the world, the journey they have traveled, the challenges that still remain, and the future that lies ahead.

The story behind International Women's Day is closely tied to the long history of women seeking dignity and equality. For many centuries, women in different societies were expected to remain within narrow boundaries set by tradition and custom. Their voices were often unheard in matters of education, employment, politics, and decision making. In many places they worked tirelessly in homes and communities but rarely received recognition for their efforts. Even with these obstacles, women continued to move forward with determination, slowly changing the course of history through courage and persistence.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, movements advocating for women's rights began to gather momentum in several parts of the world. Women who worked in factories demanded fair wages and better working conditions. Many also demanded the right to vote, believing that political participation was essential for achieving justice and equality. These movements were not easy. Many women who spoke out faced criticism, social pressure, and sometimes even punishment. Their determination laid the foundation for the changes that followed.

The idea of dedicating a specific day to women emerged from this broader movement for rights and recognition. Early gatherings of activists and reformers recognized that a global day of reflection could highlight the struggles faced by women and bring attention to the need for social change. Over time, the day evolved into what is now known as International Women's Day. Eventually the global community acknowledged the importance of the day, and international organizations began to support its observance.

International women's day serves many purposes. It celebrates achievements while also reminding societies that the journey toward equality is still continuing. It is a day of gratitude for the countless contributions women have made to families, communities and nations. At the same time it is an opportunity to ask thoughtful questions about fairness, opportunity, safety, and respect.

Women have always played a central role in shaping human civilization. Within families, women often carry the responsibility of nurturing children and guiding them through the earliest stages of life. The influence of a mother or caregiver is often the first source of learning for a child. Values such as kindness, empathy, honesty, and resilience are frequently passed from one generation to the next through everyday interactions within the home. These contributions are rarely measured in statistics, but they form the moral foundation of societies.

Outside the household, women have made remarkable contributions in many fields. In education, women have served as teachers who inspire curiosity and encourage young minds to explore the world. In science and medicine, women have conducted research, treated patients, and developed innovations that have improved the quality of life for millions of people. In literature and the arts, women have expressed complex emotions and ideas through stories, poetry, music, and visual creativity. Their voices have enriched cultural traditions and offered new perspectives on the human experience.

In the world of politics and public leadership, women have also demonstrated extraordinary capability. Many women have led movements for freedom, justice, and reform. Some have served as heads of government, diplomats, or community leaders who guided societies through moments of crisis and transformation. Their leadership has shown that compassion and strength can exist together in powerful ways.

Economic life has also been shaped by the contributions of women. Across the world women participate in agriculture, trade, entrepreneurship, and professional careers. In many communities women are the backbone of local economies, managing businesses, producing goods, and supporting family incomes. Their work sustains households and drives economic growth.

At the same time many women continue to face challenges that limit their opportunities. In some places access to education remains unequal, preventing girls from reaching their full potential. In other situations women encounter discrimination in employment, where they may receive lower wages or fewer opportunities for advancement compared to men. Safety and security also remain serious concerns in many societies where women are vulnerable to violence or harassment.

The persistence of such challenges shows that progress must continue. True equality requires more than laws or policies. It also demands changes in attitudes and beliefs. Social expectations that restrict the roles women can play must gradually give way to a broader understanding of human potential. When societies encourage both girls and boys to pursue their interests and talents freely, everyone benefits.

Education plays a particularly important role in this transformation. When girls receive quality education, they gain knowledge and confidence that allow them to shape their own futures. Education helps women understand their rights, develop professional skills, and contribute meaningfully to their communities. Research from many countries shows that educating girls leads to healthier families, stronger economies, and more stable societies.

Economic independence is another important factor. When women have the opportunity to earn income and manage resources, they gain greater control over their lives. Financial independence can increase self confidence and enable women to participate more actively in decision making within families and communities. It can also reduce vulnerability to exploitation and inequality.

Over the past few decades technological change has created new possibilities for women around the world. Digital communication, online education, and remote work opportunities have allowed many women to access knowledge and employment in ways that were not possible earlier. Women entrepreneurs now use digital platforms to promote their businesses and connect with global markets. Technology has opened doors that can help reduce traditional barriers.

However technology also brings new responsibilities. Digital spaces must remain safe and respectful environments where women can express their ideas without fear of harassment or abuse. Building such environments requires cooperation from governments, technology companies, educators, and communities.

International Women's Day encourages reflection not only on problems but also on the strength and resilience that women demonstrate every day. Around the world there are countless stories of women who have overcome hardship with remarkable courage. Some have pursued education through economic difficulties. Others have challenged social restrictions to pursue careers in science, sports, or leadership. Many women quietly support their families through hard work and dedication without seeking recognition.

These stories remind us that progress is often achieved through ordinary acts of persistence. A young girl who studies late into the night with dreams of becoming a doctor. A mother who works long hours to provide education for her children. A teacher who encourages students to believe in their abilities. Each of these actions contributes to a larger movement toward fairness and opportunity.

Another important aspect of International Women's Day is the idea of solidarity. The advancement of women is not a challenge that women must face alone. It is a shared responsibility that involves everyone in society. Men and boys also have an important role to play in promoting respect, fairness, and equality. When families and communities support the aspirations of women, the benefits extend to all members of society.

Cultural traditions and historical experiences vary widely from one region to another, but the fundamental principle of dignity remains universal. Every human being deserves respect and the chance to live with freedom and opportunity. International Women's Day reminds us that achieving such dignity requires continuous effort and reflection.

Young people represent a particularly important part of this conversation. The attitudes and values they develop today will shape the societies of tomorrow. Schools and educational institutions can play a vital role by encouraging students to understand the importance of equality and mutual respect. When children grow up learning that leadership, creativity, and intelligence are not limited by gender, they are more likely to build inclusive communities in the future.

Media and storytelling also influence how societies perceive women. Positive and realistic portrayals of women in literature, film, and journalism can challenge stereotypes and highlight the diversity of women's experiences. By sharing stories of achievement, creativity, and courage, society can inspire new generations to pursue their dreams.

The significance of International Women's Day therefore extends further than celebration. It is also a moment of self reflection. Individuals, institutions, and governments can examine their policies and practices to ensure that they support fairness and opportunity. Questions may arise about whether workplaces provide equal opportunities for advancement, whether educational systems encourage girls to pursue science and technology, or whether communities offer safe environments for women and girls.

Such reflection does not imply that societies have failed. Rather it recognizes that progress is a continuous journey. Over the past century many positive changes have taken place. Women in numerous countries now have the right to vote, access higher education, participate in professional careers, and hold positions of leadership. These achievements represent the dedication and sacrifices of generations who believed in the possibility of change.

Still, the journey toward equality is not complete. Social progress rarely follows a straight path. There are moments of rapid advancement and moments when progress slows. International Women's Day serves as a reminder that determination and cooperation remain essential for continuing this journey.

This special day celebrates the remarkable strength of women. Strength does not always appear as dramatic acts of heroism. Often it is found in quiet perseverance, empathy, and the ability to nurture hope even in difficult circumstances. Women demonstrate this strength every day in countless ways that sustain families and communities.

There is also beauty in the diversity of women's experiences. Women belong to different cultures, professions, generations, and backgrounds. Each brings unique perspectives that enrich society. Recognizing and respecting this diversity is an important part of building a world where everyone feels valued.

As the world continues to change, new challenges and opportunities will arise. Climate change, technological transformation, economic uncertainty, and global health concerns affect everyone. Women will undoubtedly play a vital role in addressing these challenges. Their ideas, leadership, and creativity will contribute to solutions that shape the future.

The spirit of International Women's Day therefore lies not only in remembering past struggles but also in imagining a better future. It encourages people to believe that societies can become more just, compassionate, and inclusive. It invites individuals to recognize the power of small actions that contribute to meaningful change.

A teacher who encourages a girl to pursue science, an employer who ensures fair treatment in the workplace, a community leader who supports women's participation in decision making, a parent who teaches children the value of equality. Each action, however small it may seem, moves society closer to a world where every person can thrive.

The meaning of International Women's Day rests in a simple but powerful idea. A society that values and supports women becomes stronger and more humane. When women are given the freedom to learn, create, lead, and dream, the benefits extend far beyond individuals. Families grow stronger, communities become more resilient, and nations move closer to achieving lasting prosperity and harmony.

As each year brings the arrival of the eighth day of March, the world once again reflects on this enduring truth. The journey toward equality continues, guided by the courage of women and the collective commitment of societies to build a future where dignity, respect, and opportunity belong to all.

Women's Empowerment and some relevant thoughts

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

Women's empowerment is not merely an act of social justice; it is a fundamental requirement for sustainable development. A society that upholds gender equality and provides women with opportunities to participate actively in all spheres of life experiences greater economic growth, social stability, and overall progress. International Women's Day offers an opportunity to reflect on the journey made toward women's empowerment and the challenges that still remain. This day is a moment to reaffirm our commitment to building an equitable society where every woman can gain access to education, economic independence, political participation, and social dignity.

The role of women in sustainable development is indispensable. Women constitute nearly half of the world's population and play a vital role in building economies, caring for families, and preserving culture. However, historical inequalities, social norms, and structural barriers have long restricted their opportunities. Achieving gender equality is not merely a matter of ensuring fairness; it is about utilizing the full potential of human resources for global development. When women are empowered, families prosper, communities flourish, and nations advance.

Education is the foundation of women's empowerment. An educated woman not only contributes to economic growth but can also make informed decisions about her health and family and break the cycle of poverty. Although significant progress has been made worldwide in girls' education, many girls are still deprived of learning due to financial constraints, cultural restrictions, and gender bias. In rural areas, early marriage and domestic responsibilities often force girls to leave school, depriving them of opportunities for learning and growth. Governments and societies must work together to ensure that every girl receives quality education, because it is the cornerstone of an empowered future.

Economic independence is another crucial aspect of women's empowerment. Financial stability enables women to take control of their lives, make independent decisions, and contribute to the national economy. Women entrepreneurs, professionals, and workers act as driving forces of innovation and progress in various sectors. Yet women continue to face challenges such as wage inequality, limited access to credit, and discrimination in the workplace. The global gender wage gap remains a significant issue, with women earning less than men for the same work. Creating a more inclusive economic environment through policies that ensure equal pay, women-friendly workplaces, and access to financial resources is essential. Women-led businesses should be supported through funding, training programs, and mentorship opportunities so that they can thrive in competitive markets.

Political representation is a fundamental dimension of empowerment. The presence of women in decision-making bodies promotes policies that address the unique challenges faced by women and encourages inclusive governance. Although progress has been made in increasing women's participation in politics, gender disparities in leadership positions remain evident in many countries. Social prejudices, lack of support, and structural barriers often hinder women from pursuing political careers. Encouraging women's participation in governance, implementing gender quotas, and creating a safe political environment free from discrimination and harassment are essential steps toward achieving political empowerment.

Access to healthcare is an integral component of women's empowerment. Women's health—including maternal health, reproductive rights, and general medical needs—must be prioritized to ensure their well-being. In many regions, women are deprived of essential healthcare services due to financial limitations, lack of awareness, or cultural misconceptions. High maternal mortality rates, malnutrition, and gender-based health disparities remain serious concerns. Governments and healthcare institutions must work to ensure accessible, affordable, and quality healthcare services for women.

Awareness campaigns, health education programs, and strong health policies can significantly improve health outcomes for women, enabling them to lead healthier and more productive lives. Social empowerment means dismantling outdated inequalities and prejudices that restrict women's choices and freedoms. In many cultures, traditional gender roles determine a woman's place in society, limiting her aspirations and ambitions. Women should have the freedom to pursue careers of their choice, participate in social and political activities, and express their opinions without fear of judgment or discrimination. The portrayal of women in media, literature, and public discourse plays an important role in shaping societal attitudes. Promoting positive and diverse representations of women, encouraging gender-sensitive narratives, and challenging deeply rooted biases are essential steps toward building a more inclusive society.

Technology and digital inclusion have emerged as powerful tools for women's empowerment in the modern age. The digital revolution has opened new pathways in education, entrepreneurship, and employment. However, the digital divide remains a significant challenge, as many women in developing regions still lack access to technology and digital literacy. This gap can be bridged by ensuring affordable internet access, providing training in digital skills, and encouraging women's participation in the technology sector. Online platforms enable women to start businesses, engage in remote work, and participate in global conversations, thereby expanding their voices and influence.

Gender-based violence remains a pressing challenge to women's empowerment. Domestic violence, workplace harassment, human trafficking, and other forms of gender-based violence affect millions of women worldwide. Fear and insecurity prevent women from realizing their full potential and participating actively in society. Combating gender-based violence requires strong legal frameworks, strict law enforcement, and widespread social awareness campaigns. Support systems such as crisis helplines, shelters, and counseling services must be strengthened to assist survivors. Establishing a culture of zero tolerance toward violence and holding perpetrators accountable are crucial for building a safer and more just society.

Women's role in environmental sustainability is another critical dimension of global development. Particularly in rural communities, women play a leading role in environmental conservation, agriculture, and climate action. Their traditional knowledge and sustainable practices contribute significantly to biodiversity conservation and natural resource management. However, climate change disproportionately affects women, as they often bear the burden of environmental degradation, water scarcity, and food insecurity. Ensuring women's participation in climate policies, promoting sustainable agricultural practices, and including women in environmental decision-making can lead to more effective and inclusive solutions for global sustainability. Men also play an important role in the movement toward gender equality. Women's empowerment is not a struggle against men; it is a collective effort to build a just and equal society. Men must actively support women's rights, challenge discriminatory practices, and promote gender equality in both personal and professional spheres. Encouraging open discussions about gender roles, fostering mutual respect, and standing firmly against gender-based violence are ways through which men can contribute to women's empowerment. When all members of society work together toward the shared goal of equality and justice, true progress becomes possible.

As we observe International Women's Day in 2025, it is important to recognize the progress that has been achieved while also acknowledging the challenges that remain. Women's empowerment is not only about providing opportunities; it is about creating an environment in which women can thrive without barriers. Governments, institutions, civil society, and individuals must commit themselves to long-term efforts to promote gender equality. Education, economic independence, political participation, access to healthcare, social inclusion, technological advancement, and safety must be prioritized so that every woman in the world can lead a full and empowered life.

Women's empowerment is the key to sustainable development, as it leads to stronger economies, healthier societies, and a more just world. A future in which women enjoy equal rights and opportunities is beneficial for everyone. The journey toward gender equality requires continuous effort, but every step brings us closer to a world where every woman and girl can realize her full potential. As we move forward, we must reaffirm our commitment to breaking barriers, challenging prejudices, and building a society that values and uplifts every woman. ***(The author is the recipient of the 'Yuba Lekhak Sanman - 2025' from the Government of Assam)***

Woman: From the vedic age to modern India

By: Lalit Nath

Women's power has evolved through the ages as one of the most important forces in society and civilization. Right from the beginning of civilization, women have played a special role in building society through their work, sacrifice and compassion. In both creation and the preservation of creation, women's contribution is unparalleled. Adorned with noble qualities such as compassion, forgiveness, love, patience, sacrifice and grace, women have played a vital role in the establishment and progress of civilization and culture. Whether in science, arts, politics, or business, women have consistently demonstrated their ability and leadership. They are the guardians of hope and symbols of limitless possibilities. The presence of women brings harmony and peace and through their nurturing influence, the world finds balance.

In Hindu mythology, women are portrayed in many powerful forms such as Shakti, the embodiment of divine energy, Durga, the destroyer of evil and Saraswati, the goddess of knowledge.

In the Vedic age, women enjoyed equal status and rights with men. Through the Upanayana ritual, they had the right to study the Vedas and actively participate in religious ceremonies and rituals at home. Learned women such as Vishvara, Atreyi, Apala, Ghosha, Lopamudra and Gargi Vachaknavi made remarkable contributions to Vedic literature and philosophy. The philosophical debate between Gargi and the sage Yajnavalkya in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad stands as a shining example of women's intellectual brilliance in Vedic society. The hymns composed by Apala in the Rigveda demonstrate her deep devotion to Lord Indra and serve as a unique example of spiritual dedication.

In the traditional Indian worldview, women are revered as manifestations of divine power. Goddesses such as Durga, Kali, Lakshmi and Saraswati symbolize protection, prosperity, wisdom and the destruction of evil. Parvati, the consort of Lord Shiva, represents devotion, strength and steadfast love, while Saraswati embodies learning, creativity and eloquence. The two great epics of Hinduism, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, are also rich with narratives of strong and influential women.

In the Ramayana, Sita is revered for her unwavering devotion, strength and purity. In the Mahabharata, when Draupadi was humiliated in the royal court, she reminded her husbands and the entire assembly of the principles of justice, dignity and equality. These mythological narratives vividly reflect the importance and dignity accorded to women in society.

During the medieval period, despite the dominance of patriarchal social structures, women displayed extraordinary courage, intelligence, and leadership. They made significant contributions in politics, warfare, administration and devotional literature.

In modern history, women played a crucial role in India's struggle for independence. Brave leaders like Rani Lakshmibai fought valiantly against British rule. Sarojini Naidu, Kamala Nehru, Aruna Asaf Ali and Indira Gandhi provided leadership in political, social and educational spheres and contributed significantly to social transformation. During Mahatma Gandhi's Non-Cooperation Movement, countless homemakers strengthened the freedom struggle by spinning yarn on the charkha, producing khadi cloth and actively participating in the movement.

Thus, women are not only the foundation of the family but also key architects of social and civilizational development. Their sacrifice, resilience, intelligence and courage have enriched Indian culture and society. In the modern era, Indian women have made remarkable contributions in fields such as science, education, politics, sports, business and social reform.

In politics, Indira Gandhi strengthened India's position on the global stage as the country's first woman Prime Minister. Pratibha Patil and Droupadi Murmu have created new milestones in women's empowerment by serving as Presidents of India, while Nirmala Sitharaman plays a key role in shaping the nation's economic policies as the Finance Minister.

In science and technology, Kalpana Chawla carried India's aspirations into space. Tessy Thomas, popularly known as the 'Missile Woman of India,' has led major missile projects such as Agni-IV and Agni-V. Dr. Indira Hinduja ushered in a medical revolution by delivering India's first test-tube baby.

More recently, Nallathambi Kalaiselvi became the first woman Director General of the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR). The achievements of these remarkable women demonstrate that with determination and dedication, women can overcome any challenge and contribute profoundly to national progress.

Similarly, social reformers such as Kiran Bedi and Medha Patkar have worked tirelessly for social justice and environmental protection. In the field of sports, athletes like P. V. Sindhu, Saina Nehwal and Harmanpreet Kaur have brought glory to the nation. In arts, literature and media, figures such as Lata Mangeshkar, Arundhati Roy and Dia Mirza have inspired society through their creativity and influence.

The contribution of women to the history and society of Assam is equally remarkable. During the freedom movement, brave women such as Kanaklata Barua, Bhogeswari Phukanani and Mulagabhoru set inspiring examples of courage and sacrifice. Social reformer Chandraprabha Saikiani led movements for women's education and rights. In literature and culture, writers like Mamoni Raisom Goswami and Nalinibala Devi elevated Assamese literature to national and global recognition.

