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27 YEARS OF DEDICATED JOURNALISM

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Voice of the hills people

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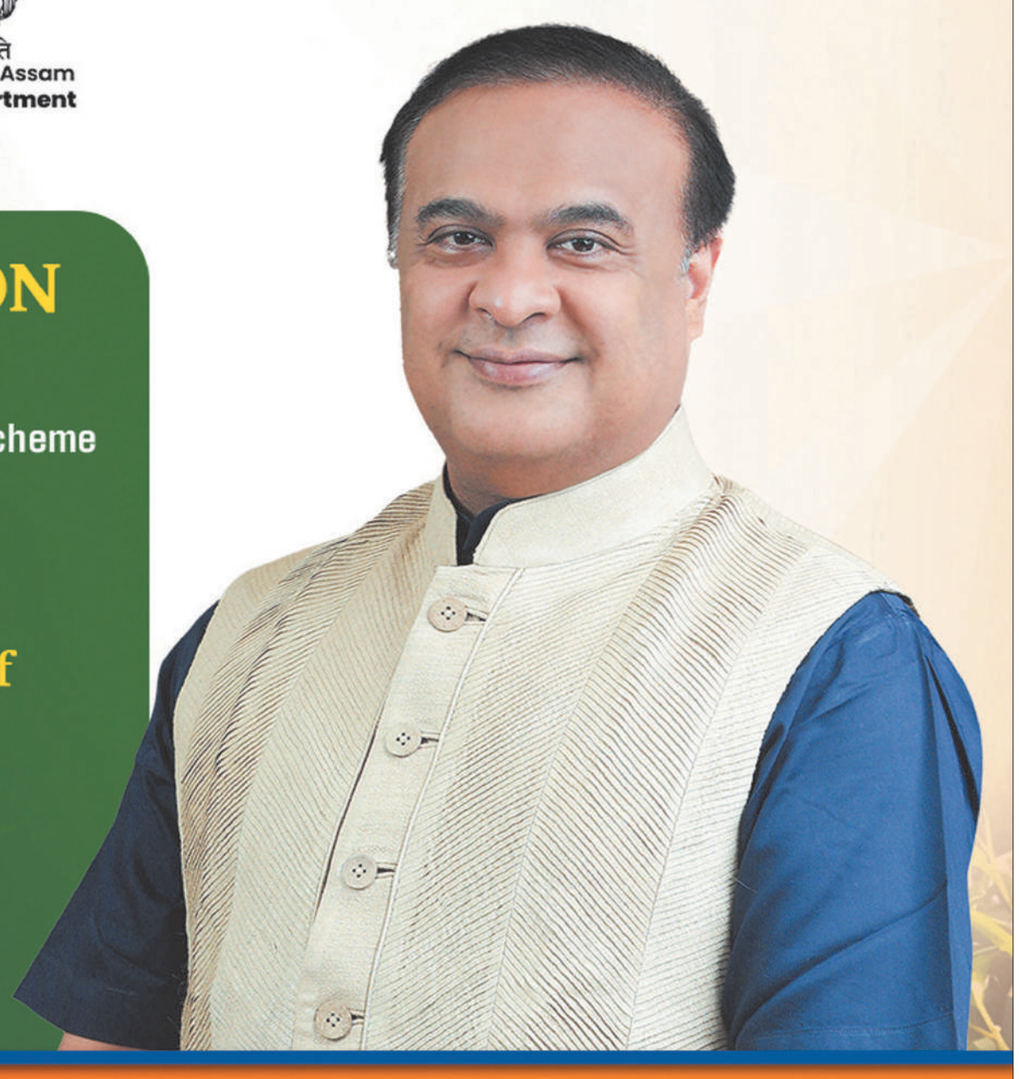
सत्यमेव जयते
Government of Assam
Finance Department

CEREMONIAL DISTRIBUTION
OF
Benefits under Assam Tea Industries Special Incentives Scheme
ATISIS
A scheme for incentivising production of orthodox and speciality tea
&
Abhinandan
Education Loan Subsidy Scheme 2.0



9 March 2026 11:00 AM
Kar Bhawan, Dispur

Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma
Chief Minister, Assam

ATISIS
Incentives of
₹94.70 crore
being provided to
486 Tea Estates
for FY 25-26

Chief Guest
Smt Ajanta Neog
Minister, Finance, etc. Assam

In the august presence of
Shri Kamakhya Prasad Tasa
Member of Parliament
Kaziranga Lok Sabha Constituency

Abhinandan
₹ 2.69 crore
to
537 Eligible Students
as one-time financial assistance of up to ₹ 50,000 against education loan taken from various financial institutions during FY 20-24

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India taps alternative crude supplies as Iran conflict drags on

NEW DELHI, March 8: Indian refiners have begun negotiating for additional crude cargoes from the US, Russia and West Africa to ensure supplies remain adequate in the event of the Middle East conflict drags on for a longer period, industry officials and analysts said.

Refineries, which convert crude oil into fuels like petrol and diesel, have deferred planned maintenance shutdowns and are maintaining normal processing rates to create buffers that could meet the country's requirement in the near term, they said.

India imports about 88 per cent of its crude oil requirement, with roughly half of those supplies in February passing through the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow sea lane between Iran and Oman that serves as a key energy transit route for global markets.

The recent military strikes by the United States and Israel on Iran, and Tehran's retaliatory attacks on US bases in neighbouring countries as well as Israel, have sharply escalated tensions in the region, leading to a near halt in tanker movements through the strategic waterway.

"Non-strait sources are fully operational and we are sourcing more and more supplies from non-conflict zones," a top oil ministry source said. "Non-Strait sources accounted for 60 per cent of supplies in 2025 which after the Middle East conflict climbed to 70 per cent."

Indian refiners are tapping crude from West Africa, Latin America and the US, he said adding the US Treasury Department issuing a 30-day waiver to allow the sale and delivery of sanctioned Russian oil that has already been loaded on vessels to India has opened up another avenue.

The waiver permits the sale, delivery or discharge of crude oil and petroleum products of Russian origin that were loaded onto vessels on or before March 5, including ships subject to certain sanctions. The exemption remains valid until April 5, allowing cargoes already in transit to be completed without violating sanctions restrictions.

There were 120 million barrels of Russian crude on the water. Of this, as many as 15 million barrels of Russia-origin crude are sitting on tankers close to India - in the Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal - while another 7 million Russian crude barrels are idling near Singapore.

Industry sources said Indian refiners have started buying Russian oil.

Reliance Industries, Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd and HPCL-Mittal Energy Ltd, which had halted purchases of Russian crude following US sanctions imposed last year on Moscow's leading producers Rosneft and Lukoil, have returned to the market to secure Russian cargoes, they said.

Before the United States imposed sanctions on Russia's leading oil producers Rosneft and Lukoil in October 2025, Reliance Industries was the largest buyer of Russian crude, importing more than 500,000 barrels per day under a long-term supply agreement with Rosneft.

The Oil Ministry official said India never stopped buying Russian oil - it imported some 1.04 million barrels per day of Russian crude in February, down from 1.6-1.8 million bpd levels seen in 2023-2025.

"We are in a very comfortable position as far as crude and finished products are concerned," he said, adding the combined inventory can meet the country's demand for 50 days.

The country currently holds approximately 144 million barrels of crude in onshore storage, equivalent to around 30 days of coverage at 2025 import levels.

Importantly, the supplies are being constantly replenished, he said.

India's Strategic Petroleum Reserves have the capacity to cover about 9.5 days of net oil imports. In addition, state-run oil companies have storage for crude and petroleum products equivalent to 64.5 days of net imports, taking the country's total storage capacity to roughly 74 days of net imports, according to petroleum ministry data.

While India may be able to secure adequate physical crude through alternative sources, analysts cautioned that the overall cost structure could worsen due to higher crude prices, increased freight and insurance premiums, and longer shipping routes.

International crude oil prices have jumped to over USD 92 per barrel from around USD 70 when the US and Israel attacked Iran on February 28. Liquefied natural gas (LNG) prices have more than doubled to USD 24-25 per million British thermal unit.

The higher prices will add to India's import bill, analysts said, adding sourcing from non-Middle Eastern suppliers mean longer shipping and higher freight. Also, insurance premiums have jumped.

Every USD 10 increase in crude prices could add 20-25 basis points to the consumer price index if passed on to consumers, or widen the fiscal deficit if taxes are cut to neutralise the impact.

The immediate impact will be a higher import bill, a widening current account deficit and pressure on the rupee.

India, the world's third-largest crude importer, depends on Middle East supply for about half of its imports, and the de facto halted tanker traffic in the Strait of Hormuz has put severe pressure on its supplies. In February 2026, India received 2.8 million bpd crude, accounting for 53 per cent of total imports, from Iraq, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Kuwait and Qatar.

For the world, around 15 million barrels per day of crude and 5 million bpd of oil products passed through the Strait of Hormuz in 2025.

India's exposure to crude flows through the Strait of Hormuz was lower at about 41 per cent in 2025, but has increased in recent months as refiners curtailed purchases of Russian crude. Imports from Russia averaged around 1.15 million barrels per day in the first two months of 2026, compared with about 1.7 million bpd in 2025. (PTI)

ICAI Guwahati branch holds seminar on Income Tax Act 2025

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 8: The Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI), Guwahati Branch (EIRC), organised the second seminar of the "Income Tax Ki Pathsala" series at ICAI Bhawan on March 7 under the chairmanship of CA Anjani Kumar Mundhra.

The programme was initiated by CA Nitika Bagaria, who highlighted the objective of the series and stressed the importance of a systematic study of the Income Tax Act, 2025, which is scheduled to come into effect from April 1, 2026. Technical sessions were conducted by CA Vivek Jain and CA Vikash Kumar Jain.

The speakers discussed several professional issues, including TDS demands of previous years, tax payments and refunds related to TDS and TCS.

The sessions aimed to enhance conceptual clarity among professionals while addressing practical challenges faced in taxation matters.

The seminar saw active participation from members and concluded with an interactive discussion session.

The vote of thanks was delivered by CA Piyush Birmiwal, secretary of the Guwahati branch, who appreciated the efforts of the speakers and the enthusiastic participation of members.

Over ₹15,300 crore proposed for agriculture, allied sectors: Punjab FM

CHANDIGARH, March 8: Punjab Finance Minister Harpal Singh Cheema on Sunday proposed an outlay of ₹ 15,377 crore for agriculture and allied sectors in the 2026-27 budget, aimed at supporting targeted interventions in crop diversification, sustainability, market reforms and farmer welfare.

While presenting the budget estimates, Cheema said to promote sustainable cropping patterns, a pilot project encouraging a shift from paddy to kharif maize has been implemented in six districts -- Pathankot, Gurdaspur, Bathinda, Sangrur, Jalandhar and Kapurthala -- with an incentive of ₹ 17,500 per hectare. An allocation of ₹ 15 crore has been earmarked for this purpose in 2026-27, he said.

To address the challenge of crop residue burning, the government continues to provide an 80 per cent subsidy to panchayats and a 50 per cent subsidy to individual farmers for the purchase of stubble management machinery.

During 2025-26, ₹ 402 crore has been utilised for subsidising such equipment, and a budgetary provision of ₹ 600 crore is proposed in 2026-27, Cheema said.

Meanwhile, Agriculture Minister Gurmeet Singh Khudian highlighted the success of Direct Seeded Rice (DSR) adoption. "The state disbursed ₹ 35 crore in FY 2025-26 to incentivise water-saving techniques, with Rs 40 crore allocated for next year," he said, while urging farmers to adopt DSR to address labour shortages and groundwater depletion. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 3...

India set to

and manufacturing excellence is essential for competing with established European brands," Tiwari said.

A landmark example of this shift is Adven Biotech, which has become India's first homoeopathy company to receive both the AYUSH Premium Mark and NABL certification.

Adesh Sharma, CEO of Adven Biotech, said AYUSH Premium and NABL are not just certificates; they are global passports for Indian homoeopathy.

"For years, Indian brands were clinically strong but undervalued internationally due to a lack of globally recognised quality benchmarks. These certifications change that perception completely and put Indian companies on the same platform as leading German manufacturers," Sharma said.

He added that India stands to gain strategically. "Germany may have legacy, but India has scale, talent, raw material strength, and now certified quality. When Indian brands combine NABL-backed testing accuracy with AYUSH Premium manufacturing standards, we can offer products that are globally trusted yet significantly more accessible. This is how India doesn't just compete with German homoeopathy; we outperform it."

Sharma further said, "We aligned our internal systems with international norms – right from raw material authentication and in-process checks to final product validation. NABL encouraged us to measure everything scientifically, while AYUSH Premium ensured holistic compliance across manufacturing and governance. It was challenging, but it has transformed our organisation."

Experts point out that this transformation is critical at a time when global consumers are becoming more discerning. Markets in Europe, the Middle East, Latin America, and Africa are demanding evidence of quality, safety, and consistency, not just tradition.

"German brands historically benefited from strong regulatory backing and standardised pharmacopoeia. India is now closing that gap rapidly," Dr Prajapati said.

From an economic standpoint, he added, the opportunity is significant. India already supplies homoeopathic medicines to over 100 countries, yet premium markets in Europe have remained relatively underpenetrated by Indian brands.

With internationally aligned certifications, experts estimate that Indian homoeopathy exports could grow two to three times in the next five to seven years, especially in regulated markets.

"Another major advantage India holds over Germany is cost-efficiency without compromising quality," Dr Prajapati said.

In the coming years, experts say the real competition with German brands will not be about legacy, but about who delivers the most reliable, transparent, and globally compliant homoeopathic solutions.

"With AYUSH Premium and NABL as strong pillars, India appears ready not just to stand shoulder to shoulder with Germany, but to lead the next chapter of global homoeopathy," Dr Prajapati asserted. (PTI)

Kolkata Port signs agreement with East Horizon for ₹260 cr FSRU project

KOLKATA, March 8: Syama Prasad Mookerjee Port, Kolkata (SMPK), on Sunday announced that East Horizon Pvt Limited will establish a Floating Storage and Regasification Unit (FSRU) at the Haldia Dock Complex.

The port and the private firm signed a licence agreement on Friday for the project, which entails an investment of approximately ₹ 260 crore.

A Floating Storage and Regasification Unit (FSRU) is a specialised offshore vessel or terminal that receives Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) from carriers, stores it in a liquid state, and converts it back into natural gas for distribution into onshore pipelines.

The project aims to enhance the port's capability in handling LNG while facilitating the development of cleaner energy infrastructure in eastern India.

The port did not disclose the size and other technical details of the project.

The proposed FSRU facility will enable the import, storage and regasification of LNG, strengthening the national gas supply chain and supporting the government's vision of increasing the share of natural gas in the country's energy mix.

SMPK said the establishment of the FSRU at Haldia Dock Complex marks an important step towards enhancing LNG infrastructure in eastern India.

"The project will facilitate greater adoption of cleaner fuels, strengthen energy security and further reinforce SMPK's role in supporting sustainable industrial growth in the region," the port said in a statement. (PTI)

realme C83 5G launched with 7000mAh battery, 144Hz display

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 8: realme has launched its latest smartphone, the realme C83 5G, featuring a massive 7000mAh battery, 144Hz display and support for 5G connectivity.

The device, introduced under the company's C-series lineup, is aimed at users seeking long battery life and reliable everyday performance.

The smartphone comes with what the company describes as the segment's biggest 7000mAh "Titan Battery," designed to provide extended usage throughout the day.

It supports 15W PD and 15W DCP charging and also offers 5W wired reverse charging, allowing the device to power other gadgets when needed.

The device is designed to deliver stable performance for up to four years.

Powered by the MediaTek Dimensity 6300 processor built on a 6nm architecture, the phone features an octa-core CPU with two Cortex-A76 cores clocked at 2.4GHz and six efficiency cores.

It is available with 4GB and 6GB LPDDR4X RAM options and 64GB and 128GB internal storage variants. With dynamic RAM expansion, the device can extend RAM up to 18GB, while storage can be expanded up to 2TB through OTG support.

The phone features a 6.7-inch LCD display with a 144Hz adaptive refresh rate, designed to deliver smoother scrolling and responsive gameplay.

It also introduces an AI Outdoor Mode that enhances system performance, speaker volume, network responsiveness and display brightness for improved usability in bright outdoor conditions.

For thermal management, the device is equipped with a 5334 mm² airflow vapor chamber cooling system intended to improve heat dissipation during heavy usage.

In terms of durability, the smartphone offers military-grade shock resistance along with IP64-rated dust and water resistance.

It also features 300 per cent super volume audio and a side-mounted fingerprint sensor for quick unlocking.

The device includes a 13MP AI rear camera capable of capturing images up to 4160 × 3120 resolution, while a 5MP front camera is housed within a waterdrop-style display. It runs on realme UI 7.0 based on Android 16.

The realme C83 5G will be available in multiple storage variants starting at ₹13,499.

