

6 NATION  
7 NORTHEAST



- Modi accuses TMC of opposing SIR to shield infiltrators
- BJP to fight 2027 Punjab polls to form own govt: Shah
- Manipur CM felicitates outstanding NCC cadets
- Conspiracy hatched to break Tipra Motha Party: Pradyot Debbarma

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PUBLISHED SIMULTANEOUSLY FROM GUWAHATI & DIPHU

Vol .No. III Issue No. 8 RNI-ASSEN/2023/86488 GUWAHATI, SUNDAY, MARCH 15, 2026 PAGES 8 PRICE ₹ 8



GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM

Public Works (Roads) Department



# RUDRA

## ROAD USER DEFECT REPORTING APPLICATION

### AI Integrated Pothole Reporting App

- An innovative digital platform designed to streamline the reporting of potholes
- The application leverages Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Geographic Information System (GIS) technologies to ensure that potholes are identified accurately and forwarded to PWD (Roads) for repair
- Citizens can download the app in mobile phone
- Real-time case status visibility is available for citizens

Launch by

**Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma**

Chief Minister, Assam

15 March 2026 | Time : 6:30 PM

Venue : Media Conference Hall, Lok Sewa Bhawan, Dispur



## Coal price spikes; anti-hoarding raids in UP, K'natka LPG 'crunch' eats into country's eateries' business

**NEW DELHI, March 14:** Eateries have cut their menus, increased prices, while many have moved to coal to surmount the LPG crisis, even as two Indian ships carrying the domestic gas from the Gulf countries crossed the Strait of Hormuz early on Saturday morning.

LPG carriers Shivalik and Nanda Devi are now headed to Mundra and Kandla ports in Gujarat, Rajesh Kumar Sinha, Special Secretary in the Ministry of Shipping, told a media briefing.

The vessels are carrying 92,700 tonnes of LPG, he said, adding Shivalik is likely to reach Mundra on March 16, and Nanda Devi is likely to dock at Kandla the next day.

The West Asia conflict has impacted the supply of crude oil and petroleum products, following the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, a narrow water passage between Iran and Oman.

In Delhi, large corporate gatherings and group parties are now taking a backseat in restaurant calendars, as eateries scale back menus and bookings amid the crunch.

Restaurant owners, particularly in Connaught Place, one of the city's busiest dining hubs, said that preparing food for large tables requires significant gas usage, prompting many establishments to temporarily halt big party bookings while focusing on regular diners.

Paramjeet Kaur, owner of Flavours of China, said the restaurant has scaled back certain offerings and limited group bookings to manage LPG consumption.

"We have had to make a few adjustments to manage the situation. For instance, we are currently not



offering sizzlers as they require continuous and high flame usage. We have also trimmed our menu and are focusing only on basic dishes that can be prepared with limited gas consumption," she said.

State authorities cracked down on hoarding and booked several people.

The Karnataka Food and Civil Supplies Department seized 316 domestic LPG cylinders allegedly being used for commercial purposes.

A case was registered against a gas agency shop in KGF, Kolar district, which was conducting illegal refilling of gas cylinders, a state authority said.

Uttar Pradesh's Food and Civil Supplies Department conducted raids at 1,483 locations here and arrested six people in an operation to check black marketing of cooking gas.

The raids were conducted on Friday, leading to the registration of 24 FIRs.

LPG distribution centres in

Kolkata and several districts of West Bengal witnessed large queues at the doors of gas agencies.

In Kolkata, the Enforcement Branch teams inspected at least 25 centres, including those in Lake Gardens and Jodhpur Park, to verify gas stock.

Kamarhati Municipal Councillor Bimal Saha distributed cold drink cakes to people standing in queues outside LPG dealerships, in what he termed a symbolic protest against the "shortage of cylinders."

Several restaurants and eateries have reduced meal options on the menu, with many switching to wood and charcoal-based cooking.

A section of autorickshaws running on LPG was also off the roads and in the adjacent districts, owing to "irregular supply" at the filling stations.

Hotels and restaurants operating in Chennai and parts of Tamil Nadu have commenced using alternative methods to keep the business running.

A top official of a city-based

popular restaurant chain told PTI. "We have moved to using induction stoves. Most of our branches are using this facility now, as we have adequate infrastructure to prepare the food on the induction stoves."

In Bhopal, the Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) urged the Madhya Pradesh government to immediately restore a limited supply of commercial LPG cylinders to prevent the "complete shut-down" of the hospitality and food service sector.

The traders' body warned that if the supply is not restored within days, the entire hospitality sector in the state capital could face closure.

In Kerala, the gas crunch has triggered an exodus of migrant workers to their native places, as Ramzan approaches and elections loom in West Bengal and Assam.

The Tamil Nadu government has announced a subsidy of ₹ 2 per unit of electricity for restaurants, hotels and tea shops that switch to electric stoves.

"This subsidy will remain in effect as long as the commercial LPG usage restrictions announced by the Centre are in place," Additional Chief Secretary J Radhakrishnan said. In Rajasthan, there is a surge in demand for coal, with several dhabas and small eateries switching to traditional coal-fired "bhattis".

"The demand has certainly increased in the last three to four days in the wake of the shortage of commercial cylinders. Dhabas and restaurants in the walled city are the main buyers right now," Deepak Khandelwal, a coal trader in the city, said. (PTI)

## Two more Indian ships safely cross Strait of Hormuz, 22 others on standby

**NEW DELHI, March 14:** Two Indian ships carrying LPG from the Gulf countries crossed the Strait of Hormuz early on Saturday morning, raising the number of Indian vessels safely passing through the war-hit, narrow shipping lane to three.

The remaining 22 ships on the west side of the strait are on standby as the Indian government engages with governments in the region for ensuring their safe passage.

LPG carriers Shivalik and Nanda Devi are now headed to Mundra and Kandla ports in Gujarat, Rajesh Kumar Sinha, Special Secretary in the Ministry of Shipping, told a media briefing.

The vessels are carrying 92,700 tonnes of LPG, he said adding Shivalik is likely to reach Mundra on March 16 and Nanda Devi is likely to dock at Kandla the next day.

Besides the safe passage being an

important milestone for Indian diplomacy, the cargo they are carrying is considered critical as shipping constraints had impacted cooking gas LPG supplies.

India imports 60 per cent of its LPG needs, with 85-90 per cent of this being sourced from Gulf countries like Saudi Arabia and the UAE who use the Strait of Hormuz as transit for shipping oil and gas to users. The strait has been effectively closed since the first week of March. The two ships were among the 24 stranded on the west side of the strait since the war broke out in the region.

Besides, four others were stranded on the east side. One of them, an India-flagged oil tanker, Jag Prakash, carrying gasoline from Oman to Africa, crossed the war-hit strait on Friday.

Sinha said of the 22 remaining India-flagged vessels on the west

side, six are LPG vessels, one is a liquefied natural gas (LNG) carrier, four are crude oil tankers, one is carrying chemical products, three are container ships and two are bulk carriers. Of the remaining, one is a dredger and another is empty, holding no cargo. Three others are on dry docks, meaning on routine maintenance.

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

"Several of our ships remain on standby in the Gulf region. We propose to continue to remain in touch and coordinate with all the concerned countries to ensure a safe and unimpeded transit for them in our effort to ensure our energy security," MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said at the briefing. (PTI)

## Amazon Air expands to NE, delivery speeds to become 5X faster

**GUWAHATI, March 14:** Amazon announced the expansion of Amazon Air to Northeast India with new air cargo routes connecting Kolkata and Guwahati, further strengthening its logistics infrastructure and connectivity across the region. The addition of dedicated air capacity will significantly improve delivery speed and reliability, enabling customers across the Northeast to access Amazon's vast selection of products with faster and more consistent delivery.

The service will support deliveries across all seven sister states — Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura — through Amazon's integrated air and surface transportation network. By combining dedicated air capacity with its multimodal logistics infrastructure, Amazon expects to reduce transit times and increase delivery speeds by up to five times, bringing customers across the region faster access to a wide selection of products — from everyday essentials to smartphones, consumer electronics, fashion & beauty and more. The inaugural Amazon Air flight to Guwahati was flagged off from the Indira Gandhi International Airport, New Delhi, by Shri Ram Mohan Naidu Kinjarapu, Hon'ble Minister of Civil Aviation, Government of India, alongside Abhinav Singh, Vice President — Operations, India and Australia, Amazon and Chetan Krishnaswamy, VP Public Policy, Amazon India.

"With Hon'ble Prime Minister Narendra Modi Ji's priority focus on the Northeast through the vision of 'Act East, Act Fast, Act First', infrastructure and connectivity in the North-Eastern region have grown manifold. Today, every state in the North-East has an airport and the number of operational airports has increased from 9 in 2014 to 16 today. Given the North East's immense potential in horticulture and cargo exports, today's launch of Amazon Air's cargo route from Delhi to Guwahati will further support the farmers, artisans and entrepreneurs of the North-East. The Government has also taken several significant interventions to encourage air cargo growth in the country. In Budget

2026, special emphasis has been placed on building air cargo infrastructure and warehousing capacity to strengthen logistics for perishable and high-value products. Additionally, the value cap on courier exports has been removed which will help boost cross-border e-commerce. And I congratulate Amazon for adding to air freight network of the country with today's milestone launch," said Ram Mohan Naidu Kinjarapu, Hon'ble Minister of Civil Aviation.

"Enhanced logistics connectivity plays a crucial role in empowering local entrepreneurs and expanding market access for businesses, and employment across the Northeast. For sellers in the region, the introduction of Amazon Air services to Guwahati will enable enterprises to connect with customers nationwide. Improved fulfillment speeds will allow businesses to reach a wider customer base and participate more meaningfully in India's rapidly growing digital economy, while also bringing the benefits of faster and more reliable deliveries to customers and communities across Assam and the wider Northeast region. Such advancements in logistics infrastructure are also expected to generate substantial employment opportunities for local youth. It is hoped that the operationalization of Amazon Air services will further contribute to job creation and support the overall economic growth of the region," said Dr. Ravi Kota, IAS, Chief Secretary, Assam.

"Since launching Amazon in 2013, we have consistently invested in building one of India's largest logistics networks to serve customers wherever they live. The expansion of Amazon Air to the Northeast is a natural progression of those investments and reflects our long-term commitment to strengthening connectivity across the country. It also aligns with the Government's focus on improving logistics infrastructure and unlocking economic opportunity in the region. For customers, this means access to Amazon's vast selection at 5x better speeds than before, while sellers and entrepreneurs in the Northeast can now reach customers across India faster and more reliably," said Abhinav Singh, VP — Operations, India and Australia, Amazon.

Contd. from Page 1...

## Discussion on BJP's Assam

"After the government programme, the Union home minister will go to the Veterinary College Playground in Khanapara to attend the youth convention of the Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha (BJYM)," Maral said. Shah will address the youths to motivate them to work for the nation and society, he added.

"Preparations were reviewed for the 'Yuva Shakti Samaroh' to be addressed tomorrow by Hon'ble Union Home Minister @AmitShah Ji, with 1 lakh+ youths set to participate. A major step towards a Viksit and Aatmanirbhar Assam," Assam BJP president Dilip Saikia said on X. An official said that after the youth convention, Shah will leave the state. The Assam assembly elections for 126 constituencies are expected to take place in April, and the BJP-led coalition is looking for a third consecutive term in power. This will be the first assembly election after the delimitation exercise, which was done in 2023.

The event will also be graced by the presence of Tejasvi Surya, along with the Chief Minister and the state BJP chief. According to Rakesh Das, all necessary arrangements for the grand event have already been completed. (With inputs from PTI)

## PM allays fear of global conflict

Modi said connectivity is being developed in the Barak Valley to link it to other parts of the Northeast and West Bengal. "It will be developed as a big logistics and trade hub of the region," he said, noting that Barak Valley is also at the centre of the government's Act East Policy and will be a bridge connecting India with Southeast Asia.

The PM alleged that Congress misguided Assam's youth into paths of violence and terrorism, while the BJP has ensured the state becomes a place of unlimited opportunities where they can reach for the sky. "Where Congress stops thinking, we start working," he said, noting that the BJP's mantra is to give priority to those left behind in development. "Assam's youth have immense opportunities in the semiconductor and technology sectors. The current era of peace and progress has been achieved through immense sacrifices, which must be protected from regressive forces," he said.

Modi said education, skill development, and healthcare have become the primary pillars of the government's development thrust.

Assam is rapidly emerging as a health hub, with AIIMS and cancer hospitals now forming a strong network, he said.

The PM said that during the Congress rule, the border villages were considered the "last villages", but his government views them as the nation's "first villages".