Women working in agriculture, handloom and tea plantations have strengthened the economy of the state through their tireless efforts. In modern times, Assamese women have also brought glory to the state in sports. Hima Das created history in 2019 by winning the gold medal in the 400-metre event at the World Under-20 Championship. Lovlina Borgohain won a bronze medal in boxing at the Tokyo 2020 Olympics. Uma Chetry became the first woman cricketer from Assam to represent India and was part of the victorious team in the 2025 Women's Cricket World Cup.

Through self-help groups, millions of women have become economically self-reliant, thereby strengthening society.

The struggles led by conscious and courageous women for liberation, rights and equality eventually led to the global observance of International Women's Day on March 8. This day recognizes the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women worldwide while also highlighting the need to eliminate gender-based violence, discrimination, exploitation and injustice.

Each year, International Women's Day is celebrated with a specific theme. The theme for International Women's Day 2026 is 'Rights. Justice. Action. For All Women and Girls.' The central aim is to ensure legal rights for women across the world and to bring about real change by eliminating discrimination and inequality.

Today, women have emerged as powerful drivers of social, cultural and national development. Their remarkable contributions in education, science, politics, literature, sports, and many other fields have strengthened the path of national progress.

Therefore, it can be said with confidence that the creative power, leadership and vision of women are guiding Indian civilization toward a brighter future. Women are the source of creation, the embodiment of strength and the eternal inspiration of human civilization—a truth that is now clearer and more evident than ever before.

Page 5 March 08_Normal Pages 07-03-2026 19:57 Page 1

A story of Indian women and their allies

A hundred lamps and an unfinished dawn

By: Zahid Ahmed Tapadar

On the evening before 8 March, one may imagine courtyards across India glowing with small earthen lamps - each lamp bearing the name of a woman who altered the course of history. The image is symbolic, yet the spirit behind it is real. Every year on 8 March, India joins the world in observing International Women's Day, and across the country government institutions, universities, civil society organizations and corporate offices mark the day through seminars, award ceremonies, cultural programmes and campaigns centred on women's rights, leadership, health, education and economic empowerment.

In India, the day is more than ceremonial. It invites reflection on a long and complex journey - from 19th-century social reform movements that challenged practices such as Sati and child marriage, to women's active participation in the freedom struggle, to contemporary efforts aimed at strengthening gender equality in law, politics, science, sports and entrepreneurship. International Women's Day thus becomes both tribute and reminder: a tribute to those who expanded the space for dignity and rights, and a reminder that the task of ensuring equality for every woman remains unfinished.

If those lamps were arranged across time, the earliest steady flame would belong to Ahilyabai Holkar, the 18th-century ruler of Malwa. At a time when political authority was almost entirely male, she governed with administrative acumen and moral authority, building roads, wells, temples and public facilities across the subcontinent. Her reign demonstrated that leadership need not be loud to be transformative; it could be rooted in welfare and justice.

The 19th century brought flames that confronted entrenched customs. Savitribai Phule opened one of India's first schools for girls in Pune in 1848. Facing harassment and public hostility, she continued to teach, believing education to be the first doorway to dignity. Around the same time, Kadambini Ganguly broke professional barriers to become the first practicing women doctor in India. She not only healed patients but also addressed political forums, arguing for women's participation in public life.

These transformations were strengthened by reformers who believed women's rights were essential to social progress. Raja Ram Mohan Roy campaigned against Sati and advocated women's education in the early 1800s. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar fought for the Hindu Widows' Remarriage Act of 1856 and established schools for girls despite fierce resistance. Dwarkanath Ganguly stood firmly for women's emancipation and supported Kadambini's professional and public life. Their work reflects a historical truth: progress was accelerated when men chose to challenge injustice alongside women.

As colonial resistance intensified, women stepped into political struggle. Rani Lakshmibai became an enduring symbol of defiance during the Revolt of 1857, refusing to surrender her kingdom. Begum Hazrat Mahal led forces in Awadh when British annexation threatened her homeland. Their actions unsettled the colonial narrative that confined women to domestic spaces.

The early 20th century broadened participation. Sarojini Naidu combined poetry with political activism, later becoming the first woman Governor of an Indian state. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit carried India's diplomatic voice abroad and became the first woman President of the UN General Assembly in 1953. Their careers marked a decisive shift: women were not only participants in national life but representatives of it.

In Assam and the Northeast, the story carries distinct echoes. Kanaklata Barua marched with the national flag during the Quit India Movement and was shot at seventeen. Rani Gaidinliu, arrested at sixteen for leading resistance against British rule, later emerged as a spiritual and cultural leader among her people.

Post-Independence India saw women entering new frontiers. Indira Gandhi became India's first and, to date, only woman

Prime Minister, shaping national and international policy during turbulent decades. In science and exploration, Kalpana Chawla travelled into space, expanding the horizon of aspiration for millions of students. Her life symbolised the idea that geography need not limit ambition.

In governance and public administration, Kiran Bedi entered the Indian Police Service and later became known for prison reforms. In social activism, leaders such as Medha Patkar highlighted issues of displacement and environmental justice. In sports, Mary Kom won world championships, demonstrating that determination could triumph over limited resources. In philanthropy and literature, Sudha Murty supported education and rural development initiatives across the country. In business, Falguni Nayar built a major entrepreneurial enterprise, illustrating women's expanding leadership in the corporate sector.

Seen across three centuries, these lamps illuminate a widening arc of opportunity. From the struggle against social practices like Sati and child marriage to constitutional guarantees of equality, from participation in anti-colonial movements to representation in global diplomacy, from classrooms to space missions, the journey reflects persistent effort rather than sudden change.

Yet the courtyard is not fully lit. Despite constitutional protections and legal reforms, challenges remain - gender-based violence, unequal wages, underrepresentation in certain sectors, and the burden of unpaid care work. International Women's Day in India therefore functions as both recognition and reminder. It honours the courage of those who widened the path, and it calls for renewed commitment to equality, safety and opportunity. As 8 March dawns, the imagined lamps do not compete; they combine. The light of Ahilyabai's governance merges with Savitribai's classroom, Lakshmibai's battlefield, Gaidinliu's resistance, Kalpana's spacecraft, and Mary Kom's boxing ring. Together, they form a continuum - a narrative of resilience and reform.

The story of Indian women is neither linear nor complete. It is an unfolding chapter of the nation's own evolution. International Women's Day offers a moment to read that chapter aloud - not as nostalgia, but as responsibility. The dawn is brighter than it was in the 18th century, yet it remains unfinished. The next lamp waits to be lit.

True Spirit of Women's Day

By: Mita Nath

For much of the world, International Women's Day is a day of protest, assertion, and demand—a day when women come together to fight for rights that history denied them. But the civilizational experience of Bharat offers a very different narrative. In India, respect for women is not a recent demand born out of social struggle; it is an ancient value embedded in our cultural and spiritual traditions. The Bharatiya worldview has always seen men and women not as competitors in a battle for power, but as complementary forces meant to coexist, cooperate, and build life together.

For Bharat, the celebration of women is not a modern idea borrowed from the contemporary world. Respect for women has been deeply woven into the cultural, philosophical, and spiritual fabric of Indian civilization for thousands of years. The idea that women deserve dignity, recognition, and space in society is not a demand that emerged recently—it is an inheritance that flows through the very bloodstream of our civilization.

India has always believed that men and women are not meant to compete with one another. They are not adversaries in a struggle for power. Rather, they are complementary forces created by nature to coexist, cooperate, and build life together. The true spirit of celebrating women in Bharat lies not in conflict between genders but in harmony between them.

The Philosophy of Complementarity

Nature itself has created the masculine and feminine energies to work together. Life itself emerges from their union. Families are built through their cooperation, and societies flourish through their shared effort. Indian philosophy has always taught that the masculine and feminine energies are not rivals. They are two halves of a greater whole.Every human being carries both strengths and weaknesses. No individual on this earth is perfect. Instead of turning these differences into sources of conflict or competition, Indian thought encourages partnership. If a man has certain limitations, a woman's strengths can support and balance them. If a woman faces certain vulnerabilities, a man's strengths can provide stability and protection. Through this mutual support, both move forward together.

This profound idea is beautifully symbolized in the ancient spiritual concept of Shiva and Shakti. Shiva represents consciousness and stability, while Shakti represents energy and creation. Without Shakti, Shiva remains inactive; without Shiva, Shakti lacks direction. Each is incomplete without the other. Together they represent the eternal balance that sustains the universe.

Women as Shakti in Indian Civilization

Carrying this philosophy, Bharat has always viewed women as embodiments of divine power—Shakti. In Indian culture, women were not merely respected; they were revered. The feminine principle was worshipped as the source of strength, wisdom, prosperity, and creation. Goddesses such as Durga, Saraswati, and Lakshmi symbolize power, knowledge, and abundance. These divine representations were not merely symbolic. They reflected the real place women occupied in ancient Indian society.

Women were scholars, philosophers, educators, writers, and spiritual leaders. The ancient text Rigveda mentions women sages such as Gargi Vachaknavi and Maitreyi, who engaged in profound philosophical debates about the nature of existence and the universe. These women debated with some of the greatest thinkers of their time. They were intellectual pioneers centuries before modern universities emerged. Such examples show that women in Bharat were never confined to silence or invisibility. They were active participants in shaping knowledge, culture, and society.

Agency and Choice in Ancient Traditions

The story of Sita reflects another important dimension of dignity and agency accorded to women in ancient India. During her swayamvar, princes and kings from across the land gathered seeking her hand in marriage. Yet the ultimate decision was hers. She had the authority to choose the person who would become her life partner. This tradition conveyed a powerful message: a woman had the right to decide her future. In many ways, this stands in stark contrast to certain modern practices where women are placed in situations where they are judged, evaluated, and either accepted or rejected. Ancient Bharat recognized the dignity and autonomy of women in ways that many modern societies are still striving to achieve.

How Did We Reach the Present Situation?

If women once enjoyed such dignity and freedom in our civilization, a natural question arises: what changed? How did society evolve to a point where daughters are sometimes seen as burdens? How did practices such as dowry emerge, forcing families to pay enormous sums simply to marry their daughters? How did we reach a stage where, in some tragic cases, girls are denied the right to be born through practices such as female foeticide?

These questions demand honest introspection.

The original values of Bharat never demeaned women. Over centuries, however, social distortions, external invasions, colonial disruptions, and changing economic conditions gradually weakened these ideals. Recognising this shift is essential if we are to restore the dignity that once defined our civilization.

Why the West Celebrates Women's Day Differently

While Bharat historically celebrated women as embodiments of Shakti, the experience of many Western societies has been very different.

In several societies influenced by Christianity, the theological narrative of Eve being created from Adam's rib contributed to interpretations that placed women in a secondary position within society. Similarly, in several regions influenced by Islam, women in certain societies historically faced restrictions related to education, mobility, employment, and personal freedom. In many parts of the world, women had to struggle for basic rights—such as the right to vote, own property, or access education. For these societies, International Women's Day became a powerful platform for women to raise their voices, unite, and demand equality.

The Indian Context

India's civilizational experience has been different. Here, women were not fighting to prove their worth. They were already recognized as sources of wisdom, strength, and guidance. The mother was revered as divine. The ancient value of Matr Devo Bhava placed the mother at the highest pedestal of respect.

The modern celebration of International Women's Day entered India largely during the last century through global influence. While the celebration is meaningful today, it is important to remember that the core spirit of honoring women has always been deeply rooted in Indian civilization.

The great spiritual leader Swami Vivekananda once said:"A nation which does not respect women cannot rise."These words remain profoundly relevant today. The progress of a nation is inseparable from the dignity and empowerment of its women. When women flourish, societies flourish. When women are suppressed, civilizations decline.

A World in Conflict, A Civilization of Balance

Today the world is witnessing growing instability—from the war between Russia and Ukraine to geopolitical tensions involving Iran and the United States. Amidst this turbulence, India continues to remain largely peaceful and stable.

One of the deeper reasons for this stability lies in our cultural values—values that emphasize harmony, family, and the balanced partnership between men and women.

The Message of Women's Day in Bharat

On this Women's Day, the message for Bharat is not merely about adopting global narratives. It is about rediscovering our own civilisational wisdom. The legacy of Gargi, Maitreyi, Sita, and countless women in Indian history reminds us that women have always been central to the strength of our society. Our responsibility today is to ensure that every girl in India receives education, dignity, opportunity, and respect.

Men and women are not meant to stand against each other. They are meant to stand beside each other. When they combine their strengths and support each other's weaknesses, they create families that nurture, societies that flourish, and nations that prosper.

This is the timeless message of Bharat. And that is the true spirit of Women's Day — to co-exist in strength, not compete in conflict.

Dr S Anukriti, Senior Economist at the World Bank, is a role model and source of inspiration for women

By: Dr Priyanka Saurabh

Looking at Dr Anukriti, one might not imagine that this ordinary-looking young woman is the prestigious Dr. S. Anukriti, holding the important position of Senior Economist at the World Bank, Washington, D.C. (USA). But it's true. Upon joining the World Bank as an economist, Dr Anukriti also became a member of the ten-member Human Resources Committee of this apex banking institution that regulates the global economy. Currently, she is co-chair of the World Bank's Center for Research on Women and Jobs, a member of the Technical Advisory Group of the PF-Impact Consortium, an active contributor to the Development Impact Blog, and a member of two committees, "We-Define" and "We-Connect," of the Bangladesh-based social science research institute, the Brac Institute of Governance and Development. Earlier, Dr Anukriti's husband Siddharth Ramalingam, who was a professor of economics at BC University, Boston (USA) for seven years, has also been a professor at Harvard University and a senior consultant at the World Bank and is currently working as a strategic and planning manager in a multinational company based in Washington DC (USA).

Dr Anukriti is extraordinary despite being ordinary. Her outstanding achievements have made her a role model and source of inspiration for young people, especially women. Dr. Anukriti has been incredibly talented and extraordinary since childhood. She never took a single rupee as pocket money from her parents, nor did she ever stand on the street and buy anything from a street vendor. She never attended a single day of tuition, yet she set a record by scoring 94.6 percent in the CBSE 10+2 (non-medical) exam. Dr. Anukriti was born in Narnaul, Haryana, but spent eighteen years in Hisar and seven in Delhi. Now, for twenty years, she has lived in America, one of the world's most developed and prosperous countries. Yet, she has never been touched by ostentation or ostentation. Whether it's summer or winter, she adapts to the Indian environment as soon as she arrives. She has been travelling by air for two decades, has visited more than twenty countries, even travels locally by metro or AC bus, but apart from a bicycle, she does not even know how to ride an Activa.

The beloved daughter of senior literary figure and educationist Dr. Ram Niwas 'Manav' and former economics lecturer Dr Kanta Bharti, and a gifted individual with exceptional talent, Dr. Anukriti has achieved world-class achievements. After earning a BA in Economics (Hons) from St. Stephen's College, Delhi, and an MA (Economics) from the Delhi School of Economics, she simultaneously received three degrees: an MA (Economics), an MPhil, and a PhD from Columbia University, Manhattan (USA), one of the world's leading universities. Dr Anukriti, who always excelled in her studies, has received education from world-class institutions, but unlike other students, she never faced any difficulty in getting admission. After completing her 10+2 education in schools in Hisar, she completed her BA Economics (Hons) from St. Stephen's College, Delhi. She then applied for an MA (International Relations) at Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi, an MA (Economics) at the Delhi School of Economics, and an MA (Mathematics) at the Indian Statistical Institute, and was selected for all three. Of these, she chose the Delhi School of Economics. Furthermore, after completing her MA (Economics) from the Delhi School of Economics, she applied for a PhD at six leading US universities: Rochester, Brown University, Wisconsin-Madison, Columbia University, New York, and Maryland, and was selected by all six. Anukriti chose Columbia University, Manhattan (New York), and earned three degrees: an MA (Economics), an MPhil, and a PhD. But even more remarkable is that after earning her PhD, she was appointed to seventeen universities or equivalent institutions in six countries, including the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Sweden, Australia, and India, of which she joined BC University. Dr. Anukriti was never a financial burden on her parents. During her education and research, she received awards such as the GE Fund Scholarship in the United States, the Vickrey and Harris Awards, and the Columbia University Research Scholarship. During her six-year PhD program at Columbia University, she did not have to rely on even a single rupee of financial assistance from her parents.

Dr Anukriti says, "I wouldn't call my journey difficult, but looking back, I realize that few people can make the journey from a small, backward town in Haryana to the World Bank. It's especially difficult for girls and women to prioritize their education and career in many states of India. However, thanks to the support and encouragement of my family, I didn't face any such difficulties. My parents raised me and my brother (who became an Indian Police Service officer) in a way that never limited our goals or aspirations to our city, state, or country. Initially, moving from a small town in Haryana to St. Stephen's College in Delhi felt like a significant difference, and it took some time to adjust. However, the journey forward wasn't too difficult for me. Therefore, I would like to urge parents and guardians to carefully consider their children's early education, as it impacts their entire lives and careers." Don't impose your interests on your children; consider their own interests; let them decide their own path and destination. Parental interests are the biggest obstacle to children's personality development. All parents want their children to become doctors or engineers, which is not appropriate. There are many other fields where, if children are allowed to pursue their own desires and interests, they too can achieve outstanding success. Yes, parental guidance and encouragement are essential for children. I don't think I would have achieved so much without my parents' guidance. My parents and other family members never discriminated between me and my brother, nor did they pressure me to marry young or focus less on my career. As a child, I was always encouraged to study and pursue the highest education; I was never burdened with household chores. Now, I also have the full support of my husband, Professor Siddharth Ramalingam; we both support each other's decisions and careers equally. We have a little daughter, Mili (Mrinalini), who has filled our lives with happiness.

All of India is truly proud of its capable and brilliant daughter, Dr S. Anukriti. Today's young generation can learn a lot from her, drawing inspiration from her to not only shape their futures but also to raise their reputations both domestically and internationally.

Page 6 (Region) March 8_Normal Pages 07-03-2026 20:45 Page 1

One-man commission to examine circumstances leading to November 29 protest

Commission of inquiry constituted to examine BTC Secretariat incident

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, March 7: A one man commission of inquiry headed by Justice H N Sarma, former Judge of the Gauhati High Court, has been constituted under Section 3 of the Commissions of Inquiry Act, 1952 to examine the facts and circumstances leading to the incident that occurred at the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) Secretariat, Kokrajhar on November 29, 2025.

The Commission will inquire into the circumstances that led to the protest by student organisations of Bodoland University, the sequence of events including the march towards the BTC Secretariat and the alleged breach of barricades, forcible entry and vandalism and the adequacy of the response of the District Administration, Police and BTC Secretariat authorities. The inquiry will also look into whether there were any lapses or failures on the part of the authorities in anticipating or managing the situation and assess the extent of damage caused to public property and disruption of official functioning.

In this regard, the Commission has invited written statements or representations from the Government of Assam, Bodoland Territorial Council, Bodoland University, aggrieved persons, organisations and members of the general public who are acquainted with the issues relating to the subject matter of the inquiry.