Honda Manesar Half Marathon 2026 draws 6,000 participants

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 8: Honda Motorcycle & Scooter India (HMSI) successfully concluded the fourth edition of the Honda Manesar Half Marathon 2026 — Run for Road Safety, held at its Global Resource Factory in IMT Manesar, Haryana. The event coincided with International Women's Day and aimed to promote road safety awareness while celebrating women's empowerment.

More than 6,000 participants took part in the marathon, which featured three categories — a 5 km fun run, a 10 km run and the 21.1 km half marathon.

In the half marathon category, Sonika won the women's race with a timing of 1 hour 22 minutes 36 seconds, while Emmanuel Rotich and Monu Kumar secured top positions in the men's category with timings of 1 hour 04 minutes 48 seconds and 1 hour 05 minutes 44 seconds respectively.

The male winner of the half marathon received the Honda CB125 Hornet, while the female winner was awarded the Honda Dio125 X. Winners in the 10 km race — Adesh and Reena — were presented with HMSI discount coupons worth ₹20,000 along with trophies. A mega lucky draw was also organised for participants across multiple age categories, including 18–35 years, 35–45 years, 45–55 years and 55 years and above, with winners receiving a Honda Dio125 X edition.

HMSI stated that organising the event on International Women's Day reinforced the message that road safety is a shared responsibility. The initiative is part of the company's broader vision of achieving zero traffic collision fatalities involving Honda motorcycles and automobiles by 2050.

The company thanked participants, government authorities of Haryana, the Industry Association of IMT Manesar and partner industries for supporting the initiative, reiterating its commitment to social causes such as road safety, healthcare, environmental sustainability and education.

Over one lakh mature

Highway-17 from Guwahati to Goalpara and construction of the Darrang Medical College and Hospital (DMCH). "In most places where trees were cut, roads have been developed -- mainly the national highways. Besides, ONGC and Oil India are also exploring crude and developing wells at new locations. For that too, some trees were felled," he added.

The DMCH is being built at a location where there was a silk plantation. So, the entire area was cleared for construction work, the minister said.

"We have planted a huge number of saplings against these felled trees. In 'Amrit Briksha Andolan', we planted one crore saplings in a single day. There are other schemes also. We have planted a total of 3.5 crore saplings in the last two years," he added.

According to the RTI data, most of the responding authorities said that more than 70 per cent saplings have survived after proper care. Over 26,000 trees have been felled in notified forest areas since May 2016, while the remaining have been cut in non-forest locations.

Nearly 84,000 trees were chopped for various government projects like construction of roads, bridges, flyovers, factories and buildings such as medical colleges, police battalions and all other structures. More than 10,000 trees have been felled for private works.

The available information shows that almost 65,000 trees have been logged from 2021 to 2025 during Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's tenure. Over 18,000 trees were removed during his predecessor Sarbananda Sonowal's period.

When contacted, Cotton University Environmental Biology & Wildlife Sciences Assistant Professor Narayan Sharma told PTI that equating the felling of mature trees with planting saplings is "problematic".

"A full-grown mature tree represents decades of ecological value that cannot be quickly or easily replaced. In most cases, sapling plantations hardly compensate for the loss of mature trees immediately, as it takes decades for them to provide comparable ecosystem services, if they survive at all to the adult stage," he added.

On the absence of a study to assess the impact of felling such a huge number of trees, Sharma, an expert of biodiversity conservation, said that when large numbers of trees are felled at a particular location, a proper ecological impact assessment "must be conducted".

He stressed that such a study or research is necessary to ascertain the damage to local microclimate and biodiversity ecosystem, including its hidden impact on human physical and mental health.

Expressing similar sentiments, Gauhati University Assistant Professor (Environmental Science) Minakshi Bora said that as an environmental science teacher, she would interpret this RTI data with caution and concern. "I would say the numbers appear impressive, but they are not directly comparable. Felling over one lakh mature trees and planting saplings are ecologically unequal actions."

A mature tree represents decades of biomass, carbon storage, habitat value and ecosystem services that a sapling cannot immediately replace, she added.

Bora, a GIS and Ecohydrology expert, also commented that not conducting the impact assessments in respective divisions is "scientifically concerning". "Without systematic study, cumulative ecological degradation may go unnoticed until impacts become severe and irreversible," she added. (PTI)

CM seeks public

Baruah and Pulak Chetia. The yatra later proceeded through Digboi and concluded at Makum, where interactions with local residents focused on regional issues while seeking public blessings for the party ahead of the elections.

CM's Women's Day

900 women-led startups have been opened and 56,000 Anganwadi workers trained.

"On #WomensDay, we celebrate Assam's unstoppable #NariShakti, who are securing futures, leading enterprises & shaping a #ViksitAssam," the CMO added. (PTI)

Three For A Joy

tactical harakiri with a 21-ball-52 but Samson's muscular effort -- a dazzling 89 off 46 balls, which was a union of beastly power and silken grace --, will be remembered for the times to come.

There were eight sixes -- a few over long-on, a couple over square leg, down the ground, and over long-off.

Samson made Rachin Ravindra's left-arm spin, Lockie Ferguson (0/48 in 2 overs) and Matt Henry's (0/49 in 4 overs) medium pace bowling look pedestrian. It was a massacre of a good bowling attack.

After match-winning efforts against the West Indies and England, Kerala's favourite son finally silenced the Doubting Thomases, who questioned his credentials over the past decade.

After a series of flop shows and his place in the side being debated from Kashmir to Kanyakumari, Abhishek finally came good with liberal help from New Zealand pacers, who handed the advantage to the southpaw on a platter.

An 18-ball-50 with his signature straight sixes, and familiar bat swing, the Punjab man enjoyed the rub of the green under the floodlit Ahmedabad skyline.

Jacob Duffy's (0/42 in 3 overs) friendly medium pace became cannon fodder for Abhishek as he smashed five of his half a dozen boundaries off him.

In case of Matt Henry (1/49 in four overs), once Samson smacked him for a six slightly wide off long-on, there was no looking back. With as many as 92 runs in the powerplay, India had seized the decisive advantage.

After Rachin Ravindra (1/32 in 2 overs) removed Abhishek after a 98-run opening stand off 43 balls, Kishan kept the tempo with four sixes and as many boundaries. (PTI)

Delhi's Khan Mkt sees 8pc rental growth of retail space last yr, 14pc rise at Gurugram's Galleria Mkt: Cushman

NEW DELHI, March 8: Delhi's upscale Khan Market saw an 8 per cent increase in rent for retail spaces last year on better demand and tight supply, according to Cushman & Wakefield.

Real estate consultant Cushman & Wakefield data showed that the monthly rent of major high street locations across Delhi-NCR rose in a range of 2-14 per cent last calendar year.

The monthly rent in Khan Market stood at ₹ 1,700-1,800 per sq ft during the October-December period of 2025, an increase of 8 per cent year-on-year. Khan Market is the most expensive high-street location in India.

In Connaught Place (Inner Circle), the monthly rent rose 4 per cent to ₹ 1,150 – 1,250 per square feet.

Main street rentals in Galleria Market (Gurugram) recorded highest 14 per cent growth at ₹ 1,150-1,250 per square feet a month. Monthly rentals in South Extension grew 3 per cent to 800–850 per sq ft.

Rents at Kamla Nagar in Delhi rose 11 per cent to ₹ 480–510 per square foot a month. Delhi's Greater Kailash-I, M Block, witnessed a 5 per cent increase to ₹ 475–500 per square foot per month.

In Karol Bagh, Delhi, the monthly rent rose to ₹ 395–415 per square foot. Rent in Delhi's Lajpat Nagar stood at ₹ 290 – 310 per square foot a month, up 3 per cent annually.

Rajouri Garden saw a 6 per cent increase in monthly rent to ₹ 255–265 per square foot. A 2 per cent increase in rent was recorded in Punjabi Bagh, Delhi to ₹ 260–275 per square feet a month.

Noida's Sector 18 posted monthly rental growth of 8 per cent to ₹ 200-220 per sq ft. In Gurugram Sector 29, the monthly rent rose 3 per cent annually to ₹ 180–190 per square feet during the October-December period of last year.

Cushman & Wakefield said the asking rent is based on carpet area of ground floor vanilla stores.

Gautam Saraf, Executive Managing Director, Mumbai and New Business, Cushman & Wakefield, said, "High streets across Delhi NCR recorded firm rental appreciation in 2025, with year-on-year growth ranging between 2–14 per cent, reflecting demand that continues to outpace the availability of quality space.

"Retailers across all product categories, particularly food and beverages (F&B) and fashion, are expanding their presence, he said.

Saraf noted that there is a growing preference among retailers for visibility-driven, high-consumption corridors with consistent footfall.

He mentioned that the rentals across key high-street locations continued to rise despite completion of few malls in the December quarter.

On the Khan Market, Saraf said it remains the country's most expensive high street and recorded around 8 per cent year-on-year rental appreciation in 2025.

"Characterised by consistently strong demand and extremely tight vacancy, the Khan market continues to attract premium and luxury brands seeking sustained visibility, brand positioning and deeper engagement with affluent consumer segments," Saraf said.

Shriram PM Monga, Co-founder & Principal Consultant at SRED Real Estate Advisory, said these established markets offer high visibility, steady footfall, and a relevant brand mix that attracts habitual consumers.

"Markets like Galleria and Khan Market benefit from limited supply and established catchment areas with high spending power," he said.

With very few new retail developments coming up at prime locations, Monga said the demand from both domestic and global brands is pushing rentals upward. (PTI)

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Voice of the hills people

Three For A Joy: India perform Demolition Act, win 3rd T20 World Cup title

AHMEDABAD, March 8: Suryakumar Yadav's team, easily India's greatest T20 outfit ever, created history on Sunday with an unprecedented third World Cup win, clinically demolishing a lacklustre New Zealand by 96 runs with an awe-inspiring batting performance and laser-precise bowling.

Suryakumar's men became the first men's international team to win successive World T20 titles and also the first to claim the trophy on home turf.

Sanju Samson (89 off 46 balls) and Abhishek Sharma (52 off 21 balls) added 92 in Powerplay and 98 for the opening stand after a tactical blunder by Black Caps skipper Mitchell Santner led to a record score of 255 for 5.

Having misread the pitch, Santner brought medium pacer Jacob Duffy dropping the useful off-spinner Cole McConchie, which proved to be decisive in the final outcome.

In-front of 86,000 fans, the chase was out of question as New Zealand huffed and puffed its way to 159 all out as Suryakumar, the man from Mumbai's Chembur, etched his name alongside Mahendra Singh Dhoni and Rohit Sharma in the record books.

"Champions! This remarkable triumph reflects exceptional skills, determination and teamwork. They have shown outstanding grit through the tournament. This victory has filled every Indian heart with pride and joy. Well done, Team India!" posted Prime Minister Narendra Modi on X within minutes of the triumph.

No credit will be enough for mostly under-fire Gautam Gambhir, who became the first coach to guide the team to two T20 World titles.

Following the demolition act with the bat, Jasprit Bumrah's artistry was good enough to dash any little hopes that New Zealand players might just have harboured at the back of their minds.

Bumrah was unreal as ever with figures of 4-0-15-4, adding to the mythical story of his career which will become folklore in years to come.

As far-fetched as it might sound, the current Indian T20 team under Gambhir's coaching has had the aura of USA's 'Dream Team' filled with the biggest of NBA stars like Michael Jordan, Magic Johnson and Larry Bird that won the 1992 Barcelona Olympics gold medal.

Just like that team, this Indian T20 outfit, filled with IPL's richest stars, has an air of invincibility around it. The side never seemed like losing the tournament in which it was the runaway favourite even before a ball had been bowled.

If the 2007 T20 World Cup victory was a watershed moment for Indian cricket, which gave birth to a behemoth like the IPL, the 2024 T20 World Cup win was a soothing balm to the heartbreak of the 2023 ODI World Cup final loss.

The 2026 title triumph is an assertion that in talent, India are light years ahead of other teams. This edition was never about a perfect campaign but always about finding an individual who would win it for the team.

Abhishek had a very poor tournament but redeemed himself in the final. Samson's career was on the line before he played the most defining innings of his career.

The 'crazy diamond' called Bumrah bowled those block-hole deliveries whenever the team asked and Axar Patel took those crazy catches which became a game-changer.

Ishan Kishan was the sheet anchor in every game and the skipper was the binding glue with Gambhir being the back-room brain that the team needed.

The team bond was evident and the players had each other's backs when one of the mates was sinking.

Both Suryakumar and Gambhir can claim credit for taking Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli's champion team to the next level.

When India batted, Samson scarred an awestruck New Zealand in the company of an equally destructive Abhishek, who saved his best for the last in India's record-breaking total.

And if that wasn't enough Ishan Kishan (54 off 25 balls) proved that even three can tango together as India's top three, in a superlative display, stunned New Zealand.

Abhishek took full advantage of Mitchell Santner's *(CONTD. ON PAGE 2)*

CM's Women's Day announcement

Nearly 40 lakh beneficiaries to get ₹9,000 next week

GUWAHATI, March 8: Emphasising that women empowerment has been central to Assam's growth story, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday, on the occasion of International Women's Day, said that nearly 40 lakh 'Orunodoi' beneficiaries will receive ₹ 9,000 each next week.

The consolidated payment comprising grants for four months along with an additional amount will be made on Tuesday, making it a record bank transfer of ₹ 3,600 crore on a single day under a government scheme, he claimed.

The single-day transfer to women beneficiaries comes as the state gears up for Assembly elections, when the BJP-led government will seek a third straight term.

"On March 10 at 10.30 am, 40 lakh Orunodoi families will receive ₹ 9,000 each," Sarma said in a Facebook Live.

Orunodoi is a flagship poverty alleviation scheme of the current government, under which eligible women beneficiaries receive ₹ 1,250 per month.

On the occasion, meetings will be held at the local level across the state, and the CM invited the beneficiary families to attend those, maintaining that it was the support of the people which has been the strength of the government.

"On a single day, ₹ 3,600 crore will be transferred to the beneficiaries, it will also be a record," he claimed.

Sarma had announced earlier that payment for four months from January this year, along with an additional amount for Bohag Bihu celebration (marking the Assamese New Year in mid-April), will be paid together in March.

Highlighting his government's focus on women's development, Sarma said in a post on X: "Empowering women has been central to Assam's growth story. From financial security to education, healthcare and entrepreneurship, our initiatives are helping lakhs of women step forward with confidence and independence."

"Today, we celebrate the strength and spirit of Assam's #NariShakti," he added.

In another post seeking support for the party in the coming elections, Sarma said, "One right vote can change the voice inside every home. The focus of @BJP4Assam has been to empower Assam's #NariShakti and every action of ours has reflected this belief."

Asserting that the effort to empower women will continue with more rigour, he appealed all to "Choose wisely, choose BJP".

The Chief Minister's Office (CMO), also in a post on the social media site, maintained that major strides have been made for the women of the state.

Under Central and state governments initiatives that have helped women, over 59 lakh tap water connections and more than 51 lakh Ujjwala gas connections for smoke-free kitchens have been provided.

Over 5.5 lakh 'Lakhpati Didis' have been created in the state, more than *(CONTD. ON PAGE 2)*

Raijor Dal-Cong alliance talks fall apart

Disagreement of seat-sharing: Akhil blames Gaurav Gogoi's 'arrogance'

Staff Reporter

GUWAHATI, March 8: Raijor Dal president and Sivasagar MLA Akhil Gogoi on Sunday announced the formal breakdown of his party's alliance with the Congress ahead of the upcoming Assam Assembly elections, blaming senior Congress leaders Gaurav Gogoi and Rakibul Hussain for what he described as "arrogance" that derailed the seat-sharing talks.

Addressing the reporters here, Akhil Gogoi alleged that the alliance collapsed primarily due to disagreements over seat allocation, particularly over a single constituency.

He said that despite several rounds of discussions, the Congress leadership failed to honour earlier assurances given to his party.

"Congress had approached us with a proposal for an alliance and sought our support. We had only asked for 15 constituencies to contest. However, they were willing to leave only nine seats for us, which was unacceptable," Gogoi said.

He further claimed that the All India Congress Committee (AICC) had earlier indicated that the Dhing Assembly constituency would be allotted to Raijor Dal as part of the alliance arrangement.

According to him, senior Congress leader Pradyut Bordoloi had also conveyed the same assurance during the negotiations.

"Both the AICC and Pradyut Bordoloi had informed us that Dhing would be given to our party. But later, Gaurav Gogoi and Rakibul Hussain refused to allow that," Gogoi alleged.

The Raijor Dal chief maintained that the dispute over the Dhing seat eventually led to the collapse of the proposed alliance between the two parties.

Gogoi also alleged that protests by Congress workers in Dalgaon against the proposed alliance were not spontaneous but were carried out under direct instructions from the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC).

"Congress workers protesting in Dalgaon were acting under the direct instructions of the APCC leadership," he claimed.

The development is seen as a setback for the prospects of opposition unity in Assam ahead of the crucial Assembly polls, as efforts had been underway to forge a broader alliance among anti-BJP forces in the state.

With the collapse of the talks, Raijor Dal is now expected to contest the elections independently.