"The second phase of the Vibrant Village Program has begun from the Cachar district and is already bringing visible improvements to border areas. The historical neglect of these areas is now being replaced by proactive development and strategic focus," he said. The PM said the state government has performed a "historical duty" by granting land rights to thousands of families of tea garden workers.

"Granting of land rights is not only a legal security that ensures dignity, but will now also allow these families to access central schemes for housing, electricity, and water," he said. Referring to former PM Manmohan Singh, Modi said he represented Assam for 10 years but did not give a single paisa to the farmers of the state, whereas the BJP has given them more than Rs 20,000 crore.

"The region's journey of progress is now unstoppable, supported by its rich language and culture. The development projects inaugurated today are just the beginning of a new era for the Barak Valley," he said. At the programme, the PM took part in the 'bhoomi puja' for the Rs 22,864-crore access-controlled expressway between Silchar in Cachar district and Shillong in Meghalaya, the first of its kind in the Northeast.

The 166-km four-lane greenfield high-speed corridor will reduce the distance between Guwahati and Silchar from 295 km to 252 km, cutting travel time from 8.5 hours to around 5 hours, officials said. Modi also took part in the 'bhoomi puja' for an elevated corridor on NH-306, from Trunk Road near Capital Point to Rangrikhari Point in Silchar, which will be constructed at Rs 565 crore. (PTI)

## 'Historic day' for Barak Valley

The central government has addressed the long-standing grievances of the people of Barak Valley, who once felt neglected, the chief minister said.

"The government now carries out development initiatives across all regions, including the Barak Valley, the Brahmaputra Valley, and the hill and plain areas, with equal attention," he said. He said that the construction of the flyover from Trunk Road near Capital Point to Rangrikhari Point on National Highway 306 in Silchar, at Rs 565 crore, will ease the city's long-standing traffic congestion.

A new medical college has been planned for the Barak Valley, while a super specialty block at Silchar Medical College remains under construction. The government has also taken steps to establish an agricultural college at Patharkandi in Sribhumi district for Rs 122 crore. He said that with the inauguration of the Assam Secretariat for the Barak Valley, the pace of development in the region will be further expedited.

"For far too long, a diverse state like Assam concentrated decision-making and development in Guwahati. This has, however, changed and over the last five years, one of my key priorities has been to end this mindset in letter and spirit," he said. A new secretariat and legislative complex is coming up in Dibrugarh, while a new secretariat in Silchar was inaugurated on Saturday, he said.

"These are not mere buildings but strong statements of intent. Through a series of reforms, we have delegated a lot of executive functions to the district administration and created co-districts, which ends the archaic practice of people travelling to the nearest district headquarters to seek government services," he said. (PTI)

## Former ABSU chief Dipen Boro

and encouragement", Boro said. "His joining will further strengthen our collective resolve to work for peace, progress, unity & integrity in BTR. My best wishes to him as he begins this new journey of public service with UPPL", Pramod Boro said.

## State Cong clears air on pamphlets

the timing of the police action, saying the "charge sheet" had been made public last month, and it was surprising that action was initiated much later if the contents were objectionable.

The Assam Congress had accused the state government of corruption, using administrative machinery to intimidate minorities and alleged that the chief minister and his close associates amassed significant wealth — allegations rejected by the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party. State Congress president Gaurav Gogoi criticised the arrests made earlier this week, alleging that the BJP government was trying to prevent the opposition from taking its charges against the government to the people. (PTI)

## Drukair to resume Bangkok

It will offer greater flexibility, improved schedule options and more efficient connections for both inbound and outbound travellers, it added.

Commenting on the expansion, chief executive officer of Drukair, Tandi Wangchuk, said, "The introduction of a third weekly service to Singapore and the reinstatement of our Bangkok flights via Guwahati represent a significant step in Drukair's ongoing network expansion strategy."

The expansion aligns with the government of India's 'Act East Policy' as well as provides support to the travel requirements of Gelephu Mindfulness City (GMC) project in southern Bhutan, adjacent to Assam, he said. Wangchuk stressed that enhanced connectivity is vital to supporting tourism growth, facilitating business and educational exchanges, and strengthening Bhutan's engagement with international markets. (PTI)

## AAU gets new VC in

Award, Reviewer Excellence Award, and the Sardar Patel Best ICAR Research Institute Award. A prolific researcher, Prof. Rajkhowa has published 196 research papers, 17 books, and 41 book chapters. He has contributed significantly to strategic policy documents such as Vision 2030 and Vision 2050 for the North-East under ICAR NEH, as well as Technology Vision 2047 for the food and agriculture sector, priorities for North-east India. Professor Rajkhowa has made notable contributions to agricultural innovation, including the development of three climate-resilient rice varieties, four integrated farming system models, organic crop production packages, climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies, and integrated weed management techniques. He also played a pioneering role in developing and popularising vermicomposting technology across the North-east region.

## Rare plant species rediscovered

Henckelia generally have erect or slightly creeping stems and simple leaves that may be ovate or lance-shaped. The plants produce axillary inflorescences bearing one or several tubular or funnel-shaped flowers, often with delicate colouration. Their fruits develop as elongated capsules containing numerous tiny seeds, enabling them to reproduce effectively in suitable ecological niches.

Botanists say such findings underline the need for continued field surveys and conservation efforts in Arunachal Pradesh, which is regarded as one of India's richest biodiversity hotspots.

Chief Minister Pema Khandu congratulated the scientists on the rediscovery.

"Delighted to learn about the remarkable rediscovery of Henckelia monophylla, a rare plant species endemic to Arunachal Pradesh, after nearly 189 years. My heartfelt congratulations to the team from the Botanical Survey of India for this significant scientific achievement," the chief minister said in a post on X.

He said the rediscovery from Lohit district highlights the extraordinary biodiversity of the state.

"Such findings not only add to global botanical knowledge but also remind us of the ecological treasures our state holds," Khandu said. (PTI)

## Freedom for Sonam Wangchuk

during an agitation by the Leh Apex Body and the Kargil Democratic Alliance for statehood to Ladakh and its inclusion under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution, leaving four people dead.

The activist was kept in Jodhpur Central Jail, where he had already undergone nearly half of the detention period stipulated under the Act, according to a statement issued by the Centre announcing the decision to revoke his detention "with immediate effect". (PTI)

## Higher education should have

modern technologies such as AI, robotics, coding, and data science into academic curricula.

AI-enabled digital platforms, virtual labs, and smart classrooms, he said, can help students in remote areas access quality education, while reminding them to use AI as a learning aid rather than a substitute for critical thinking. He also advised institutions to nurture entrepreneurship and build strong start-up ecosystems through innovation hubs, incubation centres, and start-up laboratories, enabling students to become job creators.

Sectors like eco-tourism, agri-technology, handicrafts, and digital services, he noted, hold great promise for the state and align with the national vision of Aatmanirbhar Bharat and Viksit Bharat. (PTI)

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Due to persistent default by the Borrowers in making repayment of the outstanding dues as per agreed loan terms, the below loan accounts are in delinquent status. The Bank has issued multiple notices to these Borrowers, including the final sale notice on the below-mentioned date whereby, Bank had invoked the pledge and provided 7 days' time to the Borrower to repay the entire outstanding dues in the below accounts, failing which, Bank would be at liberty to sell the pledged securities without issuing further notice in this regard. The Borrowers have neglected and failed to make due repayments, therefore, Bank in exercise of its rights under the loan agreement as a pledgee has decided to sell / dispose off the Securities on or after **21<sup>st</sup> March 2026** for recovering the dues owed by the Borrowers to the Bank. The Borrowers are, also, notified that, if at any time, the value of the pledged securities falls further due to volatility in the stock market to create further deficiency in the margin requirement then Bank shall at its discretion sell the pledged security within one (1) calendar day, without any further notice in this regard. The Borrower(s) shall remain liable to the Bank for repayment of any remaining outstanding amount, post adjustment of the proceeds from sale of pledged securities.

Sr. No.	Loan Account Number	Borrower's Name	Outstanding Amount as on 10 <sup>th</sup> Mar. 2026	Date of Sale Notice
1	XXXXXXXXXX5949	L H THANGI MANNEN	38,02,754.82	07-03-2026

DATE: 14.03.2026  
PLACE: NAGALAND  
Sd/-  
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Sr. No.	Loan Account Number	Borrower's Name	Outstanding Amount as on 10 <sup>th</sup> March 2026	Date of Sale Notice
1	XXXXXXXXXX3793	RHEMBOR G SAIBON	9,97,176.78	07-03-2026
2	XXXXXXXXXX9802	SANTOSH KR TIWARI	40,454.00	07-03-2026
3	XXXXXXXXXX5943	IMRAN HUSSAIN	2,14,602.40	07-03-2026
4	XXXXXXXXXX9836	SANTOSH KUMAR RAY	93,837.59	07-03-2026

Date: 14.03.2026 | Place: MEGHALAYA  
Sd/-  
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SUNDAY, MARCH 15, 2026

THE HILLS TIMES 3

Projects worth ₹ 23,550 crore unveiled in Silchar • 'Bhoomi poojan' of access-controlled expressway between Silchar and Shillong performed

## PM allays fear of global conflict impact, attacks Cong

SILCHAR, March 14: Asserting that the Centre was working to minimise the impacts of global conflicts on the people, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday alleged that the Congress was acting "irresponsibly" by trying to create panic in the country.

Addressing a public meeting in Assam's Silchar after unveiling projects worth over ₹ 23,550 crore, Modi alleged that the Congress had ignored the development of the Northeast for decades, and allowed a drawing of the border during Independence that cut off Barak Valley's access to the sea.

"As the world is facing wars, our effort is to minimise their impact on the people of the country. The Congress should have performed the role of a responsible political party, but it failed to do so. It is trying to create panic among the people," he alleged.

"They do not have any vision either for Assam or the nation, but only know how to abuse Modi, spread rumours, lies, and create false reels to mislead people," he claimed. Modi also took on the Congress over its shrill protest at the AI Impact Summit in Delhi last month, accusing the party of defaming the nation. "The entire world is interested in AI, and the



successful summit in Delhi was attended by global leaders, tech companies and their heads. But, the Congress tried to embarrass the country by indulging in a 'kapda phar' (tearing of clothes) exhibition," he said. Modi said the entire country condemned "this vulgar protest, but the 'royal family of the Congress' is 'patting themselves on the back'". "Congress is left with nothing but to tear its own

clothes," he added. Alleging that the Congress engages in activities against the nation's interest, the PM said it can never ensure the welfare of the people of any state. "Congress is losing one election after another, and in the near future, the party will hit a century of its losses. The despair of its losses has led it to open a front against the nation, and its leaders are busy de-

faming the country," he said. Modi alleged that the Congress kept the Northeast away from both "dil (heart) and Delhi", ensuring that development did not reach the region's people, leaving them mired in violence and backwardness. "Just as the Congress left the Northeast on its own, in a similar way, it played a major role in weakening the Barak Valley. When India became Independent, Con-

gress allowed a border to be drawn that cut off Barak Valley's access to the sea," he alleged. "Barak Valley, once known as an industrial centre, was stripped of its very strength. For decades after Independence, Congress governments remained in power, yet the region saw little development. Today, the BJP government is working to change that," he added. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

### Corridor from Srirampur to Guwahati on the anvil 'Historic day' for Barak Valley: Himanta

SILCHAR, March 14: After Prime Minister Narendra Modi unveiled development projects valued at ₹ 23,552 crore for the Barak valley in Assam on Saturday, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said that it was a "historic day" for both the region and the state.

Speaking on the occasion, Sarma said that the Silchar-Guwahati corridor from Mawlyngkhung near Umiam in Meghalaya to Panchgram will reduce the distance between Guwahati and Silchar from 295 km to 252 km and cut travel time from the present 8.5 hours to about 5 hours.

The chief minister said that no one had demanded this road, but after learning that the existing route from Silchar to Guwahati via Haflong often faces disruptions for various reasons, Prime Minister Modi initiated the construction of this new high-speed

corridor. He said that in just one year, Assam received major projects, including the Silchar-Guwahati corridor involving a financial outlay of Rs 22,864 crore now, and the earlier announced tunnel road cum rail project under the Brahmaputra river to be built at an estimated cost of Rs 20,000 crore.

"The state had never received such large projects in the past, and this has become possible due to the Prime Minister," he said.

The government has also planned a corridor from Srirampur to Guwahati with the aim of ensuring seamless travel from Silchar to Siliguri in West Bengal within 10 hours, Sarma said.

The state government has already received environmental clearance for the construction of the greenfield Doloo Airport near here, and work on the airport will begin very soon, he said. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

### Former ABSU chief Dipen Boro joins UPPL

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, March 14: Former president of the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) Dipen Boro, former president of Dularai Bodo Harimu Afad (DBHA) Bijay Nelson Daimary formally joined the UPPL at a programme held at Udalguri town on Saturday.