Such statements or representations may be submitted individually or collectively and should contain the full name, postal address and contact number of the person making the submission, along with supporting documents and a list of witnesses, if any, accompanied by an affidavit supporting the statement of facts.

The written statements are to be submitted in triplicate to the office of the Commission, either personally during office hours or by Registered Post/Speed Post so as to reach the office on or before March 26, 2026. Submissions may also be routed through the office of the District Commissioner, Kokrajhar, through Subham Sinha, Assistant Commissioner, Kokrajhar, who will forward the same to the Commission.

KAAC postpones eviction drive at Kheroni Girls High School

Authorities cite Supreme Court protocol compliance and shortage of security personnel

HT Bureau

DIPHU, March 7: The Land and Revenue Department of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) has officially postponed the eviction drive scheduled for Saturday at Kheroni Girls High School in West Karbi Anglong. Officials cited failure to meet Supreme Court-mandated protocols and a lack of adequate security personnel as the primary reasons for the delay.

During a press conference held on Saturday at the KAAC New Secretariat, Si-im Taro, Secretary in-charge of Land and Revenue, clarified that the drive is not cancelled but merely deferred until legal and logistical requirements are fully met.

According to Taro, the encroached area belonging to the school spans 32 bighas and 3 kattas, currently occupied by approximately 20 families totalling over 100 individuals.

Taro emphasised that a modern eviction drive is a multi-departmental effort that must strictly follow Supreme Court guidelines. The Land and Revenue Department cannot act in isolation. Key requirements include the involvement of the Health Department and Anganwadi workers to identify and care for pregnant women and lactating mothers; the Forest Department must oversee the removal of illegally planted trees and the Animal Husbandry and Agriculture Departments must take custody of cattle, poultry and standing crops like paddy or wheat found on the site.

"Only the Land and Revenue Department alone cannot carry out an eviction drive. There must be cooperation from other line departments," Taro stated, highlighting the necessity of a coordinated humanitarian and administrative approach.

A significant hurdle for Saturday's operation was the unavailability of security forces. With Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma scheduled to visit Diphu on March 11, the bulk of the Assam Police and paramilitary forces have been diverted for VVIP security arrangements.

Tensing Rongpi, Additional Secretary and Eviction In-charge, echoed these sentiments, confirming that the drive will resume "immediately" once the line department manpower is secured and the Chief Minister's visit concludes.

While the eviction remains on hold, the KAAC is preparing for a wave of new infrastructure. Assistant Technical Secretary Budho Teron informed the press that during the Chief Minister's visit, schemes worth Rs 700.3 crore will be inaugurated and the foundation for new infrastructure projects with an estimated value of Rs 900.96 crore will be laid.

The KAAC remains committed to reclaiming the school land, asserting that the removal of encroachers is essential for the institution's future growth, provided the process remains within the bounds of the law.

'Sankalp Yatra' of Asom Yuva Parishad held in Jorhat

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, March 7: Amid discussions ongoing between the BJP and the AGP regarding the Teok seat, the AGP has made it clear that it is not willing to give up the constituency. Indicating a green signal for an AGP candidate to contest from the constituency, the party's youth wing, Asom Yuva Parishad, organised a "Sankalp Yatra" (Resolution March) in Jorhat, keeping the upcoming elections in mind.

The programme was organised by the Asom Yuva Parishad Jorhat District Committee, with cooperation from the Teok Assembly Constituency Committee, following directions from the AGP central committee. The yatra began from the AGP office located at Ajanta Hall Bypass in Jorhat and covered a large area in the form of a massive bike rally, carrying the message of peace and progress.

The rally was attended by several party leaders and workers, including AGP Jorhat District president Saurav Pran Bora, AGP Central General Secretary Bikash Saikia, Jitu Borgohain, office bearers of Asom Yuva Parishad, members of the Jorhat district AGP committee and a large number of supporters and voters from the constituency.

Protest erupts in Diphu against businessman

HT Bureau

DIPHU, March 7: Tensions erupted in Diphu on Saturday as social organisations and the opposition All Party Hills Leaders Conference (APHLC) protested against local businessman Pankaj Jain, who is accused of illegally locking the Media Officer's room at the office of the Additional Chief Medical & Health Officer (Family Welfare) in Rongkhelan on March 2.

Protesting groups, including the Karbi Nationalist Youth Council (KNYC), Karbi National Organisation (KNO), Karbi Students & Youth Council (KSYC), and All India Karbi Students Union (AIKSU), gathered at Jain's business, Nirmal Fancy Stores, accusing him of treating a government office as personal property. KNYC president Podmo Teron condemned Jain for interfering in government operations.

Speaking at the protest, KNYC president Podmo Teron lambasted the businessman for interfering in government operations.

"Pankaj Jain is neither a government officer nor an employee of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC). He has behaved like a 'gunda' and a mafia, showing complete disregard for the authority of the Council," Teron alleged.

The groups demanded that the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) cancel all of Jain's contracts, revoke his trading licence and hold him accountable. APHLC representatives alleged that Jain sent his own men to lock the office and exercises undue influence over departmental affairs, including appointments and contract works, allegedly channelled through firms linked to him.

As of Saturday evening, the reason for locking the room remains unclear and Jain could not be reached for comment.

OBITUARY

Dr Pradip Bordoloi, noted E&T Specialist, popular actor, dramatist and a leading figure in Sivasagar social circle passed away in a Dibrugarh Nursing Home on Friday following kidney failure. He was 81 and is survived by a son, a daughter and their families.

Pradip Bordoloi earned reputation as an actor since playing the role of Lachit Borphukan in Parag Chaliha's famous drama 'Sari Hejar Basarar Asom'. Bordoloi was the founder president of Navajagaran Sangha, an institution for dramatic art. He acted in two Assamese films Gondh and Bisfuran. His last acting stint was Kakoti Master in a short film produced by Agama Production.

Bordoloi's last rites were performed at Thanamukh crematorium in the presence of large number of his admirers.

Karbi Anglong youth dies in Hyderabad

HT Correspondent

HOWRAGHAT, March 7: A pall of gloom has descended upon Miribali Das village in Howraghat, Karbi Anglong, following the death of a local youth in Hyderabad under suspicious circumstances. The family has alleged that the youth was murdered by his friend, who also hails from the same village.

The deceased, Vikram Das (27), son of Nikhil Das, had moved to Hyderabad in search of employment and was living in shared accommodation with four others, including his two brothers and his friend, Pritam Das.

According to reports, the incident occurred on March 4 during Holi celebrations when a heated argument reportedly broke out between Vikram and Pritam. The family alleged that Pritam physically assaulted Vikram during the altercation, causing a fatal neck injury, reportedly a broken cervical bone.

Vikram was rushed to a local hospital in Hyderabad. As his condition worsened, doctors advised advanced treatment. The accused reportedly arranged an ambulance to transport him to Guwahati for treatment but did not accompany him and has since switched off his mobile phone.

Vikram succumbed to his injuries while being transported to Assam. The family has also shared a video clip recorded before his death in which he is purportedly heard saying that Pritam had hit him.

The bereaved family approached the Howraghat Police Station to file a complaint but alleged that the police have not shown urgency in the matter. The family has appealed to Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and the Assam Police for a thorough investigation and immediate arrest of the accused.

Nagaland Express gets stoppage at Kharahat

HT Correspondent

DEMOW, March 7: After news spread that the Nagaland Express will have a stoppage at Kharahat Railway Station, people of Demow and its surrounding areas expressed happiness.

Sushanta Borgohain, MLA of 95 No Demow Constituency, flagged off the 15670 Nagaland Express at Kharahat Railway Station near Demow on Friday in the presence of Anurag Kumar, Assistant Commercial Manager and a host of dignitaries.

Talking to the media here on Friday, Sushanta Borgohain said that local residents had submitted applications seeking a train stoppage at Kharahat Railway Station. He said he informed the state Chief Minister about the demand and told him that if a train stoppage was introduced at Kharahat Railway Station, people would benefit.

He said that travelling to Guwahati by bus or other vehicles costs around ₹ 1,000, whereas travelling by the Nagaland Express costs only about ₹ 190.

He added that patients travelling to Guwahati by ambulance have to bear a heavy expense, but with the train service they will be able to travel at a much cheaper rate.

Borgohain thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma for facilitating the train stoppage. He also thanked the local people, saying the stoppage was introduced following their request.

Gaurav Gogoi sounds election bugle in Jorhat

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, March 7: With the Assam Assembly elections approaching, political activities have intensified across the state. The Congress party has stepped up its activities in the Jorhat constituency after announcing that Gaurav Gogoi, the Member of Parliament from Jorhat Lok Sabha constituency will contest from the Jorhat Assembly seat.

The Indian National Congress workers in Jorhat are striving to regain the party's past glory in the constituency. Accordingly, Gaurav Gogoi was seen actively participating in several programmes in the area on Saturday, effectively sounding the election bugle. In the afternoon, he first visited the Chaolung Sukapha Samannay Kshetra in West Jorhat, where a reception programme was organised in his honour. The event was attended by Jorhat District Congress leaders and a large number of party supporters who warmly welcomed the Congress candidate.

After receiving the greetings of the public and party workers, Gaurav Gogoi told reporters that people, irrespective of religion and caste, want to build a greater Assam and therefore intend to bring the Congress party back to power. He also remarked that the public is dissatisfied with the rule of the Bharatiya Janata Party and is determined to hand over the responsibility of governance to the Congress-led alliance this time.

Regarding a possible alliance with Raijor Dal, he said that there is still hope for a partnership. He mentioned that he had not seen what Akhil Gogoi had written on social media but added that discussions about an alliance are ongoing.

KVK Karbi Anglong holds awareness drive on farmers' rights and traditional seed protection

HT Bureau

DIPHU, March 7: In a significant move to safeguard indigenous agricultural heritage, the Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK), Karbi Anglong, successfully conducted a one-day training-cum-awareness programme on the Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Act (PPVFRA), 2001.

The event, held at the KVK campus in Diphhu, was sponsored by the PPV&FR Authority under the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Government of India. The initiative aimed to educate the local farming community on the legal frameworks available to protect and register traditional seed varieties.

The programme commenced with a welcome address by Dr Monuj Kr Doley, Senior Scientist and Head of KVK, Karbi Anglong. Dr Doley underscored the critical need for registering farmers' varieties to ensure that the traditional knowledge and biodiversity preserved by local communities are legally recognised.

"Registration under this Act is not just about paperwork; it is about ensuring recognition and fair benefit-sharing for the farmers who have been the silent custodians of our botanical diversity for generations," Dr Doley remarked.

Bidyasri Langthasa, Deputy Secretary (i/c Agriculture) of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), graced the occasion as the chief guest. In an inspiring address, she urged farmers and farm women to take pride in their indigenous crops. She further linked the importance of the PPVFRA to the broader goal of obtaining Geographical Indication (GI) tags for local produce, noting that such protections are vital for community upliftment and economic security.

The event saw a high-profile gathering of agricultural experts and dignitaries, including Dr Kishore Kumar Sharma (HOD, Plant Breeding & Genetics, AAU Jorhat), Dr Rupam Borgohain (Principal Scientist, Directorate of Research, AAU Jorhat), Dr Subal Maibangsa (Professor, Crop Physiology, AAU Jorhat), Dr K D Singha (Chief Scientist, Zonal Research Station, Diphu), Sarding Tisso (Subdivisional Agriculture Officer, Diphu) and Dr Manoj Kumar Chauhan (Scientist, Directorate of Extension Education, AAU Jorhat).

International Women's Day celebration in state

Programmes highlight empowerment, achievements and participation of women

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, March 7: The International Women's Day observed at the Auditorium Hall of Girls' College, Narabari, under the theme of "Give to Gain", on Saturday in Kokrajhar

The programme was organised by Sankalp: Hub for Empowerment of Women under Mission Shakti of the Women and Child Development Department under Beti Bachao Beti Padhao initiative, with the aim of promoting awareness on women empowerment and recognising the contributions of women in society.

Pami Brahma, Secretary, Women and Child Development, Govt of BTC, attended the programme as the Chief Guest.

Addressing the gathering, she said that the spirit of Women's Day should not be confined to a single day, but must be reflected every day through respect, opportunities and equal participation for women in all spheres of life. She acknowledged the struggles and contributions of women who fought for women's rights over the years, which have paved the way for policies and opportunities available to women today. She observed that societal conditioning and mental barriers often restrict women from aspiring to larger goals and urged women to break these limitations and pursue their dreams with confidence. She encouraged the students to remain determined in the pursuit of their aspirations and not allow societal expectations to define their ambitions. She further stated that while challenges and obstacles are inevitable in life, strong self-confidence and determination can help overcome them.

On the occasion, national and international level athletes Daisy Rabha (Wushu), Sinayti Basumatary (Taekwondo U-19) and Smriti Basumatary (Taekwondo U-19) were felicitated for their achievements. The programme also featured cultural performances and a dance competition participated in by various ICDS projects of the district. The event concluded with the distribution of prizes to the winners and a vote of thanks.

Principal and Vice Principal of Girls College, Narabari; DSWO, ASLRM representative, CDPOs were also present in the occasion.

Our Nagaon Correspondent adds: International Women's Day 2026 was celebrated at Nowgong Girls' College on Saturday. The programme was organised by the Nowgong Girls' College Students' Union in collaboration with the Centre for Women's Studies. The event witnessed enthusiastic participation from students, faculty members, and invited guests.

The programme was moderated by Krishnakhi Saikia, Union Secretary (Culture and Drama). It commenced with a melodious chorus presented by the students of the college, setting an inspiring tone for the event. The welcome address was delivered by the Principal of the college, Dr Kulen Chandra Das, who highlighted the importance of celebrating women's achievements and empowering young women through education and awareness. He also spoke on the evils of the society like witch hunting which can be wiped off only if women are educated and empowered

Ashrawika Himadri Borah, Assistant Professor of History at Rupahi College attended the event as chief guest. She delivered a highly engaging and insightful speech on the significance of women's empowerment and the role of education in shaping a progressive society. She also spoke on struggles of women in the male-dominated world from time immemorial till today.

The programme also featured the inauguration of a Self Make-up Workshop for the students of the college by the alumna Shantipriya Alampuriya. The workshop aimed to encourage self-confidence and self-care among students. This was followed by an inspiring speech by Dr Amiya Pator, retired associate professor of Assamese Department, who shared her experiences and thoughts on the progress of women in society. Another motivating address was delivered by Marami Gayan, Vice Principal of the college, emphasising the importance of women's participation in all spheres of life.

The cultural segment of the programme included a graceful Sattriya dance performance by a student of the college and the staging of a one-act play "Nari Kontho Nirob Nohoe" both of which were highly appreciated by the audience.

The event also included the declaration of results and prize distribution of an Inter-College/University Painting Competition, where talented participants from various institutions were honoured for their creative works.

Page 7 March 8_Normal Pages 07-03-2026 20:17 Page 1

Development must be measured by difference it makes in people's lives: Meghalaya CM

Marks eight years of NPP-led MDA government in Meghalaya

TURA, March 7: Conrad K Sangma, who became Meghalaya's longest-serving chief minister in terms of continuous tenure by completing eight years in office, said development must be measured by the difference it makes in people's lives.

Addressing a programme here on Friday to mark eight years of the National People's Party (NPP)-led Meghalaya Democratic Alliance (MDA) government, Sangma said the journey since 2018 has been filled with challenges but has been sustained by public support.

"Over the last eight years, our journey has been filled with challenges and difficulties. At times, it has been painful and it has certainly not been easy. But with blessings from above, the love of the people and the support of our citizens, we have been able to overcome most of these challenges," he said.

The chief minister said that while infrastructure projects are important, the real measure of governance lies in improving people's lives.

"People often ask what the greatest achievements in the last eight years were. Whether it was the new secretariat being built in Shillong or the additional secretariat being constructed in Tura, roads built or schools constructed. While all these are important, the greatest satisfaction I get is being able to bring a smile on the face of a citizen," he said.

Conrad K Sangma, who first took oath as the 12th chief minister of Meghalaya on March 6, 2018, completed eight years in office on Friday, surpassing the previous record for continuous tenure held by the state's first chief minister Williamson A Sangma, who had served for 7 years and 335 days in one stretch.

Interestingly, Conrad K Sangma had not contested the 2018 Meghalaya assembly elections and was then serving as the Member of Parliament from the Tura Lok Sabha constituency when the NPP emerged as a key player in the formation of the MDA coalition government with 19 MLAs.

Though senior NPP leader Prestone Tynsong had initially been projected as the chief ministerial face, coalition partners, including the United Democratic Party (UDP), Hill State People's Democratic Party (HSPDP) and the BJP rallied around Sangma and requested him to return from Delhi to lead the government.

He resigned as the MP and returned to Meghalaya, while his sister Agatha K Sangma contested from the Tura Lok Sabha seat he vacated. Sangma later contested and won the South Tura Assembly by-election, paving the way for him to formally assume office as the chief minister.

Deputy Chief Minister Prestone Tynsong described the completion of eight years of the MDA government as a significant milestone and said financial assistance amounting to around Rs 220 crore was distributed among beneficiaries during the programme.

Speaker of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly, Thomas A Sangma, congratulated Conrad K Sangma on becoming the longest-serving chief minister in the state.

During the programme, the CM also announced several welfare initiatives, including the Chief Minister's Scholarship Scheme for the academic year 2025-26, benefiting nearly 98,751 students with total assistance of over Rs 5 crore.

A Rs 3-crore initiative to provide a uniform grant to around 50,000 students through direct benefit transfer was also launched.

The chief minister also remotely inaugurated 101 community halls across the state under a project supported by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). *(PTI)*

Nagaland minister calls for collective action against gender-based violence

KOHIMA, March 7: Nagaland Minister for Forest, Environment and Climate Change C L John on Saturday called for stronger collective efforts to address gender-based violence and unequal opportunities, stating that such issues remain major barriers to women's empowerment.

Speaking at the state-level celebration of International Women's Day in Kohima under the theme "Rights, Justice, Action: For All Women and Girls", the minister said the day is not only about celebration but also about recognising the sacrifices, struggles and achievements of women in every sphere of life.

The programme was organised by the Department of Social Welfare, Nagaland in collaboration with the Nagaland State Commission for Women, Nagaland State Rural Livelihoods Mission, Directorate of Women Resource Development and the Kohima Municipal Council.

John highlighted that Naga women have always played a crucial role in shaping society, describing them as the backbone of families, villages and communities.

From agricultural fields to marketplaces and from classrooms to hospitals, he said, women continue to contribute tirelessly to the progress of the state.

He also noted encouraging progress in women's participation in governance and leadership, pointing out that Nagaland currently has two women members in the state assembly and one representing the state in the Rajya Sabha.

The minister also recalled the contribution of pioneer leader Rano M Shaiza, the first woman Member of Parliament from Nagaland, whose leadership paved the way for future generations.

At the same time, John stressed that issues related to gender-based violence must be addressed urgently, stating that such acts are violations of human rights and obstacles to gender equality.

He urged society to create an environment where every girl child in Nagaland can grow with confidence, dignity and equal opportunity.

Advisor for Social Welfare, Wangpang Konyak in his address said the theme of the 2026 celebration calls for concrete steps to advance women's rights and remove barriers to progress.