Int'l Women's Day observed in KA and WKA

HT Bureau

DIPHU, March 8: Along with the rest of the world, International Women's Day was observed across Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong with programmes highlighting women's empowerment and social justice.

The Bharatiya Janata Party's women's wing, Bharatiya Janata Mahila Morcha, Lumbajong Mandal organised a programme at its office at 6 Kilu, The-so Ajur.

Addressing the gathering, Seema Ronghangpi, former president of Karbi Nimso Chingthur Asong (KNCA) and a leader of the Mahila Morcha, said that women still lack adequate representation in society.

Recalling her earlier involvement in movements for women's rights in the Karbi community, she noted that traditional Karbi authorities had once imposed restrictions on women, including barring them from entering certain areas while wearing sandals, using umbrellas or wearing bras.

Among others present at the programme were BJP Lumbajong Mandal president Bishnu Tisso, Bharatiya Janata Mahila Morcha Lumbajong Mandal president Irish Beypi and local MAC member Johny Timung.

Meanwhile, KNCA and the All India Progressive Women's Association (AIPWA) jointly organised a commemorative event focusing on women's empowerment and the continuing struggle for social justice.

The programme was inaugurated with the lighting of a ceremonial lamp by KNCA central committee vice-president Reka Terangpi and AIPWA Diphu district committee president Protima Singnarpi. Speakers including Protima Teronpi and KNCA general secretary Pratima Engheepi highlighted the global significance of the day and stressed the need to continue advocating for women's rights in the region.

Several leaders and activists from local organisations participated in the programme, including Sumit Timung, president of the Karbi Students' Association central committee; Jensing Timung, its general secretary; Robi Kumar Phangcho of Communist Party of India (Marxist–Leninist) Liberation; Kache Rongpipi of Serdihun Serpindeng Asong; Kamola Tissopi of KSKA; and Jibo Kumar Phangcho of the RYA Hills Committee.

During the programme, participants also observed a one-minute silence in memory of late Arati Terangpi, a former veteran leader of AIPWA Karbi Anglong, paying tribute to her contributions to the women's movement in the region.

Heroin worth ₹3.25 cr seized, 5 held

GUWAHATI, March 8: Five people were arrested after heroin worth ₹ 3.25 crore was seized from their possession in Assam's Cachar district, according to the Chief Minister's Office.

The arrests and recovery of the narcotics substance were made from two vehicles on Saturday.

The CMO, in a post on X, said that acting on specific intelligence, the Cachar police intercepted the two vehicles on the Silchar-Kalain Road.

"A total of 538 g of heroin worth ₹ 3.25 crore was seized, and five peddlers were held," it said.

"HCM Dr @himantabiswa has lauded the team for their clinical execution, reaffirming that Assam's fight against drugs will continue with zero compromise until our state is drug-free," the CMO added. (PTI)

CM seeks public support in polls

Jan Ashirwad Yatra draws large crowd in Margherita

HT Correspondent

MARGHERITA, March 8: The Jan Ashirwad Yatra, a major pre-election outreach initiative of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), continued to gather momentum across Assam ahead of the 2026 Assembly elections, with large crowds greeting chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma during the seventh day of the campaign on Sunday.

The campaign, which aims to seek public blessings and highlight the government's development and welfare initiatives, was flagged off by the chief minister on February 28 from the Gupteshwar Temple in Dhekiajuli of Sonitpur district.

On Sunday, the chief minister began the day's programme in Margherita after arriving by helicopter at the playground of Ledo Bazaar Bengali Higher Secondary School.

He later visited the Ledo Central Namghar to offer prayers and receive blessings from devotees and Vaishnavas.

Thousands of supporters lined both sides of National Highway 315 from Ledo to Margherita, creating a vibrant atmosphere as people welcomed the chief minister with flower showers and cheers.

Addressing supporters, Sarma expressed gratitude for the overwhelming response and highlighted the achievements of the state government while urging voters to support BJP candidates in the upcoming Assembly elections.

The chief minister was accompanied by Dilip Saikia, Cabinet minister Rupesh Gowala, Margherita MLA Bhaskar Sharma, and senior BJP leaders including Sanjay Singh, Kusha Kanta Borah, Pranab *(CONTD. ON PAGE 2)*

CERTIFIED QUALITY FRAMEWORKS

India set to lead global homoeopathy: Experts

NEW DELHI, March 8: India, home to one of the world's largest homoeopathy ecosystems, is set to emerge as a global leader in the sector, driven by strong clinical expertise, large-scale practitioner networks, and internationally recognised quality certifications and standards.

For decades, the German homoeopathy brands have enjoyed a premium global reputation, often being perceived as the gold standard in quality, consistency, and research-backed manufacturing, AYUSH experts said.

However, they said that India is not only on track to match but even surpass them, driven by two powerful quality frameworks - the AYUSH Premium Mark and NABL accreditation.

According to industry reports, the country has over 2.5 lakh registered homoeopathy practitioners, nearly 300 teaching institutions, and millions of patients relying on homoeopathy as their primary or complementary system of medicine.

The global homoeopathy market is

valued at over USD 8 to 10 billion, with Europe accounting for a significant share, historically dominated by Germany. Experts believe that quality-backed Indian brands are now well-positioned to challenge this dominance.

"The key differentiator lies in certified quality and scientific validation," said Dr Pradeep Prajapati, Director of the All India Institute of Ayurveda (AIIA).

He added that the AYUSH Premium Mark, launched by the Ministry of AYUSH, represents global-level compliance in manufacturing, safety, and quality management for AYUSH products.

The NABL (National Accreditation Board for Testing and Calibration Laboratories) certification ensures internationally benchmarked accuracy, reliability, and reproducibility in testing and quality control – aligned with ISO standards recognised across Europe and beyond, Dr Prajapati explained.

Rajeshwar Tiwari, a senior representative from the Ministry of AYUSH, said India has unmatched clinical data, practitioner strength, and patient diversity in homoeopathy.

"When this experiential advantage is supported by certified quality frameworks like AYUSH Premium and NABL, Indian homoeopathy gains scientific credibility that is globally comparable. This integration of research, regulation, *(CONTD. ON PAGE 2)*

Over one lakh mature trees chopped in Assam in 10 yrs; experts worried in absence of impact study

GUWAHATI, March 8: More than one lakh mature full-grown trees have been felled across Assam since May 2016, when the BJP formed its first government in the state, for various public and private projects, according to official records.

The Assam government, on the other hand, said that all these trees were cut in "dire necessity" to develop the projects, while more than 3.5 crore saplings have been planted in the last two years alone to compensate the loss in green cover.

However, experts from different state-run institutions opined that cutting so many trees have resulted in "significant ecological loss" and comparing felling of mature trees with planting saplings is "problematic", while terming it "scientifically concerning" for no study to assess the impact.

Replying to a set of queries sent to the Principal Chief Conservator of Forest (PCCF) through an application under the Right to Information Act, 15 out of 44 wildlife and territorial divisions across Assam have said that 1,06,896 trees have been felled so far since May 2016.

A set of 11 queries were submitted to the Office of the PCCF & Head of Forest Force under the Environment, Forest and Climate Change Department of the Assam government. It was forwarded to 43 divisions across the state.

Apart from the 15 divisions that provided data, 12 more responded to the RTI application but did not give any information related to tree felling.

No reply has come from the remaining 16 divisions at all so far.

None of the 27 divisions that responded to the queries have conducted any study on the impact on ecology for cutting these huge numbers of trees over the years.

When contacted, Assam Environment, Forest and Climate Change Minister Chandra Mohan Patowary told PTI that the trees were cut for oil exploration projects as well as infrastructure development.

"These trees have been cut across the state for various development projects. It was a dire necessity to fell the trees for different projects," he added.

Giving examples, Patowary said a huge number of trees were cut for the four-laning of National *(CONTD. ON PAGE 2)*

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QUOTE OF THE DAY

The struggle you're in today is developing the strength you need tomorrow.- Robert Tew

Nitish quitting state politics

With Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar joining the Rajya Sabha, the avenue is now fully open for the Bharatiya Janata Party to appoint its own chief minister in Bihar for the first time. However, Nitish will formally enter the Upper House once the new Rajya Sabha term begins after April 9, when outgoing members will retire. Potential successors include Bihar deputy chief minister Samrat Choudhary and Union minister Nityanand Rai, both considered as strong contenders if the BJP takes over the top post. However, speculation is doing rounds that Nitish Kumar's son Nishant Kumar may soon formally enter politics by joining the Janata Dal (United). Political chatter has also speculated that if Nitish Kumar eventually moves to the Rajya Sabha, Nishant could even emerge as a contender for the post of Bihar's Deputy Chief Minister. Meanwhile, the Opposition has accused the BJP of carrying out a political abduction in Bihar, and said the core voter of Janata Dal (United) feels cheated now. RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav on Thursday said that Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's decision to enter the Rajya Sabha was a betrayal of the people's mandate. He alleged that the BJP has always been opposed to Dalits and OBCs, and with Kumar leaving the CM's post, it will seek to implement its agenda in the socialist stronghold. While the Congress leader Jairam Ramesh said the elevation of Nitish Kumar was a conspiracy hatched by the big two in the BJP.

The Rajya Sabha elections to seven seats in Maharashtra are likely to be uncontested, because there are exactly seven candidates in the fray. The BJP's candidates are Ramdas Athavale, party general secretary Vinod Tawde, Maya Ivnate, and Ramrao Vadkute. The Shinde Shiv Sena's candidate is its firebrand speaker, Dr Jyoti Waghmare. The Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) candidate is Parth Pawar (son of the late Ajit Pawar), while the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) has successfully managed to avoid a tussle and had supported the candidature of Sharad Pawar.

The architect of this united front was Pawar's daughter Supriya Sule, who took the initiative and she had a discussion with Uddhav Thackeray and Rahul Gandhi in order to secure support for Sharad Pawar's candidature. However, Uddhav Thackeray is said to have put forth a condition that the NCP's Sharad Pawar would not join hands with the BJP in case of a merger between the two factions. As a result, senior NCP (SP) leader Jayant Patil made a statement that a merger was out of the question. So, there is no possibility of a merger anymore. This issue does not exist anymore.

The Importance of Freedom of Speech

DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

The concept of democracy is fundamentally rooted in the active participation of the people and in their continuous expression of opinions, where freedom of speech is regarded as an indispensable and inseparable component. In a healthy society, every individual's ability to express their thoughts, ideas, and beliefs without any fear or apprehension is a basic right. Without this right, the foundation of democracy easily becomes fragile, because when the voice of the people is silenced, the governing system gradually paves the way toward authoritarianism. Human life is not confined merely to food, clothing, and shelter; the urge for self-expression is a natural and inherent human instinct. When a citizen can openly present their views before the government or society, they indirectly participate in the policy-making process of the nation and contribute to nation-building. This concept of freedom of speech creates space for diverse ideas in society, which acts as a powerful catalyst for overall intellectual development. Since governance in a democracy is generally conducted through elected representatives, it is extremely important that the people retain the right to closely observe their actions and criticize them when necessary. Such criticism not only points out mistakes but also helps keep the machinery of governance constantly alert and active. There can be no alternative to freedom of speech in sustaining an environment of rational debate and open discussion at every level of society. It is not merely a political right; it is a deeply sensitive and significant aspect of human dignity, which gives individuals the courage to apply their existence and ideas for the greater good of society. In the absence of freedom of speech, a dreadful culture of silence develops in society, where people hesitate to speak out even when they witness injustice, and as a result, the seeds of corruption and moral decay begin to germinate. Every form of social change begins with a new idea, and to establish that idea in society requires fearless freedom of speech. Therefore, for a transparent, accountable, and progressive system of governance, the protection and continuous practice of freedom of speech at every level of society is desirable.

In the sphere of state administration, the only weapon to hold any government accountable is the right to fearless criticism and its proper application. The very nature of power is to centralize itself, and whenever power accumulates in one place, the possibility of its misuse increases. The only way to prevent this possibility is to keep the people's right to question constantly alive. When citizens can thoroughly analyze governmental decisions and freely express their opinions on them, the government is compelled to refrain from acting arbitrarily. Freedom of speech creates an environment in which the ruling class realizes that every step they take is under the vigilant watch of the people. As a result, transparency emerges in governance and the level of corruption decreases. In a democratic country, the relevance of opposing ideologies can never be denied, because opposition is the first barrier against the arbitrariness of rulers. Protecting the voices of those who hold dissenting views is a very important objective of freedom of speech, since there is no guarantee that the opinion of the majority is always correct. At times, the reasoning of a single individual can transform the perspective of an entire society, provided they are given the opportunity to speak freely. This right is also essential for ensuring political stability and social justice. If there is no legitimate and peaceful means for people to express their grievances and dissatisfaction, such resentment is more likely to take a violent form. Freedom of speech provides an avenue for that resentment to be expressed through intellectual and rational means, thereby preventing disruption to overall social peace. Thus, freedom of speech is not merely a tool for opposing the government; rather, it is a powerful means of guiding a nation along the right and stable path.

The intellectual growth and transformative trajectory of a society depend entirely on how freely its people can think and how openly they can express those thoughts to others. A society that welcomes new ideas and opposing perspectives progresses rapidly. The free environment created by freedom of speech continuously inspires people to seek new truths and to challenge outdated and irrelevant notions. To speak out against traditional customs or blind beliefs requires healthy mental strength, and freedom of speech provides people with that strength. When thought is bound by artificial chains, the creativity and innovative capacity of a society suffer an untimely death. To ensure equal opportunities for all in a democracy, equal opportunities for expression must first be ensured. The poor, the deprived, and the oppressed sections of society use freedom of speech as their primary weapon in the struggle for their rights. It is through this freedom that their grievances reach the ears of the elite and the government. This fosters a balanced condition within society and promotes mutual understanding among different sections. The constant exercise of freedom of speech nurtures rational thinking among people, teaching them to seek solutions through reason rather than emotion. For the formation of a knowledge-based society, the free flow of information and its impartial analysis are extremely important. Where freedom of speech is protected, there is always the opportunity to verify the truth of information and to strongly resist misinformation that can mislead society. The continuous practice of freedom of speech plays a crucial role in enriching the collective reservoir of knowledge and in strengthening human values.

The free flow of information and the right to form independent opinions based on that information constitute one of the fundamental pillars of a democratic system, which is deeply intertwined with the freedom of the press. In a healthy society, it is essential for the people to be aware of the true condition of the nation, and to accomplish this effectively, an impartial and unhindered press is necessary. Only when the media can present truthful information before the public without fear of the government or any other pressure can ordinary people gain comprehensive knowledge about the policy-making process of the country. This practical dimension of freedom of speech builds a strong bridge between the government and the people. The tendency to conceal information or distort the truth strikes the heaviest blow to the foundation of democracy. In such circumstances, the pursuit of truth and bringing it before society becomes an extended expression of freedom of speech. In the present time, ordinary people also have access to numerous open platforms to express their views, which has expanded the scope of freedom of speech in an unprecedented manner. As a result, it has become possible to build widespread public opinion against injustice occurring in any corner of society within moments. However, with every form of freedom comes a serious sense of responsibility. Freedom can never mean arbitrariness; it is a disciplined process of expressing one's views while respecting the rights and dignity of others. In a democracy, everyone must remain vigilant to ensure that the misuse of freedom of speech does not disrupt social peace and order. The spread of false information and the creation of division in society tarnish the true concept of freedom of speech. Therefore, in a healthy society, freedom of speech means standing in favor of reason and continuously waging an intellectual struggle against falsehood, thereby making the future of democracy more secure and safe.

The true meaning of freedom of speech is not limited merely to expressing one's own thoughts; it also fosters a generous mindset of patiently and respectfully listening to opposing views. Genuine democracy flourishes in a society where people learn to accept differing opinions and maintain an atmosphere of tolerance. Freedom of speech is, in fact, a great test of tolerance. Allowing even those views with which we completely disagree to be expressed freely is the essence of democratic values. This is not indifference; rather, it is a profound expression of respect for others' freedom. Without freedom of speech, no individual can fully develop their mental and intellectual potential, because without the exchange of ideas, the scope of human knowledge can never expand. Just as the right to life is fundamental, freedom of speech too should be regarded as an indispensable component of society. It creates an environment conducive to justice and equality and provides a powerful language of protest against any form of discrimination. Every question raised in a democracy compels the system of governance to become more dynamic, vigilant, and people-oriented. Therefore, the protection of freedom of speech cannot be left solely to laws or courts; the entire civil society must remain alert and conscious about it. Every individual in society must deeply understand that their own freedom is equally intertwined with the freedom of their neighbors and fellow citizens. This interdependence binds society together in unity. In conclusion, the more freedom of speech develops, the deeper the roots of democracy will penetrate into society, leading to the emergence of a healthy, strong, and rational community. (The author is the recipient of the 'Yuba

Is there a mirror universe where time moves backward?