Boro, joined UPPL along with more than 800 followers and supporters amidst the presence of UPPL chief, Rajya Sabha MP and former CEM of Bodoland Territorial Region, Pramod Boro. Remarkably, Dipen Boro resigned from the presidential post of the students' union on Friday after a 25-year-long journey. He devoted his services towards the welfare and development of the Bodo community.

UPPL chief Pramod Boro accorded warm welcome and felicitation to Dipen Boro in the joining program. Dipen Boro said that he would devote himself towards the welfare and ushering of social integration amongst the citizens in the region.

"I witnessed an ocean of people standing with me during my joining moment in UPPL. I express my heartfelt gratitude to each and every one who came forward with love, blessings," (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

### State Cong clears air on pamphlets

4 Cong workers held for carrying 'provocative' pamphlets against CM

GUWAHATI, March 14: Four Assam Congress workers have been arrested for allegedly possessing and transporting "provocative and inflammatory" pamphlets containing allegations against Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, with the opposition party questioning the charges and calling the action undemocratic.

According to police, the accused were found in possession of posters and pamphlets meant for mass distribution that allegedly contained "provocative, inflammatory and scandalous allegations" under the headline 'Chargesheet against the Chief Minister', which could disturb public tranquillity and the electoral atmosphere.

The Congress asserted that the pamphlets contained allegations that were part of a 20-point "charge sheet" released on February 19 by the party's Assam unit ahead of the assembly election.

Police said the four were taken into custody after a vehicle carrying a large quantity of printed

leaflets was intercepted in the Rukminigaon area here. They are currently in judicial custody.

Several provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, including Section 152, which deals with acts or speech that endanger India's sovereignty, unity, and integrity, have been invoked in the case, as per the arrest notices served to the accused. PTI is in possession of a copy of the notice.

The police said the arrests were made to ascertain the source of printing and financing of the material, as well as the distribution network involved.

Responding to the development, state Congress media department chairman Bedabrata Bora questioned the charges and asserted that criticism of a chief minister could not be equated with anti-national activity. "The pamphlets in question were part of the 20-point charge sheet unveiled by Priyanka Gandhi Vadra," Bora said. He also questioned (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

### Discussion on BJP's Assam poll strategy on agenda

Amit Shah arrives in Guwahati for two-day Assam visit • PMCH in Kalapahar to be inaugurated today

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 14: Ahead of the Assam assembly elections, Union Home Minister Amit Shah arrived here on Saturday for a two-day visit to the state, during which he will attend an official function and address a rally of the BJP's youth wing.

Shah was received by Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and other senior officials at the Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport here.

"I extend a warm welcome to Adarniya @AmitShah ji to the land of Maa Kamakhya. Adarniya Griha Mantri ji will dedicate various developmental projects and entuse our Yuva Shakti with his words of wisdom," Sarma said in a post on X.

Shah will spend the night at the Kainadhara State Guest House in the city, a party functionary said.

"He is likely to meet the top leadership of the party and discuss the strategies for the upcoming Assam assembly polls. There is nothing scheduled, but we look forward to his guidance," BJP Assam Media Relation Convenor Dhruvajyoti Maral told a news agency. On Sunday morning, Shah will inaugurate the Pragjyotishpur Medical College and Hospital (PMCH) in the Kalapahar area.



The Pragjyotishpur Medical College and Hospital has two campuses -- one at Panbazar and the other at Kalapahar.

It will be the second such institute in the state capital after Gauhati Medical College

and Hospital. The Mahendra Mohan Choudhury Hospital (MMCH) at Panbazar and the Kalapahar TB Hospital have been upgraded and made the two sites of the PMCH. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

### AAU gets new VC in Prof Dipjyoti Rajkhowa



HT Correspondent

JORHAT, March 14: Internationally renowned agricultural scientist Professor Dipjyoti Rajkhowa has assumed charge as the new Vice-Chancellor of Assam Agricultural University. The appointment was made by the Governor of Assam and Chancellor of the university, Lakshman Prasad Acharya.

Following the appointment, Professor Rajkhowa officially joined the university on Friday. With over 35 years of experience in teaching, research, extension, and administration, Professor Rajkhowa will serve as the 14th Vice-Chancellor of the university. He completed his BSc (Agriculture), MSc, and PhD from Assam Agricultural University and later served there in various academic positions including Assistant Professor, Senior Sci-

entist, and Professor. Subsequently, he joined the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) and worked at its Research Complex for the North Eastern Hill Region in Umiam, Meghalaya as Chief Scientist and Head of the Natural Resource Management Division. He later served as Joint Director of ICAR's Nagaland Centre.

Professor Rajkhowa has received numerous prestigious recognitions, including the Gold Medal from the Indian Society of Agronomy, and fellowships from organisations such as the Indian Society of Weed Science and the Indian Association of Hill Farming. He has also been honoured with several awards including Distinguished Scientist Award, Best Research Paper Award, Best Centre Award, Centre of Excellence (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

### Freedom for Sonam Wangchuk after 6 months

NEW DELHI/JODHPUR/LEH, March 14: Incarcerated for nearly six months, activist Sonam Wangchuk was released from Jodhpur Central Jail on Saturday afternoon, hours after the Union Government announced its decision to revoke his detention under the National Security Act, a move welcomed by political parties and agitating Ladakh outfits.

Wangchuk, 59, was detained on September 26 last year under the stringent NSA on an order issued by the Leh district magistrate, two days after violent protests erupted (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

### Higher education should have clear, purposeful vision: Arunachal Guv

ITANAGAR, March 14: Arunachal Pradesh Governor Lt Gen KT Panikar (Retd) on Saturday said that higher education must progress with a clear and purposeful vision.

In his address during the inaugural session of the 23rd Conference of Higher and Technical Education at Itanagar, Panikar urged universities to promote innovation, research, and creativity, encouraging students and faculty to develop solutions to regional challenges such as sustainable agriculture, biodiversity conservation, disaster management, and border area development. He emphasised focused research in areas relevant to the state, including Himalayan ecology, renewable energy, and indigenous knowledge systems. Stating that technology is the biggest enabler, the governor highlighted the need to integrate (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

### Rare plant species rediscovered in Arunachal after 189 years

ITANAGAR, March 14: Scientists from the Botanical Survey of India have rediscovered a rare plant species endemic to Arunachal Pradesh nearly 189 years after it was last recorded during a field survey in Lohit district, officials said on Saturday.

The species, Henckelia monophylla, had not been documented since the early 19th century, making the finding a significant addition to botanical records of the Eastern Himalayas.

Belonging to the Gesneriaceae family, Henckelia monophylla is a perennial herbaceous plant usually found in humid forest environments. Species of the genus (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



Frequency on Singapore route via Guwahati to be increased

### Drukair to resume Bangkok flights

GUWAHATI, March 14: Bhutan's national carrier Drukair has announced the resumption of flights from Paro to Bangkok via Guwahati, along with the introduction of a third weekly service on its Singapore route through the northeastern city from next month.

The services are expected to boost regional air connectivity and reflect the airline's ongoing network expansion strategy, a statement said on Saturday.

"The reintroduction of twice-weekly flights to Bangkok via Guwahati restores an important regional link that has historically played a significant role in facilitating tourism, medical travel, education and business exchanges among Bhutan, the northeastern states of India, and Thailand," it said. The expanded flight services will operate on the Paro-Guwahati-Singapore and Paro-Guwahati-Bangkok sectors from April.

The additional Singapore frequency is introduced in response to sustained growth in passenger demand and reflects Drukair's strategic focus on expanding access to key international gateways, the statement said. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

# Namghar: Lifeline of Faith, Culture, and Unity

*The Namghar also served as a moral compass for village communities, guiding social behaviour and maintaining harmony among people. In many parts of rural Assam, it traditionally functioned as an informal yet respected forum for resolving disputes and addressing social conflicts. When disagreements arose between families or individuals, the matter was often brought before the Namghar, where elders and community members gathered to deliberate and seek a fair resolution. The moral authority associated with the Namghar made its decisions highly respected. People believed that speaking falsehoods or concealing the truth within such a sacred environment was a serious moral offense. As a result, individuals were often willing to acknowledge their mistakes and accept the judgment of the community. The objective of such deliberations was not merely to punish wrongdoing but to restore peace and strengthen relationships within the community. Through dialogue, reconciliation, and collective understanding, the Namghar played a vital role in preserving social stability and mutual trust among villagers*

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

Within the cultural and social landscape of Assam, few institutions hold as deep and enduring a significance as the Namghar. It is not merely a place of religious gathering but a living symbol of the collective spirit, identity, and moral consciousness of the Assamese people. Established during the medieval period by the great saint-scholar and reformer, the Namghar emerged as a revolutionary institution that sought to unite society through faith, equality, and shared responsibility. At a time when social life in the Indian subcontinent was burdened by rigid caste divisions, ritualistic complexities, and social discrimination, Sankardev envisioned a space where people from all walks of life could come together in devotion and dialogue. The Namghar thus became not only a centre of spiritual practice but also a powerful instrument of social reform and community building, eventually evolving into one of the most vital pillars of Assamese civilization.

From the very beginning, the Namghar embodied the ideals of inclusiveness and equality. Unlike many traditional religious spaces that restricted participation based on caste or status, the Namghar welcomed everyone without discrimination. Within its sacred premises, the distinctions that often divided society were deliberately set aside. Farmers, artisans, scholars, and labourers all gathered on the same floor to participate in prayers, discussions, and community decisions. This sense of equality fostered a powerful spirit of unity among villagers and helped cultivate a culture of mutual respect and cooperation. The people, commonly referred to as the "Rajji," played a central role in the functioning of the Namghar. Decisions concerning community welfare, social conduct, and collective responsibilities were often discussed openly within its walls, where every individual had the opportunity to express opinions and contribute to the collective wisdom of the group. Such practices reflected a form of grassroots democracy that had existed in Assamese society for centuries, long before modern democratic institutions became widely recognized.

The Namghar also served as a moral compass for village communities, guiding social behaviour and maintaining harmony among people. In many parts of rural Assam, it traditionally functioned as an informal yet respected forum for resolving disputes and addressing social conflicts. When disagreements arose between families or individuals, the matter was often brought before the Namghar, where elders and community members gathered to deliberate and seek a fair resolution. The moral authority associated with the Namghar made its decisions highly respected. People believed that speaking falsehoods or concealing the truth within such a sacred environment was a serious moral offense. As a result, individuals were often willing to acknowledge their mistakes and accept the judgment of the community. The objective of such deliberations was not merely to punish wrongdoing but to restore peace and strengthen relationships within the community. Through dialogue, reconciliation, and collective understanding, the Namghar played a vital role in preserving social stability and mutual trust among villagers.

Beyond its social and ethical influence, the Namghar has long been a vibrant centre of cultural creativity and artistic expression. The cultural traditions associated with Assamese Vaishnavism flourished within the atmosphere of the Namghar, giving rise to some of the most distinctive forms of Assamese performing arts.



*The Namghar has also become an important platform for women's participation in social and cultural life. While earlier social conditions sometimes limited women's public roles, contemporary Namghars increasingly provide opportunities for women to contribute actively to devotional singing, community discussions, and cultural activities. Women's groups associated with Namghars often organize gatherings, social initiatives, and awareness campaigns addressing issues such as alcohol abuse, gambling, and environmental protection. Through such initiatives, women have emerged as important voices in community development and social reform. The Namghar thus continues to evolve as a space where diverse members of society can participate and express their perspectives*

Devotional music known as Borgeet, dramatic performances such as Bhaona, and the rhythmic traditions of Gayan-Bayan developed and thrived under its influence. These artistic expressions were not simply forms of entertainment but powerful mediums for communicating spiritual teachings and moral values. Through storytelling, music, and performance, philosophical ideas were presented in ways that were accessible and engaging for the entire community. The Namghar therefore functioned as both a cultural academy and a stage where artistic

talent could flourish while reinforcing shared beliefs and traditions.

The aesthetic dimension of the Namghar tradition is also evident in its architecture and craftsmanship. Many Namghars are constructed with a simplicity that reflects humility and devotion, yet they often display remarkable artistic detail. Intricate wooden carvings, traditional paintings, and carefully designed interiors reveal the creativity and skill of local artisans. The preparation of masks, costumes, and musical instruments used in Bhaona performances has

also become an important craft tradition sustained by communities associated with the Namghar. In several regions of Assam, these artistic practices have evolved into cottage industries that support local livelihoods while preserving cultural heritage. Through these activities, the Namghar not only safeguards

artistic traditions but also contributes to the economic vitality of rural communities.