He said the Nagaland State Commission for Women has been actively promoting women's empowerment and gender equality by engaging with various institutions and stakeholders since its inception.

He also highlighted that the Commission instituted the NSCW Awards in 2021 to recognise women achievers who have made significant contributions towards the upliftment and empowerment of women in Nagaland.

The awards aim to recognise excellence, inspire younger generations and promote gender equality across different sectors.

While noting that Nagaland has often been cited as one of the safest states for women according to the National Crime Records Bureau, Konyak acknowledged that crimes against women and girls have been increasing over the years.

He therefore called upon society to confront the reality of violence, encourage the involvement of men and boys and work collectively to end gender-based violence.

Delivering the keynote address, Social Welfare Secretary, Limawabang Jamir said that the One Stop Centre in the state has handled more than 1,800 cases related to violence against women since 2016, many of which remain underreported due to stigma and lack of support systems.

He also highlighted initiatives under the Mission Shakti scheme aimed at ensuring women's safety, security and empowerment.

The programme also featured felicitation of Self Help Group achievers under the Nagaland State Rural Livelihoods Mission, as well as municipal and Anganwadi workers for their service, along with the presentation of the NSCW Achievers Awards to women who have contributed significantly to society. *(PTI)*

NFR achieves sustained freight performance with 1191 rakes unloaded

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 7: Northeast Frontier Railway continued its strong freight performance in February 2026, recording a notable rise in unloading activity. During the month, 1191 freight rakes were unloaded across the zone, marking a growth of 4.7% compared to 1137 rakes unloaded in February 2025.

Throughout the month, NFR ensured smooth transportation of essential and industrial commodities including food grains, fertilizers, cement, coal and other goods. These consignments were efficiently handled at various goods sheds across its jurisdiction, ensuring timely supply and operational reliability.

A major share of freight movement during the period was dedicated to meeting the requirements of the northeastern states. Assam accounted for the unloading of 655 rakes, of which 308 rakes carried essential commodities, underlining the Railways' crucial role in supporting public distribution systems and daily consumer needs. During the same period, 85 rakes were unloaded in Tripura, 17 in Nagaland, 9 in Arunachal Pradesh, 16 in Manipur, 1 in Meghalaya and 7 in Mizoram.

Additionally, within the jurisdiction of Northeast Frontier Railway, West Bengal recorded the unloading of 222 rakes, while Bihar accounted for 179 rakes, comprising both essential and non- essential commodities, further strengthening inter regional supply chains.

The movement of essential commodities and industrial goods remains crucial for meeting public needs and supporting economic activities across the region. Through close monitoring and coordinated efforts by field units, Northeast Frontier Railway has improved turnaround time and unloading efficiency, reaffirming its commitment to reliable freight operations and the socio- economic development of the Northeast.

Nagaland holds export summit to boost MSME growth

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, March 7: In an effort to strengthen Nagaland's export ecosystem and enhance the performance of MSMEs in the state, a two-day State Export Summit 2026 commenced at the Nagaland police complex in Chumoukedima on Friday.

The summit is structured as an intensive workshop, focusing on food processing on the first day, while handicrafts and handloom will be the main focus on the second day.

Participants were encouraged to interact closely with the experts to gain practical strategies for expanding their businesses.

Organised by the industries & commerce department under the Raising and Accelerating MSME Performance (RAMP) initiative, the summit emphasised that entering international markets requires strict adherence to quality standards, certifications and regulatory compliance.

Exporting products involves greater complexity than selling in local markets and entrepreneurs must be prepared to meet global expectations in packaging, branding and product quality, it was stated.

In her keynote address, MLA and adviser to industries & commerce Hekani Jakhalu stressed the importance of strengthening the export ecosystem.

She urged the entrepreneurs to focus on improving product quality, branding and value addition in order to access international markets.

Jakhalu noted that experts from institutions such as the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT), Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA), Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts (EPCH) and the North Eastern Handicrafts and Handloom Development Corporation were present to provide technical guidance and insights to entrepreneurs.

Highlighting recent achievements, she said Nagaland performed strongly on the NITI Aayog Export Preparedness Index, ranking in the leader category.

Among the northeastern states, Nagaland ranked first and secured the third position among small states in the country, reflecting the government's efforts to build strong systems and platforms that support export growth, she added.

Chairing the inaugural session, P Tokugha Sema, director, industries & commerce, emphasised the importance of building a strong export-oriented environment that will empower local entrepreneurs and industries to compete in wider markets.

The event has brought together policymakers, industry leaders, entrepreneurs and stakeholders to deliberate on strategies for promoting exports, improving MSME competitiveness and expanding market access for products from Nagaland.

Security forces arrest five people including 4 militants in Manipur

IMPHAL, March 7: Security forces arrested five people, including four militants belonging to different banned outfits in Manipur, a police statement said on Saturday.

One active cadre of NRFM was apprehended from Imphal International Airport on Friday.

A UNLF (Pambei) cadre and his associate were arrested from his residence at Khurai Sajor Lairou Pukhri Mapal in Imphal East district on Friday. One 9 mm pistol with magazine was seized from his possession, the statement said.

Two cadres of two different banned outfits were arrested on Thursday from Bishnupur district, it said. Police said upon their disclosure, one HK-33 Rifle with magazine and 38 live rounds, three IEDs were recovered from the Takmu lakeside of the Ithing playground of the district, the statement added. *(PTI)*

Nagaland to hold district-wise 'Mahila Jan Sunwai' from March 9

KOHIMA, March 7: The National Commission for Women in collaboration with the Nagaland State Commission for Women (NSCW) will organise district-wise 'Mahila Jan Sunwai' (public hearings) across the state from March 9 to 13.

Addressing a press conference here on Saturday, NSCW chairperson W Nginyeih Konyak said that public hearings aim to provide women with a direct platform to raise grievances and seek institutional support.

The week-long initiative aims to strengthen access to justice for women by allowing them to voice complaints related to domestic violence, workplace harassment, maternity benefits, abandonment, trafficking and other forms of gender-based injustice, she said.

The hearings are part of a nationwide outreach programme intended to ensure quicker grievance redressal and greater awareness of women's rights, she said.

Konyak said that during the public hearings, dedicated benches comprising members of the Nagaland State Commission for Women, district administration officials, representatives from the District Legal Services Authority, police authorities, legal experts and protection officers will be present.

"They will provide immediate hearing of complaints, legal guidance, registration of cases where necessary and time-bound follow-up mechanisms," she asserted.

The NSCW chairperson also said that walk-in complaints will also be accepted during the hearings, enabling women to directly approach the panel without prior registration.

She said the initiative seeks to bridge institutional gaps by bringing grievance redressal mechanisms directly to districts, especially benefiting women in rural areas who often face difficulties accessing legal and administrative support.

The programme will be held at the DC Conference Halls of the 12 districts, beginning Monday in Tuensang, Zunheboto, Tseminyu and Wokha districts; followed by Mokokchung and Niuland on March 10; Chumoukedima on March 11; Longleng and Peren on March 12 and Mon, Kohima and Dimapur on March 13.

The initiative, organised as part of the observance of International Women's Day, aims to move beyond symbolic celebrations and focus on practical measures to strengthen women's safety, dignity and access to justice, she asserted.

The other five districts would also have the Jan Sunwai, but on later dates, the NSCW chairperson added. *(PTI)*

In biggest haul, drugs worth ₹ 51 cr seized in Meghalaya, 2 held

SHILLONG, March 7: The Meghalaya Police seized drugs worth over ₹ 51 crore, the biggest haul of narcotics in the state so far in East Jaintia Hills district and arrested two Mizoram-based persons in this connection, a senior officer said on Saturday.

The seizure was made during a coordinated naka-checking conducted by the police and Anti-Narcotics Task Force (ANTF) personnel in the Ratacherra area on Friday, he said.

During the operation, a vehicle with three persons, including the driver on board was intercepted and searched in accordance with due legal procedures.

Upon checking, 19 plastic soap cases, containing suspected heroin weighing 203.7 grams were recovered from the possession of one of the three persons, the officer said.

The search of the vehicle led to the recovery of a blue-coloured trolley bag belonging to another occupant of the vehicle.

Suspected crystal meth (methamphetamine) tablets weighing 10.145 kilograms were found in the bag, the police officer said. *(PTI)*

EMPANELMENT OF HONORARY VISITING CONSULTANTS (HVS) OF GYNAECOLOGY (O&G) AND GENERAL SURGERY

No. H/41/HVS/NTSK/2025-26 Dated:-02/03/2026

Chief Medical Superintendent, N.F. Railway, Tinsukia invites applications for empanelment of Honorary Visiting Consultants (HVS) of Gynaecology (O&G) (Preferably Lady Gynaecology) and General Surgery at Sub-Divisional Railway hospital/New-Tinsukia.

Terms & Conditions: 1. Educational qualifications & Experience: (a) For Super-Specialty: Minimum qualification will be post Doctoral qualification, DM/MCH or equivalent.

(b) For Specialty: Post-graduate degree from recognized university. Minimum 3 (three) years experience in the professional works related to concerned specialty after obtaining P.G. degree.

(c) Where suitable candidates with PG degree are not available PG Diploma holders with 5 years experience in the professional work related to concerned specialty after obtaining P.G. diploma.

2. Age Profile: During first time engagement, the preferred age in between 30 years to 64 years. Upper age limit of continued engagement is 65 years.

3. Current rate honorarium to be paid.

Hours	Specialist	Super Specialist
2 Hours a day for 6 days/week	Rs.52,000/-P.M	Rs.64,000/-P.M
2 Hours a day for 4 days/week	Rs.32,000/-P.M	Rs.40,000/-P.M
2 Hours a day for 2 days/week	Rs.16,000/-P.M	Rs.20,000/-P.M

4. Tenure of working:- Each time the offer is given for a year only. After expiry of one year, extension can be given on an yearly basis subject to age limit.

5. Details terms & conditions as per Railway Board's L/No.2014/H-1/12/8/HVS/Policy dated 19/06/2018 can also be obtained from railway website.

6. Short listed Doctors will be intimated in course of time after approval from Competent Authority.

7. The application in plain paper along with address, contact number, passport size photograph & attested copies of documents (MBBS Certificate, post graduate degree certificate, Post doctoral degree certificate (where applicable). Registration Certificate, additional qualification & experience. PAN Card, Email ID and phone number) may be submitted at the address below.

8. Address of correspondence-Chief Medical Superintendent, N.F. Railway, Tinsukia.

9. Last date of receipt of application **01:00 PM of 07.04.2026**.

10. Visit us at :**http://www.nfr.indianrailways.gov.in**

Chief Medical Superintendent, New Tinsukia

NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY

Serving Customers With A Smile

Manipur govt committed to support Rly authorities for completion of project connecting Imphal: CM

IMPHAL, March 7: Manipur Chief Minister Y Khemchand Singh said his government is committed to extending all necessary support to ensure the timely completion of a railway project that will connect the state's capital with the pan-India rail network.

The railway line connecting Imphal to Jiribam town, bordering Assam's Cachar district is a critical 111-km infrastructure project worth over ₹ 22,000 crore, which is expected to be fully operational by 2028.

The CM's comment comes after he held a meeting with North East Frontier Railway general manager (Construction, Maligaon) Ashish Bansal and other officials at the CM secretariat on Friday night.

Sharing details of the meeting on Facebook, Singh said, "The delegation apprised me of the latest progress on the construction of the railway line connecting Imphal, a landmark infrastructure project for the state."

He emphasised that the commissioning of the railway line would significantly strengthen Manipur's transport infrastructure, enhance connectivity and ensure a more efficient and secure supply chain.

He also said, "The government remains fully committed to extending all necessary support to ensure the timely completion of this vital project for the progress and prosperity of Manipur."

This transformative project will "contribute to improving the ease of living for our people in line with the vision of Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi Ji", the CM added. *(PTI)*

No.: JDB/15th-FC/T/10/2025-26/2538 *Date 19/02/2026*

NOTICE INVITING TENDER

Sealed Tenders affixing a non-refundable Court fee stamp amounting Rs. 8.25(Rupees eight & twenty five paisa) only with a validity period of 180 Days which will subsequence to be converted and drawn up in the printed of F-2 form are invited form the registered Contractor of Class-I (A,B,C), Class-II, Class-III category of Assam PWD (Roads & Building) and BTC for the following works under 15th-FC (tied Grant) fund for the year 2024-25 during 2025-26 under Jalah Dev. Block of BTC area. The Tenders will be received by the undersigned up to **2.30PM on 13-03-2026** and will be opened on the same date & place at 3.30PM.

Sl. No.	Name of Scheme	Tender Value (In Rs.)	Bid Security	Cost of BID documents (D/D) @ 0.03% (Approx.)	Time of Completion
1	Const. of community toilet at Hatkhula Shiv Mandir premises	Rs.11,00,000/-	Rs. 11,000/- @ 1% for ST/SC/OBC & Rs. 22,000/- @ 2% for General	Rs. 330/-	3 (Three) months from the date of issue of work order
2	Const. of community toilet at Daodhara Comla Bazar	Rs.11,00,000/-	Rs. 11,000/- @ 1% for ST/SC/OBC & Rs. 22,000/- @ 2% for General	Rs. 330/-	3 (Three) months from the date of issue of work order

Details NIT may be seen at the office of the undersigned from 19/02/2026 to 13/03/2026 up to 1.00PM. The contractor should be attested copy of latest Registration certificate, Labour licence, Income Tax, GST, PAN, Aadhar, Caste etc. The BTC authority reserves the right of accepting or rejecting the tender papers without assigning any reason thereof.

Sd/-
Block Development Officer,
Jalah Dev. Block, Jalahghat

IPR(BTC)/C/2025-26/4361

Page 8 March 8_Normal Pages 07-03-2026 19:28 Page 1

India's rise is 'unstoppable' and it alone will determine trajectory of its growth: Jaishankar

NEW DELHI, March 7: India's rise is "unstoppable" and the trajectory of its growth will be determined by the country alone on the basis of its strengths and not by the "mistakes" of others, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said on Saturday.

Jaishankar's comments at the Raisina Dialogue came two days after US Deputy Secretary of State Christopher Landau said that the US will not repeat the mistake of providing India the same type of economic advantages it gave China that helped Beijing become a key competitor of the US.

"When we speak today about the rise of countries... the rise of countries is determined by the countries. The rise of India will be determined by India," Jaishankar said at the discussion on cooperation among countries of the Indian Ocean region.

"It will be determined by our strength, not by the mistakes of others," he said without naming any country.

Amid some concerns over the US strike on an Iranian warship off the coast of Sri Lanka three days back, Jaishankar also highlighted India's growing role in the Indian Ocean as a net security provider but at the same time noted that it doesn't override the realities of the region.

In that context, he mentioned the military bases of Diego Garcia, Djibouti and Hambantota.

The external affairs minister also confirmed India's approval of urgent docking for an Iranian naval vessel, IRIS Lavan, in Kochi this week.

"We got a message from the Iranian side that one of the ships, which presumably was closest to our borders at that point of time, wanted to come into our port. They were reporting that they were having problems. On March 1, we said -- you can come in. It took them a few days to sail in and then they docked in Kochi," he said.

The Indian Navy approved the request to dock the ship, days before the US torpedoed and sank

Iranian frigate IRIS Dena.

IRIS Lavan docked at Kochi on March 4. The vessel remains in Kochi with its 183 crew members currently being accommodated at Indian naval facilities on humanitarian grounds.

Jaishankar also emphasised the need to follow the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

While analysing the situation in the Indian Ocean region as well as the India growth story, Jaishankar said, "Those who work with us obviously will get more benefits; I'm not saying there are no challenges to India's rise, there are."

"But the direction of India's rise is very clear. In a way, it's unstoppable," he said.

In his comments at the Raisina Dialogue on Wednesday, Landau, talking about various facets of Washington's foreign policy, said the US is not a charity organisation.

At the same time, he said the US is determined to expand ties with India and that the proposed trade deal between the two countries is "almost at the finish line now".

"India should understand that we are not going to make the same mistakes with India that we made with China 20 years ago in terms of saying, we are going to let you develop all these markets, and then, the next thing we know, you are beating us in a lot of commercial things," he had said.

"We are going to make sure that whatever we do is fair to our people. Because ultimately, we have to be accountable to our own people, just as the government of India has to be accountable to its people," he said.

After the US announced a 30-day waiver to India from American sanctions to procure Russian crude oil, the opposition parties accused the government of allowing the US to dictate the country's foreign policy.

India has been maintaining that it will continue to procure energy from multiple sources and diversify them to ensure stability in the supply chain, with national interests remaining the "guiding factor" for the procurement. *(PTI)*

Voter deletions in post-SIR electoral rolls aimed at dividing Bengal, alleges Mamata

KOLKATA, March 7: West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Saturday alleged that voter deletions in the post-SIR electoral rolls were aimed at dividing the state.

Addressing a gathering during her demonstration against the alleged arbitrary deletions, Banerjee accused the BJP of depriving Bengali-speaking people of their voting rights.

The CM continued her protest for the second consecutive day on Saturday, after she spent the night at the sit-in site at Metro Channel in central Kolkata.

"Their (Election Commission and BJP) intent is to divide Bengal. The BJP is planning to take away votes by dividing Bengal and turn parts of the state into a union territory. They (BJP leaders) are subjecting Bengali-speaking people to harassment in other states and are conspiring to deprive Bengalis of their voting rights," Banerjee alleged at the protest site.

The chief minister claimed that she saw in a tweet a day ago that Bengal and Bihar could be divided to form a union territory.

"Let them touch Bengal if they have the guts. This is their conspiracy. They did it once in Bihar by creating Jharkhand, and now they are trying to do it again," she said.

Slamming the Election Commission for allegedly deleting lakhs of names in the post-SIR electoral rolls, Banerjee said 36,000 votes were deleted from a single assembly constituency, like Dinhata.

"In my own constituency, 60,000 votes have been deleted. I challenge you to delete the entire voter list," she said while asking several women from her Bhabanipur constituency to come on the stage and show their documents.

"Are they not the citizens of the country? Don't they have the right to vote?" she said, accusing the Election Commission of "looting votes".

"You want to divide Bengal, but first deal with Epstein. Remember, the more you attack us, the stronger the retaliation will be," she said, referring to the Epstein Files row, but did not elaborate about the link.

"We respect all religions in Bengal and see everyone in society equally, irrespective of caste, creed, or religion. And remember that the Bengali language was recognised long before Independence. I have an old Rs 10 currency note in which the amount is written in Bengali," she said.

On the occasion of International Women's Day (March 8), thousands of women will hit the streets in the city on Sunday to protest against the deletion of women's names from the voter list and the hike in LPG prices, the TMC supremo said, adding that the protesters will wear black clothes.

"Beware BJP. You cannot divide Bengal by deleting votes. And if you cross the limits, your Delhi government will be toppled," she said.

Banerjee also claimed that the BJP never executes its electoral promises of equal rights and empowerment of women, while "the TMC-led Bengal executes these in letter and spirit".

"Bengal is the only state that has 37 per cent elected women representatives in Parliament, and they (BJP leaders) talk about 33 per cent reservation for women! In panchayats and municipalities, we already have 50 per cent reservation for women. We also have parental leave.