By: Satyabrat Borah

A quiet question has followed humanity for centuries. What is time and why does it move only forward? Every day people wake up, grow older, and watch memories accumulate while moments disappear. Broken cups do not reassemble themselves. Yesterday never returns. Life moves in a single direction. Yet modern physics sometimes whispers ideas that challenge this simple understanding. One such idea has recently captured public imagination. Some physicists suggest that our universe may have a strange twin, a mirror universe where time flows in the opposite direction.

At first hearing, the idea sounds like a plot from a science fiction film. A universe running backward where cause and effect appear reversed seems impossible to imagine. Yet scientific curiosity often begins with questions that feel strange or even uncomfortable. Throughout history, discoveries that once sounded unbelievable later became part of accepted knowledge. The Earth moving around the Sun once felt absurd. The idea that invisible particles shape all matter also felt strange when first proposed. Science grows by testing daring ideas.

The concept of a mirror universe linked to reversed time emerges from attempts to understand the earliest moments of the cosmos. Scientists studying the birth of the universe face a puzzle. The universe began about 13.8 billion years ago in an event known as the Big Bang. This event marks the moment when space, matter, and time began expanding. When physicists examine equations describing that event, some find a curious symmetry hidden within the mathematics.

Symmetry plays a powerful role in physics. Many laws of nature look the same when certain changes occur. A snowflake shows symmetry in its pattern. A butterfly shows symmetry between its wings. Physical laws also show similar balance. Some equations describing the universe remain valid when time runs forward or backward. This property fascinates physicists because daily experience tells a different story. In ordinary life time never reverses. A glass falling from a table shatters. The fragments never leap back together to rebuild the glass.

Physicists call this one way flow the arrow of time. The arrow points from past to future. One explanation for this direction comes from the concept of entropy, which describes disorder. According to thermodynamics, disorder tends to increase. Ice melts in warm air. Smoke spreads through a room. These changes give time a sense of direction. Yet some fundamental equations of physics do not care about this direction. They work equally well if time moves forward or backward. This strange feature led some researchers to consider a radical possibility. Perhaps the Big Bang did not create just one universe moving forward in time. Perhaps two universes appeared at that moment. One moves in the direction humans experience as time moving forward. The other moves in the opposite direction.

According to this idea, the Big Bang sits like a dividing line between two cosmic realms. On one side lies the universe where humanity lives. On the other side lies a mirror universe where time flows away from the Big Bang in the opposite direction. To inhabitants of that universe, time would still feel normal. They would experience past and future in their own direction. Their physics would feel as natural to them as ours feels to us.

One can imagine the Big Bang as a central point where two rivers begin flowing in opposite directions. Each river moves away from the same source. Observers traveling along either river would feel that they are moving forward, never realizing that another stream flows the other way.

This idea gained attention after work by several physicists who tried to solve a puzzle involving the symmetry of nature. Physical laws often respect a principle known as CPT symmetry. The letters stand for charge, parity, and time. If certain properties are reversed, the laws of physics should still hold true. When scientists applied this symmetry to the universe itself, an interesting possibility appeared. The universe might naturally come in pairs that mirror each other through time.

In such a picture, the mirror universe would contain particles that behave as reflections of those in our universe. Time for that universe would flow in the opposite direction relative to ours. The entire cosmic story there would unfold backward from our perspective.

This does not mean that people in that universe would walk backward or remember the future. Inside that world everything would still feel normal. Their past would remain behind them and their future ahead. Only an observer outside both universes could notice the reversed direction.

Another reason scientists explore such ideas comes from the mystery of dark matter. Astronomers know that galaxies contain far more mass than visible matter can explain. Stars move under the influence of a hidden substance called dark matter. This material does not emit light and remains invisible to telescopes. Researchers still do not know what it is made of.

Some physicists wonder whether particles from a mirror universe could help explain this hidden mass. In certain models, a type of particle called a sterile neutrino may exist. Such particles interact very weakly with ordinary matter. They might have formed in the early universe under conditions predicted by the mirror universe theory. If these particles exist they could contribute to dark matter. Scientists are searching for clues in cosmic radiation and particle experiments. No definite evidence has appeared yet, though the possibility continues to attract attention.

The idea also touches deeper philosophical questions about time itself. Human beings experience time as a constant flow carrying events from past to future. Memories form in one direction. Aging occurs in one direction. The universe expanding from the Big Bang gives the impression of an unfolding story.

Yet physics sometimes suggests that time might not be as simple as human perception implies. Some equations treat time as another dimension similar to space. In that view past and future might both exist in a larger structure that human awareness experiences step by step.

A mirror universe with reversed time challenges imagination but also encourages fresh thinking. It invites people to ask what time really means. Is time a fundamental feature of reality or simply a property emerging from deeper physical laws?

Such questions have fascinated scientists and philosophers alike. Ancient thinkers once wondered whether time existed independently of human experience. Modern physics approaches the mystery through mathematics and observation.

Albert Einstein revolutionized understanding of time with his theory of relativity. According to his work time does not flow identically everywhere. It can stretch or slow depending on gravity and motion. Clocks aboard fast moving spacecraft tick differently from clocks on Earth. Time near a black hole moves more slowly compared with distant regions of space.

These discoveries already transformed the old idea of time as a universal ticking clock. The mirror universe concept adds another layer of imagination to that evolving picture. Some scientists remain cautious about the idea. Physics requires experimental evidence before accepting bold theories. At present the mirror universe remains a hypothesis rather than confirmed reality. Researchers continue examining cosmic data to see whether observations support or contradict such models.

Science moves forward through testing ideas rather than immediately accepting them. Many theories fade when evidence fails to support them. Others grow stronger as new observations match predictions. The search for truth about the universe involves patience and curiosity. Even ideas that later prove incorrect can still inspire new research and creative thinking. Questions often open doors to deeper understanding.

Public fascination with the mirror universe reflects a larger human desire to understand our place in the cosmos. People naturally wonder whether reality might contain hidden layers still unknown to science. The night sky has always invited such questions.

Centuries ago early astronomers gazed at the stars without knowing that galaxies existed far outside the Milky Way. Today powerful telescopes reveal billions of galaxies scattered across immense distances. Each discovery expands awareness of the universe's scale and complexity.

The possibility of a mirror universe continues that tradition of expanding imagination. It reminds people that the cosmos may hold structures stranger than anything previously imagined. Some readers imagine what life might look like in such a universe. Would stars shine in the same way. Would planets form similar worlds. Would intelligent beings wonder about the nature of time just as humans do.

Physics does not yet provide answers to these imaginative questions. The mirror universe theory focuses mainly on mathematical symmetry and cosmic origins rather than detailed descriptions of alternate worlds. Still the idea offers a poetic image of the cosmos. Two universes emerging from the same birth moment, each carrying time in opposite directions, suggests a deep balance hidden within reality.

This vision does not diminish the wonder of the universe humans inhabit. Instead it enriches appreciation for the mystery surrounding existence. The more scientists learn about the cosmos, the more questions appear. Space exploration continues revealing unexpected discoveries. Telescopes detect planets orbiting distant stars. Observatories capture images of black holes. Instruments measure faint radiation left from the early universe.

Each discovery adds pieces to a cosmic puzzle that humanity has only begun to assemble. Ideas like the mirror universe illustrate how science blends imagination with careful reasoning. Children often ask simple questions that touch profound mysteries. Why does time move forward. What happened before the universe began. Could other universes exist.

Scientists ask similar questions using mathematics and observation. Their answers sometimes sound strange because reality itself may be stranger than everyday intuition suggests.

The mirror universe theory may eventually prove correct or may be replaced by another explanation of cosmic symmetry. Either outcome contributes to scientific progress. Knowledge grows through exploration of possibilities. Theories act as stepping stones guiding researchers toward deeper insight.

For ordinary readers, the idea offers a reminder that the universe remains full of secrets waiting to be uncovered. The sky above Earth represents only a small window into a vast and complex reality.

Human curiosity continues pushing that window wider. Each generation of scientists inherits unanswered questions and carries the search a little further.

One day new observations may reveal whether the universe truly has a hidden twin where time moves in the opposite direction. Until that moment arrives, the idea remains one of the most fascinating possibilities in modern physics.

The story of science shows that imagination often leads to discovery. When people dare to question familiar assumptions, new perspectives emerge.

Time itself may still hold surprises. The steady march of seconds and minutes that shapes human life might represent only one aspect of a deeper cosmic structure.

The mirror universe concept encourages a sense of wonder about that structure. It invites humanity to keep asking questions about the nature of reality.

Perhaps somewhere within the mathematical fabric of the cosmos lies a reflection of our universe moving along its own path through time. Whether real or symbolic, the idea reminds us that understanding the universe is an ongoing journey.

As long as curiosity remains alive, people will continue exploring mysteries of space, time, and existence. The universe may still hold revelations that challenge imagination and reshape understanding of reality itself.

Israel, US, Iran war is an economic disaster for India

By: Matein Khalid

The geopolitical convulsion in Iran has led to panic buying in Brent crude as Saudi Arabia's largest refinery Ras Tanura and Qatar's LNG mega complex at Ras Laffan shut production even as tanker traffic in the Straits of Hormuz comes to a halt amid soaring war risk, insurance premia, IRGC attacks on oil tankers and a 3X spike in VLCC/LNG freight costs. This is a disaster for India, the world's third largest crude oil importer at 5-MBD, of which no less than 2.6-MBD originates from the Gulf states and Iran via the Straits of Hormuz maritime choke point.

A protracted war in the skies above Iran or a blockade of Hormuz would have a disastrous impact on India's current account deficit and set the stage for the Indian rupee, the worst performing currency in Asia despite Modi's (56 inch) chest beating propaganda to inexorably depreciate to 100 against King Dollar, the planet's resurgent FX safe haven. Higher inflation in India amid a widening current account deficit at fiscal pressures would ignite capital outflows from Dalal Street in Asia's most expensive stock market. The GCC is the destination for 15 percent of Indian exports and its entrepôt Dubai is the transshipment hub for Indian exports to Europe and Asia. The 10 million Indian workers in the GCC also account for 40% of $135 billion in global remittances it attracted last year. The UAE is a favourite destination for India's financial elite and the Iran crisis has exposed its vulnerability to drone and missile attack on its airport, seaports, five star hotels and luxury villa enclaves on man-made islands in the Gulf. There are 3.8 million Indians living, working in the UAE, which is also the second largest market after the US for Indian electronics exports. The end of the Dubai property bubble and the escalation of US-Israeli aerial attacks on Iran are thus a financial, trade, diplomatic and human disaster for the Indian diaspora. India's high-net worth elite will increasingly favour Singapore/Hong Kong, Switzerland and even Malta as safer hubs for their offshore nest eggs than the UAE, Bahrain or Qatar since geopolitical and logistics risk in the Gulf have just skyrocketed. The Indian rupee has fallen 10% against the US dollar in the past 2-years. The Indian rupee was 58 when Modi was first elected prime minister in May 2014 and has now fallen to 92, a horrific 48% depreciation in a decade when the BJP supposedly delivered an economic miracle. This 48% fall in the Indian rupee since 2014 is one reason why so many Arab ultra high net worth family offices I know in the Gulf refuse to invest in Indian private equity apart from the usual complaints of dodgy sponsors, manipulated IPOs, high taxation, onerous bureaucracy and politicised securities regulator. All these trends will be magnified by the Iran crisis and inevitable fallout on the Indian rupee, inflation, current account deficit and a steeper INR yield curve.

The Iran crisis's endgame could well be $100 Brent and a plunge in cross border trade and private investment flows that could presage a global recession even as inflation and interest rates surge in India. The volatile geopolitics of the Middle East will only amplify the traditional Indian investor penchant towards hard assets such as gold and silver over financial assets like equities, G-Secs, corporate bonds, mutual funds and private equity. The anti-rupee phobia of long term Indian HNW investors in the Gulf will be reinforced by a steeper depreciation path for the INR in the next 3-years. Indian wealth will naturally gravitate to the offshore embrace of King Dollar. The parabolic rise in global gas prices after the closure of Qatar Energy's LNG complex, the largest in the world, is also a disaster for the Indian fertilizer and crop nutrient market, which is also hostage to the war in the Gulf. Modi could thus face political unrest in the next wave of Indian state elections, particularly in the agricultural heartlands of the Punjab, Haryana and UP. The loss of Iranian imports and a multi-billion dollar write off in India's investment on the Chabahar Port in the Gulf means, India is at the mercy of Trump not to impose punitive tariffs on its cheap Russian oil and gas imports. The sharp rise in the Indian VIX to a 9-month high reflects panic on Dalal Street amid a quest for protection from a Nifty whose downside risk could be a lot more than 25,000 as corporate earnings growth assumptions must now be reevaluated in a grimmer macro/INR zeitgeist.

Hopefully, the return of El Niño will not mean a weak monsoon that will aggravate the fuel price hit to margins and rural demand. The RBI cannot ease in this macro milieu and even a 6.7% G-Sec rate is insufficient to offset the higher inflation risk implicit in $85 Brent crude. My fave short remains the paint sector for obvious reasons, especially since Asian paints is losing market share to Grasim even as input costs soar to wreck margins. ***(IPA Service)***

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The long afterlife of a regulatory failure: India, HPV, and Vaccine Hesitancy

By: Oommen C. Kurian

India launched its nationwide HPV vaccination campaign on 28 February 2026, announced by Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi, with Union Health Minister Jagat Prakash Nadda joining virtually. Given India's high burden of cervical cancer, the nationwide rollout carried significant public health importance. It was also quietly remarkable for another reason, particularly for those who have followed this story closely. Mr Nadda had been a member of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Health that, in 2013, produced a damning report on the conduct of an HPV vaccine demonstration project in India. The report followed an investigation into the deaths of seven participants who received the vaccine under the project, mostly poor tribal girls living in government hostels, among the country's most vulnerable and voiceless communities. The Chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee at the time, Mr Brajesh Pathak, now Deputy Chief Minister with additional charge of health in Uttar Pradesh, also launched the vaccination campaign in the state on 28 February.

The 2013 committee report focused on regulatory, ethical, and surveillance failures within the system. A separate committee appointed by the Government of India later examined the seven deaths of vaccinated girls. It concluded that they were most probably unrelated to the vaccine, noting the absence of any consistent clinical pattern preceding death or any temporal or spatial clustering. Despite the controversy, the HPV vaccines continued to be available in India's private market. International scientific literature has not identified safety concerns, and the World Health Organization (WHO) has endorsed the vaccine now being rolled out in India.

The launch of the 2026 HPV vaccination campaign triggered a fresh wave of social media opposition, with the 2013 parliamentary committee report widely recirculated. The seven deaths associated with the 2009 PATH demonstration project were repeatedly invoked, and anti-vaccine accounts portrayed the rollout as a repetition of an experiment that had already claimed the lives of tribal girls. Missing from much of this discourse were the committee's actual findings and, crucially, what it did not conclude. In response, medical associations and government agencies have mounted a coordinated outreach effort across traditional and social media to reassure the public of the vaccine's safety.

The launch of the 2026 HPV vaccination campaign triggered a fresh wave of social media opposition, with the 2013 parliamentary committee report widely recirculated. The seven deaths associated with the 2009 PATH demonstration project were repeatedly invoked, and anti-vaccine accounts portrayed the rollout as a repetition of an experiment that had already claimed the lives of tribal girls. Missing from much of this discourse were the committee's actual findings.

This divergence between perception and evidence reflects what occurs when a regulatory system lacks both the capacity and the credibility to settle a question authoritatively. India's sixteen-year delay in adopting HPV vaccination stemmed from institutions' inability to communicate safety conclusions with sufficient clarity and conviction. That institutional fragility was evident earlier: in 2014, the Ministry of Health acknowledged "collective failure" three times in its formal response to the parliamentary committee's report. The resulting controversy delayed national rollout for over a decade and a half, at the cost of tens of thousands of preventable deaths, until the recent decision to correct course and implement a nationwide campaign.

Ethical Lapses and Regulatory Breakdown

In mid-2009, PATH, a Seattle-based non-governmental organisation, partnered with India's apex medical research body, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), to conduct what it termed a "demonstration project" for HPV vaccines in the districts of Khammam and Vadodara. Approximately 23,000 girls aged 10–14 — many from poor tribal communities residing in government hostels — received either Merck's Gardasil or GlaxoSmithKline's Cervarix, both supplied by the manufacturers. The project was funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. At the same time, PATH was running similar demonstration projects in Uganda, Peru, and Vietnam. The 72nd Parliamentary Standing Committee later observed that the selection of countries — all high-burden, high-population markets with potential for rollouts of universal immunisation programmes suggested a commercial rationale alongside a public health objective.

When seven girls died during the course of the project, the programme was suspended. It is at this juncture that the episode has been most persistently misread — with lasting consequences. Investigations by a government-appointed inquiry committee concluded that none of the deaths was likely caused by the vaccine. The recorded causes included drowning, snakebite, two instances of pesticide ingestion classified as suicide, and a case of malaria; the remaining deaths were indeterminate but showed no clinical pattern consistent with vaccine-related harm. No post-mortem examination identified evidence of an adverse vaccine reaction.

India records over 120,000 new cases of cervical cancer and approximately 80,000 deaths each year — the majority preventable through vaccination.