Another important dimension of the Namghar's influence lies in its role as a centre of economic cooperation and social solidarity. In village life, the Namghar often acts as a focal point for collective assistance and mutual support. Community members frequently contribute resources such as grain, money, or voluntary labour through the Namghar to support those in need. These contributions are used to help families facing financial difficulties, assist with community events, or provide aid during emergencies. In times of natural disasters such as floods or droughts, the Namghar frequently becomes a gathering place where villagers organize relief efforts and extend support to affected families. Such practices reinforce a culture of generosity and compassion within the community, ensuring that no individual feels isolated during times of hardship. By encouraging collective responsibility and shared resources, the Namghar strengthens social bonds and promotes a sense of belonging among people.

The influence of the Namghar is equally profound in shaping the mental and emotional well-being of individuals. In the fast-paced and often stressful conditions of modern life, people frequently experience feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and disconnection. The Namghar provides a refuge from such pressures, offering an atmosphere of spiritual calm and communal warmth. The sound of devotional hymns, the rhythmic resonance of traditional instruments, and the quiet moments of collective prayer create a deeply soothing environment. Participating in Naam-Kirtan or devotional gatherings allows individuals to experience a sense of unity and inner peace. The shared expression of faith often helps people release emotional burdens and regain psychological balance. In this sense, the Namghar functions as a form of community-based healing, where spiritual practice and social interaction combine to nurture emotional resilience and collective well-being.

Education and moral instruction have also been integral aspects of the Namghar tradition. In earlier times, when formal educational institutions were scarce in rural areas, the Namghar served as an informal centre of learning. Reli-

gious texts such as the Bhagavata and other devotional literature were regularly recited and interpreted, allowing community members to gain insights into philosophy, ethics, and human values. Even those who lacked formal literacy could acquire knowledge through listening to these explanations and participating in discussions. Over time, such interactions enriched the intellectual life of villages and helped cultivate thoughtful, informed individuals. Children who grew up participating in Namghar activities absorbed important lessons about discipline, humility, respect for elders, and compassion toward others. These values, transmitted through everyday participation in community life, played a crucial role in shaping the character of generations of Assamese people.

In recent decades, the Namghar has also become an important platform for women's participation in social and cultural life. While earlier social conditions sometimes limited women's public roles, contemporary Namghars increasingly provide opportunities for women to contribute actively to devotional singing, community discussions, and cultural activities. Women's groups associated with Namghars often organize gatherings, social initiatives, and awareness campaigns addressing issues such as alcohol abuse, gambling, and environmental protection. Through such initiatives, women have emerged as important voices in community development and social reform. The Namghar thus continues to evolve as a space where diverse members of society can participate and express their perspectives.

Despite its enduring importance, the Namghar also faces challenges in the contemporary world. Rapid urbanization, technological change, and shifting lifestyles have sometimes weakened the connection between younger generations and traditional institutions. Many young people today are less familiar with the deeper philosophical and social significance of the Namghar, viewing it primarily as a place for occasional religious gatherings. This changing perception poses a challenge for communities seeking to preserve the rich legacy associated



with the institution. In some cases, internal disputes or political influences surrounding the management of Namghars have also created tensions that undermine the spirit of unity they were meant to promote. Addressing such challenges requires renewed commitment from communities to uphold the principles of harmony, humility, and shared responsibility that form the foundation of the Namghar tradition.

Another issue concerns the modernization of Namghar structures. In several places, elaborate buildings have been constructed with the intention of enhancing the institution's physical appearance. While such developments may improve facilities, they sometimes risk overshadowing the simplicity and spiritual focus that traditionally defined the Namghar environment. The true strength of the Namghar lies not in architectural grandeur but in the sincerity of devotion and the sense of community that it nurtures. Preserving this balance between tradition and modernization is essential to ensuring that the institution continues to serve its original purpose.

Even in the face of these challenges, the Namghar remains a powerful symbol of unity, faith, and cultural continuity. Its enduring influence reflects the remarkable vision of Sankardev, who understood that spiritual practice could serve as a foundation for social harmony and ethical living. By bringing people together in shared devotion and dialogue, the Namghar nurtures a collective identity that transcends differences of wealth, status, or background. It reminds society that genuine progress cannot be achieved without compassion, cooperation, and moral responsibility.

In the broader context of Assamese history and culture, the Namghar stands as one of the most significant institutions ever created. Its impact extends far beyond religion, touching the spheres of social organization, artistic creativity, education, and community welfare. Through centuries of transformation and change, it has remained a beacon of unity and a guardian of cultural heritage. As long as the values it represents—faith, equality, and collective harmony—continue to inspire people, the Namghar will remain an enduring lifeline for Assamese society, guiding it toward a future rooted in shared humanity and cultural pride.



# Cooking Gas Crisis and India's New Black Market

By: Satyabrata Borah

A quiet shortage can sometimes reveal more about a system than a loud crisis. Gas cylinders sitting in kitchens across India rarely attract attention until they become difficult to find. Cooking gas is one of those everyday necessities that quietly supports the rhythm of life. Families cook breakfast before work and school. Street vendors prepare snacks. Restaurants feed crowds. Small eateries provide meals to workers who cannot cook at home. When the supply of LPG begins to tighten, the disruption spreads quickly through households, businesses, and entire neighbourhoods.

Official announcements continue to say that there is no shortage of LPG. Government records may show that supply is being managed and that cylinders are reaching consumers. Still, stories from the ground tell a different story. In many places people are whispering about cylinders being sold at twice the official price. The moment something essential begins to sell for double its price, it signals that a black market has quietly appeared. Such markets rarely appear without a reason. They usually grow when the gap between demand and legal supply becomes large enough to invite middlemen.

The present situation has been shaped by restrictions on LPG supply to commercial kitchens. Restaurants, roadside eateries, tea stalls, catering services, and small food businesses have suddenly found their access to cooking gas reduced. From the government's perspective the decision carries a clear logic. Energy supplies have been shaken by tensions around the Strait of Hormuz, one of the world's most critical routes for oil and gas shipments. India imports a large share of its energy needs, and any disruption in shipping lanes creates uncertainty. When supply looks uncertain, the first instinct of policymakers is to protect essential domestic consumption. Families must be able to cook their daily meals.

The reasoning sounds sensible. Households depend on LPG for daily survival. A family cannot easily replace cooking gas with another fuel in a modern city apartment. A shortage inside homes could create panic. So the state has tried to make sure that domestic consumers continue receiving their cylinders. That decision has pushed a different part of the economy into trouble.

Commercial kitchens feed millions of people every single day. The small restaurant that serves lunch to office workers is as important to urban life as the stove inside a family kitchen. Street vendors who sell breakfast items in the early morning provide food to workers heading to construction sites or factories. Many students and migrant workers depend entirely on these small eateries for their daily meals. When gas supply to commercial kitchens slows down, their ability to cook slows down as well.

These kitchens also employ lakhs of people. Waiters, cooks, helpers, cleaners, delivery work-



ers, and suppliers all depend on these businesses. A restaurant cannot operate without cooking gas. Electric cooking equipment cannot replace large LPG burners easily in many setups. So when legal gas supply becomes limited, owners begin searching for alternatives.

That search often leads to informal channels. Cylinders that were meant for domestic use slowly begin to find their way into commercial kitchens. Agents, transporters, and middlemen step into the gap. A cylinder that officially costs a certain price suddenly costs double in the shadows of the market. People know it is illegal. They also know they have little choice if their business depends on that cylinder.

This is how a black market grows. It does not start with a dramatic announcement. It begins quietly with one or two transactions. A restaurant owner pays extra to secure a cylinder because the kitchen must remain open. Word spreads that cylinders are available if someone is willing to pay more. Soon a network of unofficial suppliers begins moving cylinders around cities.

Administrators understand this pattern well. India has lived through shortages before. Many people still remember stories from the 1970s and 1980s when waiting lists defined everyday life. Families applied for LPG connections and waited years. Parents often booked connections for their daughters when they were born so that the connection would arrive by the time the daughter got married. The same happened with scooters. Booking a Bajaj scooter meant entering a queue that stretched for years.

That era also saw rationing of

many daily goods. Rice, sugar, kerosene, and cooking oil were often controlled and distributed through ration shops. The prices were fixed and supply was limited. People knew that the same goods could be found outside the ration system at higher prices. Everyone understood that a parallel market existed. It was an open secret across the country.

India slowly moved away from that environment after economic reforms. Markets opened. Supply chains expanded. Waiting lists for basic goods disappeared. LPG connections became widely available. Scooters and motorcycles filled showrooms. Younger generations grew up in a country where shortages of essential consumer goods were rare.

That is why the present situation feels unusual. The year is 2026. India has one of the world's largest economies. Technology connects markets faster than ever. Online ordering systems track deliveries. A country with such infrastructure should not easily slip into the conditions that once defined the 1970s.

Part of the answer lies in the sudden shock to global supply. When shipping routes face threats or disruptions, energy markets react quickly. Gas shipments may slow down. Import contracts become uncertain. Governments respond by protecting domestic reserves. This explains why policymakers feel the need to ration supply between domestic and commercial consumers.

Another part of the story lies in the structure of the market itself. When supply is limited and the government fixes prices for certain groups of consumers, the system creates opportunities for unofficial trade. Commercial kitchens still need gas. Their demand does not disappear just be-

cause supply has been reduced. When legal channels cannot meet that demand, the demand moves underground.

Economists often describe markets in simple terms. When supply falls and demand remains strong, prices rise. Higher prices encourage suppliers to bring more goods into the market. The price eventually stabilizes when supply and demand reach a balance. A free market allows that adjustment to happen naturally.

A government cannot always allow such adjustments for essential goods. Cooking gas touches the lives of poor households. If the price of a cylinder suddenly increases by four hundred or five hundred rupees, millions of families would struggle. A government must consider the political and social consequences of such a decision.

So the state keeps domestic LPG prices relatively controlled. That decision protects households. It also creates a price gap between the official price and the value of the cylinder in the market where supply is scarce. The gap attracts middlemen.

A middleman who sells a cylinder illegally takes a risk. Authorities monitor distributors and agencies. Penalties for diversion of domestic cylinders are strict. Licenses can be cancelled. Fines can be heavy. Criminal cases may follow. Because the work is risky, the middleman adds a risk premium to the price.

The customer paying for that cylinder ends up paying a high amount. The price includes the official cost, the scarcity premium created by limited supply, and the risk premium charged by those handling illegal distribution. The result is a cylinder that costs far more in the black market than it might cost in an open

market where prices adjust freely.

This creates an ironic situation. Efforts to suppress illegal trade can sometimes increase its profitability. When enforcement becomes strict, the risk for middlemen increases. They respond by charging even higher prices. The black market becomes more expensive but does not disappear because demand remains strong.

Authorities face a difficult choice. If they ignore the black market, illegal trade could become normalized. Distributors might quietly divert cylinders knowing that enforcement is weak. Consumers would gradually accept higher unofficial prices as a normal part of the system.

If authorities crack down aggressively, prices in the black market could rise even more as risk increases. Small restaurants would struggle to survive if they must pay extremely high prices for gas. Workers in those businesses would suffer. Customers who rely on affordable meals would also feel the impact.

The situation calls for careful management rather than simple enforcement. The first step is to increase the supply of LPG as quickly as possible. India already imports a large share of its cooking gas. Government companies can explore additional suppliers and accelerate purchases from global markets. Strategic reserves may also play a role in stabilizing supply during temporary disruptions.

The second step involves a difficult conversation about pricing. Cooking gas is not diesel or petrol in terms of its influence on inflation. A moderate increase in LPG prices would not ripple through transport costs the way diesel prices do. A small price ad-

justment may help reduce the gap between official prices and black market prices. When that gap narrows, the incentive for illegal trade also weakens.

Price adjustments can also help public sector oil companies recover costs. Higher revenue allows them to purchase additional supplies from global markets. That money returns to the energy system rather than flowing into the pockets of middlemen.

Transparency can serve as a powerful tool as well. Many modern industries use digital dashboards to track inventory and supply in real time. Gas agencies could adopt similar systems. If every distributor shows current stock levels online, consumers and regulators gain a clear view of the supply situation. Suspicious patterns become easier to identify.

Public access to such information can build trust. A restaurant owner checking an online dashboard could see which nearby agencies have available cylinders. Regulators could monitor sudden drops in inventory that suggest diversion. Technology cannot eliminate every illegal activity. It can make the system more visible and accountable.

Auditing distributors also becomes important. Random inspections and digital tracking of cylinder movement can reduce diversion. Each cylinder already carries identification numbers. Linking those numbers with delivery records creates a trail that investigators can follow if irregularities appear.