Employed women receive around 735 days of leave. They (BJP leaders) only give Rs 10,000 to voters ahead of elections and then come with bulldozers after the polls," she said.

The TMC supremo had begun the demonstration in central Kolkata on Friday, accusing the Election Commission of conspiring with the BJP to "disenfranchise Bengal voters" ahead of the upcoming assembly elections.

The protest comes just days before the full bench of the Election Commission is scheduled to visit West Bengal, amid rising political tensions over the voter list revision ahead of the assembly polls.

According to official data released on February 28, as many as 63.66 lakh names — around 8.3 per cent of the electorate — have been deleted since the SIR process began in November last year, reducing the voter base from about 7.66 crore to just over 7.04 crore.

In addition, over 60.06 lakh electors have been placed under the "under adjudication" category, meaning their eligibility will be determined through legal scrutiny in the coming weeks, a process that could further reshape constituency-level electoral equations.

In a post on X, Banerjee on Friday alleged, "BJP has made it their life's mission to dismantle Babasaheb Ambedkar's Constitution brick by brick, tearing apart India's democratic fabric."

She also claimed, "Obsessed with their fascist fever dream of 'One Nation, One Man, One Party', these Bangla-Birodhi Zamindars are conspiring to rob Bengal's people of their sacred right to vote."

Banerjee said Bengal is "no easy prey to be bullied into submission".

"Our Maa-Mati-Manush will not be harassed, intimidated, or coerced into silence. We will not be erased by your deletions, your deceit, or your Delhi diktats. I will go to any length, fight every battle, to safeguard their rights and dignity. This is our solemn oath," the chief added. *(PTI)*

PM Modi praises LS Speaker Om Birla ahead of Oppn-sponsored no-confidence motion

KOTA, March 7: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday described Om Birla as an outstanding Member of Parliament and "excellent" Speaker of the Lok Sabha, praising him for functioning above party lines and carrying everyone along while presiding over the House.

The prime minister's comments came two days ahead of the Lok Sabha taking up a motion of no-confidence moved by opposition parties against Birla.

"Om Birla ji is as outstanding a Member of Parliament as he is an excellent Speaker of the Lok Sabha. He is fully dedicated to the Constitution, and he maintains complete allegiance to parliamentary procedures.

"Today, he is not a member of any one side; he is completely above party lines when it comes to ruling side and opposition," Modi said during his virtual address at the foundation stone laying ceremony of Kota airport.

The prime minister said that when he sees Birla in the House, he feels that perhaps it is the influence of coming from the city of education, Kota, that as Lok Sabha Speaker, he stays in the role of taking everyone along like a good head of the family.

"And all our Honourable MPs present in the House, he handles them very well; he greatly respects their feelings and their requests. He is such a speaker who has the nature of giving the utmost respect to the MPs," he said.

Birla is a three-time MP from the Kota-Bundi seat and is serving his second successive term as Speaker of the Lok Sabha.

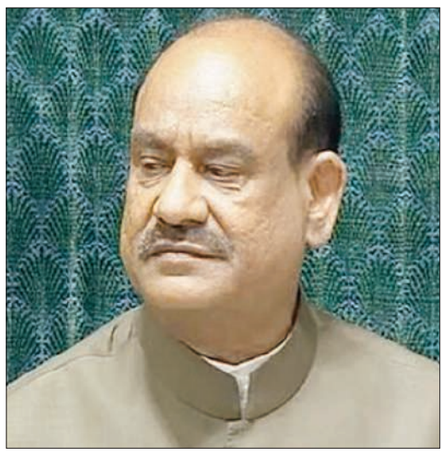
Modi said even when some arrogant, troublemaking "students" from prominent families (bade gharana) come in, who just won't give up their habit of creating a ruckus, even then, he handles everyone like the head of the House.

"He does not humiliate anyone; he tolerates everyone's bitter words as well. And you must have noticed, he smiles every time; a sweet smile always remains on his face. Perhaps that is also a reason why he is universally loved in the House," he said.

The debate and subsequently the voting on the no-confidence motion moved by the opposition against the Lok Sabha Speaker will be taken up on March 9, when the House reassembles after the recess.

The budget session with the President's address to the joint sitting of Parliament, on January 28 and went on recess on February 12.

In the first part of the session, the Lok Sabha witnessed disruptions since February 2, after Congress leader Rahul Gandhi was disallowed by the chair from quoting from an article based on excerpts of former Army chief M M Naravane's "unpublished memoir", which has references to the India-China conflict of 2020.



On February 4, Prime Minister Narendra Modi could not reply to the debate on the Motion of Thanks due to opposition protests. In an unprecedented move, the Motion of Thanks was passed on February 5 without the customary speech by the prime minister. The speaker read out the Motion of Thanks to the President for her address and it was passed by a voice vote amid sloganeering by opposition members.

Birla said he received concrete information that many Congress MPs could carry out an "unexpected act" by reaching the spot where PM Modi sits and, therefore, he asked him not to come to the House to deliver his address. Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra refuted this.

Eight opposition members were suspended for the remainder of the Budget session for unruly behaviour in the House.

In the last few days of the first part, the Speaker decided to step aside from his role as the presiding officer of the House after the opposition submitted the notice for his removal from office, alleging that he had acted in a "blatantly partisan" manner. *(PTI)*

Delhi: 26-year-old killed in Holi clash was studying digital marketing to support family, say kin

NEW DELHI, March 7: A 26-year-old man who died following a clash during Holi celebrations in southwest Delhi's Uttam Nagar had been pursuing a digital marketing course and hoped to support his family, his relatives said on Saturday, while demanding strict action against the accused.

The deceased, identified as Tarun, died after sustaining severe injuries in the clash that was allegedly triggered by a dispute between two families from different communities over a balloon in the JJ Colony area on Wednesday, according to police.

So far, six people have been arrested and one minor apprehended in connection with the case, a senior police officer said on Saturday.

Speaking to PTI, Tarun's father Memraj claimed that a balloon filled with coloured water accidentally fell on a woman from the other family, which started the initial altercation.

"It was around 11 pm on Holi, and we were getting ready to sleep when they came to attack us. Earlier in the day, a little girl had dropped a balloon by mistake, and it fell on a woman from another community. They made such a big deal about it. We even apologised to her," he claimed. According to Memraj, the woman later gathered her relatives, who allegedly came armed with sticks and attacked the family members.

"They first attacked us, and we rushed to our homes. They then locked our gates from the outside. They were around 10 to 12 people.

"My brother was injured, got stitches in his head and his hands are broken. I also have injuries in my eyes, and my wife was beaten up too," he said.

He claimed that Tarun had gone out to play Holi and was attacked when he was returning home.

"My son had gone out to play Holi with his friends. When he came back, they were waiting for him. They attacked him brutally and killed him," he alleged.

Memraj said his son was pursuing a digital marketing course and wished to support the family.

"He was our hope. He was doing a course in digital marketing and told us he would become our support," he said.

Tarun's uncle alleged that a large group of people had attacked them during the incident.

"About 25 to 30 people attacked us. There were only three of us. By mistake, some splashes of water fell on that woman, and she started turning it into a big issue, saying her fasting had been ruined," he claimed.

He alleged that Tarun was assaulted outside their lane when he was returning home.

"He was just 26 years old and was studying. He had no idea what had happened. They caught hold of him outside the lane and beat him with hockey sticks and sticks on his head," he said.

Maan Singh, the victim's grand-uncle, said the family has been informed that two more persons have been arrested in the case, taking the total number of arrests to six on Saturday, while a juvenile has also been apprehended.

"Tarun was my nephew's son. We are a simple family. We only want justice. None of us in our family are violent. If we would have been like that, why would our own child die?" Singh added.

Speaking about their meeting with an MP and a minister, Singh said the family demanded strict action against the accused. "We want the Yogi (Uttar Pradesh chief minister) bulldozer model to be used. Their unauthorised houses should be demolished and all illegal extensions removed," he said.

Delhi Transport Minister Pankaj Singh and West Delhi MP Kamaljeet Sehrawat have paid visits to the grieving family and met the relatives of the deceased. *(PTI)*

Amit Shah holds meeting with Odisha's BJP MLAs, Rajya Sabha poll candidates

BHUBANESWAR, March 7: Union Home Minister Amit Shah held a meeting with Odisha's BJP MLAs and Rajya Sabha poll candidates ahead of the March 16 elections to the Upper House of Parliament. Shah, who undertook a day-long visit to Odisha on Friday and attended marathon official programmes, visited the BJP's state headquarters here and held a crucial meeting with the chief minister, MLAs, MPs, ministers and three candidates in the fray.

While the party has named Odisha BJP chief Manmohan Samal and MP Sujeet Kumar as its candidates, it backed former Union minister Dilip Ray, who is contesting as an Independent nominee.

Though Odisha BJP president Manmohan Samal said that Shah discussed "organisational matters", party MP from Bargarh, Pradip Purohit, said that there was a discussion on Rajya Sabha elections as well.

"The MLAs, who will vote in the March 16 elections, were told to ensure that all three candidates won the polls," he said. BJP spokesperson Surath Biswal said it was obvious that Shah discussed the Rajya Sabha polls. "He is the biggest poll strategist of our party...He suggested how to win the Rajya Sabha polls," Biswal said. The Rajya Sabha elections will be held for four seats from Odisha as the tenure of Niranjan Bishi and Munna Khan (BJD), and Sujeet Kumar and Mamata Mohanta (BJP) expires on April 2.

According to the Rajya Sabha arithmetic in Odisha, one candidate needs at least 30 first-preference votes to win a seat. In the current Odisha Assembly, the BJP has 79 MLAs and the support of three Independents, totalling 82, which is eight short of the number required for electing three MPs. The opposition BJD has 48 MLAs, after two of its members were suspended last month. After electing one MP, it will have a surplus of 18 first-preference votes but will require another 12 to bag the second seat. The Congress has 14 MLAs, and the CPI(M) has one. *(PTI)*

ISRO, ESA sign agreement on earth observation missions

BENGALURU, March 7: The ISRO on Saturday announced that it has signed an agreement with the European Space Agency (ESA) to collaborate on joint calibration, validation activities and scientific studies for earth observation missions.

In a statement, the Bengaluru-headquartered space agency said, the agreement titled "ESA–ISRO Arrangement concerning Joint Calibration and Validation Activities and Scientific Studies for Earth Observation Missions" was signed virtually on March 4 by ISRO Scientific Secretary M Ganesh Pillai and ESA Director for Earth Observation, Simonetta Cheli.

The arrangement strengthens their long-standing cooperation that began in 1978 and was renewed in 2002.

Cheli highlighted the importance of the collaboration in the context of upcoming Earth observation missions, particularly ESA's FLEX (Fluorescence Explorer) mission aimed at improving understanding of vegetation biology.

Pillai noted that the partnership between the two agencies spans several areas including Earth observation, navigation, ground station support and human spaceflight cooperation. *(PTI)*

President Murmu urges Santal youth to embrace education, preserve language and traditions

KOLKATA, March 7: President Droupadi Murmu on Saturday said the contributions of the Santal community to India's freedom struggle have not received due recognition, asserting that several legendary figures were "not deliberately included in history."

Speaking at the ninth International Santal Conference in West Bengal's Siliguri, she recalled, "It is a matter of pride for the Santal community that our ancestor, Tilka Majhi, raised the banner of revolt against exploitation nearly 240 years ago. Nearly 60 years after his revolt, the brave brothers Sido-Kanhu and Chand-Bhairav, along with the brave sisters Phoolo-Jhano, led the Santal Hul in 1855."

Murmu said, "But I know how much the Santals have contributed for the country. Baba Tilka Majhi, Sido-Kanhu and Chand-Bhairav, and there are others whose names are not in history. I think, if their names were included, then the entire history would be filled with their names. But their names were not deliberately included. Even today, history wants their names. But why are you scared and walking behind?"

She praised the courage of the Santals, saying, "You are the ancestors of them, but I do not think that you are Santals; you have the blood of the Santals running in your veins. Santals do not like inferiority. They fight against inferiority; they are brave and belong to a brave community."

Highlighting ongoing challenges, the President questioned the pace of development in some regions, adding, "I don't think that Santals and other adivasis in this area are progressing. I don't think that you are getting the benefits of the development."

She also noted obstacles in organising such gatherings, suggesting that "When I was coming here to this international conference, I realised that someone was not willing for this meeting to take place. It seems that some do not want the Santals to progress, to learn and to unite to be strong."

Murmu recalled key milestones in Santali identity, stating, "The year 2003 will always be remembered in the history of the Santali community. That year, the Santali language was included in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution of India. Last year, on the birth anniversary of former PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the Constitution, written in the Santali language in the Ol Chiki script, was released."

Paying tribute to Pandit Raghunath Murmu, inventor of the Ol Chiki script, she said, "In 1925, Pandit Raghunath Murmu invented the Ol Chiki script. His contributions provided Santali speakers with a new opening for expression. He also composed plays such as Bidu Chandan, Kherwal Veer, Dalege Dhan, and Sido Kanhu - Santal Hul. In this way, he spread the light of literature and social consciousness within the Santali community."

She urged Santals to learn other languages while remaining rooted in their own.

On cultural and social responsibilities of tribal communities, Murmu said, "Tribals have preserved their folk music, dances and traditions for centuries. They have maintained a sensitivity to nature, passed down from generation to generation. The lesson of nature conservation must be passed to future *(PTI)*generations." *(PTI)*

Page 9 March 8_Normal Pages 07-03-2026 19:52 Page 1

2.68 lakh for deletion in claims, objections period

UP SIR: Over 70 lakh forms for including names

LUCKNOW, March 7: Over 70.69 lakh Form 6 claims for inclusion in the electoral rolls and 2.68 lakh objections via Form 7, seeking deletion of names, were received in Uttar Pradesh between January 6 and March 6 as part of the SIR exercise in 2026, Chief Electoral Officer Navdeep Rinwa said on Saturday.

Addressing a press conference at the Lok Bhawan here, Rinwa said that during the two-month claims and objections period, 70,69,810 Form 6 applications were received, with 35,72,603 submitted by women and 34,96,911 by men, indicating that the number of applications by women exceeded those by men. As many as 296 applications were submitted by third gender voters. He said that since October 27, 2025, when the revision exercise was announced, the state has received 86,69,073 Form 6 applications, including 43,06,364 from men, 43,62,323 from women and 386 from third gender voters.

Regarding objections for deletion of names from the rolls, Rinwa said 2,68,682 Form 7 applications were submitted between January 6 and March 6.

Of these, 1,58,027 sought deletion of male voters, while 1,10,645 of female voters and 10 of third gender voters.

From October 27 to March 6, a total of 3,18,140 Form 7 applications were received, including 1,86,362 for male voters, 1,31,766 for female voters and 12 for third gender voters, he said. Rinwa said the draft electoral roll published on January 6 contained 12.55 crore voters, including 6.88 crore men (54.8 per cent), 5.67 crore women (45 per cent) and 4,119 third gender voters (0.01 per cent).

He said notices were issued to 3.26 crore voters whose details required verification. This included 1.4 crore voters whose details were not mapped with the 2003 Special Intensive Revision (SIR), and 2.02 crore voters where discrepancies were found, such as a mismatch in names or implausible age gaps between family members.

The first notices were issued on January 14, and hearings began on January 21, he said, adding that 100 per cent notices have now been generated, while about 3.60 crore notices (93.8 per cent) have already been served.

"So far, hearings have been completed for around 2.80 crore voters, which accounts for about 85.8 per cent of the cases," Rinwa said.

To facilitate the process, the Election Commission arranged hearings at 5,621 locations across the state and set up help desks to assist voters.

Booth level officers also visited households and carried out verification using a mobile application, he added.

"Around 14 per cent of the hearings are still pending, but with the current pace of work, the process is expected to be completed within the stipulated deadline of March 27," Rinwa said.

The poll panel's state chief further said that a total of 22,55,473 Form 8 applications for corrections, change of address and replacement of EPIC cards were received between October 27 and March 6.

Of these, 1,56,313 were for change of address, 20,25,611 for correction of entries in the electoral roll, 71,536 for replacement of EPIC cards and 2,013 related to identification of persons with disabilities, he said.

The Form 8 applications received during the two-month claims and objections period stood at 16,33,578, including 1,12,877 for change of address, 14,88,115 for correction of entries, 31,602 for replacement of EPIC cards and 984 related to identification of persons with disabilities.

Rinwa said that under the guidelines of the SIR, no name can be deleted from the draft electoral roll published on January 6 without issuing a notice and without a reasoned order passed by the Electoral Registration Officer or Assistant Electoral Registration Officer as per the prescribed procedure.

He also said that after the launch of the revision exercise, the chief electoral officer's office held five meetings with representatives of recognised political parties at the state level to brief them about the latest guidelines and the progress of the exercise. During the enumeration phase from November 4 to December 26 and the claims and objections period, a total of 3,090 meetings were held with representatives of recognised political parties across the state to inform them about the procedures and seek their cooperation, he added.

According to Rinwa, 5,82,877 booth level agents appointed by recognised political parties actively participated in the revision process. During the claims and objections period, these agents submitted 40,669 Form 6 applications and 1,805 Form 7 applications.

The chief electoral officer further said four special campaign days were organised across all polling stations in the state to facilitate inclusion of eligible citizens in the electoral rolls. Booth level officers were present at polling stations with required forms and draft electoral rolls to assist voters.

Rinwa added that 92,497 complaints were received on the Election Commission's National Grievance Service Portal between October 27 and March 6, out of which 91,790 complaints, or 99.24 per cent, have been resolved. *(PTI)*

CEC says pure electoral rolls are bedrock of democracy; calls SIR process transparent

KOCHI, March 7: CEC Gyanesh Kumar on Saturday said pure electoral rolls are the bedrock of democracy and the SIR of electoral rolls was conducted with the clear objective of ensuring that no eligible voter is excluded and no ineligible person is included.

Addressing a press conference here after reviewing preparations for the upcoming Kerala Assembly elections here, he said democracy was not new to the state and that Kerala had taught democratic practices to many parts of the country and the world.

Recalling his association with the state, Kumar said Kerala had been his workplace for 18 years and he had served as the Ernakulam Collector around 22 years ago.

He said Kerala had 'Nattukuttams' (village gatherings) more than 1,000 years ago, which laid the foundation for collective decision-making.

"Kerala also made the first code of conduct way back in 1960, which was later adopted by the Election Commission of India in consultation with all political parties and which we today call the Model Code of Conduct," he said.

The CEC said Kerala had also been a pioneer in election management, with the first pilot use of electronic voting machines introduced in 1982 in the Paravoor Assembly constituency.

"With this strong foundation, all political parties of Kerala and the entire election machinery of the state have declared in one voice that the upcoming polls will not just be for the state but a model for the entire world," he said.

Kerala has 140 Assembly constituencies -- 124 general seats, 14 reserved for Scheduled Castes and two reserved for Scheduled Tribes.

"Pure electoral rolls are the bedrock of democracy. The Special Intensive Revision (SIR) that was undertaken recently had a single and clear objective — that no eligible voter should be excluded and no ineligible person should be included," he said.