What the investigations did identify was a research exercise conducted under conditions that would have been unacceptable in jurisdictions with robust clinical oversight. Consent procedures were deeply compromised: in many cases, hostel wardens or school principals signed on behalf of illiterate parents. In Andhra Pradesh alone, thousands of consent forms bore a warden's signature rather than that of a parent or legal guardian. Immunisation cards were printed in English, a language neither the girls nor their families could read, and thousands of thumb impressions were recorded in place of signatures. Many participants believed they were receiving a routine government vaccination and were unaware that they were enrolled in a research study. No systematic mechanism to monitor adverse events was established. These findings pointed to grave ethical and procedural failures. They did not establish that the vaccine caused the deaths, a distinction that was largely erased in the public debate that followed.

The 72nd Parliamentary Standing Committee report, presented to the Rajya Sabha on 30 August 2013 and endorsed by members across major political parties, recognised this distinction, even if its language was unsparing. Its criticism was directed primarily at process failures: the misclassification of a clinical study as a "demonstration project", the exploitation of regulatory grey areas, and the use of state machinery to administer a research exercise as though it were a routine public health intervention. The committee observed that the Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) had "remained a silent spectator … even when its own rules and regulations were being so flagrantly violated." The failure was identified as institutional and systemic, shared across multiple agencies. It was not an indictment of a harmful vaccine.

These systemic lacunae were not unique to the HPV vaccine project. For years, India's clinical research ecosystem functioned amid uneven regulatory enforcement, under-resourced ethics committees, and weak institutional accountability. Concerns regarding consent procedures and adverse-event reporting resurfaced during the COVID-19 vaccine trials. The HPV episode was therefore not an aberration, but a particularly visible manifestation of a structural weakness, one that predated PATH's entry into India and endured well beyond it.

A comparison with the other countries where PATH conducted HPV demonstration projects highlights the difference in timelines. Uganda incorporated the HPV vaccine into its national immunisation programme in 2015. Peru moved even earlier, introducing it nationwide in 2011 without significant political controversy. Vietnam, the slowest of the three, has scheduled national inclusion for 2026 — the same year India is finally proceeding with rollout.

Weak regulatory systems do not merely fail in the moment of oversight. They create informational vacuums that allow mistrust to harden, fuelling vaccine hesitancy long after the original events have passed.

India records over 120,000 new cases of cervical cancer and approximately 80,000 deaths each year — the majority preventable through vaccination. Peru and Uganda, both participants in the earlier PATH demonstration project, have protected adolescent girls against the HPV strains responsible for most of these cancers since 2011 and 2015, respectively. India and Vietnam began only in 2026. The social media backlash accompanying the 2026 rollout draws on the same recycled narrative that contributed to that delay.

In the absence of a credible and widely accepted official account, a simpler story took hold: that foreign organisations had experimented on tribal girls, that seven had died, and that the episode had gone unaddressed. The narrative carries emotional force and persistence, resurfacing with each subsequent vaccine initiative. Weak regulatory systems do not merely fail in the moment of oversight. They create informational vacuums that allow mistrust to harden, fuelling vaccine hesitancy long after the original events have passed.

Rebuilding Credibility in Implementation

India is now administering single-dose Gardasil, procured through Gavi, as the indigenously developed Cervavac by Serum Institute of India awaits WHO approval for single-dose use. The vaccine is being delivered to millions of girls through a public programme whose credibility will depend on the strength of the institutions behind it. At this scale, adverse events will occur. Each will be viewed through the memory of 2009. Public trust will turn on how transparently and consistently those events are investigated and communicated.

Union Health Minister Jagat Prakash Nadda's movement from the 2013 committee room to the 2026 ministry podium reflects, in miniature, India's own path. The country moved from a legitimate grievance about research conduct through years of conflation and mistrust before recognising that the science itself was not at fault.

That requires independent adverse-event surveillance with findings reported publicly, regardless of convenience; consent processes designed for the communities they serve rather than for bureaucratic compliance; and ethics review mechanisms with genuine autonomy. A programme of this magnitude, serving a population that has waited this long and borne this cost, demands institutional foundations capable of sustaining it through the next wave of opposition — and the one after that.

The girls in Khammam and Vadodara received vaccines that were, and remain, among the most effective cancer-prevention tools in modern medicine. The failure lay not in the science, but in procedure and oversight: serious enough to warrant reform, yet categorically different from the narrative that has circulated for over fifteen years. Union Health Minister Jagat Prakash Nadda's movement from the 2013 committee room to the 2026 ministry podium reflects, in miniature, India's own path. The country moved from a legitimate grievance about research conduct through years of conflation and mistrust before recognising that the science itself was not at fault. Trust in a health system is not restored by announcement. It is built gradually, through institutions that act with credibility and consistency. ***(Courtesy: ORF)***

Medicare costs: 3 key changes in 2026

By: David Mills

Experts are urging Medicare recipients to carefully research their options for next year during the open enrollment period that is now under way.

They say changes in premiums and other Medicare components as well as the government shutdown could affect what they pay for medical care as well as what services are available to them.

"Millions of Medicare beneficiaries will face higher out-of-pockets costs and reduced benefits in 2026, so comparing Medicare coverage options is especially crucial this year," Whitney Stidom, vice president of consumer enablement at eHealth, told Medical News Today.

"Beneficiaries should be proactive during the Medicare annual enrollment period, as comparing plans from multiple insurers can help people save money and find the right option for them," Stidom added.

The open enrollment period for Medicare began on October 15 and lasts until December 7. This eligibility window is for people 65 years and older who want to sign up for the federally funded health program or make changes to their current plans.

In addition to the usual considerations, there also may be some uncertainties added this year if the federal government shutdown lasts for an extended period of time.

One is that the processing of claims by recipients and payments to medical providers could be delayed.

Another is that telehealth services could be reduced. Some telehealth programs that were offered over the past several years expired on October 1 and Congress did not take action to renew them.

"Telehealth restrictions will lead to gaps in access for many patients, especially those who are dealing with disabilities or those living in rural areas," said Kanwar Kelley, MD, a specialist in otolaryngology head and neck surgery, obesity medicine, and lifestyle medicine as well as the co-founder and chief executive officer of Side Health in Orinda, CA.

"Converting patients accustomed to telehealth back to in-person visits will incur costs for transportation, lost work, and time," Kelley told MNT. "Patients with mobility issues, rural travel barriers, or caregiver constraints — who benefited most from telehealth — may face greater costs and logistical hurdles to get needed care, and delayed or avoided care can increase downstream costs and worse outcomes."

The basic facts about Medicare

About 69 million people in the United States get health coverage under the Medicare system. About 90% of those covered are 65 years or older. Most of those under 65 are people with specific disabilities.

Basic Medicare coverage includes what is known as Part A and Part B.

Part A covers inpatient care at hospitals, critical access hospitals, and skilled nursing facilities. It also helps cover hospice care and some home healthcare. It is estimated that only 1% of people on Part A pay a monthly premium.

Part B covers necessary medical services such as doctor's visits, outpatient care, and ambulance services. Premiums are usually deducted from a person's monthly Social Security check. An estimated 51% of Medicare recipients have supplemental health insurance such as a Medicare Advantage plan.

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) estimate there will be about 5,600 Medicare Advantage Plans available nationwide in 2026. That is close to the numbers from 2025, when the amount of options decreased from the previous year. The number of plans available to an individual Medicare recipient varies from state to state.

In addition, some Medicare Advantage providers, including UnitedHealthcare, have said they plan to scale back their service areas and/or coverage options.

Monthly insurance premiums may change

The average Part B premium is expected to rise from $185 in 2025 to $206 in 2026. That 12% increase would be twice as high as the 2025 hike.

It would also more than offset the projected 2.7% increase in Social Security monthly benefits paid to individuals.

One reason given for these increases is that people are utilizing Part B coverage more often, resulting in lower profits for health insurance firms. In addition, more people are enrolling in Part B plans. There are also higher costs in general for hospitalization and outpatient care. At the same time, it is projected that the average monthly premium for Medicare Advantage plans with prescription drug coverage will decrease from $16 in 2025 to $14 in 2026.

In addition, the CMS estimates that monthly premiums for standalone Part D plans will drop from $38 in 2025 to $34 in 2026. Premiums for Part D that are part of Medicare Advantage plans will dip slightly from $13 to $11 per month.

However, insurance companies will be allowed to raise Part D premiums as much as $50 per month, higher than the current $35 monthly maximum.

Experts say Medicare recipients will feel the effects of any premium increases.

"Any cost increase to medical premiums will be significant as prices are rising for other goods and services. In the end, it means less money in consumers' pockets," said Kelley.

Out-of-pocket costs and deductibles

The annual out-of-pocket limit for in-network services for Medicare Advantage recipients will decrease slightly from $9,350 in 2025 to $9,250 in 2026.

The annual cap on out-of-pocket expenses for Part D drugs will increase slightly from $2,000 in 2025 to $2,100 in 2026.

The maximum out-of-pocket cost for insulin will remain at $35 per month and most vaccines will still be covered under Part D.

However, earlier this year the Trump administration decided against Medicare covering the cost of GLP-1 weight-loss drugs such as Ozempic.

At the same time, the annual deductible for Part B medical coverage is projected to rise 12% in 2026 to $288.

The annual deductibles for Part D coverage are also expected to increase. Those amounts can vary, but the maximum any plan can charge will rise from $590 in 2025 to $615 in 2026. Experts say any increases in deductibles or out-of-pocket costs will be felt.

"Changes to their deductibles, copays, and coinsurance can have a big impact on Medicare beneficiaries, especially for people who live on a fixed income. It is important that beneficiaries are confident they can afford the medical care they will need in case of an unforeseen illness or injury." – Whitney Stidom

Prescription drug prices

It is estimated that about 81% of Medicare recipients are also enrolled in Part D, which covers prescription drug expenses.

The number of standalone Part D plans is forecasted to decrease from 464 nationwide in 2025 to 360 in 2026. Medicare officials are expected to continue to negotiate prices for drugs covered under Part D.

Experts say that could result in discounts of 38% to 79% on list prices on 10 widely used prescriptions, including blood thinners Eliquis and Xarelto, as well as diabetes medications Januvia, Jardiance, and Farxiga.

People with Part D plans will also continue to be able to utilize an automatic prescription payment plan that spreads out drug costs over the year. People who currently have this plan will be automatically re-enrolled for 2026 unless they opt out.

Despite these price reductions, experts say some Medicare recipients could still pay more for prescription drugs.

"Although the price of Part D (drug benefits) may reduce overall, the reduction in options and changes to covered medications could result in higher costs for consumers of certain specialty medications," Kelley noted.

Advice for Medicare recipients for 2026

An estimated 70% of Medicare recipients do not currently compare plan options.

Experts say it is important for Medicare recipients to research options and study different plans during the open enrollment period to see what is best for them financially as well as which medical services are covered.

Stidom noted that consumers should have recently received an annual "notice of change" letter from their Medicare Advantage and Part D providers, informing what will be different in 2026.

She said using a licensed insurance agency such as eHealth can save consumers as much as $1,800 a year.

"For help finding coverage, Medicare beneficiaries can start online with a private marketplace, which can help people compare plans side by side from multiple insurers," she said. "Some websites make it convenient to compare Medicare Advantage plans based on various factors, including personal health needs, locations, prescribed drugs, and more."

Stidom also recommended Medicare recipients closely check their Part D plans "because these plans are offered through private insurers, the year-over-year premium changes can vary."

"Some enrollees may also see changes to their list of covered drugs or to the drug tiers that determine what patients pay for them out of pocket," she noted. ***(Courtesy: MNT)***

Eating with sense: Old lessons for new times

By: Vinayak Rajat Bhat

Long before modern nutrition science, Caraka, the great Indian physician, reminded us that life stands on three simple pillars-ahara (food), svapna (sleep), and brahmacarya (self-discipline and the pursuit of knowledge). If any one of these is neglected, balance is lost. Among the three, food holds a special place, because it shapes the body every single day. What we eat, when we eat, and how we eat quietly influence our energy, mood, and long-term health. Interestingly, modern research is beginning to say much the same thing. A recent study by R Davis and others (2022) explains that eating at the wrong times can disturb the body's natural internal clock, affecting the way food is processed and stored. Many such studies now warn us that unhealthy eating practices can slowly disrupt the body from within. Food, therefore, is not merely a daily routine or a source of pleasure-it is a science that deserves care and awareness. In this article, we turn to the Indian Knowledge tradition to see what it has to say about food, eating habits, and the art of living well.

Healthy eating, according to the Indian Knowledge tradition, depends on desa (region), kala (time or season), and prakriti (one's natural constitution). This means that what suits one person may not suit another. Yet, alongside these individual considerations, there are some simple and universal principles of eating that anyone can follow in daily life. One such principle is beautifully expressed in a verse from Ksemakutuhala od Ksemedra, a 16th-century text:

madhuram adhuramadau madhyato mlaikabhavah
katukatukamathante tiktatiktam tathaiva,
yadi sukhaparinamam vanchasi tvam hi rajan
tyaja khalajanasangam bhojanam ma kadacit.

Addressing a king, the verse explains that food should be eaten in a certain order-sweet tastes at the beginning, sour in the middle, and pungent and bitter towards the end. The poet draws a striking contrast: the company of a wicked person may begin sweetly but ends in bitterness, and therefore should be avoided; food, on the other hand, should never be abandoned if it follows this very pattern.

This naturally raises a question-why should sweet foods be eaten first? Ayurveda offers a clear explanation. When a person is hungry, pitta, or digestive fire, is already strong. If sour, pungent, or spicy tastes are taken at this stage, pitta can become excessive. Sweet taste, however, has a calming effect and helps settle the digestive fire gently. If pitta is aggravated repeatedly, it may lead to problems such as acidity or gastritis, and in severe cases, serious health complications.

To avoid this, Ayurveda recommends beginning the meal with something sweet. This is why, in many parts of India, the first item served during a traditional meal is a sweet. Until recently, and even today in several regions, it has been customary to welcome a guest returning from long travel with jaggery or a sweet-an everyday practice quietly guided by deep dietary wisdom. Again this is a general norm. It might change based on the region, time/season or compendium of an individual.

When should we eat?

Ayurveda offers a simple yet practical answer: one should eat only when genuinely hungry. Hunger is seen as a sign that the digestive system is ready to receive food. Along with this, Ayurveda also gives clear time-based guidelines to help maintain balance.

A classical verse explains this idea:

yamamadhye na bhoktavyam yamayugmam na langhayet,
yamamadhye rasodvego yugmetite balaksayah.

In simple terms, the text advises that one should not eat again within about three hours of a meal, nor should one remain hungry for more than six hours. Eating too soon after a meal disturbs the digestive process, while waiting too long weakens the body and drains energy. For example, if someone eats a full lunch and then snacks again within an hour or two out of habit rather than hunger, the digestion of the earlier meal is interrupted. On the other hand, skipping meals for long hours-such as working through the day without eating until late evening-often leads to fatigue, irritability, and low energy. Interestingly, modern nutrition science supports this balanced approach. Research in the field of chrononutrition shows that meal timing and regular eating intervals play a significant role in metabolism and overall health. Eating in alignment with the body's internal biological clock, rather than grazing frequently or delaying meals for long periods, has been linked to better digestion, improved metabolic function, and healthier weight regulation. In this way, contemporary research quietly echoes Ayurveda's long-standing advice: good health depends not only on what we eat, but also on when and how regularly we eat.

How much should we eat?

Before answering how much to eat, Ayurveda first asks us to understand the nature of food. Broadly, food is classified into two types-guru (heavy) and laghu (light).

Guru foods are those that take longer to digest. They tend to cause a feeling of heaviness, increase bodily waste, but are also nourishing, strengthening, and growth-promoting when taken properly. Laghu foods, on the other hand, are light and easy to digest. They help reduce excess weight and even support healing, such as recovery from wounds or illness.

With this understanding, Vagbhata, the author of the Astanga-hrdaya, gives a clear and practical guideline:

matrasi sarvakalam syat matra hyagneh pravartika,
matra dravyanyapeksante gurunyapi laghunyapi.

In simple words, one should always eat in the right quantity, because proper quantity keeps the digestive fire functioning well. Whether food is heavy or light, it becomes beneficial only when eaten in moderation. Ayurveda further explains what this moderation looks like in practice. Heavy foods should be eaten only to about half one's capacity, while light foods should not be eaten to the point of complete fullness. Eating too little weakens the body, reduces vitality, and can disturb vata, leading to various health problems. On the other hand, eating too much-regardless of the type of food-can aggravate all bodily imbalances and burden digestion.

Contemporary studies on portion size and digestion show that consistently overeating, even of "healthy" foods, strains the digestive system and is linked to problems such as obesity, insulin resistance, and chronic inflammation. On the other hand, eating very small portions or skipping meals for long periods can lead to fatigue, nutrient deficiencies, and loss of muscle mass.