The goal is not to punish distributors who are trying to manage a difficult supply situation. The goal is to protect the integrity of the system so that cylinders reach the consumers they are meant for. Honest dis-

tributors also benefit from such measures because they no longer compete with illegal operators who exploit shortages.

Public communication plays a role as well. When people understand why supply is tight and what steps are being taken to address the issue, panic reduces. Silence creates rumours. Rumours encourage hoarding. Hoarding makes shortages look worse than they actually are.

Restaurants and small food businesses should also be part of the conversation. Policymakers often divide consumers into domestic and commercial categories. Real life is more complex. A street food vendor feeding hundreds of workers each day provides a service that is deeply connected to social welfare. Policymakers must consider how such businesses can continue operating during supply disruptions.

Temporary support measures may help. Limited allocations for small commercial kitchens or priority supply for community kitchens could prevent large disruptions in food services. Such policies acknowledge that cooking gas supports not only households but also an entire ecosystem of livelihoods.

India's economic history shows that markets function best when supply flows freely and information flows openly. The country has moved a long way from the shortage economy of earlier decades. Shelves are full in most markets. Delivery services bring goods to doorsteps within hours. The current LPG tension reminds us how quickly supply disruptions can revive old patterns.

Energy security will remain a central challenge for any country that imports large quantities of fuel. Global politics, shipping routes, and market fluctuations all influence availability. Strengthening domestic storage capacity, diversifying import sources, and encouraging alternative energy technologies can reduce vulnerability over time.

For now the immediate challenge is to keep kitchens running across the country. A cylinder sitting quietly in a kitchen corner may appear ordinary. It carries the ability to cook meals, run businesses, and sustain livelihoods. When supply becomes uncertain, the effects travel through every layer of society.

A thoughtful response from policymakers can prevent the situation from sliding into a full scale shortage economy. Increasing supply, adjusting prices carefully, strengthening transparency, and supporting small food businesses can restore balance. The goal is simple. Cooking gas should remain available through legal channels at prices people can understand and afford.

When that balance returns, the quiet rhythm of everyday cooking will continue without interruption. Families will light their stoves each morning. Restaurants will open their doors to customers. Street vendors will prepare meals that keep cities moving. And the shadow of a black market will fade back into memory where it belongs.

## LPG shortage has started affecting people across Indian States, cities

By: Dr. Gyan Pathak

Though the government of India has assured that there are enough oil and gas resources in the country, and there is no reason for public to panic, hotels and eateries in several cities in Maharashtra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and elsewhere have shut down causing great difficulties to those who depend on them for food – which included students, patients, travellers, and others.

Some sort of panic has spread across the country after the Bengaluru Hotels Association said that hotels and eateries in the city will shut down from tomorrow. It has been reported that the supply of gas cylinders for commercial use has been stopped from March 9, 2026.

Industry bodies have said that the shortage of commercial cylinder supply in already being felt in other cities too, such as Mumbai and Chennai, where eateries rely heavily on commercial cooking gas for their daily operation.

Government has said that it has prioritized domestic LPG supplies for households to ensure that it remains available for them. However, for the hotels or restaurant industries, the government has formed a panel of three Executive Directors of Oil Marketing Companies to examine requests for LPG supply for them.

In Karnataka, the Deputy CM D K Shivkumar has said today that the state's entire hotel and commercial industry have been affected. The Hotel

association has said that sudden stoppage of supply of commercial cylinders has compelled the hotels to shut. The president of the association PC Rao has said yesterday that only about 10 per cent of hotels and restaurants in Bengaluru had received LPG supply on March 9, and they could keep their kitchens running only until afternoon of March 10.

It Maharashtra, the Mumbai Hotels and Restaurants Association has said that around 20 per cent of hotels in the city have already closed. It has also warned that nearly 50 per cent may have to shut down soon if the supply situation does not improve. LPG dealers have said that the disruption has already affected the availability of cooking gas, and consumers facing delays in delivery between two and eight days. Supply of commercial cylinders has been completely at halt.

It is not only the food or cooking that is affected by the LPG crisis. It has widened to crematoriums run by LPG. In Pune, the municipal Commissioner, Naval Kishor Ram has said that out of 27 crematoriums in the city, 18 are temporarily shut due to break in supply of LPG.

In Tamil Nadu, Chennai city is witnessing heavy shortage in LPG supply. The hotel associations have appealed directly to Prime Minister for urgent LPG supply restoration. Hospitality sector, hotels, restaurant, and all sorts of eateries have been affected.

In Rajasthan, Oil and marketing companies have halted fresh booking

for commercial LPG cylinders across the state. Food vendors, dhabas, and restaurants reported supply disruptions.

In West Bengal, reports of crisis have been coming from Kolkata. Short supply of commercial cylinders has become a concern for the hospitality and hotels sector in the state. Restaurant bodies have reported irregular supply of commercial cylinders there.

Telangana, Uttar Pradesh and other major states are also affected due to short supplies. Long queues and panic buying were also reported after rumours of LPG and fuel shortage. However, household supply disruptions have not been widely confirmed.

The crisis has impacted hospitality industry, since restaurants and hotels heavily depended on commercial LPG. Industry bodies have warned of mass shutdowns if supply is not restored quickly. Small businesses are also affected which included street food vendors, dhabas, catering business, and bakeries. Food delivery ecosystem may be impacted soon along with the public utilities, such as gas based crematoriums and institutional kitchens.

Karnataka, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan, and West Bengal are feeling the strongest impact of the crisis. LPG penetration is highest in Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Punjab and Himachal Pradesh where penetration level is between 95-100 per cent. Southern states have about 98% LPG penetration, among the highest in India.



Medium penetration states are Maharashtra, Gujarat, Haryana, West Bengal, and Uttarakhand. LPG penetration in these states are between 85 and 95 per cent. Lower penetration between 70 and 85 per cent are in the states Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha, Assam, and Chhattisgarh, where many households still rely partly on biomass and coal.

Lowest penetration states are all the states in the North-East India and Tribal belts. LPG penetration there is between 70 and 75 per cent. These regions still depend heavily on traditional cooking fuels.

Given the penetration and the demography, high-risk states are – Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Rajasthan.

Mediums risk states are – Bihar, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh. Gujarat, Delhi, and North East states are lower risks states. Gujarat has high PNG penetration, Delhi has PNG and electricity, and North East states have mixed fuel consumption.

In the meantime, Union Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas has directed refineries to ramp up LPG production and divert the additional LPG specifically for domestic consumption. The gap between LPG refill booking has been increased from 21 days to 25 days to avoid hoarding and black marketing. The government insists domestic household supply is being protected, but the crisis has already caused disruptions in several

states. LPG prices were raised by about Rs 60 per 14.2 kg cylinder across major cities. Price Increase for 19 kg commercial cylinder was between Rs114.50 to Rs115. The Centre has invoked Essential Commodities Act to control supply and prevent hoarding. Government is also exploring additional LPG imports from the US and Canada.

Some state governments have also taken steps on their part, such as Pune Municipal Corporation shifted to electric crematoriums. However, it should be noted that the states do not control LPG supply directly, since it is largely handled by Oil and Marketing Companies and Union Ministry of Petroleum. (IPA Service)

'Countdown has begun' for Mamata govt

## Modi accuses TMC of opposing SIR to shield infiltrators

**KOLKATA, March 14:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday accused the ruling TMC of opposing the SIR exercise to "protect its vote bank of infiltrators", alleging that unchecked illegal immigration under its rule had altered the demographic balance in several parts of West Bengal.

Addressing a rally at the Brigade Parade Ground here, Modi launched a sharp attack on the state's ruling party, accusing it of encouraging infiltration, changing the demography of the state and insulting constitutional institutions, while asserting that the "countdown has begun" for the Mamata Banerjee government ahead of the assembly polls.

He claimed that in many places "demography has changed", Bengali Hindus were "deliberately being made minorities", and alleged that the TMC opposed granting citizenship to persecuted Hindu refugees.

The prime minister said the ruling party feared the SIR exercise because it would remove the names of illegal voters.

"These people oppose SIR so that the names of infiltrators cannot be removed from the voter list, and the voter list cannot be purified. They are not even ready to remove the names of those who have already died," Modi said.

Claiming that infiltration had become a major security and political issue in Bengal, he alleged that the TMC government had encouraged the phenomenon for electoral gains.

"Due to unchecked infiltration by the TMC, the demography of Bengal has changed in many areas. The TMC is deliberately making Hindus a minority in many areas," Modi alleged.

According to official data released after the revision exercise, 63.66 lakh names, around 8.3 per cent of the electorate, have been



deleted since the process began in November last year, reducing the voter base in the state 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.

He also accused the ruling party of opposing citizenship for Hindu refugees who had fled religious persecution in neighbouring countries.

"When it comes to giving citizenship to persecuted Hindu refugees, the TMC opposes it because they do not consider them their vote bank," the prime minister said.

The voter list revision exercise and the issue of infiltration have emerged as key

political flashpoints in Bengal ahead of the assembly elections, with the BJP accusing the TMC of protecting illegal immigrants, while the ruling party has alleged that the process is aimed at disenfranchising genuine voters.

Sharpening his attack on the Mamata Banerjee government, Modi alleged that the state administration functioned with the support of criminal elements.

"The TMC government runs on the support of goons and criminals. Extortion and cut money are their sources of income. To strengthen such gangs, they bring infiltrators. Because of infiltration, Bengal's bread, daughters and land are under threat," he alleged.

The prime minister also accused the TMC

of targeting constitutional institutions, including the Election Commission, over the voter roll revision exercise.

"The TMC is busy attacking constitutional institutions like the Election Commission. This is shameful," he said.

In a strong political message ahead of the assembly elections, Modi declared that the days of the ruling party were numbered.

"I want to remind TMC, its days of hooliganism are ending. The countdown has begun," he said.

He asserted that a BJP government in the state would bring governance based on the principle of "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas".

"At the same time, everyone will be held accountable," Modi added.

Issuing a warning to those allegedly involved in political intimidation and violence, the prime minister said strict legal action would be taken against them.

"Those TMC goons who threaten you, their days of fear will begin. Criminals will fear the law. Infiltrators will fear the law. Appeasement politics will fear the law. Such criminals will have only one place—jail, jail, jail," he said.

Accusing the ruling party of creating a climate of fear, Modi alleged that voters, opposition parties and even the media were being intimidated in the state.

"TMC has made politics of fear its weapon. Voters are threatened. Opposition is threatened. Media is threatened. If someone does not vote for TMC, they are told they are not Bengali. If someone does not vote for TMC, they are told they will not receive government benefits," he claimed.

Framing the assembly elections as a decisive battle for the state's future, Modi urged people to bring about political change. (PTI)

## BJP to fight 2027 Punjab polls to form own govt: Shah



**MOGA (PUNJAB), March 14:** Virtually ending speculation about reviving the alliance with Shiromani Akali Dal, Union Home Minister Amit Shah said here on Saturday that the BJP will fight the 2027 elections in Punjab to form its own government.

Addressing a "Badlav" rally here, Shah said the BJP, in a way, has launched its poll campaign today from Moga for the assembly polls early next year. "I have come to appeal to people of Punjab to give us your blessings," the Union minister said, seeking support for his party.

With the BJP earlier having been part of the government in Punjab as a junior partner to the Akalis, Shah, without naming any party, told the gathering, "Whenever we came before you, we came in the role of a younger brother. We could not have formed the government (on our own)".

"Magar aaj mein keh kar jaata hu 27 (2027) kay chunav mein, Bharatiya Janata Party apni sarkar banane kay liye chunav ladne ja rahi hai (The BJP is now going to fight the 2027 election to form its government in Punjab)," he said.

Addressing the rally in the Killi Chahlan village here, Shah said that Punjab has given many opportunities to Congress, Akalis and AAP, and should now give the BJP a chance.

"We will bring change in Punjab," he said.

Shah said that in 2024, the BJP got "19 per cent votes. And it is our track record, where the BJP gets 19 per cent of the vote, the next government formed there is of the BJP. And this happened in Odisha, Assam, Manipur, Tripura, Uttarakhand, and now it is the turn of Punjab".

The Shiromani Akali Dal had snapped its 24-year-old alliance with the BJP in September 2020 over the now-scrapped three farm laws. At present, the BJP has two MLAs in the 117-member House.

Prior to the end of their electoral alliance, both Akalis and the BJP used to fight together. Under their poll pact, the BJP used to contest 23 seats and the SAD 94 assembly seats.

In parliamentary polls, the SAD used to fight for 10 seats and the BJP would contest three.

The SAD-BJP combine formed the government in the state thrice - 1997-2002, 2007-12, and 2012-17.

Addressing the gathering, Shah, who donned a saffron turban, asked the audience to raise their hands in support, while telling them that the BJP will form the government in Punjab in 2027.