He said Kerala has 2,69,53,644 voters, which is more than the combined population of Australia, Norway and Costa Rica.

Kumar said there would be 30,471 polling stations across the state, including around 5,000 new ones, and 100 per cent webcasting would be ensured. No polling station will have more than 1,200 electors.

He added that 397 polling stations will be managed entirely by women and over 790 model polling stations will be set up.

He said Kerala has around 2.43 lakh voters with disabilities.

More than two lakh senior citizens aged above 85 years, including 1,571 centenarians, will be eligible to vote from home.

There are 4.24 lakh voters in the 18–19 age group and nearly 45 lakh in the 20–29 age group, for whom special campaigns will be held at educational institutions to encourage them to participate in the "festival of democracy".

The Election Commission will ensure improved facilities for senior citizens and persons with disabilities, including ground-floor polling stations, ramps, wheelchairs and priority voting.

Mobile phones can be carried up to the entrance of polling stations and deposit facilities will be arranged, he said.

"In order to enable electors to select the candidate of their choice without any doubt, coloured photographs of candidates will be displayed on EVMs for the first time in Kerala," he said.

Kumar said earlier the Election Commission had more than 40 different applications, which have now been integrated into a single platform called ECINET.

The ECINET mobile software integrates over 40 applications and provides information for voters, candidates and other stakeholders. All polling stations will have 100 per cent webcasting to ensure transparency.

He said election updates, including voter turnout, will be provided every two hours.

Postal ballots will be counted two rounds before the EVM votes to avoid pressure on returning officers, he said.

"All data related to the election by way of indexing shall be made available within 72 hours of counting. The mandatory counting of VVPAT slips will also take place," he said.

There will be strict enforcement of the law during the election period without fear or favour, he said.

He added that polling stations would have a festive look to welcome electors and ensure a pleasant voting experience.

Enforcement agencies have been directed to curb inducements such as cash, liquor and narcotics during the election period, he said.

Kumar said the ECINET platform has a facility called cVIGIL through which violations of the Model Code of Conduct can be reported.

"The normal turnaround time for action is 100 minutes. Rather than creating narratives, it is better to put complaints on cVIGIL," he said.

He said the SIR exercise in Kerala was conducted effectively and if any eligible person has been left out, they can submit Form 6 along with the required documents to include their names in the electoral roll.

"The SIR exercise has been one of the most transparent processes to ensure that only electors who are eligible under Article 326 of the Constitution of India are included in the electoral rolls," he said.

Regarding West Bengal, Kumar said the SIR process there was being carried out in accordance with the Constitution and the directions of the Supreme Court.

Election Commissioners Sukhbir Singh Sandhu and Vivek Joshi, and Kerala Chief Electoral Officer Ratan U Kelkar were also present.

The Chief Election Commissioner and Election Commissioners also felicitated three first-time voters — Amritha, Sulaiman and Fenal — during the event.

They also honoured 96-year-old voter P V Visalam, transgender activist Sherin Antony and disabled activist Rajeev Paluruthy. *(PTI)*

Decision taken to make Nishant Bihar's deputy CM, MLC: Nitish aide

PATNA, March 7: JD(U) MLA Hari Narayan Singh, a close aide of Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, on Saturday claimed that a "unanimous" decision has been taken to make the party supremo's son Nishant the deputy CM in the new government to be formed upon his father's resignation.

Singh, the MLA from Harnaut, the assembly segment in Nalanda district that Kumar himself had represented in the 1980s, also claimed that Nishant, who is entering politics in his late 40s, will be elected to the state legislative council next month.

"At the legislature party meeting held at the chief minister's residence, a unanimous decision was taken to make Nishant the deputy CM in the new government," Singh told a private news channel here, a day after the JD(U) president briefed his colleagues about his decision to give up the post and move to the Rajya Sabha.

The JD(U) MLA added, "It was also decided that Nishant shall formally join the JD(U). Since he must become a member of the legislature to hold a constitutional post, he would be elected to the legislative council in April when biennial elections to nine seats are scheduled. He need not necessarily contest from the seat that falls vacant upon his father's resignation."

To a pointed query, Singh said, "It is not clear whether Nishant will become the deputy CM as soon as a new government is in place or after some time. That is a decision to be taken by the top leadership in due course. I cannot say anything about the speculations that the JD(U) will insist on having two deputy CMs. Yesterday, a decision was taken only on Nishant."

Notably, Nishant is all set to formally join the JD(U) on Sunday, less than a week after his father, known to be a vociferous critic of "dynasty politics", chose to hang his boots, less than four months after having been sworn in for a fifth consecutive term in office.

Speculations are rife that the chief minister's post shall now be taken by the BJP, which is the single-largest party in the ruling NDA, and the JD(U) might insist on having two deputy CMs with the crucial Home portfolio, a complete reversal of the arrangement that is currently in place.

Of the two deputy CMs, Samrat Choudhary and Vijay Kumar Sinha, both from the BJP, the Home portfolio, in which vests the control of the state police, is held by the former.

Meanwhile, the opposition continued to fish in the NDA's troubled waters, alleging that Kumar was being "driven out of Bihar" by the BJP which was also "denying him an honourable exit".

Former chief minister and RJD leader Rabri Devi told reporters, "Nitish Kumar is not giving up his post on his own accord. He is being driven out of Bihar by the BJP. But he should resist and refuse to buckle under pressure." *(PTI)*

All senior Opposition leaders believe Uddhav's re-election to legislative council is important: Raut

MUMBAI, March 7: Forced to announce its support to Sharad Pawar for the lone winnable Rajya Sabha seat owing to coalition politics, the Shiv Sena (UBT) has now virtually staked its claim for the "sure-shot" seat the MVA can win in the legislative council polls for Uddhav Thackeray.

Thackeray is a strong opposition voice in the legislature, and it is important that he is re-elected, said Sena (UBT) MP Sanjay Raut, citing the wishes of all senior leaders of opposition parties for his re-election. Asserting that the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) can win one seat in the legislative council polls, Raut called for an unopposed contest.

With 20 MLAs, the Shiv Sena (UBT) is the largest constituent in the Maha Vikas Aghadi, followed by Congress (16 MLAs) and Sharad Pawar's NCP (SP), which has 10 members in the assembly.

"Uddhav Thackeray is a strong voice in the legislature and council. We all wish, and all senior opposition party leaders desire, that it is important that Uddhav Thackeray go to the legislature again," Raut told reporters.

He, however, emphasised that all decisions will be taken by MVA constituents unitedly at an appropriate time when the elections to the

upper house of the state legislature are announced.

MVA MLAs will not take any wrong decision, Raut added.

Elections to nine MLC seats are expected to be held in April, necessitated by the retirement of Thackeray, four legislators of the BJP and one each from Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena, NCP, Congress, and NCP (SP) .

"If one looks at the quota (of votes by MLAs who elect MLCs), we can win two seats in the council if planned properly. One seat can surely be won. The government must first agree that there should be an Opposition voice in the council," he said.

In the legislative council, the opposition can only win one seat due to its depleted numerical strength if there is a contest.

When asked whether the council polls will be held unopposed, Raut said the government is arrogant and is addicted to horse-trading.

The government is sitting on huge amounts of money earned through corruption and hawala, he alleged.

The fresh push by the Sena (UBT) for its candidate ahead of the legislative council polls can potentially ruffle the feathers of the NCP (SP) and Congress.

The Uddhav Thackeray-led party is already upset over not being able to send its nominee to the Rajya Sabha in the upcoming elections.

Given by its numerical strength in the 288-member assembly, the MVA is in the position to win only one Rajya Sabha seat, which has been allocated to NCP (SP) president Sharad Pawar.

All seven candidates are set to be elected unopposed to the Rajya Sabha. The biennial elections to the Rajya Sabha from Maharashtra are being held for seven seats. With numbers heavily stacked in favour of the ruling BJP-led Mahayuti. The last day for withdrawal of nominations is March 13.

On Saturday, Sena (UBT) MLA Aaditya Thackeray obliquely expressed disappointment over the party not getting to field its candidate for the RS polls, despite numerical supremacy. *(PTI)*

Dera Sacha Sauda chief acquitted in 2002 journalist murder case by HC

CHANDIGARH, March 7: The Punjab and Haryana High Court on Saturday acquitted Dera Sacha Sauda chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh in the 2002 murder case of a journalist, seven years after he was convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment in the case by a special CBI court. The 58-year-old Dera chief is currently lodged in Rohtak's Sunaria jail, where he is serving a 20-year jail term given in 2017 for the rape of two of his disciples. In May 2024, the High Court had overturned another special CBI court order and acquitted Ram Rahim and four others in the 2002 murder of the sect's former manager, Ranjit Singh.

Journalist Ram Chander Chhatrapati was shot outside his house in October 2002 in Haryana's Sirsa after his newspaper 'Poora Sach' published an anonymous letter narrating the alleged sexual exploitation of women followers at the Dera headquarters in Sirsa. The journalist later succumbed to injuries, and a case was registered in which Ram Rahim was named as a conspirator. The case was handed over to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) in 2006. Ram Rahim and three others were convicted by a special CBI court in Panchkula in January 2019. He had challenged the conviction before the high court. *(PTI)*

Rahul Gandhi alleges PM Modi 'betrayed' country by signing US trade deal

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, March 7: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Saturday said Prime Minister Narendra Modi has "betrayed the country" by signing a trade deal with the US, claiming it would harm farmers and small businesses in India.

He was speaking after inaugurating the valedictory function of the state-wide 'Puthuyuga Yatra' led by Leader of Opposition in the Kerala Assembly V D Satheesan.

"PM has let the country down. He betrayed the country. I believe the Prime Minister betrayed the country by signing the US deal," Gandhi said. He alleged that the consequences of the deal would be borne by ordinary people, including farmers and small business owners.

"No Prime Minister before him opened Indian agriculture to US agriculture," Gandhi said.

He claimed that large, mechanised American agricultural firms would now compete with small Indian farmers, which he said would lead to "devastation" in the country's agriculture sector.

According to him, the energy sector had been compromised and US President Donald Trump had extracted Indian data through the deal.

He alleged that Modi is controlled by President Trump. In the same way, the Kerala CM is controlled by Modi. *(PTI)*

Science and diplomacy have to work together: Switzerland-based foundation's director general

NEW DELHI, March 7: The idea behind setting up the Open Quantum Institute by Geneva Science and Diplomacy Anticipator (GESDA) along with CERN, is to make sure that when quantum computing is out in the future, it will be "accessible to all", the Switzerland-based foundation said.

GESDA's director general, Marilyne Andersen, who is currently visiting India to take part in the Raisina Dialogue here, also said that science and diplomacy have to work together, in the sense that they "influence positively" each other, or are needed by each other.

In an interview with PTI at the Swiss Embassy here on Friday, she spoke about the vision of the foundation set up in 2019, and its mission to anticipate emerging scientific discoveries and translate them into concrete actions for the benefit of society.

Andersen, trained as a physicist, has been conducting pioneering work at the interface between science and engineering, design, society and culture.

Illustrating how science and diplomacy can come together in a meaningful collaboration, she cited the establishment of CERN in the 1950s as a premier global institution for research on particle physics.

"There is an example that probably everybody knows already, which is not related to GESDA directly, but it's a partner of GESDA, CERN. CERN was born out of international cooperation, bringing all the scientists and all the science together to look at the origins of the universe and understand where humanity comes from in the broadest sense. So, this is a very strong and powerful example of a successful merge of science and diplomacy," Andersen told PTI in an interview.

She said at GESDA, they were actually currently working with CERN in the field of quantum.

"So, this is the next frontier of information encoding, which will work hand in hand with artificial intelligence, which is something that is very much talked about, and is in a very quickly rising trend as well. And quantum has this very special nature... quantum computers don't exist formally yet, but lab experiments are being run. There are industries and businesses working on quantum computing already," Andersen said.

But that means one can still work with the diplomacy sector to prepare for what this will mean for the world later, she said, and cited GESDA's motto -- "Use the Future to build the Present" -- to buttress her point.

"And this is what we incubated at GESDA in the name of the Open Quantum Institute together with CERN. It's supported by the private sector, through UBS, the Swiss bank. The idea there is to make sure that when quantum computing is out, it will be accessible to all. There will be enough effort to build the capacities to embrace it. And also that it will bring around the table all the actors that are needed," she underscored.

The embassy on Friday evening hosted an 'Anticipatory Leadership Lab' in collaboration with the GESDA and the office of the principal scientific advisor to the Government of India.

It brought together around 60 leaders from the fields of science, governance, diplomacy, business and civil society in a structured, multi-stakeholder dialogue to strengthen their collective capacity to anticipate and govern emerging scientific and technological breakthroughs, officials said.

The GESDA Science Breakthrough Radar -- an annual report that maps the research advances expected to transform society and the planet over the next five, 10 and 25 years -- was also discussed at the event.

Andersen said quantum computing as a next frontier science is highlighted in GESDA's Radar.

The Open Quantum Institute (OQI) is part of GESDA's initiative "Quantum for All". It is a multilateral governance initiative that promotes global and inclusive access to quantum computing and the development of applications for the benefit of humanity, according to the website of the foundation.

Born at GESDA and supported by UBS, the OQI is hosted at CERN for the pilot phase (2024-2026).

"Recognising the urgent need to align quantum innovation with societal impact, GESDA convened world-leading scientists, diplomats, private sector partners, and multilateral institutions to co-design the OQI. Today, GESDA's commitment continues through GESDA's strategic guidance in the institute's governance, co-chairing its Advisory Committee, and leading the diplomatic engagement," it said.

The statement also underlined that India has played a "pioneering role" as a member of the advisory committee of the OQI - GESDA's anticipatory governance initiative designed to address the societal implications of quantum technologies before they reach full maturity and widespread deployment.

Andersen said science can provide the "evidence-based foundation" for decisions to be made or for what is important to look at, either now or in the future.

"Just that we look more into what is coming next, in terms of emerging science. But for that, decisions now already also have to account for this. And this merging of the two worlds is also important, or its reverse, is that science benefits from international cooperation and from different countries working with one another, or different sectors working with one another.

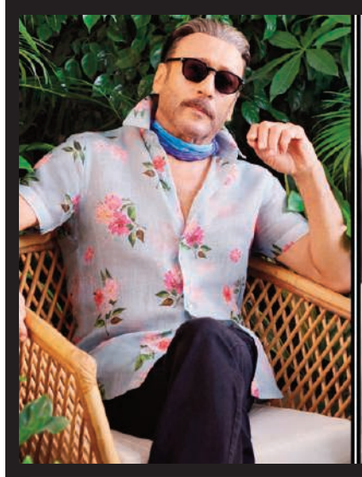
"So, it is a mutually beneficial relationship that has to sort of flourish through evidence-based grounding of policymaking," she said.

GESDA was established by the Federal Government of Switzerland, the Republic and Canton of Geneva, and the City of Geneva to ensure that Switzerland and Geneva remain a prime location for multilateralism.

Inspired by the long-standing tradition of International Geneva as a hub for diplomacy, science, and multilateral cooperation, GESDA operates at the intersection of science, diplomacy, and societal impact. *(PTI)*

Page 10 March 8_Normal Pages 07-03-2026 18:23 Page 1

Jackie Shroff remembers late Shammi on her death anniversary



Bollywood actor Jackie Shroff paid tribute to late cinema star Shammi on her eighth death anniversary.

Shroff shared a black-and-white picture of the late actor on his Instagram handle on Friday. "Remembering Shammi ji on her death anniversary," he wrote.

Shammi, whose real name was Nargis Rabadi, was known for her impeccable comic timing.

She died in March 2018 after a prolonged illness, aged 87.

She featured in over 200 films, including "Ustad Pedro", "Bhai-Bahen", "Dil Apna Aur Preet Parayi", "Half Ticket", "Jab Jab Phool Khile", "Ittefaq", "The Burning Train", "Kudrat", "Shirin Farhad Ki Toh Nikal Padi", and others.

She also acted in popular TV serials, such as "Kabhi Yeh Kabhi Woh" and "Filmi Chakkar".

Shroff's latest work is "Tu Meri Main Tera Main Tera Tu Meri", where he essayed the role of Amar Wardhan Singh.

Directed by Sameer Vidwans, the film also starred Kartik Aaryan and Ananya Panday.

It released in 2025. (PTI)

Dhurandhar 2: Ranveer Singh returns fiercer than ever in explosive spy saga

The Dhurandhar wave clearly isn't slowing down anytime soon. After the first film became one of the biggest action blockbusters of 2025, fans have been eagerly waiting to see what happens next in this gripping spy saga. And now, the excitement has hit a new high. The second trailer of Dhurandhar 2 has finally dropped, giving audiences a fiery glimpse of the next chapter in Ranveer Singh and Aditya Dhar's ambitious franchise.

Released on March 7, 2026, at exactly 11:01 am, the new trailer promises a film that is bigger, darker and even more intense than the first instalment. With powerful visuals, high-stakes drama and explosive action sequences, the sequel looks ready to expand the Dhurandhar universe in a massive way.

The original Dhurandhar, which hit theatres in December 2025, quickly became one of the most talked-about films of the year. Written, directed and co-produced by Aditya Dhar, the spy-action thriller blended geopolitics, espionage and emotional storytelling into a gripping cinematic ride. With a runtime of over three hours, it also stood out as one of the longest Indian films ever made.

The story followed an undercover Indian intelligence agent tasked with infiltrating Karachi's dangerous criminal syndicates and political networks to dismantle a terror operation targeting India. Drawing loose inspiration from several real geopolitical incidents in South Asia, the film explored covert missions and intelligence warfare while keeping audiences hooked with thrilling action.

Ranveer Singh led the film with a fierce and layered performance. The ensemble cast also included Akshaye Khanna, Sanjay Dutt, Arjun Rampal, R. Madhavan, Sara Arjun, Rakesh Bedi, Gaurav Gera and Danish Pandor. Shot across multiple locations including Punjab, Maharashtra, Chandigarh, Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh and Thailand, the film's scale and visual ambition were widely appreciated. Shashwat Sachdev's music and Vikash Nowlakha's cinematography added to the film's immersive experience.

The plot of the first film centred on a covert mission launched after terror incidents such as the 1999 IC-814 Kandahar hijacking and the 2001 Indian Parliament attack. Intelligence Director Ajay Sanyal, played by R. Madhavan, initiates a secret operation named Dhu-Ran-Dhar to infiltrate Pakistan's criminal networks from the inside.

For this mission, a young man from Punjab is recruited, Ranveer Singh's character, who adopts the identity of Hamza Ali Mazari. Slowly, he gains the trust of a powerful Baloch gang led by Rehman Dakait, played by Akshaye Khanna. Hamza eventually executes a daring plan to eliminate Rehman with the help of SP Aslam Chaudhry, portrayed by Sanjay Dutt.

The film's final moments hinted at a much bigger conspiracy. After the mission, Hamza wakes up and opens a confidential diary given by another Indian agent. He removes Rehman's name from a hit list, only to discover a far more dangerous set of targets, including ISI officer Major Iqbal and the Khanani brothers. In the closing scene, Ajay Sanyal reveals that the larger operation has only just begun.