Research on mindful and portion-controlled eating also shows better digestion, improved metabolic health, and greater satiety when people stop eating before they feel completely full-remarkably similar to the Ayurvedic advice given centuries ago. Repeated overeating, Ayurveda warns, leads to indigestion, which it considers the root cause of many diseases. The lesson is simple and timeless: good health depends not only on what we eat, but also on how much we eat-and knowing when to stop. ***(Courtesy: The Pioneer)***

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Women achievers honoured, heritage walks and educational initiatives highlight the spirit of the day

International Women's Day celebrated across state

HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, March 8: Sivasagar Barowari Mahila Mancha, Hindu Dharmasabha Mahila Chora, Sanatan Dharma Namghar Mahila Samaj and Rangpur Mohila Chora jointly observed International Women's Day on Sunday in Hindudharma Namghar Auditorium. Utpola Shrutikar Baruah anchored the programme that began with an inaugural song.

Nilaxi Baruah, manager, Canara Bank, Jakhalabondha, as the appointed speaker said that a woman must have the courage to establish oneself and to say the truth.

Sitala Devi, former Principal, Sivasagar Government HS MP School, said that if women do not get respect and recognition at home, society will never do that. Gauri Bhagawati, former teacher of Fuleswari Girls HS also delivered an inspirational speech. Dr Arun Chandra Changkakoty, dand Manoj Kr Borthakur in their speech, highlighted the importance of the day. Gayatri Baruah sang the famous song 'Jaya nai, Jaya Nai'.

Our Hojai Correspondent adds: The Family Strengthening Program of SOS Children's Village, Hojai, marked International Women's Day with enthusiasm at Hira Basti in Hojai. Distinguished guests included B Chowdhury, DSP (HQ), Srimanta Sankardev Nagar, Arpana Kindo, Labour Officer and Namita Chakraborty, LADCS, DLSA Hojai. Around 177 caregivers from Hawaipur, Milik Basti, Dhanuhar Basti and Hira Basti joined the event. The programme began with a welcome address by Chitta Ranjan Mohanty, Assistant Village Director.

Namita Chakraborty highlighted women's rights and free legal aid via DLSA, urging participants to seek support. Arpana Kindo discussed Labour Department schemes, stressing Nirman Sramik Portal registration for benefits and insurance. B Chowdhury opened the floor for caregivers to share views, calling the day a chance for women to build confidence and drive societal progress.PRI members and village leaders praised SOS's role in family development and women's empowerment.

Our Tezpur Correspondent adds: A day-long programme marking International Women's Day was organised by Seva Sadhana Santha at Harihar Dham auditorium in Chandmari, where several women were felicitated for their contributions to society. The event, chaired by Basundhara Sarma, began with the ceremonial lighting of the lamp and a tribute led by founder president Dharmakala Upadhyay.

Chief guest MLA Prithiraj Rabha spoke on the importance of women's social and economic empowerment, citing successful initiatives like Amul and Lijjat Papad as examples of self-reliance. Keynote speaker Indu Prabha Devi, executive president of the Assam Nepali Sahitya Sabha, stressed that true empowerment means progressing equally alongside men. Manisha Upadhyay, Aruna Devi and Ansumwi Basumatary attended as distinguished guests.

The Seva Sadhana Samman was awarded to Tara Devi Giri, while the Sabita Upadhyay Memorial Award went to Nirmala Subba. Several women were felicitated. Mothers above 75 years of age were honoured. Established in 1994, the organisation had formed a self-help group with local women to promote economic self-reliance through a common fund.

Meanwhile, Tezpur College in association with its Women's Group and Alumni Association Women's Wing, also celebrated International Women's Day at the Chandra Mohan Medhi Auditorium. The programme was inaugurated by Principal Dr Manoj Kumar Hazarika.

Several distinguished women were felicitated, including writer Maya Sharma, Tezpur Central Jail Superintendent Naima Ahmed, Assam Valley School Administrative Officer Daisy Barua, dancer Mousumi Sharma and Mitali Dutta. A cooking competition was also held, judged by

Anupama Barua and Arati Sharma.

The main session was presided over by Trishna Kakoti, Head of the Education Department, and conducted by Dr Trishna Rani Deka and alumna Jinia Sharma. The programme featured dance and musical performances and concluded with a vote of thanks by Surajita Bora.

Our Dhubri Correspondent adds: Marking International Women's Day, a curated heritage walk was organised in Dhubri by the virtual museum 'Abhijna e-Museum', led by senior journalist Bijoy Kumar Sharma. The nearly three-kilometre walk through the historic town brought together around 20 participants, including students, heritage enthusiasts and local residents.

Beginning from the Victoria statue at Tetoltala, the walk covered several historically significant sites reflecting Dhubri's colonial past and cultural diversity. Key stops included the revered Paanch Peer Dargah, known for its syncretic traditions, the historic Dhubri Gurudwara Sahib associated with Guru Tegh Bahadur and the Brahma Mandir linked to the Brahma Samaj reform movement.

Organisers said the initiative aimed to promote awareness of local heritage and encourage community engagement with history. They also noted that holding the event on International Women's Day highlighted the growing role of women in heritage documentation and cultural initiatives.

Our Kokrajhar Correspondent adds: The districts of the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) observed International Women's Day on Sunday with various programmes highlighting women's empowerment.

In Kokrajhar, the 15th Aijw Falangi Bantha (Women Entrepreneur Award) 2026 was conferred on Putuli Borgoyary of the Haltugaon–Dalgaon area. She runs a small tea shop near Central Institute of Technology Kokrajhar to support her family and educate her two children, one of whom is currently pursuing an MBBS degree. The award, instituted by the Kokrajhar-based NGO North East Research and Social Work Networking (NERSWN), included a citation, ₹ 20,000 and traditional Aronai and Eri chador.

The UPPL Women's Wing also celebrated the day at the party's central office in Kokrajhar. The programme began with flag hoisting by Women's Wing president Pratibha Brahma, followed by an open discussion. Kokrajhar MLA Lawrence Islary, social activist Menan Kumar Brahma and several women activists attended the event.

Oxford's International School Kokrajhar also emerged as a notable example of women-led leadership in education. Established in 2024 at Charaikhola Part 2, Harinaguri Road, the school is guided by co-founder and director Bandita Newar. Out of 25 staff members, 17 are women, including 14 teachers and three non-teaching staff, making it one of the most female-driven educational workplaces in the region. In Tamulpur, the Bodo Bima Gouthum celebrated its second foundation day along with International Women's Day at Kumarikatha with various programmes, where successful women were felicitated and discussions were held on the welfare and empowerment of women in the region.

Couple found dead in Rangrangia, infant rescued

HT Correspondent

DEMOW, March 8: A tragic incident shook Rangrangia near Demow on Sunday morning, when the dead bodies of a married couple, Lakhan Munda and his wife Mamoni Munda, were found inside their residence. The couple has left behind an infant, who was taken to Demow Model Hospital for treatment and later handed over to the Child Welfare Committee (CWC) in Dibrugarh. Locals alerted Moran Police, who arrived at the scene and began an investigation. The exact cause of the deaths remains unknown. Reports suggest that the couple struggled with alcohol consumption. They had also withdrawn Rs 35,000 from their PMAY house fund, which was reportedly used to purchase alcohol, according to local sources.

Training of Presiding Officers begins in Kokrajhar

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, March 8: The training programme for Presiding Officers (POs) in connection with the forthcoming Assam Legislative Assembly Election 2026 began on Sunday in Kokrajhar district. The Presiding Officers, who are teachers from High Schools, ME Schools and Higher Secondary Schools are being trained to ensure the smooth and efficient conduct of polling during the election.

The training is being conducted simultaneously at two venues- Bodoland University, Kokrajhar and St. Anthony's College, Gossaigaon, where officials briefed the participants on election procedures, duties and responsibilities of Presiding Officers, operation of EVMs and VVPATs and other essential guidelines to be followed on polling day.

Pankaj Chakravarty, District Commissioner and District Election Officer, Kokrajhar, also visited the training session and addressed the Presiding Officers.

150 couples tie nuptial knots in Balijuri

HT Correspondent

BISWANATH CHARIALI, March 8: A total of 150 couples of the greater Jamuguri-Sootea and Biswanath area tied their nuptial knots at a sacred and grand community marriage ceremony convened by Lok Kalyan Samiti, NER and Jana Kalyan Samiti, Jaipur in association with the general public of Naduar and Biswanath LAC and held at Dr Bhupen Hazarika memorial community hall located at Balijuri under Biswanath district on Sunday. The religious mass marriage ceremony was held as per the Hindu rituals. The organisers had made arrangements of pandals, reception (feast) besides the band party. Religious priest Devanayak Adhikari offered blessings to the couples in common. The community marriage ceremony was attended by Naduar MLA Padma Hazarika, Biswanath MLA Pramod Borthakur and ASTC chairman Pallab Lochan Das among others who offered blessings to the couples.

Mid term session of Nagaon Zila Sahitya Sabha concludes

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, March 8: The mid-term session of the Nagaon Zila Sahitya Sabha concluded at Renaissance Senior Secondary School, Amolapatty, Nagaon on Sunday.

The session was held in collaboration with the Amolapatty branch of Nagaon Zila Sahitya Sabha. During the session, the literary body resolved to launch a campaign "One Book a Month" to promote reading habits among people. The association also decided to create e-books, online literary portals and digital archives to make Assamese literature more accessible in the digital age.

The session also expressed concern over the incorrect spelling of place names on national highways and urged the authorities to use the correct Assamese spellings.

The session was attended by prominent literary figures, including Padum Rajkhowa, vice president of Asom Sahitya Sabha and Dr Hemanta Kumar Goswami, senior scribe Jiten Borkataky among others.

Woman assaulted on suspicion of witchcraft in Tezpur

HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, March 8: A woman in her 50s was reported allegedly assaulted by a group of people on suspicion of practising witchcraft at Burhachapori , near Tezpur.

According to reports, the victim, identified as Rambha Yadav, was attacked by a section of residents of the same village who accused her of being a "witch". Notably, some of the alleged attackers are said to be close relatives of the woman.

DTO Dhubri's massive road drive fills district's transport coffers

HT Correspondent

DHUBRI, March 8: As the financial year draws to a close, the District Transport Office (DTO) of Dhubri has intensified its operations to recover pending taxes and enforce road safety regulations. In a massive two-day crackdown, transport officials seized 36 e-rickshaws for various violations, including non-payment of taxes and lack of valid registration.

The drive is part of a larger month-long initiative aimed at ensuring all vehicle owners in the district clear their outstanding dues before the March 31 deadline. The enforcement wing's rigorous efforts have already yielded significant results for the state treasury.

According to official data, the revenue collected through fines and tax clearances during this enforcement period has already surpassed the 2 crore mark. District Transport Officer (DTO) Dibyajyoti Karjee, who is leading the initiative, emphasised that the department is not just focused on penalties but on compliance.

The seizure of 36 e-rickshaws in two days marks a specific focus on the growing unregulated transport sector in Dhubri town. Many of these vehicles were found to be operating without the necessary permits, contributing to both revenue loss and traffic congestion.

The DTO office has warned that the frequency of these "spot-check" drives will increase as the March 31 deadline approaches. In addition to e-rickshaws, commercial trucks, private cars and two-wheelers with long-standing tax defaults are also on the department's radar. Residents are encouraged to use the online Parivahan portal or visit the DTO Dhubri office to settle their dues and avoid having their vehicles towed or blacklisted.

3 vegetable traders died, 4 injured in tragic road accident at Haflong

HT Correspondent

HAFLONG, March 8: A tragic road accident claimed the lives of 3 persons and left 4 others seriously injured late Saturday night in the Boro Haflong area under Haflong Police Station in Assam's Dima Hasao district.

According to reports, the accident occurred at around 9:30 PM, when a Magic van bearing registration number AS08C-4409 lost control while passing through the main road at Boro Haflong. The vehicle reportedly veered off the road and plunged down onto the approach road leading to the New Haflong Railway Station before overturning.

The van was carrying seven passengers, including the driver. Three of them died on the spot due to the severe impact of the crash, while the remaining 4 sustained serious injuries.

Upon receiving information about the incident, Haflong Police rushed to the scene and carried out a rescue operation. The injured were immediately transported to Haflong Civil Hospital, where they are currently undergoing treatment. Sources said that all the victims were residents of Langting in Dima Hasao district and were engaged in the vegetable trade. On Saturday, they had travelled from Langting to Haflong in the Magic van to sell vegetables at the weekly vegetable market held in the town. After completing their business, they were returning to Langting at night when the unfortunate accident took place.

The deceased have been identified as Bimala Dibragede, Lambu Narzari and the driver Manjay Gurung. The injured persons have been identified as Animoy Chakma, Sulmita Bathari, Sumit Munda and Sunila Basumatary.

NFR RPF recovers contraband and arrests offenders

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 8: The Railway Protection Force (RPF) of Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) conducted a series of successful operations between February 28 and March 4, 2026, aimed at ensuring passenger safety and protecting railway property.

During the period, RPF personnel apprehended several offenders, recovered contraband items and rescued vulnerable passengers through coordinated vigilance across various stations and trains under NFR.

On March 2, RPF personnel at Hojai apprehended a person involved in stone pelting on Train No 13176 DN between the Dhalpukhuri and Lanka section, which damaged a window glass though no passenger was injured. In another incident on March 4, RPF staff at Kamakhya arrested an individual for stone pelting on Train No 15946 DN after the train crossed Saraighat Bridge, which resulted in injury to a passenger. Cases under relevant sections of the Railway Act were registered in both incidents.

RPF teams also prevented the illegal transportation of prohibited items. On March 2, RPF and GRP personnel at New Alipurduar recovered 50.900 kg of unclaimed ganja worth approximately Rs 25.45 lakh from Train No 01666 DN. Besides this, several recoveries of unclaimed liquor were made at stations including Guwahati, Rangiya, Katihar, Kishanganj and Barsoi between March 1 and March 4. The seized items were handed over to the concerned Excise authorities for further legal action.

Apart from enforcement activities, RPF personnel also carried out humanitarian initiatives. Between March 2 and March 4, several runaway minors and vulnerable passengers were rescued at stations such as Guwahati, Badarpur, Lumding and Kamakhya and were safely handed over to Childline authorities or their guardians after completing due procedures.

The operations reflect the continued efforts of the RPF under Northeast Frontier Railway to maintain a safe, secure and passenger-friendly railway environment across its jurisdiction.

Veterans and Veer Naris honoured; medical aid and employment support provided

Mega ex-servicemen rally at Ghoramari , thousands attend

HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, March 8: In a strong gesture of gratitude towards former soldiers and their families, the Gajraj Corps of the Indian Army organised an Ex-Servicemen Rally at Hem Barua Higher Secondary School in Ghoramari near Tezpur on Sunday. The event brought together thousands of veterans, Veer Naris and their families, reinforcing the Army's continued commitment to the welfare and dignity of those who once served the nation.

According to Defence Spokesperson Tezpur Lt Col Athul Shreedharan in this rally nearly 4,000 ex-servicemen and family members from Biswanath and Sonitpur districts attended the rally, reflecting the deep and lasting bond between the Army and its veteran community.

The programme was attended by H S Gill, General Officer Commanding of the Blazing Sword Division, who graced the occasion as the Chief Guest. Several senior Army officials, representatives from the civil administration and officials from different government departments were also present. Addressing the gathering, the Chief Guest acknowledged the immense contribution of veterans and Veer Naris in protecting the sovereignty and security of the nation. During the event, six Veer Naris—whose spouses made the ultimate sacrifice in service of the country and eight distinguished war veterans were honoured for their courage, dedication and exemplary service. Their stories of sacrifice and resilience continue to inspire younger generations.

To ensure comprehensive support for the veteran community, 46 welfare stalls were established at the venue offering services such as pension assistance, financial counselling, employment guidance, medical support and help with documentation. Pension-related issues were addressed with the support of officials from the Controller of Defence Accounts Guwahati and PCDA (P) Prayagraj. A special help desk for the SPARSH pension system also assisted veterans with digital pension services.

A free medical camp organised during the rally offered consultations in gynaecology, orthopaedics, ophthalmology and dentistry. In addition, eight wheelchairs and eleven hearing aids were distributed to elderly and disabled veterans. A specially customised tri-scooter was also handed over to a disabled war veteran to help improve his mobility and independence. The rally also hosted a voluntary blood donation drive, collecting around 80 units of blood from soldiers, veterans and local residents. Employment assistance counters further informed veterans about nearly 400 job openings across different sectors.

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Israel renews assault on Lebanon

Netanyahu promises 'many surprises' in next phase of war

DUBAI, March 8: Israel renewed its assault on southern Lebanon on early Sunday, including targeting commanders of the Lebanese branch of Iran's Revolutionary Guards' Quds Force, after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu promised "many surprises" for the next phase of the conflict.

The Israeli military said in a statement that it would "not allow Iranian terrorist elements to establish themselves in Lebanese territory."

The latest strikes in Lebanon followed an Israeli attack Saturday on an oil storage facility in Tehran, which sent up pillars of fire that could be seen in Associated Press video as a glow against the night sky.