He said that if anybody can free the state from drug menace and other problems, it is Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his party.

"Today, Punjab has been destroyed due to debt, drugs, religious conversions, corruption and terror of gangsters," Shah said.

"I have come to seek blessings from the people of Punjab, including mothers, sisters and the elderly. Give us your blessings. If there is anyone who can rid the state of the drug menace, it is only Narendra Modi and the BJP," he said.

"And we have done it. We scrapped Article 370 in J&K. Today, Naxalism is on the verge of its end. If Punjab has to be rid of the drug menace, it needs BJP's double-engine government," he said.

The BJP fought the 2022 assembly polls in alliance with the SAD (Sanyukt) and former chief minister Amarinder Singh's Punjab Lok Congress, which was later merged with the BJP.

The BJP unsuccessfully contested all 13 parliamentary seats in 2024. Its vote share increased from 9.6 per cent in 2019 to nearly 19 per cent in 2024.

The state BJP leaders have been maintaining that the BJP was preparing to fight all 117 assembly seats in Punjab. (PTI)

## Centre, state taking steps to ensure LPG supply: Andhra Minister

**AMARAVATI, March 14:** Andhra Pradesh Finance Minister P Keshav on Saturday urged people not to panic over the availability of cooking gas, assuring that both the central and state governments are taking steps to ensure there is no inconvenience to people.

Keshav said the Group of Ministers (GoM) tasked to deal with the Liquefied Petroleum Gas situation is continuously monitoring the supply scenario.

"There is no need for people to panic about cooking gas as the central and state governments are taking measures to avoid inconvenience for them," he said in an official press release.

On Saturday, Keshav, Agriculture Minister K Atchannaidu and executives from Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) met officials of the Civil Supplies Department, including police, vigilance and others.

During the meeting, they reviewed the daily requirement for cooking gas, its supply position, current situation and future course of action, said the press release.

The ministers have decided to move ahead with a strong action plan based on real-time data analysis.

Appealing to people not to fall for rumours, Keshav and Atchannaidu said the Centre has ordered refineries across the country to ramp up gas production by reducing output of other petroleum products, which could lead to an increase of 20 per cent in gas production.

Further, they said priority is being given to supply of cooking gas to households while hospitals and hostels are also being prioritised.

According to the Ministers, the Centre imposed some restrictions on booking gas cylinders. Under the new norms, refilling can be booked only after 25 days in cities and 45 days in rural areas, while consumers with double cylinders have to wait for 32 days.

Further, they warned of stringent action against those involved in black marketing of cooking gas cylinder.

The government has already held meetings with hotel and gas dealers' associations. (PTI)

## Chhattisgarh CM launches Gaudham Yojana to build 1460 shelters for stray, abandoned cattle

**BILASPUR, March 14:** Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai on Saturday launched the Gaudham Yojana under which 1,460 shelters will be set up across the state to ensure protection and proper management of stray and abandoned cattle.

Sai visited the Gaudham at Lakhasar village in Takhatpur development block here where he formally announced the launch of the scheme. He then virtually inaugurated 29 Gaudhams across 11 districts during an event held at Guru Ghadasid Central University auditorium.

Addressing the gathering at Lakhasar, Sai said his government has been implementing the scheme in phases to strengthen the tradition of cow protection while ensuring proper care for stray cattle.

"It is a matter of great fortune that the Gaudham Yojana is being launched from the sacred land of Lakhasar. The initiative marks an



other step in the state's development. Cattle form a key pillar of rural culture, agriculture and the economy. Various programmes will be organised at Gaudhams, including training in animal husbandry, green fodder cultivation and making useful products from cow dung," the CM said.

These initiatives are expected to create self-employment opportunities for local residents and strengthen the rural economy, he added.

He also announced that all Gaudhams in the state will now be

known as 'Surabhi Gaudham'.

The Chief Minister approved Rs 25 lakh for the construction of a training building at the Lakhasar Gaudham and announced the provision of one cow catcher vehicle and one animal ambulance.

Sai interacted with local cattle-rearers and villagers and appreciated those involved in cow protection and related service activities. He also inspected arrangements for fodder, water and healthcare for animals housed at the facility.

The Lakhasar Gaudham, operated by the Kamdhenu Gausihala Committee, is spread across 25 acres, of which 19 acres are dedicated to green fodder cultivation.

Later, addressing the event at Guru Ghadasid Central University, the Chief Minister targeted the previous Congress government for alleged misuse of public funds in the name of cow protection. (PTI)

## No fuel shortage in TN, don't panic: Oil companies

**CHENNAI, March 14:** The state level coordinator of three major oil marketing companies on Saturday sought to allay fears of a fuel shortage in the state and urged the people not to believe rumours.

Indian Oil Corporation's Executive Director and State Head for Tamil Nadu and Puducherry M Annadurai said the three terminals operated by Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd, Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd and Indian Oil Corporation Ltd, have sufficient stock of High Speed Diesel and Motor Spirit (Petrol), which would last for the next nine days. "Besides, we are receiving regular supply of the petrol and diesel through rail wagons and pipelines. There is no shortage of fuel. Please do not panic. And do not believe in rumours (about shortage of fuel)," Annadurai, who is also the State Level Coordinators for the three Oil Marketing Companies (HPCL, BPCL and IOCL), told reporters. (PTI)

## Churning within TVK; to be lone 'guiding light' of Tamil Nadu or be part of NDA

**CHENNAI, March 14:** While TVK senior leader C T R Nirmal Kumar on Saturday denied scope for an alliance with the NDA, multiple party sources said that internal discussions, led by party General Secretary N Anand were ongoing to explore bringing together "Vijay's charisma and the strength of seasoned parties," to provide electoral synergy and ensure a magical victory.

Among the points being debated is the electoral viability of TVK joining hands with the AIADMK-BJP combine "to replicate in Tamil Nadu the Pawan Kalyan-led Janasena-TDP government model" of neighbouring Andhra Pradesh.

Sections within the party make a strong pitch to go solo, continue to invoke the legacy of MGR and emerge as a winner like him.

BJP state chief Nainar Nagenthran, when asked whether talks for an alliance with the Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam were ongoing, declined to provide a direct reply, furthering guesswork on social media. Nainar neither denied nor agreed.

"You are worried about the alliance, and I am concerned about the people's issues, especially the failure of law and order in the state and lack of safety for women," Nagenthran told reporters here.

Dismissing the reports of negotiations for an alliance with NDA as "rumours," TVK's Joint General Secretary C T R Nirmal Kumar said that the virtual meeting with the party's district secretaries held on March 13 was to assess the strengths and alliance prospects.

"There's no scope for an alliance with the NDA. We have already made it clear that the BJP is our ideological enemy," Nirmal Kumar told PTI and sought to know if the "rumours" were true, will the NDA constituents—including the AIADMK and BJP—accept Vijay as the chief ministerial candidate. He dismissed reports on the likelihood of an electoral pact as media speculation.

Meanwhile, speculation on social media is refusing to die down, and several "alliance hypothesis" revolves around TVK and its cadres, who are active participants in the online communities. (PTI)

## Ladakh leaders welcome Wangchuk's release, Leh Apex Body calls it 'big victory'

**LEH, March 14:** Leaders from Ladakh on Saturday welcomed climate activist Sonam Wangchuk's release from Jodhpur jail and demanded the release of remaining detainees.

Wangchuk was released from prison on Saturday after the Union government revoked his detention with immediate effect.

Ladakh MP Mohamad Hanifa hailed his release and urged the government to accept their demands for statehood and protection under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution.

"We welcome the release of Sonam Wangchuk. But others also need to be released, and the government should also take back the cases filed against people who participated in the protests," Hanifa told PTI.

Hanifa, however, said protest is a Constitutional right, and urged the government to resolve the issue through dialogue.

The Leh Apex Body (LAB) described the decision of his release as a "big victory" for the people of Ladakh, saying it vindicated their stand on his innocence and removed the "anti-national" blot on the region.

LAB co-chairman Chering Dorje said the government "saved its face" by revoking Wangchuk's detention ahead of the Supreme Court hearing later this month, asserting that the peaceful struggle for statehood for Ladakh and its inclusion in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution will continue.

Kargil-based politician and Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA) member Sajjad Kargili, in a post on X,



demanded the immediate release of Deldan Namgial and Smanla Dorje, and appealed to the government to drop all charges against other detainees unconditionally.

"The revocation of NSA against Shri Sonam Wangchuk is a welcome move. However, our struggle of our legitimate rights continues," he said.

The Centre on Saturday said it had revoked with immediate effect the detention of Wangchuk under the National Security Act (NSA), nearly six months after he was arrested following violent protests in Leh that left four dead.

The decision, which the Centre said was to foster peace in Ladakh, comes days after the Supreme Court on Tuesday adjourned to March 17 the hearing on a plea filed by the activist's wife, Gitanjali J Angmo, challenging his detention. (PTI)

## Surrendered Maoist leader Devuji seeks lifting ban on CPI (M)

**HYDERABAD, March 14:** CPI (Maoist) leader Thippiri Tirupati alias Devuji, who recently surrendered before Telangana Police, on Saturday demanded that the Centre lift the ban on the outfit and recognise it as a political party, though the organisation does not favour participating in electoral politics.

Speaking to PTI Videos, he said his outfit is ready to lay down arms if it is recognised as a legal political party.

"We requested the Chief Minister (A Revanth Reddy, during a recent meeting) to bring the matter to the notice of the Centre (about lifting the ban). The CM responded positively and spoke to the Union Home Minister (Amit Shah). They say that only the government should have arms, and not others. We also say that we will handover arms if our party is recognised as a legal party," he said.

The CPI (Maoist) suffered losses as many Maoists were either arrested or died or surrendered after the Centre's anti-Maoist 'Operation Kaggar' started, he said. (PTI)

## PM unveils connectivity projects worth ₹ 18,680 crore in West Bengal

**KOLKATA, March 14:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi unveiled connectivity projects valued at ₹ 18,680 crore in West Bengal on Saturday, and said a new chapter of India's development was being written from the state.

The PM asserted that these projects will give new momentum to West Bengal and eastern India, boosting business and enterprise.

"A new chapter is being written for West Bengal and eastern India's development from Kolkata.... Lives of lakhs of people will be eased; they will get new opportunities," Modi said after inaugurating and laying the foundation stone for the projects at a programme here.

He said these projects will further strengthen eastern India's logistics system.

"These new projects related to roads, rail and ports are opening new vistas for Bengal's modern future," he said.

The PM said that these projects will benefit everyone, including farmers, traders, entrepre-

neurs and students.

"New opportunities will be created in the tourism sector also," he said, adding that local enterprise and services will get a boost from the projects.

"We are determined to ensure that Bengal, which once showed the way to the rest of India, will once again become a developed state and regain its glory," he said.

Modi said that strong connectivity and modern infrastructure will become the foundation of a developed Bengal. The PM said that completion of the Kharagpur-Moregram expressway, for which he laid the foundation stone, will speed up economic activity.

He laid the foundation stone for five sections of the 231 km-long four-lane Kharagpur-Moregram economic corridor, which will reduce the distance by around 120 km and save nearly seven to eight hours.

The road, which is part of the economic corri-

dor between Kharagpur and Siliguri, will pass through Paschim Medinipur, Bankura, Hooghly, Purba Bardhaman, Birbhum and Murshidabad districts, officials said.

The corridor will integrate key national highways, including NH-16, NH-19, NH-14 and NH-12, thereby strengthening multi-corridor connectivity, they said.

The PM also laid the foundation stone for the construction of a 5.6-km-long four-lane Dubrajpur Bypass and additional four-lane major bridges over the Kangshabati and Shilabati rivers on NH-14.

He inaugurated sections of NH-19 and NH-114, which will enhance road safety, reduce travel time, ease congestion and pollution, improve regional connectivity, and boost tourism and economic growth in the region.

The PM said that a mission has been undertaken to modernise India's railways.

"We are determined to ensure that West Bengal

does not lag behind in this mission," Modi said, maintaining that the central government is working to ensure speedy development of the state's railway infrastructure.

He flagged off the Purulia-Anand Vihar Terminal Express and unveiled six railway stations redeveloped under the Amrit Station scheme.

These stations are Kamakhyaguri, Anara, Tam-luk, Haldia, Barabhum and Siuri.

He said that several other stations are also being redeveloped under the Amrit Station scheme.

Modi also dedicated two railway projects to the nation -- the 16-km-long third rail line between Belda and Dantan and the automatic block signalling system between Kalaikunda and Kanimohuli in the South Eastern Railway zone.

Stating that port and water transport is as important as road and rail connectivity, the PM said that this sector has, however, been neglected for decades in Bengal.

"But new avenues are opening up today for waterways, trade and enterprise," Modi said.