Now, Dhurandhar 2: The Revenge is expected to pick up from that cliffhanger.

The new trailer shows Ranveer Singh returning in his dual avatars as Jaskirat Singh Rangi and Hamza Ali Mazari, suggesting that the story will dive deeper into the mystery surrounding his identity. Several questions that fans have been debating online may finally be answered. How did Jaskirat transform into Hamza? Who is the mysterious Sher-e-Baloch? And what exactly is the next stage of Mission Dhurandhar?

The sequel is also expected to expand the role of R. Madhavan's Ajay Sanyal, who will reportedly be seen training Jaskirat in espionage tactics and combat. Meanwhile, the power vacuum in Karachi after Rehman's death could lead to new battles, with Uzair Baloch preparing to take control of Lyari. Fans are also curious to see whether characters like Major Iqbal and SP Aslam Chaudhry suspect the infiltrator and whether Yaalina will eventually learn the truth about Hamza.

What's clear from the trailer is that the stakes are much higher this time. The story appears more personal, the action grander and the political intrigue deeper.

Trade experts are already optimistic about the film's prospects. The first instalment broke several box-office records in India and overseas markets, particularly in North America, Canada, the UK and Australia, and industry insiders expect the sequel to perform just as strongly.

Backed by Jio Studios and B62 Studios, the film continues Aditya Dhar's ambitious spy-action saga. Dhurandhar 2: The Revenge is set to release in cinemas worldwide on March 19, 2026, in Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam and Kannada. (Agencies)

'The Last Letter' by Maan Panu will take over your feed & your heart

Not every story gets a closure, some simply fade into memory, leaving behind a void. Emerging as one of the most promising names in India's Indie pop space, singer-songwriter Maan Panu is known for his quietly expressive songwriting and honest storytelling. His latest release 'The Last Letter' is a song that feels more like a confession, a quiet conversation with the past.

With its mellow sound and introspective lyrics, The Last Letter doesn't dramatise heartbreak. Instead, Maan leans it into the stillness that follows it, transforming the absence of closure into music that feels deeply personal and universally relatable. He voices the sentences that never found their way out, to conversations that only lived in your head and a kind of love that doesn't ask for attention but refuses to be forgotten.

Speaking his thoughts on the release, Maan Panu shares, "The Last Letter" carries the weight of endings, but also the quiet strength of new beginnings. It's about making peace with what was, and finding the courage to step into what's next. In many ways, this isn't just the last letter to someone else, it's the first letter to myself.

Even before its official release, the track had already begun to resonate with listeners. Maan's video performing the song when viral on social media, garnering nearly 10 million views before release. Since then, the hints and teasers across his social media have only deepened the anticipation, turning the track into a quiet fan favourite among his listeners.

At its core, The Last Letteris Maan's final act of love, born from the realisation that some people don't come back. Not now, not ever. And in that silence, he chose to write the closure he never received. With this release, Maan continues to carve a space for himself as an artist who creates emotional experiences, the kind that stays with you even when music fades.

Rapper apologises, Haryana Police in process of issuing lookout notice

BADSHAH SONG CONTROVERSY

Police have initiated the process to issue a Look Out Circular against rapper-musician Badshah to prevent him from leaving the country, a day after he was booked over alleged objectionable lyrics and visuals in his recently released Haryanvi music video, 'Tateeree'.

Meanwhile, Badshah uploaded a video on his official Instagram handle, apologising if anyone's sentiments were hurt by his latest song.

Panchkula police has issued a formal notice directing Badshah to appear before the police immediately. Several police teams have been constituted to ensure his arrest and are conducting continuous raids at various possible locations, the Haryana Police said in a statement on Saturday.

Considering the possibility of the accused attempting to leave the country, the process to issue a Look Out Circular (LOC) against him has been initiated, it said.

Police on Friday registered an FIR under various provisions of law based on a complaint lodged by a Panchkula resident, alleging the use of objectionable lyrics and visuals in Badshah's recently released music video.

Sections 3 and 4 of the Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986, and BNS Section 296 (obscene acts and songs) have been slapped against the rapper.

"Taking a strict stance against the spread of objectionable content on social media and in songs, Haryana Police has initiated major action against singer Aditya Prateek Singh Sisodia, popularly known as Badshah," the police statement said.

Additionally, notices have been issued to remove the video from all social media platforms, it added.

In a video message, the singer said, "My new song 'Tateeree' has been released. I am seeing that sentiments of many people of Haryana have been hurt because of the portion of lyrics and visual representation in the song. I want to say that I am from Haryana. Those who know me, my language, food and lifestyle, my identity is from Haryana. I am a proud Haryanvi."

"I never intended to say anything objectionable against any woman or child from Haryana, he said. I am from the Hip-hop genre where lyrics often show looking down on competitors. These are never for any woman or child, now will I do this," he said.

"I have always tried to take Haryanvi language and culture to take new heights. But if anyone one is hurt, I seek apology. I expect that you will forgive me by considering me the son of Haryana," Badshah said.

The Haryana State Commission for Women has also taken cognisance of the song and issued a summons to the rapper.

The police said the video depicts minor girls wearing school uniforms throwing away their school bags and appearing to run away from studies.

"The use of words such as 'Badshala' in the song has also been found to depict the school environment and education in a misleading and inappropriate manner. Furthermore, objectionable and derogatory expressions towards women and girls have also been identified in the lyrics," it said.

Police have made it clear that "if any individual is found creating or sharing reels or videos related to the controversial song and thereby promoting objectionable content, strict legal action will be taken against them as per the law".

They are also looking into if the makers of the video have taken proper approval for showing what appears to be a government school premises and a Haryana Roadways bus from the Jind depot. If required approvals were not taken, legal action will be taken, the police said.

On Friday, Haryana Education Minister Mahipal Dhanda said the government has taken cognisance of the music video.

The depiction of school girls in the song and the manner our culture is shown in it is condemnable, he said. (PTI)

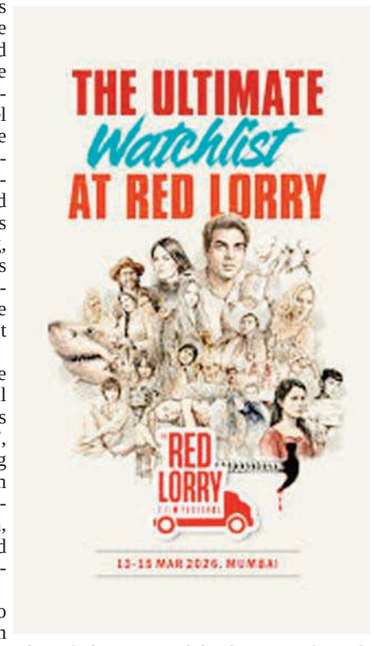
Red Lorry Film Festival to screen 12 acclaimed French films

The Red Lorry Film Festival is set to screen some of the popular French-language movies like "Case 137", "The Piano Accident", and "Nino", with an aim to celebrate their enduring power and global influence.

The three-day festival will kickstart from March 13 to 15 and will be hosted at INOX Maison, Jio World Drive Plaza, BKC, with satellite screenings at PVR ICON, PVR City Mall, PVR Dynamix, Cinepolis Fun Republic.

The line-up features some of France's most acclaimed films across genres. It includes crime-drama "Case 137", which earned multiple Cesar nominations including best film, best director for Dominik Moll, and best actress for Léa Drucker, "The Richest Woman in the World", a comedy-drama starring Isabelle Huppert.

Mathieu Bejot, Audiovisual Attache of the French Embassy in India, said they are thrilled about the movies being showcased at the Red Lorry Film Festival in India.



"French cinema has always been a bridge between cultures, and we are delighted to see these remarkable contemporary works travel to India through the Red Lorry Film Festival. This selection reflects the diversity and vitality of today's French filmmaking, from bold new auteurs to powerful human stories that resonate across borders," Bejot said in a statement.

Other films to be screened at the festival are Quentin Dupieux's "The Piano Accident", which was the opening film at Cannes Film Festival in 2025, coming-of-age drama, "Colors of Time" and "Nino", a Cesar-nominated debut.

The festival also presents deeply human stories exploring identity, love, belonging, and displacement through titles including "Pieces of a Foreign Life", (L'etrangere), "Hint of Love" (Une pointe d'amour), "You Found Me" (L'ame ideale), and "The Orphans" (Les orphelins).

Psychological tension is explored in "The Residence" (Dalloway), while historical memory and justice come into focus with "Furcy" (L'affaire de l'esclave Furcy), a powerful examination of human rights and colonial history.

Curated by BookMyShow, the festival will showcase over 120 films, featuring a mix of world premieres, restored classics, and tributes to cinematic legends.

Ashish Saksena, Festival Director, Red Lorry Film Festival and COO- Cinemas, BookMyShow, said they are grateful to the French Consulate and Alliance Française Bombay for curating the programme.

"French cinema has always balanced artistic boldness with emotional depth. This programme reflects that spirit, bringing together award winning new films, daring voices," Saksena said. (PTI)

Page 11 March 8_Normal Pages 07-03-2026 18:43 Page 1

'My coach was also saying just be extra prepared after long rallies because even he is tired'

Lakshya stuns Li Shifeng to enter All England semifinals

BIRMINGHAM, March 7: India's Lakshya Sen produced an authoritative display to storm into the semifinals of the USD 1,450,000 All England Open after defeating former champion Li Shifeng of China in straight games here.

The world No. 12 Indian, runner up at the 2022 edition, prevailed 21-13 21-16 over the world No. 6 Chinese in exactly an hour to set up a last four clash against Canada's Victor Lai, who beat Japan's Koki Watanabe 18-21 21-17 21-15 in another quarterfinal match.

It is Lakshya's third semifinals at the prestigious championships.

"Happy with the way I played both the sets and also credit to him (Shifeng), he played a really solid game. There were some long rallies, both of us were getting tired, but yeah, happy with the way I stuck in there even after the long rallies," Lakshya said.

"My coach was also saying just be extra prepared after long rallies because even he is tired, so just don't give any easy mistakes.

"I'm happy with the way I'm moving on court, and now it's time to again recover as well so that I can move well tomorrow (Saturday)."

Lakshya made a confident start, racing to a 4-1 lead and then extending it to 10-4 with aggressive, positive play as Shifeng appeared slightly tentative in his movement. The Indian held a comfortable 11-6 advantage at the mid game interval.

Although Lakshya briefly struggled to read Shifeng's powerful overhead crosscourt smashes, he still maintained control, moving ahead 15-11.

Shifeng fought back with a probing rally to narrow the gap to 13-15, but Lakshya regained momentum and stretched the lead to 18-13 with the help of a fortunate net cord.

The Indian was firmly in command through the opening game and sealed it in 24 intense minutes.

The Chinese looked sharper after the change of ends and matched Lakshya point for point early in the second game as the two moved to 6-6.

A body smash followed by a clever net disguise gave Lakshya a two point cushion, but Shifeng responded with a superb crosscourt smash and capitalised on a backline judgement error from the Indian to level at 9-9. Lakshya, however, produced another powerful smash to take a slender one point lead at the break.

Shifeng again closed the gap to 12-13 with a body smash, but Lakshya raised his intensity, covering the court with remarkable energy as he dived and retrieved repeatedly to keep rallies alive.

An exceptional defensive backhand return helped him extend the lead to 17-13. Shifeng briefly stayed alive in the contest by winning a gruelling 45 shot rally when trailing 15-19, but Lakshya soon surged to match points.

Although the Indian produced a weak return in the final exchanges, Shifeng pushed his shot long, allowing Lakshya to raise both fists in celebration after completing a commanding victory. *(PTI)*

Agarkar's three years: The art of taking tough calls beyond numbers

AHMEDABAD, March 7: When Ajit Agarkar took over as the chairman of India's senior selection committee, the circumstances were anything but routine.

His appointment followed the unceremonious exit of Chetan Sharma (caught making loose comments on a TV channel's sting operation). The transition came with the kind of scrutiny that accompanies every powerful position in Indian cricket.

Three years later, his tenure can best be described as eventful, filled with difficult calls, bold convictions and an acceptance that the role of a selector rarely fetches applause.

A selector is like a wicketkeeper.

The good catches might draw a feeble applause but a sharp drop will invite sharper criticism. There is a certain symmetry to Agarkar's journey.

Back in 2020-21, when the top selector's post had opened up, it was Chetan Sharma who had pipped him despite Agarkar being an applicant.

When the opportunity finally came his way in mid-2023, he inherited a responsibility to rebuild trust in a selection process that is constantly under public glare.

In the broader history of India's selection committees, particularly in the years following the influential tenures of Dilip Vengsarkar and Krishnamachari Srikkanth, Agarkar has arguably been among the most talked-about chairman.

That attention has come not merely from the position he holds but from the nature of decisions he has been willing to take.

Over the past three years, the Indian team has played four ICC finals (2023 ODI World Cup, 2024 T20 World Cup, 2025 Champions Trophy, 2026 T20 World Cup), winning two and losing one. It could be three wins overall if India wins on Sunday against New Zealand in the T20 World Cup final.

While the players and support staff rightfully command the spotlight for performances on the field, the selectors' role in shaping squads for global tournaments cannot be overlooked.

Agarkar's tenure has been marked by calls that demanded conviction that could withstand criticism. His bullish backing of Suryakumar Yadav as a long-term T20I captain over Hardik Pandya was one such move.

Far more sensitive was the decision to replace an extremely successful and sentimental favourite Rohit Sharma as ODI captain.

In both instances, Agarkar did not attempt to hide behind silence. He fronted up, taking the inevitable bullets that came with high-profile calls.

If statistics alone were the parameter, every cricket lover could pick their own playing eleven. But selection is rarely that straightforward.

It demands the ability to identify players, understand roles and visualise how individuals fit into a larger tactical framework. On that front, it must be said that Agarkar and his panel, earlier comprising S Sharath (now replaced by Pragyan Ojha), along with Subroto Banerjee (now replaced by RP Singh), SS Das and Ajay Ratra, have done more than a commendable job in white-ball cricket.

Call it the IPL effect, but India today possesses an enviable depth of talent.

New Zealand's Glenn Phillips remarked ahead of Sunday's final that India have enough players to field "three T20 teams".

Managing talent in abundance, at times can be way more challenging that managing the paucity of it. For a selection committee, every opportunity granted to one player inevitably means disappointment for another.

May be for Agarkar, the most crucial realisation has been that a selector cannot afford to be a people pleaser.

The role demands distance, clarity and the courage to accept that popularity cannot be the yardstick for every decision. It has not been an easy path.

One can say with certainty that Agarkar has rarely had anyone providing cover fire for the decisions he has taken.

The criticism and accompanying questions have largely come his way, and he has faced them head-on.

One of the less visible aspects of his tenure has been his insistence on maintaining the sanctity of conversations with players who have been dropped.

In an era of dressing-room whispers becoming public discourse, that discretion has mattered.

There have, of course, been questions. Some have wondered why Agarkar spends more time travelling with the national team rather than watching domestic cricket.

There have also been questions on whether his presence alongside the Indian think-tank helps in lending adds balance to decision-making that might otherwise tilt in a unilateral direction.

No tenure is without blemishes.

There could be criticism over whether Shubman Gill needed to be brought back into the T20I side for the Asia Cup, made vice-captain and then dropped later.

Yet context matters. Sanju Samson had endured a poor run of form in the preceding T20 series against England in early 2025. When decisions are made in real time, they are rarely as simple as they appear in hindsight.

Overall, the percentage of Agarkar's successful calls has far outweighed the ones that might be viewed as errors.

As the cricketing calendar moves forward, there is a strong buzz that Agarkar could move on after the T20 World Cup. Yet his tenure still has a year remaining.

For the sake of continuity, he might continue at least until the 2027 World Cup cycle to complete the full tenure.

Agarkar has shown that selection is not merely about numbers on a spreadsheet. It is about judgment, conviction and the willingness to stand alone when the call demands it. *(PTI)*

Divyansh, Khyati win 10m Air Rifle T3 finals, Anish takes 25m Rapid Fire Pistol top spot

NEW DELHI, March 7: Divyansh Singh Panwar and Khyati Chaudhary secured the top spots in the 10m Air Rifle men's and women's events respectively in the National Selection Trials 3 (Group A) here on Saturday.

Olympian Anish Bhanwala won the T3 finals of the 25m Rapid Fire Pistol event at the Dr. Karni Singh Shooting range.

In the 10m Air Rifle men's finals, Tokyo Olympian Divyansh finished on top of the eight-men final with a score of 252.5. Parth Rakesh Mane finished in second place with a final score of 251.5 while Shahu Tushar Mane took the third place with a score of 230.9.

The top spot in the women's finals was decided in an exciting shoot-off where Khyati prevailed over Mahit Sandhu after both were tied at 251.4 after the completion of 24 shots.

In the shoot-off, Khyati shot an outstanding 10.9 to secure the top spot ahead of Mahit who shot 10.2. Mehuli Ghosh took the third place with a final score of 230.1.

Earlier in men's qualification, Dhanush Srikanth qualified for the finals on top spot with a score of 633.2 followed by Mahesh Babu Bathula who shot 632.6.

The national record holder Himanshu Dhillon and Niraj Kumar shot 632.1 to qualify in third and fourth places respectively.

Parth Mane, Divyansh and Shahu qualified in the next spots after shooting 631.8, 630.6 and 630.4 respectively. National Champion Kiran Ankush Jadhav completed the top eight with a score of 630.3.

Mehuli qualified for the finals at the top spot in the women's event with a score of 633.4 followed by Sonam Uttam Maskar who scored 633.2.

Tilottama Sen qualified in third place with a score of 632.0 followed by Khyati and Mahit who shot 630.7 and 629.7 respectively.

Vidarsa K Vinod (629.4), Sakshi Sunil Padekar (629.3) and Isha Anil Taksale (629.1) completed the top eight.

Olympian Anish Bhanwala continued his dominance in the 25m Rapid Fire Pistol event securing the top spot in T3 with a score of 33 in the finals.

Rajkanwar Singh Sandhu took the second place with a score of 31 while Bhavesh Shekhawat survived a shoot-off with Vijayveer Sidhu to finish in third place with a score of 29. Vijayveer finished in fourth with 23 hits.

Bhavesh, who was leading after Stage 1 of qualification, qualified on top spot with a combined score of 583-17x followed by Rajkanwar who hit a combined score of 581-20x. Adarsh Singh qualified in third place with a score of 580-15x and Anish shot 578-15x.

Neeraj Kumar (576-16x), Vijayveer (576-15x), Omkar Singh (575-18x) and Pradeep Singh Shekhawat (575-15x) completed the top eight. *(PTI)*

War and Games: With one eye on middle-east crisis, Santner ready to break a billion hearts

AHMEDABAD, March 7: Mitchell Santner doesn't ooze intensity like some of the modern day captains do. Neither is he the quintessential 'Funny Man', whose smart one-liners would bring the house down.

But in his own inimitable way, the New Zealand captain was ready to answer every question that came his way, including the Iran-US conflict that has effectively shut down the middle-east airspace and the obvious one, like Pat Cummins in 2023, he also wouldn't mind hearing the sound of crushing hearts.