It appeared to be the first time a civil industrial facility has been targeted in the war. State media blamed "an attack from the US and the Zionist regime" at the site that supplies the capital and neighbouring provinces in the north.

Elsewhere, Kuwait authorities said two border guards were killed when the Gulf country was hit by a swarm of missiles and drones. The Interior Ministry said only that the guards were killed "while performing their national duty." No other details were available.

Israeli airstrikes killed eight people in southern Lebanon, the Lebanese Health Ministry said, and local media reported that an Israeli drone hit a hotel in Beirut, killing four and wounding 10 others. The deaths come on top of at least 47 others killed Saturday in Israeli strikes.

The Iranian president apologises for the attacks: Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian apologised Saturday for attacks on "neighbouring countries," even as his country's missiles and drones flew toward Gulf Arab states and hard-liners asserted that Tehran's war strategy would not change.

A rift between politicians looking to de-escalate the war and others committed to battling the United States and Israel could complicate any diplomatic efforts. Conflicting Iranian statements

came from two of the three members of the leadership council overseeing Iran since Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei was killed in the war's opening airstrikes.

Pezeshkian, who is a member of the council, also dismissed US President Donald Trump's call for Tehran to surrender unconditionally, saying: "That's a dream that they should take to their grave."

Trump threatened that Iran would be "hit very hard" and more "areas and groups of people" would become targets, without elaborating. Already, the conflict has rattled global markets and left Iran's leadership weakened by hundreds of Israeli and American airstrikes.

"We're not looking to settle," Trump told reporters Saturday aboard Air Force One. "They'd like to settle. We're not looking to settle."

He described the ongoing US operations in Iran as an "excursion" and said issues such as rising gas prices and the safety of Americans would improve once the conflict ends.

Iranian leaders have limited power over the Revolutionary Guard: Pezeshkian's message underlined the limited powers exercised by theocracy's leaders over the paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, which controls the hundreds of ballistic missiles targeting Israel and other countries. It answered only to Khamenei and appears to be picking its own targets.

Pezeshkian's statement said Iran's leadership council had been in touch with the armed forces and "from now on, they should not attack neighbouring countries or fire missiles at them, unless we are attacked by those countries. I think we should solve this through diplomacy."

The US strikes have not come from the Gulf Arab governments under attack, but from US bases and vessels in the region.

Hard-line judiciary chief Gholam Hossein Mohseni-Ejei, another member of the three-man leadership council, suggested that the war strategy will not change.

"The geography of some countries in the region — both overtly and covertly — is in the hands of the enemy, and those points are used against our country in acts of aggression. Intense attacks on these targets will continue," he posted on X.

Iran's U.N. mission later suggested, without offering evidence, that strikes on nonmilitary sites "may have resulted from interception by US electronic defence systems."

Late Saturday, top Iranian security official Ali Larijani asserted in an address carried by state media that "our leaders are united on this issue and have no disagreements with one another."

Trump says the Kurds won't be involved: In other developments, Trump said he has ruled out having Kurds join the war, even though Kurdish fighters in the region are willing to assist in efforts to topple the Iranian government.

"The war is complicated enough without having ... the Kurds involved," Trump told reporters.

Days ago, Kurdish officials told the AP that Kurdish-Iranian dissident groups based in northern Iraq were preparing for a potential cross-border military operation in Iran and that the US had asked Iraqi Kurds to support them.

The US and Israel have targeted Iran's military capabilities, leadership and nuclear programme. The war's stated goals and timelines have repeatedly shifted as the US has at times suggested it seeks to topple Iran's government or elevate new leadership.

The fighting has killed at least 1,230 people in Iran, more than 290 in Lebanon and 11 in Israel, according to officials in those countries. Six US troops have been killed.

Missile lands at US Embassy compound in Iraq: Three Iraqi security officials said a missile landed on the helicopter landing pad in the US Embassy complex in Baghdad. They spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorised to comment publicly. An embassy spokesperson declined to comment. There were no reports of casualties.

It was the first reported strike to land in Baghdad's heavily fortified Green Zone since the Iran war began. Iran and allied Iraqi militias have launched dozens of attacks on US military bases and other facilities in Iraq since then.

Iraq's caretaker Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani called the embassy attack a "terrorist act" carried out by "rogue groups."

Strikes target other Gulf countries: Hours after Pezeshkian's apology, the United Arab Emirates said debris from an aerial interception fell onto a vehicle and killed a driver. Four people have now been killed in the UAE since the war began. Authorities have said all were foreign nationals.

Sirens sounded earlier Saturday in Bahrain as Iran targeted the island kingdom. Saudi Arabia said it destroyed drones headed toward its vast Shaybah oil field and shot down a ballistic missile launched toward Prince Sultan Air Base, which hosts US forces.

In Kuwait, authorities said a wave of drones targeted critical infrastructure, including fuel tanks at Kuwait International Airport and a government building in Kuwait City. At least two people were killed by strikes in Iraq's semi-autonomous Kurdish region. (AP)

India, China should view each other as partners, not rivals: Foreign Minister Wang Yi

BEIJING, March 8: India and China should view each other as "partners, not rivals" and "opportunity instead of threat", Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said here on Sunday.

Wang, at his annual press conference on the sidelines of the Chinese parliament, the National People's Congress (NPC), said both countries should stick to the direction set by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Xi Jinping to improve relations without interference.

Modi and Xi had a successful meeting in Tianjin last August, Wang said. "Building on the fresh start enabled by their Kazan meeting in 2024, the Tianjin summit brought about further improvement in China-India relations," he added.

"We are heartened to see re-energised interactions at all levels, a new record in bilateral trade, and closer people-to-people exchanges. All this has brought tangible benefits to the two peoples," he said.

On the future course of the ties, Wang said both countries "must maintain the correct strategic perception of each other as partner rather than rival, and opportunity instead of threat".

"Both sides also must uphold good-neighbourliness and friendship, and jointly safeguard peace and stability in the border areas and focus on development," he said.

"As each other's important neighbours and members of the Global South, China and India enjoy profound civilisational ties and share extensive common interests," Wang said.

"Mutual trust and cooperation is beneficial to the development of the two countries, while division and confrontation is detrimental to the rejuvenation of Asia," the Chinese foreign minister said.

The two sides should follow the direction set by leaders and remove interference, he said without elaborating.

He said India and China should support each other hosting BRICS summits. While India is set to host the summit this year, China is due to host the summit in 2027.

BRICS which originally comprised Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, later expanded with the admission of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, United Arab Emirates, Ethiopia, Indonesia and Iran.

India-China relations, which were frozen for five years due to military standoff in eastern Ladakh, began the process of normalisation following two summits between Modi and Xi at Kazan in Russia in 2024 followed by a second meeting on the sidelines of the SCO summit in Tianjin last year. (PTI)

RSP heads towards historic victory in Nepal election, Balen Shah likely next PM

KATHMANDU, March 8: The RSP of the young musician-turned-politician Balendra Shah 'Balen' is on Sunday heading towards a spectacular victory in the general elections that saw the legacy parties face rout at the hustings.

Formed in 2022, the Rashtriya Swatantra Party (RSP) has won 120 of the 165 directly elected seats while it is leading in another six in the House of Representative elections, according to the Election Commission (EC).

The EC has announced results for 156 of the 165 seats as of 5:30 pm.

Results for only nine seats remain to be declared, EC officials said, adding, it may be late Sunday night or by Monday morning that the process will be complete.

Counting started soon after voting completed on Thursday and Saturday saw start of the results being declared, a major among them being RSP's 35-year-old prime-ministerial candidate Balen defeating four-time prime minister K P Sharma Oli, the chair of Nepal's one of the largest parties -- CPN-UML -- by a huge margin of about 50,000 votes in the Jhapa-5 constituency.

Balen is expected to be the next prime minister of Nepal, reflecting a public mood of rejection of established parties. He will be the first Madhesi prime minister of the Himalayan nation and also the youngest to occupy the top post in the country's parliamentary history.

The Nepali Congress (NC) is a distant second, winning 17 seats while the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) – CPN-(UML) -- of ousted prime minister K P Sharma Oli has won just seven seats and is leading in three.

The Nepal Communist Party (NCP) has won seven seats, the Shram Sanskriti Party has won three while the Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) won one seat, the EC data showed. Among the winners is one independent.

Independent candidate Mahabir Pun, who had resigned as education minister in the interim government, won in Myagdi-1 constituency in remote mountain districts beating his nearest rivals from the CPN-(UML) and the NC. Incidentally, the RSP had not fielded any candidate against him.

The seats won by RSP, headed by Ravi Lamichhane, include a clean sweep in all 15 constituencies of three districts in Kathmandu Valley, the EC data showed.

Legacy parties failed to convince voters for whom the major issues included fighting corruption and an end to nepotism apart from a generational change in political leadership of the country.

Former deputy speaker Indira Rana Magar, of the RSP, won from Jhapa-2 by defeating the speaker of the dissolved House of Representatives and senior leader of CPN-

UML Dev Raj Ghimire.

Rana Magar won by a huge margin of 48,742 votes against Ghimire, who secured 11,368 votes.

Nepali Congress president Gagan Thapa, 49, who was projected as his party's prime ministerial candidate, lost from Dhanusha-4 constituency to Amaresh Singh of the RSP.

Singh received 33,688 votes against Thapa's 22,831, according to the Election Commission.

Other senior leaders of Nepali Congress, including general secretary Guru Raj Ghimire, Shekhar Koirala and Bimalendra Nidhi, also faced defeat.

Ten office bearers of the CPN-UML, including the party's general secretary Shankar Pokharel, also lost the election.

Other leaders of the CPN-UML who lost were vice presidents Bishnu Paudel, Prithvi Subba Gurung and Gokarna Bista, deputy general secretary Raghubir Mahaseth, and secretaries Sherdhan Rai, Mahesh Basnet, Rajan Bhattarai and Bhanubhakta Dhakal.

Harka Rai, chairman of the Shram Sanskriti Party, won from Sunsari-1, defeating RSP candidate Goma Tamang.

RSP chairman Lamichhane won with a huge margin from the Chitwan-2 constituency, marking his third consecutive victory, with 54,402 votes against his nearest rival, NC's Mina Kumari Kharel, who received 14,564 votes.

According to the EC, former prime minister and NCP leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' won from Rukum Purba district by securing 10,240 votes against his rival, Lilamani Gautam of the CPN-UML, who got 3,462 votes.

RPP's Gyanendra Shahi won from the Jumla constituency of Karnali province by defeating his closest rival, Naresh Bhandari of the NCP, and became the only candidate of the pro-monarchist party to have secured a seat in the House of Representatives.

The election also saw 10 women candidates emerge victorious -- nine from the RSP and one from the NC.

The election was being closely watched by India, which is hoping for a stable government in the politically-fragile Himalayan country to take forward the developmental partnership between the two sides.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday congratulated the people and government of Nepal for the successful conduct of the election.

"It is heartening to see my Nepali sisters and brothers exercise their democratic rights so vibrantly. This historic milestone is a proud moment in Nepal's democratic journey," Modi said in a post on X.

Nepal witnessed about 60 per cent voter turnout during the March 5 election to the House of Representatives.

Of the 275 members of Parliament, 165 are being elected through direct voting, while the remaining 110 through a proportionate method.

Around 3,400 candidates were vying for 165 seats under direct voting and 3,135 candidates for 110 seats through proportionate voting.

The RSP is also leading in proportional voting system with 24,55,764 votes followed by the Nepali Congress with 8,31,224 votes.

The CPN-UML has received 7,09,575 votes, the Nepali Communist Party 3,36,933, the RPP 1,78,975 and Shram Sanskriti Party 1,21,066 votes, according to the EC. Gen Z, through its two-day intensified protests on September 8 and 9 last year, ousted Prime Minister Oli, who was heading a coalition government with the backing of the Nepali Congress that enjoyed nearly two-thirds majority support.

The major issues raised by Gen Z before and during the election campaign were anti-corruption, good governance, an end to nepotism, a generational change in the political leadership, etc. (PTI)

1 killed, 2 injured in Pak petrol pump firing amid panic buying

LAHORE, March 8: A man was killed and two others seriously injured after customers opened fire at a petrol pump in Pakistan's Punjab province following a dispute amid panic buying of fuel triggered by fears of shortages due to the US-Iran conflict, police said on Sunday.

The incident occurred on Saturday in Sialkot, about 100 km from Lahore, when an altercation broke out between customers and workers at a filling station on Daska Road, police said. According to police, long queues of motorists had formed at the petrol pump as concerns grew over oil supplies following the closure of the Strait of Hormuz amid the ongoing US-Israel-Iran conflict.

Two men who arrived in a car had their vehicle filled with petrol and then asked the filling station worker to fill fuel in a couple of jerry cans they had brought with them. The station worker refused, saying filling fuel in cans is not allowed under government policy. "This led to an altercation between the filling station staff and the car riders," police officer Dost Muhammad said.

The car riders left, threatening them of dire consequences, he said.

"An hour or so later, the car riders came back with automatic weapons, assaulted the filling station staff and opened fire on them, leaving three workers critically injured," Muhammad said. One of the injured, identified as 25-year-old Muhammad Sibtain, succumbed to his injuries in hospital, while the condition of the other two remains critical," he said.

The main suspect, Khawaja Munib, has been arrested. A case of murder and attempted murder has been registered against him and four of his accomplices, police said.

Meanwhile, panic buying of petrol and diesel has been reported in parts of Pakistan after authorities announced a steep increase of PKR 55 per litre in fuel prices on Friday.

Several petrol pump owners in Punjab had temporarily shut their outlets ahead of the price hike, triggering long queues and panic among motorists.

The surge in petroleum prices, attributed to the US-Israel-Iran conflict and disruption of shipping through the Strait of Hormuz, is expected to push up the prices of essential commodities and transport costs across the country.

"The 20 per cent increase in oil prices means a 20-25% rise in the prices of commodities, essential items, fares, materials, and transportation. It means additional and sudden burden on consumers," businessman Farooq Yousuf Sheikh said. (PTI)

Russia says int'l law effectively dead, calls for UNSC P-5 summit

MOSCOW, March 8: Russia has said international law is effectively dead amid escalating tensions in West Asia following the US-Israeli strike on Iran, and called for reviving President Vladimir Putin's proposal to convene a summit of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the current global situation underscores the need to revisit Putin's proposal, first made before the COVID-19 pandemic, for a summit of the P-5 -- Russia, the US, China, France and the UK -- to discuss global security and stability.

"We have all lost what we call international law... I don't even understand how anyone can be called upon to follow the norms and principles of international law. It effectively no longer exists," Peskov said in an interview with the state-run Rossiya TV.

He said international law exists "de jure" (by law) but no longer "de facto" (in fact).

"We cannot tell anyone to follow international law, follow which law? Nobody can formulate today what it is," he said.

Referring to the sharp escalation following the US-Israeli attack on Iran, Peskov said the situation in the region has become significantly destabilised.

"The region has become significantly destabilised, and the cumulative effect of the vast number of regional conflicts and unresolved issues is resulting in both economic and political consequences," he said.

Meanwhile, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said the US should clarify its broader plans and explain how they relate to existing international norms.

"We talk a lot about wanting to define what kind of world we live in... We believe the US should explain its plans and how this all relates to what previously defined certain norms," he said in a programme on state TV. (PTI)

Trump grieves with families during return of soldiers killed in war in Middle East

DOVER AIR FORCE BASE (US), March 8: President Donald Trump on Saturday joined grieving families at Dover Air Force Base at the dignified transfer for the six US soldiers killed in the war in the Middle East.

The dignified transfer, a ritual that returns the remains of US service members killed in action, is considered one of the most sombre duties of any commander in chief. During his first term, Trump said bearing witness to the transfer was "the toughest thing I have to do" as president.

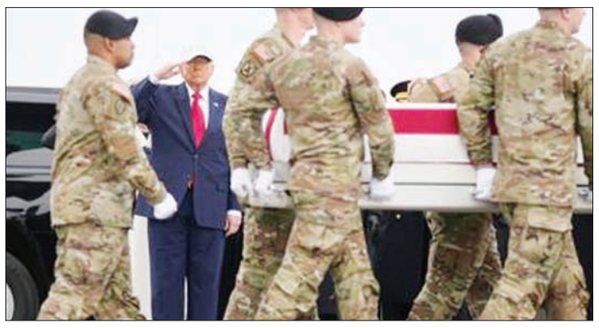
"It is a very sad day," Trump told reporters on Air Force One as he returned to Florida later on Saturday afternoon, saying that he was "glad we paid our respects". He said the relatives of the deceased are "great people, great parents, wives, family" and said that the "parents were so proud".

Both Trump and Vice President J D Vance were present for the transfer, as were their spouses. A host of top administration officials were in attendance, including Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth, who wrote in a social media post on Friday of "an unbreakable spirit to honour their memory and the resolve they embodied", Attorney General Pam Bondi, White House chief of staff Susie Wiles, special envoy Steve Witkoff and Tulsi Gabbard, the director of national intelligence.

Also present for the solemn event were governors and senators from Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska and Florida.