Maintaining Kolkata and Haldia docks have for a long time been major centres for trade in eastern India, he said, new projects have been taken up for modernisation and augmentation of these.

The PM inaugurated the mechanisation of Berth 2 at Haldia Dock Complex, which will enable efficient, faster and environment-friendly cargo handling, and the rejuvenation project at Khidderpore Docks (Dock 1 - West).

He laid the foundation stones for multiple port infrastructure projects, including the mechanisation of Berth 5 at Haldia Dock Complex and the renovation of the Bascule Bridge in Kolkata.

The PM also laid the foundation for a river cruise terminal and river tourism facility near the Indenture Memorial in the city.

Assembly elections are expected to be held in the state in April. (PTI)

## Manipur CM felicitates outstanding NCC cadets

Seven cadets honoured for achievements at national-level NCC events

**IMPHAL, March 14:** Manipur Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand on Saturday felicitated seven NCC cadets from the state for their outstanding achievements at recent national-level NCC events, officials said.

At an event held in Imphal, Singh expressed pride in the cadets' achievements and reiterated that the state government remains committed to creating opportunities for youth to excel and contribute towards a peaceful, progressive and prosperous state.

The cadets represented the North Eastern Region in prestigious programmes, including the Republic Day Parade in New Delhi and the NCC Prime Minister's Rally.

Later in a post on X, Singh said, "Delighted to attend the felicitation ceremony honouring the outstanding NCC cadets from Manipur who represented the state at the Republic Day Parade and NCC Prime Minister's Rally in New Delhi.

He said these young cadets have made Manipur proud with their dedication, discipline and exem-



plary spirit of national service. Their achievements truly reflect the immense potential, commitment and patriotism of our youth.

Singh also congratulated each cadet who was felicitated and called on them to continue to uphold the values of leadership, in-

tegrity and service instilled by the NCC and inspires many more young people to serve the nation with pride and honour. (PTI)

## Sikkim DGP orders stringent action against hoarding, overcharging of LPG cylinders



**GANGTOK, March 14:** Sikkim's Director General of Police (DGP) Akshay Sachdeva on Saturday directed all district police units to take stringent action in connection with complaints regarding hoarding of LPG cylinders and overcharging by distributors.

He also told them to take action against the diversion of domestic LPG to hotels and restaurants in the Himalayan state.

In a direction to all Superintendents of Police (SPs), Sub-Divisional Police Officers (SDPOs) and Station House Officers (SHOs), the DGP said that multiple complaints have been received from consumers from various parts of Sikkim about irregularities in the distribution of LPG cylinders.

Observing that there is no actual shortage of LPG cylinders in the state, the DGP said that some people are trying to create artificial scarcity to bring disrepute to the government.

Sachdeva directed police officers at the district level and below to carry out field inspections and ensure proper distribution of LPG cylinders.

He said that the police should take legal action against hoarders and those diverting or overcharging cooking gas.

The DGP directed the SPs to warn through media and social media networks the hoarders and individuals trying to manipulate the LPG supply chain for profiteering. (PTI)

## 'Strengthen market linkages to ensure better returns for cardamom growers'

**ITANAGAR, March 14:** Arunachal Pradesh Horticulture Minister Gabriel D Wangsu on Saturday highlighted the need to strengthen market linkages for large cardamom growers to ensure transparent trade and better price realisation. He was speaking at the inauguration of the large cardamom productivity award distribution programme for the last four years, held alongside a buyer-seller meet organised by Spices Board India.

Over 250 spice growers, including members of Farmer Producer Companies (FPCs) and Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) from Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Nagaland, Manipur and Meghalaya, attended, along with around 35 spice exporters from across India.

Congratulating award-winning farmers, Wangsu praised their disciplined farming and adoption of scientific orchard management, which has improved both productivity and quality. He said the achievements of these farmers would motivate others to follow improved cultivation practices. (PTI)

## Six people arrested in ATM robberies

**SHILLONG, March 14:** Meghalaya police have arrested six people, including two alleged kingpins from Haryana in connection with three ATM robberies that netted nearly ₹ 1 crore.

Addressing media persons, East Khasi Hills Superintendent of Police Vivek Syiem said a special cell traced Salim (36) and Rahul (31) to Nuh district in Haryana and picked them up on March 10, while local facilitators John Faisal Lyngkhohi and Joyous Dura were held in Shillong.

The six accused were involved in looting ₹ 28.13 lakh from an ATM at Mawkriah on May 21, 2025, ₹ 35.57 lakh at Smit on December 30, 2025 and ₹ 35 lakh at Mylliem on February 8, 2026.

The accused executed the robberies with military precision timing, taking roughly about seven minutes per job.

"We have actually never seen such professional people looting ATMs so fast," Syiem said.

After registering three cases, two in Mawn-gap and one in Madanring, a seven member team flew to Haryana on February 27.

Working with the CIA there, officers arrested out of state suspects Salim (36) and Rahul (31) on March 10, then picked up Shillong facilitators John F Lyngkhohi (32) and Joyous Dura (47).

"These people are wanted in many such ATM cases in the country," Syiem said, adding that the courts granted five days remand for Salim and Rahul and six days for the locals.

The hunt for ATM cutting gangs led to two additional arrests in Assam.

"On March 12 another team headed by DSP (Crime) left for Assam. Officers picked up Rijol Garim (38) from Jakhla in Bongaigaon district and last night Lius Ali (28) from Boraogon under Gorchuk police station," the SP said, adding, "We found incriminating evidence against these people."

## Debate on English and identity at MLCU seminar

**SHILLONG, March 14:** Scholars and politicians at Martin Luther Christian University, Shillong, debated on Friday whether English liberates or flattens underrepresented communities, urging speakers to wield it without losing their mother tongues.

In her keynote address, Dr Theyiesnuo Keditsu described English as a paradoxical language, one that carries both colonial and capitalist histories while also serving as a tool of empowerment.

She noted that greater control over English often translates into greater socio-political influence, while learning the language also reveals the hierarchies embedded within society.

Dr Keditsu encouraged participants to reflect on whether we are using English as a tool or allowing it to shape and control us.

She also cautioned against over-

reliance on artificial intelligence in language use, observing that AI tends to standardise language and diminish accents and linguistic diversity.

The seminar also featured interactive conversations with distinguished speakers.

Tura MP Saleng A Sangma spoke about the role of languages, particularly English and their impact on communities.

He emphasised the importance of maintaining a balance between English and native languages, noting that while English opens doors for wider communication, indigenous languages remain essential to cultural identity and community life.

In another session, Prof Jyotirmoy Pradhan discussed how English can act as a bridge between languages and cultures, especially in Northeast India. Drawing exam-



Syiem stressed that the probe is far from closed.

"Investigation is still on to arrest some of the culprits who are absconding."

He said the district police will endeavour to get all those culprits as soon as possible.

"As and when we interrogate, we will get to know more people," Syiem said.

The SP said two accused arrested from Shillong had acted as local guides and have lengthy criminal histories.

"These people are local facilitators," Syiem said, explaining that Assam contacts hired Haryana specialists and relied on the Shillong pair to survey the area and identify the ATMs to be looted.

He added that the local men are linked to drug trafficking, murder and other forms of criminal activities and have a history of crimes.

Crediting a team effort, he noted that SPs and DSPs in operations and city sections pieced the

evidence together to get the bigger picture. Responding to a question on whether one accused is related to a politician, he said, "I am not in the know. As to whom they are related to be not part of the term of reference of the investigation."

It may be mentioned that a crowd of roughly 30 people tried to free ATM theft accused Rahul during a Haryana escort on March 10, forcing officers to fire warning shots.

Syiem said Rahul had been produced in Nuh district court and was being returned to Nuh when the group accosted the team at Sikrawa, even attempting to snatch a weapon.

"They had to resort to blank shots. One bullet ricochet hit a person and that person is recovering," Syiem said.

Haryana police have registered a case and identified 12 assailants.

The SP added that investigators have found no involvement of bank employees in the Meghalaya ATM robberies. (NNN)

## Conspiracy hatched to break Tipra Motha Party: Pradyot Debbarma

**AGARTALA, March 14:** Tipra Motha Party (TMP) supremo Pradyot Kishore Manikya Debbarma on Saturday alleged that a conspiracy has been hatched to break his party before the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAACD) elections.

Debbarma's allegations came amidst rumours circulating in the state that a section of TMP legislators, including a minister will join the BJP before the TTAACD elections.

The Tripura Motha has 13 MLAs in the 60-member Tripura Assembly, and two of its legislators are also ministers in the Manik Saha government.

Chief Minister Manik Saha on Thursday had said that reports of TMP MLA and Forest Minister Animesh Debbarma joining the BJP were a rumour.

Addressing a party programme at Khumulwng in West Tripura, Debbarma said he has been fighting for the rights of Tiprasa people for the past two years.

Without naming any leader, he



said, "There were reports on attempts being made to split the party, but the conspiracy was actually hatched to break Bubagra (king). Those who have made an attempt will get a fitting reply in due course of time."

Underlining the need to be united, Debbarma alleged that attempts will be made to divide the indigenous people along the lines of Hindu and Christian or Tripuri (community), Reang or Mog to win the elections.

Debbarma said TMP will declare the list of candidates for TTAACD elections within five minutes of the BJP announcing its

aspirants, so that it (BJP) cannot pick any TMP leaders.

The TMP supremo also urged the leaders of the tribal party not to fight among indigenous people in the elections.

"In the TTAACD election in 2021, the TMP had to fight against the Indigenous People's Front of Tripura (IPFT), for which the Tiprasa (tribal) community had to suffer. This time, the stage is set for a battle between the BJP and TMP. We all must ensure that there should not be an electoral battle within the Tiprasa community," he said.

Referring to Chief Minister Manik Saha's announcement of the BJP contesting all the 28 seats of the tribal council in some recent rallies, Debbarma said the TMP is ready to fight against the BJP in all the seats.

"We have not broken the electoral understanding with the BJP, but if the chief minister throws a challenge, we will accept it wholeheartedly. I hope the chief minister will not backtrack later," he said. (PTI)

## NSF to hold rally against imposition of Vande Mataram tomorrow

**HT Correspondent**

**DIMAPUR, March 14:** The Naga Students Federation will hold a public rally at Kohima on 16 March to collectively express the concerns and opposition of the Naga people against the compulsory imposition of Vande Mataram.

The federation expressed deep concern over the implications of the recent notification issued by the ministry of home affairs on January 28, mandating the compulsory observance and singing of the 'revised Indian national song' Vande Mataram during official functions and in educational institutions, within the Naga homeland.

In a release, the NSF said the rally also seeks to uphold the democratic principle that the conscience and will of the people must be respected in any administrative directive affecting the concerned populace.

In solidarity with the central rally at Kohima, the federation asked all its federating units and

subordinate bodies across the Naga homeland to organise peaceful demonstrations at their respective centre on March 16.

All units have also been directed to ensure that the educational institutions under their respective jurisdictions observe a symbolic and peaceful demonstration within their institutions on the same day.

The NSF said this collective exercise aims to express the opposition of the Naga people to the compulsory imposition of Vande Mataram, protect the rights and conscience of Naga students and educational institutions, reaffirm the distinct identity, beliefs and historical consciousness of the Naga people and demonstrate unity among the Nagas in safeguarding "our rights and dignity".

All federating units and subordinate bodies have been asked to submit pictorial and video documentation of the demonstrations conducted within their jurisdiction to the NSF office for record and documentation purposes.

## Arunachal students' association inquires elephant killing in Pasighat

**HT Correspondent**

**ITANAGAR, March 14:** The Arunachal Students' Association (ASA) on Friday submitted a memorandum to the PCCF (HoFF) environment forest and climate change department of Arunachal Pradesh requesting to take strict action against killing of wild elephant in Pasighat.

"We the Arunachal Students' Association (ASA) would like to pray you for your immediate intervention and launching of investigation against the killing of a Tusker wild Elephant recently in Pasighat Reserved Forests under Pasighat Forest Division here in East Siang District," the students' body stated.

It further added, "A wild elephant tusker has allegedly been killed by poachers and its tusks are said to be removed while the trunk is also chopped off. As per the video footage of killed tusker which is circulating in some of the closed groups of Whatsapp indicates about a case of brutal wildlife crime because the killing have taken place within the Reserved Forests which is closed to the DERING Memorial Wildlife Sanctuary."

"The Elephant comes under Schedule-I species which is protected under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 and any act of hunting, killing, or illegal possession of its body parts is a grave offence punishable under the provisions of the Act. Such incidents within a Reserve Forest area and ESZ of a wildlife sanctuary raises serious concern regarding the safety and protection of wildlife in the region," said Ninur Rubko, general secretary of ASA.