How much of a relevance does winning a T20 World Cup final when human lives are on line due to West Asia crisis?

"It's a hard one to avoid or not see because it is, you know, everywhere and it's obviously a pretty tough situation. Obviously people at the World Cup have been affected as well," Santner said, not avoiding the sensitive question as some of his contemporary international captains would.

West Indies and England teams are still held up in Kolkata and Mumbai respectively due to shutdown of Dubai airspace and Santner can feel how anxious some of the fellow cricketers from opposition countries are.

He accepted that it is difficult to just focus on a sporting finale when people are unable to go back home but that's their present job in hand.

"Guys not being able to go home. I think for us, it's, you know, it's trying to just think about what it looks like tomorrow for the game. And then, yeah, it's obviously a challenge to put that out of your mind.

"But I guess for us, it's thinking on, you know, what does tomorrow look like for us against a very, very good Indian team."

New Zealand have played five ICC finals in last 11 years and perhaps it is about time that they delete the word second that has eternally stayed ahead of the 'best' whenever they have been in a summit clash.

"We just go out there and do our thing as a unit. It's been no different this time. And again, it's going to be obviously a challenge where everyone knows we're probably not the favourites. But we don't mind. But yeah, I wouldn't mind breaking a few hearts to lift the trophy for once," he said matter-of-factly, the smile refusing to leave his face.

He didn't for once try to be politically correct by saying that it is just another game.

"It's easy to say it's just another game, but everyone knows it's probably not. The way you go about it has to be the same, whether it's your preparation, what that looks like on the day, leading up to the game."

T20 cricket is all about moments and he would want his men to seize them.

"It always comes down to a couple of moments, especially in T20 cricket, where if you can squeeze the opposition or take the advantage through there. I think we saw the other night."

The word ruthless might not be associated with New Zealand but on Sunday, Santner won't mind being tough on opposition.

"If you can be very consistent in the way you approach the game, with bearing a couple of moments where you could potentially be a little bit more ruthless," he said.

"But I don't think you have to reinvent the wheel," he added. *(PTI)*

Pranavi rises to tied fifth, Diksha is Tied-14th in Australia

MAGENTA SHORES (AUSTRALIA), March 7: Pranavi Urs (70) dropped a double bogey near the end on the 17th hole but managed to stay in the top-5 after three rounds of the Australian Women's Classic.

Pranavi with 72-66-70 was 8-under and tied fifth, as Kelsey Bennett took a one-shot lead into the final round of the Australian Women's Classic after carding 66-68-70 to move to 12-under par and maintain her slender advantage.

Diksha Dagar (69) recovered from her second round 73 to get to 5-under and was Tied-14th with one round to go.

The other two Indians, Avani Prashanth and Hitaashee Bakshi had missed the cut.

Pranavi birdied the second but dropped shots on the fourth and the fifth. She recovered from that with birdies on the eighth and the ninth and turned in 1-under. On the back nine she was doing great with birdies on the 11th, 13th and the 15th before she hit a double bogey on the 17th. Diksha bogeyed the fifth and the sixth and was in trouble but she rallied strongly with birdies on the eighth and the ninth. Three more birdies on the back nine took her to 3-under for the round and 5-under total.

Playing alongside Thailand's Trichat Cheenglab and England's Meghan MacLaren at Magenta Shores, Bennett got off to an excellent start with a birdie on the par-5 first and maintained the tempo.*(PTI)*

Shubhankar Sharma makes cut in weather affected Joburg Open

JOHANNESBURG, March 7: Shubhankar Sharma struggled to a 2-over 72 and found himself at T-48 after two rounds, but good enough for the Indian to make cut here at the Joburg Open.

Sharma earlier shot a round of 4-under 66 on the first day.

The second round saw play being suspended due to lighting as several players were unable to finish their second round. Sharma made the cut which fell at 1-under par.

On the first day Sharma was 4-under par through 14 holes with play being suspended due to darkness. Once play resumed the 29-year-old closed the first round with four straight pars.

Sharma began the second round on the back nine and had an early double bogey on the 15th before making three consecutive birdies on the back nine of the course.

On the front nine Sharma had consecutive bogeys on the second and third holes to drop two strokes before dropping another stroke with a bogey on the ninth hole to finish the day at 2-over par.

Brandon Robinson Thompson moved into sole lead with a 36 hole score of 12-under par.

Thompson carded 4-under 66 in his first round. In his second round he made four birdies in the first five holes before closing the front nine with his only bogey of the day on the ninth.

The 33 year old Englishman started the back nine with consecutive birdies on the 10th and 11th holes before gaining another two strokes with an eagle on the 13th hole and a late birdie on the 17th to equal the course record on a day where weather played spoilsport.

First day leader Luke Brown slipped down the order to T-5.

Brown had a score of 7-under par after 12 holes on the first day.

When play resumed on the second day Brown dropped three strokes in his last six holes to card 4-under 66 in his first round.

In his second round Brown carded 3-under 67 to find himself at T-5 with a two day total of 7-under par. The second round by Brown included four birdies and one bogey. *(PTI)*

Page 12 March 8 (GHY)_Normal Pages 07-03-2026 22:08 Page 1

Mix of Rugby and Soccer: Ahead of final, Black Caps relax playing 'Donny Ball'

AHMEDABAD, March 7: The days of warm-up exercises have long been a passe in international cricket and teams now play games ranging from soccer to foot volley before getting down to the real part -- the skills training.

Ahead of New Zealand's high-profile T20 World Cup final against hosts and firm favourites India, the Black Caps also had a unique fun activity game ahead of the net session which involved country's national sport Rugby and also soccer.

It also had a quirky name attached to it -- "Donny Ball" -- coined after team's strength and conditioning coach Chris Donaldson, who introduced it to the players. So the game has three sets of team -- five player each, who would be confined in a square made up of fielding cones.

Each team will have one rugby ball and one soccer ball (football). One player each from teams would simultaneously kick the rugby ball and soccer ball on half-volley randomly towards any of the other two teams.

If the player fumbles or drops while catching the rugby and the football, he will have to leave the court. In the end the team that has the maximum number of players standing on court is the winner.

"Yep, it's rugby and soccer ball to be caught on the full without fumbling. It's called 'Donny Ball' named after Chris Donaldson, our strength and conditioning coach," a member of NZ support staff informed PTI.

While the support staff termed it as a "fun warm-up game", the exercise is also meant to improve both concentration and reflexes at the same time.

The New Zealand players did seem relaxed despite training under scorching afternoon Sun. Once the 40-minute session was over, the net session started with full intensity.

Skipper Mitchell Santner was seen bowling at the nets for a long time along with off-spinner Glenn Phillips. *(PTI)*

India eye women's hockey WC berth under returning coach Marijne

HYDERABAD, March 7: Under a new but familiar coach in Sjoerd Marijne, India will aim to secure a coveted berth at the upcoming FIH Women's Hockey World Cup when they open their campaign against Uruguay in the Qualifiers here on Sunday.

The tournament will feature eight teams -- hosts India, England, Scotland, Korea, Italy, Uruguay, Wales and Austria -- competing for three coveted qualification spots for the global showpiece.

At stake will be three direct World Cup berths, with the teams finishing first, second and third in the tournament earning direct qualification for the 2026 edition to be hosted jointly by Belgium and the Netherlands from August 14 to 30 alongside the men's event.

It will be Marijne's first assignment back as head coach, as the Dutchman returns for the second time since leaving the position after the team's historic fourth-place finish at the Tokyo Olympics in 2021.

India are currently ranked ninth in the world and are the second-highest ranked team in the tournament behind England, who are ranked seventh globally.

"We are really excited to play the qualifiers at home in front of our fans. The team has been preparing very hard for this tournament because we know what is at stake. Every team here is competing for a place in the World Cup, so we expect tough matches from the start," India captain Salima Tete said.

Going by world rankings, India start as favourites against Uruguay and if not for a bad day in office, they are certain to win.

After Uruguay, India will take on Scotland and Wales on March 9 and 11 respectively.

Meanwhile in other matches of the day, England will play Italy, Korea will be up against Austria and Scotland against Wales.

In the qualifiers, the teams are divided into two pools, with England, Korea, Italy, and Austria in Pool A, while hosts India, Scotland, Uruguay, and Wales form Pool B.

The top two teams from each pool will progress to the semifinals. The winners of both semifinals and the bronze medal match will secure automatic qualification for the World Cup. Additionally, the highest world-ranked team finishing fourth in this tournament will also earn a place at the World Cup.

The upcoming World Cup will feature 16 teams in both the men's and women's competitions, with nine teams in each category already having secured qualification.

India have played in eight editions of the Women's World Cup so far and are targeting their ninth appearance. Their best finish came in the inaugural edition of the tournament in 1974, when they finished fourth. *(PTI)*

Taiwan beats Vietnam 1-0 in Women's Asian Cup match

PERTH, March 7: Taiwan defeated Vietnam 1-0 on Saturday to move into second place in Group C at the Women's Asian Cup with one match remaining. Su Yu-hsuan scored the decisive goal in the 26th minute after Saki Matsunaga's shot hit the crossbar, leaving Su to nod the rebound into an empty net for the team which won the last of its three Asian Cup titles in 1981.

It was a deserved victory for Taiwan, 2-0 losers to Japan on Wednesday, which created several chances to extend its lead.

Vietnam, the 2022 quarterfinalist, beat India in its opener but struggled to threaten the Taiwan defense and failed to record a shot on target. Thi Duyen Tran came closest with a first-half chance that went wide from inside the area.

Both teams now have three points from two games. Taiwan sits ahead of Vietnam and behind Japan, which faced India later Saturday. India is still seeking its first point in the tournament.

Record attendance continues Australian organizers said Saturday that the tournament had sold 250,000 tickets. The milestone follows the tournament already breaking the all-time total attendance record, with 92,795 fans at the first 10 matches. That surpassed the previous record of 59,910 for the 2010 edition in China.

State of playThe top two teams in each of the three groups advance to the quarterfinals along with the two best third-place teams.

In Group A, Australia, which beat Iran 4-0 on Thursday, and South Korea have already qualified. Australia and South Korea will meet in Sydney on Sunday to determine top spot in the group, where another record crowd is expected. *(AP)*

Bumrah is in everyone's conversation and Varun hasn't become bad overnight: Santner

AHMEDABAD, March 7: It is impossible that a bowler of Jasprit Bumrah's calibre won't feature in strategic discussions New Zealand will have ahead of the T20 World Cup final against India, skipper Mitchell Santner said on Saturday.

Bumrah has been in prime form in the ongoing T20 World Cup and his death overs bowling against a rampaging England in the semi-final has become a stuff of legends.

"Bumrah, yeah, I think he should be in everyone's conversation, the way he has been going. Against England, he looked pretty hard to hit. And he was obviously the game changer for India the other night," Santner said when asked about what kind of conversations the think-tank is having with regard to Bumrah.

But Santner said with a word of caution that focussing only on

Bumrah would be foolish as a lot of Indian players have individually turned up on particular days during the campaign.

"We knew that was (Bumrah performing) always going to be the case. He's obviously a world-class bowler. But, you know, not just him, everyone has stepped up at different times. And as a team, that's where you want to be," the Black Caps skipper said.

Varun Chakravarthy has had a poor tournament by his standards but Santner feels it could be the big finale where the Tamil Nadu man might rediscover his mystery.

So will there by a psychological advantage with Chakravarthy not in his element?

"No, I don't think so," Santner denied the assumption categorically.

"We have all seen how good he is. And I think the challenge for any bowler is when pitch is flat compared to how it looks like when it's spinning or seaming.

"But when it is flat, I think, everyone can go for 60 on such a day. I think he's got to know that he is still a very good bowler. You should know that you are only one game away from changing the tide."

While Santner hasn't had a look at the strip, he presumed that it would be flat and high-scoring.

"Yeah, I mean, I haven't had a look at the wicket yet. It is still under cover. But one can only assume it's going to be pretty flat and high scoring," the skipper said.

Against England, India smashed their way to 253/7 on a Wankhede shirtfront but Santner's idea is to restrict them to 220 if they want to make a match of it.

"And at the end of the day, if it's going to be flat, like it was the other night, trying to restrict India to 220 instead of 250, it might give us a good chance," the skipper said. *(PTI)*

'Mystery' continues over Varun's spot in playing XI even

AHMEDABAD, March 7: India captain Suryakumar Yadav on Saturday brushed aside any concerns about the form of Varun Chakravarthy, but the intrigue over the mystery spinner's spot in the playing XI for the T20 World Cup final against New Zealand refused to die down on the eve of the summit clash here.

With Kuldeep Yadav waiting in the wings, the team's final combination remains a talking point even as the skipper insisted that there was no anxiety within the camp regarding Chakravarthy's returns in the tournament.

"There are no concerns regarding Varun's form. We have won the match due to collective effort and once you have won a match, you shouldn't overthink," Suryakumar replied to a query if there is a worry about the spinner going for plenty in recent games.

"If you have 11 players, not everyone will perform on each day. There will be ups and downs and there are others to cover for that person.

"I have no worries about Varun as he is a World No. 1 bowler, he knows how to raise his game on big occasions and win it for his team, and I am sure he will definitely win the final for us," Suryakumar talked up his colleague like any captain would do.

But at the training session, there was no definitive way of confirming that Chakravarthy could take his place for granted.

At the training session here, Chakravarthy kept largely to himself. The Tamil Nadu spinner did some single-wicket bowling with bowling coach Morne Morkel watching closely from behind the nets.

All this while, Suryakumar, head coach Gautam Gambhir and chairman of selectors Ajit Agarkar were engaged in a chat a short distance away, standing on the match strip.

After a while, Chakravarthy walked back and quietly sat on a blue ice box, observing the proceedings as Kuldeep and Tilak Varma took turns bowling in the adjacent net.

The intrigue surrounding his spot continues as Chakravarthy has gone at nearly nine runs per over in the competition -- 8.85 to be precise -- including being smashed for 64 runs against England in one of the games. *(PTI)*

'No point being father figure, just allow freedom of expression'

AHMEDABAD, March 7: It took Suryakumar Yadav roughly six months into his India captaincy to understand that trying to be a "father figure" or "elder brother" to younger members of the team won't work.

The Mumbai man realised that the only thing which would work is allowing a free-flowing exchange of ideas, freedom of expression and letting every flower bloom in its own way.

With liberal help from coach Gautam Gambhir, who believes that 7-ball-21s should be celebrated as much as a hundred, Surya decided that while he would "follow the footsteps of Rohit Sharma", the "shoes will be his own". *(PTI)*

All India Inter-University Sepak Takraw Championship

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 7: The All India Inter-University Sepak Takraw National Championship (Men & Women) 2025–26 at Assam University, Silchar was successfully inaugurated on Friday at the Indoor Stadium.

Prof Rajive Mohan Pant, Honourable Vice Chancellor of Assam University, Dr Pradosh Kiran Nath, Registrar of Assam University and Dr Bishnu Ram Nunisa, General Secretary of the Assam Sepak Takraw Association, among others, addressed the gathering during the inauguration programme. The Women's Championship is being held from 6–9 March 2026, followed by the Men's Championship from 11–14 March 2026.

Wishing the organisers and all participating athletes the very best for a successful championship.

England, SA, WI to leave India on ICC charter flights over weekend

NEW DELHI, March 7: England, South Africa and West Indies are set to depart India over the weekend on chartered flights arranged by the ICC following disruption to commercial air travel due to the ongoing conflict involving US, Israel and Iran.

A source told PTI that England, who went down to India in the second semifinal on Thursday, are expected to leave from Mumbai on Saturday evening on a direct flight to London.

West Indies and South Africa are the other two teams still in the country despite their campaigns having ended.

While the Windies were knocked out of the T20 World Cup after India defeated them by five wickets at the Eden Gardens on Sunday, South Africa's campaign ended after their defeat to New Zealand here in the first semifinal on Wednesday.

Both South Africa and West Indies will travel together from Kolkata on a another charter flight.

The two sides are likely to fly first to Johannesburg before the West Indies contingent continues onward to Antigua.

The exact departure time is yet to be confirmed but the flight is expected to leave on Sunday.

A section of the South African group, including members of the team management along with players Keshav Maharaj, Jason Smith and George Linde, will head to New Zealand on Sunday for a limited overs tour beginning on March 15.

The Cricket West Indies had on Thursday confirmed that arrangements were being made for a charter flight to take the team back home after they remained stuck in the city for more than four days due to international airspace restrictions in the Gulf region.

"During a high-level call earlier today involving CWI, ICC officials, a representative of team management, and a representative of the players, it was confirmed that a charter flight is currently being arranged for the team's departure from India, with the expected departure scheduled within the next 24 hours," CWI had said in a statement.

"The departure time remains subject to final air traffic approvals. The team remains safe and well as arrangements continue to be finalized," the governing body had added.

The CWI said it had been in constant touch with the players, team management and the International Cricket Council while working on travel arrangements.

"While the situation remains complex and fluid due to international airspace restrictions arising from security concerns in the Gulf region, CWI assures the public that every precaution is being taken to ensure the safe return of the team to the Caribbean," the board had said. The development had come hours after West Indies head coach Daren Sammy voiced his frustration over the delay on social media in a post that he "just wanna go home".

Following the arrangement he had posted "Got an update. That's all WI wanted." *(PTI)*

Chokers tag should be handed over to NZ if they falter in T20WC final: Steyn

NEW DELHI, March 7: South Africa pace great Dale Steyn says New Zealand would deserve to inherit the unwanted "chokers" tag if they fail to beat hosts India in the T20 World Cup final in Ahmedabad on Sunday, saying it would be nearly impossible for the Kiwis to topple the home side..

New Zealand have entered the summit clash for the second time in the T20 World Cup history by beating favourites and perennial "chokers" South Africa in the first semifinal at the Eden Gardens in Kolkata.

India beat England by seven runs in a high-scoring second semifinal at Mumbai on Thursday.

Steyn said New Zealand have made it to the final of the World Cups more than the Proteas, and if they come short on Sunday the chokers tag should be handed over to them.

New Zealand played the finals of the 2019 50-over World Cup, 2021 T20 World Cup and the 2025 Champions Trophy, and came up short on all three occasions.

"Let's be honest here. Everyone likes to call South Africa chokers, but I am going to say it. New Zealand haven't won many World Cups themselves, and they have been in more finals than we have. So, no offence, New Zealand, but please go on to win this," said Steyn in a chat with AB de Villiers on the latter's YouTube channel. *(PTI)*

Printed, published and owned by Rameswar Chauhan & Printed at Echo Printing Press, Printing unit of The Echo of India, AK Deb Road, Katabari, Gorchuk, Guwahati- 781035 and Published at Rabha Complex, 2nd Floor, Rukmini Gaon, Opp.- Pantaloons, Guwahati-781022, Guwahati Office Phone - 0361 2220018, Diphu Office Phone - 272106, Fax- 272106, e.mail: hillstimes@gmail.com, thehillstimesnamsai@gmail.com and ads.hillstimes@gmail.com (only for advertisement)
Associate Editor- Nilomoni Borah **Editor - Rameswar Chauhan**