He said, "Our ASA being into conservation of forest and wildlife in the past years strongly condemns such act of killings and those responsible behind the killing should also be booked and arrested. And movement of armed public into the RF areas and other illegal activities should all be banned with immediate effect."

## Toddler killed, father injured in bomb blast in Manipur's Noney

**IMPHAL, March 14:** A four-year-old boy was killed and his father injured in a bomb blast in Manipur's Noney district on Saturday, police said.

The incident happened in Taolingpung village in Khoupung when the toddler and his father were clearing bushes outside their house, they said.

The bomb, which was hidden in the bushes, went off when they struck it accidentally, police said.

The father, 40, is at present undergoing treatment at a hospital in Imphal, around 95 km from their village, they said.

A case was registered and an investigation started to ascertain the origin of the bomb, police said. (PTI)

## NPO urges Kuki bodies to withdraw ultimatum

**IMPHAL, March 14:** The Naga People's Organisation (NPO), the apex Naga body in Senapati district, Manipur, has urged the Kuki Organisation for Human Rights Trust (KOHUR), the Committee on Tribal Unity (CoTU), a Kangpokpi-based Kuki body and the Kuki Inpi Manipur (KIM) to withdraw their ultimatum at the earliest.

It can be mentioned here that, following the recovery of two dead bodies hailing from the Kuki community in Ukhrul district on Thursday, the three Kuki organisations—KIM, KOHUR and CoTU—served a 48-hour ultimatum to the Manipur government to arrest those responsible for the killing of the two Kuki men.

In this regard, the NPO said it was shocked by the 48-hour ultimatum served by the Kuki Inpi Manipur, KOHUR and CoTU, directly pointing fingers at the NSCN-IM for the loss of two Kuki individuals' lives. "We would like to question what evidence they possess to blame the Tangkhul community or the NSCN-IM for that unfortunate and unwanted incident," the NPO asked.

The Naga People's Organisation, how-

ever, strongly condemned such incidents involving unknown miscreants and expressed deep concern over the loss of lives. It said violence and unverified accusations will only aggravate the already sensitive situation and disturb the fragile peace in the region.

"The Naga People's Organisation would like the Kuki community to recollect certain past incidents where situations could have easily escalated had the Naga community not exercised restraint in the larger interest of peace and the safety of innocent people," the NPO said.

One such incident occurred at Ireng Naga village, where some Kuki miscreants reportedly dismantled a waiting shed and inscribed communal slogans on a stone, such as "Kukiland" and "Stay Away Nugas," the NPO pointed out, adding, "There was also a viral audio recording of a self-styled Commander of KNF (P), Mr Tiger alias Thangboi Kipgen, who directly threatened the village chairman, stating that his cadres would come and attack Ireng Naga village."

Another serious incident was the burn-

ing down of a residential building at Lung-wirang by some Kuki miscreants, the Naga body further pointed out. "It was surprising that the responsible Kuki civil society organisations did not come forward during those times. In both cases, the Naga People's Organisation visited the affected sites and advised our people to localise the issues as far as possible and to avoid any form of escalation," the NPO reminded.

However, during the K Songlung incident, the United Naga Council (UNC), without hesitation, owned responsibility and intervened promptly to prevent further escalation, the NPO also said.

The NPO then said the present "communal tension" in the Litan area is believed to have originated from the incident that occurred on the night of February 7, "where Mr Starling was seriously injured." The extent of the victim's injuries was witnessed by many through video clips circulating on social media, the NPO also said, adding, "It is difficult to understand whether the Kuki community can justify such a degree of torture to any individual merely for accidentally flashing a torch-

light in the darkness of the night."

According to information gathered from various sources, the matter could have been compromised and peacefully resolved had the Kuki side not neglected the issue, the NPO added.

The NPO then said there are certain aspects where statements from the two sides contradict each other, though there are also converging points. It also pointed out that both parties stated that information about the chief of Sareikhong was conveyed to the same evening. "As it was already late, it was decided that the matter would be discussed the following day. However, the village (Sareikhong) chief of the accused party remained silent until around 2 PM the next day," it added.

The NPO then said it is a customary practice among all communities that the accused party approaches the victim's side first and requests settlement or compromise. The NPO said, "We were also informed that one citizen of Sinakeithi village was abducted and held hostage by armed Kuki militants while attending his

field. We would like to know the clear intention of the Kuki community as to why such barbaric and illegal activities are repeatedly carried out by their people."

The NPO then said, "For the recent incident where one individual sustained a leg injury and two others lost their lives, the abduction of 21 innocent Tangkhul commuters is completely and completely unjustifiable."

The NPO also requested the competent authorities to book all the perpetrators involved in the abduction of innocent commuters in a time-bound manner for the safety and security of all.

Therefore, the Naga People's Organisation urged the Kuki Inpi Manipur (KIM), KOHUR and CoTU to withdraw their ultimatum at the earliest. "Otherwise, any eventuality arising out of it shall be held upon them," it warned.

The Naga People's Organisation also urged all concerned organisations and communities to exercise restraint and responsibility and to allow the competent authorities to properly investigate the matter and establish the truth. (PTI)

# Antonelli on pole for F1's Chinese Grand Prix after teammate Russell wins sprint



**SHANGHAI, March 14:** Kimi Antonelli stepped up when his Mercedes teammate George Russell hit trouble in qualifying to become the youngest-ever driver on pole position for a Formula 1 Grand Prix on Saturday. After holding off a challenge from Ferrari to win the sprint race earlier in the day, Russell seemed near-unbeatable. Then he stopped on track in qualifying and limped back to the pits with technical problems.

Russell's team got the car going again with seconds to spare for him to set a time. It was only good enough for second on the grid, 0.222 of a second off Antonelli, who kept up Mercedes' run of qualifying dominance after F1's sweeping changes to the cars for 2026. The Ferraris of Lewis Hamilton and Charles Leclerc will start third and fourth. Their fast starts could threaten Mercedes off the line, as they did last week in Australia and in Saturday's sprint race.

The 19-year-old Antonelli becomes the youngest driver to take pole position for a full Grand Prix race, though he was also on pole aged 18 for a sprint race last year in Miami.

**Russell holds off Ferraris in sprint**

Russell won the first race of the season in Australia last weekend, and he followed up taking the 19-

lap sprint in China.

As last week in Australia, the Ferraris were fast off the line and Russell and Lewis Hamilton swapped the lead several times on the first few laps. But Russell began to pull away after the early laps with Hamilton fading as the constant battles took a toll on his tires. Charles Leclerc was second with his teammate Hamilton third.

"Lewis did an amazing job in the in the early laps," Russell said. "He caught me off guard — 20 years of experience. So I've still got a bit to learn."

"It was pretty fun in the end," Russell added. "A lot of strategy in play and overtakes. It's not easy. I hope it was fun race to watch. Usually the sprint races are pretty boring."

Hamilton received loud applause from the Shanghai crowd when he began his on-track interview by saying "Ni hao" — hello in Chinese.

"That speed (of Mercedes) on the straight is just a little bit too much at the moment," said Hamilton, who won last year's sprint in China for his only victory since joining Ferrari. "I think I put up a good fight."

Hamilton and Leclerc couldn't renew their challenge late in the race after a safety car period for Audi's Nico Hulkenberg stopping on track. (AP)

# 21-point system has worked well, any change in format should be carefully considered: Saina

**NEW DELHI, March 14:** Olympic medallist Saina Nehwal has urged the Badminton World Federation (BWF) to exercise caution regarding proposed scoring changes, maintaining that the current 21-point system preserves the sport's essential intensity and endurance.

The game's governing body (BWF) has proposed switching to a 3x15 scoring format from the current 3x21 system, with a membership vote on the change scheduled at the BWF Annual General Meeting in Horsens, Denmark on April 25.

"Badminton has a rich tradition, and tournaments like the All England Open Badminton Championships and the BWF World Championships have always been special because of their intensity and endurance factor," Saina, who joined the advisory board of India's International Movement to Unite Nations (I.I.M.U.N.), told PTI in an interview.

"Any change in scoring or format should be carefully considered. The current 21-point system has worked well and players have adapted to it over many years.

"If changes are introduced, they should ensure that the quality of rallies and the competitive balance of the sport are not affected. At the end of the day, the focus should remain on fair competition and the spirit of the game."

According to the revamped BWF World Tour, the five Super 1000 tournaments, to be staged across Asia and Europe, will introduce a new format in singles, with 48 players competing in a group stage followed by knockouts. Doubles events will feature 32-pair knockout draws, and each Super 1000 tournament will run for 11 days across two weekends.

Saina feels the BWF needs to prioritise player welfare, saying the packed international calendar leaves little room for recovery and can lead to injuries and burnout among elite shuttlers.

"Badminton is always a very tough sport both physically and mentally. The rallies are longer, the speed of the game is higher, and players are competing in tournaments almost every week.

"The Badminton World Federation has tried to structure the calendar, but from a player's perspective, recovery time is extremely important. Injuries and fatigue can affect performance and also shorten careers.

"I feel the schedule should allow better



recovery periods between major tournaments, and teams should have more support for sports science and rehabilitation."

Lakshya has ability and mindset, All England title is not far away

Last week, Lakshya Sen finished runner-up at the All England Open after going down to Chinese Taipei's Lin Chun-Yi in the men's singles final, repeating his near-miss at the tournament after finishing second in 2022.

Praising Lakshya for his consistency on the big stage, Saina said: "First of all, reaching the final of All England Open Badminton Championships twice is a big achievement. It's one of the most prestigious tournaments in badminton and the level there is always extremely high.

"Consistency at that stage shows that Lakshya is doing many things right. Sometimes in sport, the difference between winning and finishing runner-up is just a few points or moments of composure. If a player keeps reaching those stages, it usually means the title is not far away.

"So I would say it's a very positive sign. It shows he has the ability and the mindset to compete with the best in the world," added the 2015 All England runner-up.

The 35-year-old from Hyderabad is also impressed with the performance of young

Indian shuttlers but said physical strength, match temperament and tactical awareness remains key to consistency. "Consistency at the top level comes from fitness, discipline and mental toughness over many years. Players need to maintain their level across the entire season, not just in a few tournaments," said the former world No. 1. "When PV Sindhu and I were competing regularly, the focus was always on preparation, recovery and staying hungry to improve.

"For the current generation, the key is to keep improving their physical strength, match temperament and tactical awareness so they can perform consistently in the biggest tournaments."

Explaining her decision to associate with I.I.M.U.N, Saina, a two-time Commonwealth Games champion, said: "I've always believed that sports teaches values like discipline, leadership and resilience, which are also important in life.

"Being part of India's International Movement to Unite Nations (I.I.M.U.N) is special because it gives young people a platform to think globally, develop leadership skills and express their ideas confidently.

"If my journey can inspire young students to believe in themselves and work hard toward their goals, I feel that would be a meaningful contribution." (PTI)

# Mayank Chakraborty scripts history, becomes first GM from North-East and India's 94th



**NEW DELHI, March 14:** Talented youngster Mayank Chakraborty crossed the final hurdle in his promising career by securing his third and final GM norm, becoming the 94th Grandmaster and the first from India's North-East region to achieve the coveted title.

Hailing from Guwahati in Assam, the 17-year-old Chakraborty -- who became an International Master in 2024 -- achieved the feat with a round to spare in the eighth round of the Hotel Stockholm North by First Hotels Chess Talents Tournament, defeating Swedish IM Philip Lindgren.

Chakraborty was at the top of his game in the victory over Lindgren, accumulating the required 6.5 points that were enough to secure his final Grandmaster norm. In the final round, he played out an exciting draw with English International Master Jonah B Willow to seal what was his most memorable performance to date.

Chakraborty also crossed the critical 2500 Elo rating mark in the process, with his current rating standing a few points above the threshold, thereby confirming the Grandmaster title as per the rules of the international chess federation, FIDE.

Chakraborty lost one game, drew two and won the remaining six to finish with seven points out of a possible nine, also clinching the tournament title in the process with a half-point lead over Norway's Aksel Bu Kvaloy, who received a last-round walkover.

In 2024, Chakraborty had become an International Master and has been one of the top performers in his age group.

Chakraborty, the former India and Asia No.1 in the Under-11 category, had a breakout season in 2021 when he competed in Europe, jumping from an Elo rating in the 1800s to nearing 2200 while also becoming world No.6 in the Elo rankings for boys born on or after 2009.

His precocious talent also saw him emerge as the Under-9 national silver medallist and Under-11 national gold medallist, besides winning the Under-10 silver at the Asian Youth Chess Championship in Sri Lanka.

Behind his rise has been strong family support -- his doctor mother serving as a pillar of strength, while his father quit his job to travel with him during tournaments. (PTI)



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