Those killed in action were Maj. Jeffrey O'Brien, 45, of Indianola, Iowa; Capt. Cody Khork, 35, of Winter Haven, Florida; Chief Warrant Officer 3 Robert Marzan, 54, of Sacramento, California; Sgt. 1st Class Nicole Amor, 39, of White Bear Lake, Minnesota; Sgt. 1st Class Noah Tietjens, 42, of Bellevue, Nebraska; and Sgt. Declan Coady, 20, of West Des Moines, Iowa, who was posthumously promoted from specialist.

As is protocol, Trump -- wearing a blue suit, red tie and a white USA hat -- did not speak during the transfer. The president saluted as each flag-draped transfer case was carried from the military aircraft to awaiting transfer vehicles, which would take them to a mortuary facility to prepare them for their final resting place. The families were largely silent as they observed the ritual, which lasted about a half hour.



The six members of the Army Reserve, who were killed by a drone strike at a command centre in Kuwait, were all from the 103rd Sustainment Command based in Des Moines, Iowa, which provides food, fuel, water and ammunition, transport equipment and supplies. They died just one day after the US and Israel launched its military campaign against Iran.

"These soldiers engaged in the most noble mission: protecting their fellow Americans and keeping our homeland secure," Republican Sen. Joni Ernst of Iowa, a combat veteran, said earlier this week after the six were identified. "Our nation owes them an incredible debt of gratitude that can never be repaid."

During the ritual, transfer cases draped with the American flag and holding the remains of the fallen soldiers are carried from the military aircraft that transported them to an awaiting vehicle to take them to the mortuary facility at the base. There, the service members are prepared for their final resting place.

Amor's husband, Joey Amor, said earlier this week that she had been scheduled to return home to him and their two children within days.

"You do not go to Kuwait thinking something is going to happen, and for her to be one of the first -- it hurts," Joey Amor said.

O'Brien had served in the Army Reserve for nearly 15 years, according to his LinkedIn account, and his aunt said in a post on Facebook that O'Brien "was the sweetest blue-eyed, blonde farm kid you'd ever know. He is so missed already".

Marzan's sister described him in a Facebook post as a "strong leader" and loving husband, father and brother.

"My baby brother, you are loved and I will hold onto all our memories and cherish them always in my heart," Elizabeth Marzan wrote.

Coady was among the youngest people in his class, trained to troubleshoot military computer systems, but he impressed his instructors, his father, Andrew Coady, told The Associated Press.

"He trained hard, he worked hard, his physical fitness was important to him. He loved being a soldier," Coady said. "He was also one of the most kindest people you would ever meet, and he would do anything and everything for anyone."

Khork's family described him as "the life of the party" who was known for his "infectious spirit" and "generous heart" and who had wanted to serve in the military since childhood.

"That commitment helped shape the course of his life and reflected the deep sense of duty that was always at the core of who he was," according to a statement from his mother, Donna Burhans, his father, James Khork, and his stepmother, Stacey Khork.

Tietjens, who came from a military family, previously served alongside his father in Kuwait. When he returned home in February 2010, he reunited with his overjoyed wife in a local church's gym. Tietjens' cousin Kaylyn Golike asked for prayers, especially for Tietjens' 12-year-old son, wife and parents, as they navigate "unimaginable loss".

Trump most recently travelled to Dover in December to honour two Iowa National Guard members and a US civilian interpreter who were killed in an ambush attack in the Syrian desert. He attended dignified transfers several times during his first term, including for a Navy SEAL killed during a raid in Yemen, for two Army officers whose helicopter crashed in Afghanistan and for two Army soldiers killed in Afghanistan when a person dressed in an Afghan army uniform opened fire. (AP)

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'The country will not forgive either, the tribal society of the country will never forgive either'

People of West Bengal will not forgive TMC for grave insult to Prez: PM

NEW DELHI, March 8: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday stepped up his attack on the TMC government in West Bengal over the treatment meted out to President Droupadi Murmu, saying the "enlightened people" of the state will never forgive the party for "insulting" a woman tribal leader and the President of the country.

"Today, as the nation celebrates International Women's Day, it is deeply concerning that just yesterday, the TMC government in West Bengal demonstrated a grave insult towards the honourable President of India, Draupadi Murmu," the prime minister said in the national capital after inaugurating two new Delhi Metro corridors and other projects.

Modi's remarks came after President Murmu expressed displeasure over the change of venue of a conference of the tribal Santal community in West Bengal on Saturday and the absence of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and her ministers during her visit.

Soon after, Banerjee had accused the President of speaking "on the advice of the BJP" and had questioned her silence on alleged atrocities against tribals in states LIKE Manipur and Chhattisgarh. The BJP lashed out at the TMC government for "insulting" the President, while PM Modi termed it "shameful and unprecedented" and accused the TMC of crossing all limits. The controversy has led to a further rise in the political temperature of the poll-bound state, where the BJP hopes to end Banerjee's 15-year rule.

On Sunday, PM Modi said the TMC government's actions not only resulted in the mismanagement of the tribal community event but also constituted an affront to the President, the Constitution and the noble tradition of democracy in the country.

"President Murmu ji visited Bengal to attend a significant celebration honouring the Santal tribal tradition. However, the TMC chose to boycott this sacred and important event, which holds great meaning for both the President and the tribal community," he said.

He said the President herself is from a tribal background and has shown deep concern for the Santal community.

Modi said the "enlightened" people of West Bengal will never forgive TMC "for insulting a woman, for insulting a tribal, and for insulting the honourable President of the country".

"The country will not forgive either, the tribal society of the country will never forgive either, and the women's power of the country will never forgive either," he said.

The prime minister inaugurated two new Delhi Metro corridors and laid the foundation stone for three more metro lines, providing direct connectivity to several important locations in the capital.

The prime minister also inaugurated and laid the foundation stone of projects worth ₹ 15,200 crore under the central government's General Pool Residential Accommodation (GPRA) redevelopment plan.

The total cost of all projects is around ₹ 33,500 crore.

On the occasion of International Women's Day, Modi announced that more than 3 crore women have now achieved the milestone of becoming "Lakhpati Didi".

He said a few years ago, his government made a commitment to empower 3 crore women to become "Lakhpati Didi", whose annual household income is more than ₹ 1 lakh.

"At the time, many doubted our resolve and dismissed it as a political move. However, I am proud to announce that we have fulfilled our promise -- more than 3 crore women have now achieved the milestone of becoming Lakhpati Didi," he said.

Terming the previous Aam Aadmi Party dispensation in Delhi as "AAPda (disaster) government", Modi alleged it had halted all development work in the national capitali for the past 10 years.

"Now, our government is operating in mission mode to address the challenges facing Delhi. With the construction of the Peripheral Expressway, lakhs of vehicles no longer need to enter the city. Our government is also undertaking large-scale initiatives to clean the Yamuna River," he said. (PTI)

PROTOCOL 'LAPSES' AT PREZ EVENT

Centre seeks response from West Bengal govt

NEW DELHI, March 8: Amid a row over "lapses" at President Droupadi Murmu's event in West Bengal, the Centre has sought a response from the state government by 5 pm on Sunday over the "violations" of the rules related to protocol, venue and route arrangements during her visit, sources said.

In a letter to the West Bengal chief secretary, the Union home secretary has asked him to furnish a response on the violations of the 'Blue Book' rules of protocol, venue and route arrangements. The 'Blue Book' is a confidential document which lists out rules for the security and protocol for the President, Vice-President and the prime minister and their families.

President Murmu on Saturday expressed dismay over a low turnout at a tribal community event near Bagdogra airport, and questioned the decision to shift the venue from Bidhannagar. She also noted the absence of West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and her ministers during her visit.

Highly placed sources said the communique sent to the West Bengal chief secretary sought response on the absence of the chief minister, the chief secretary and the DGP when the President arrived in the state, saying it is a serious violation of the Blue Book rules.

The Centre has taken note of the fact that only the Siliguri Mayor was present to receive her which is a violation of protocol, they said.

According to the sources, the washroom set up for the President did not have water for which an explanation has been sought from the state government.

The state has been asked to explain why the route chosen by the administration for ferrying the President was littered with garbage, they said.

The letter seeks to know about the action taken against District Magistrate of Darjeeling, Commissioner of Police, Siliguri and Additional District Magistrate who seem to be directly responsible for such violations. Murmu had been invited to the annual programme of the tribal community, which was originally scheduled to be held at Bidhannagar in Siliguri.

However, citing security and other logistical reasons, authorities shifted the venue to Goshaipur near the Bagdogra airport, officials said.

When the President arrived at the venue on Saturday afternoon, only a handful of people were present. Siliguri Mayor Gautam Deb was the only representative present at the airport to receive her.

"Mamata Banerjee is like my younger sister. I am also a daughter of Bengal. I do not know whether she is upset. Anyway, that does not matter. All of you stay well," the President had said. She also questioned the change of venue for the tribal community's annual programme from Bidhannagar to Goshaipur, where the turnout was reportedly low. "Had the programme been held there (at Bidhannagar), it would have been better. There is ample space there, and many people could have attended. But I do not know why the state administration did not permit the meeting there. Today's programme is being held at such a place that it is difficult for people to come here. Perhaps the state government does not want the welfare of tribals, and that is why they were prevented from coming here," Murmu had said.

According to protocol, the chief minister or a minister of the state government is usually present to receive the President. Vice President C P Radhakrishnan on Saturday described "lapses" in President Murmu's event in West Bengal as unfortunate, saying the high constitutional office must always get the dignity it deserves.

Accusing the West Bengal government of insulting President Murmu during her visit to the state, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday said it was "shameful and unprecedented" and the TMC dispensation has "truly crossed all limits".

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu and his Odisha counterpart Mohan Charan Majhi also voiced concern over the protocol "violation" in West Bengal during President Murmu's visit.

Naidu emphasised the necessity to uphold the dignity of the country's highest constitutional office, while Majhi said the incident has "deeply saddened" the coastal state and the tribal community nationwide.

Former Uttar Pradesh chief minister and BSP president Mayawati said everyone must respect the office of the President in accordance with the ideals and dignity of the Constitution and avoid politicising constitutional positions in any manner. (PTI)

Eight accused held in Uttam Nagar Holi death case

NEW DELHI, March 8: The Delhi Police on Sunday arrested another accused in connection with the killing of a 26-year-old man during a clash between two families in southwest Delhi's Uttam Nagar on the night of Holi festival, an official said.

Police have arrested a total of seven people in the case so far and apprehended a minor.

They said stringent provisions of the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act have also been invoked following statements recorded from the victim's family. The eighth arrestee has been identified as Imran alias Bunty (38).

This comes days after Tarun (26) was killed during a clash that broke out between his family and their neighbours in the JJ Colony area on March 4. According to police, the altercation started after water from a balloon thrown by a girl from Tarun's family splashed on a woman from the neighbouring family during Holi celebrations.

Police said the two families had known each other for nearly five decades but had earlier been involved in disputes over issues such as parking and garbage disposal in the locality.

Earlier, the police had arrested Umardeen (49), Jummadeen (36), Kamruddin (36), Mustaque (46), Muzzafar (25) and Tahir (18), while a juvenile was apprehended in connection with the case.

Meanwhile, Tarun's brother demanded strict action against the accused and said that they are not satisfied with the bulldozer action. "Such criminals must be encountered. They killed my brother, and they must meet the same fate. We are not fully satisfied with the bulldozer action," he said.

The Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) on Sunday carried out a demolition drive and razed illegal portions of a house linked to one of the accused in the case, police sources said.

Civic authorities reached the locality with two bulldozers and demolished only the illegally constructed portions of the structure and not the entire house, according to sources.

The MCD said the action was taken as part of an exercise to remove encroachments built over drains that obstruct the flow of water, especially with the monsoon approaching.

Heavy police and paramilitary deployment remained in place during the demolition drive to maintain law and order in the area, which authorities said had been divided into zones, sectors and sub-sectors for monitoring.

The incident had sparked tensions in the locality, with an angry mob damaging several vehicles and setting them on fire on Friday, prompting the deployment of additional police and central forces.

Senior officers said the situation in the area is under control and strict vigil is being maintained to prevent any breach of peace. (PTI)

Govt committed to ensuring safety of women: Adityanath

LUCKNOW, March 8: Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Sunday hailed the role of women in building an empowered society, and said his government is firmly committed to ensuring their safety, dignity and self-reliance.

In a post on X on the occasion of International Women's Day, the chief minister said before 2017 many girls hesitated to step out of their homes after evening and felt unsafe commuting to schools and colleges. "Crimes against women were common earlier, but today daughters are working even in night shifts," he said, attributing the change to "clear policies and honest intent" of the government.

"In building an empowered society the Uttar Pradesh government is firmly committed to ensuring the safety, dignity and self-reliance of the 'aadhi abadi', he said.

Adityanath said initiatives such as Mission Shakti and Anti-Romeo Squads have instilled fear among those committing crimes against girls and women. "A society where daughters are safe and respected moves on the path of continuous progress," he said.

Highlighting welfare measures for women and girls, the chief minister said schemes like Mukhyamantri Kanya Sumangala Yojana support daughters from birth through education, while Mukhyamantri Samuhik Vivah Yojana enables poor families to solemnise their daughters' marriages with dignity.

He also referred to nutritional support programmes for pregnant and lactating women and said pension for destitute women has been increased from ₹ 1,000 to ₹ 1,500. Adityanath said these initiatives have led to a sharp decline in dropout rates among girl students and a significant reduction in maternal and infant mortality rates in the state.

The chief minister also highlighted the growing role of women in economic activities, noting that self-help groups have expanded to all development blocks of the state and around 40,000 "BC Sakhis" are confidently handling financial transactions worth thousands of crores.

Women-led initiatives such as "Lakhpati Didi", "Drone Didi", "Swasthya Sakhi" and "Surya Sakhi" are not only strengthening their families economically but also contributing to the state's economy, he said. (PTI)

Nitish's RS move may lead to 'ideological takeover' in Bihar politics: CPI (ML) gen secy

NEW DELHI, March 8: Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's decision to move to the Rajya Sabha could lead to an "ideological takeover" and a shift in the political discourse in the state, CPI(ML) Liberation general secretary Dipankar Bhattacharya said on Sunday, calling it a "betrayal of the people of Bihar".

In an interview with PTI, Bhattacharya alleged that the development signals the growing dominance of the BJP over its ally Janata Dal (United) and may alter Bihar's political landscape.

"I think this will mean some kind of a political takeover, not just takeover of power, but also a change of discourse in Bihar and maybe North India," he said.

Calling the development a "big shock", the Left leader said the manner in which it was unfolding appeared "very disrespectful" towards Kumar.

"People of course knew that the BJP is now effectively controlling the government, but the way it is happening is a kind of disrespectful dumping of Nitish Kumar," he said. Bhattacharya said the move could leave many voters feeling "cheated", as the alliance had sought a mandate in Kumar's name.

"They went and sought mandate in Nitish Kumar's name, another term for Nitish Kumar, and now they are just dumping him," he added.

Kumar, the JD(U) chief, on Thursday announced that he will be contesting the Rajya Sabha polls, bringing the curtains down on his tenure as the longest-serving chief minister of Bihar. His move comes months after he led the NDA to a landslide victory in the assembly elections held in November last year.

The CPI(ML) Liberation is a member of the opposition Mahagathbandhan (Grand Alliance), which is the state-level coalition of the national INDIA Alliance. Its primary alliance partners include the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) and the Indian National Congress (INC). Bhattacharya further said people feel that it has been some kind of a coup, which has been engineered over a period of time from within the JD(U) around Nitish Kumar.

The Left leader alleged the development could deepen unease within the JD(U), with many in the party apprehensive about its future.

"Within JD(U), obviously they can see that this is how the party is almost being gobbled up by the BJP. So this is a power game of the BJP, and it's not going to go down well," he said.

According to Bhattacharya, although the JD(U) had been in alliance with the BJP for years, it had largely remained aligned with what he described as the "social justice camp".

"Nitish Kumar always used to say that he is not going to compromise with the communal forces... Now that will go, and that will mean complete ideological subsumption of the JD(U) by the BJP," he

added. He questioned the stated reason behind Kumar's decision to move to the Rajya Sabha, saying it was difficult to believe that it was a long-standing aspiration of the veteran leader.

"Going to Rajya Sabha cannot be some kind of a lifetime achievement award for someone who has been at the helm of affairs in Bihar for two decades," Bhattacharya said.

"At one time he was seen as a prime ministerial aspirant and now we are told Rajya Sabha was his aspiration. Nothing could be flimsier than this," he added.

The CPI(ML) Liberation leader alleged the move reflected the BJP's attempt to project its political dominance. "It shows the language of power of the BJP; they think they enjoy complete power and they can be blunt about it," he said.

Asked if the development could help opposition parties, Bhattacharya said the key issue was that the political situation had become clearer.

"The question is not whether it helps or not. This is the reality and the opposition and the people will have to come to terms with it," he said.

He also alleged that the state government had begun functioning along the lines of what he described as "bulldozer rule". "Demolitions have started, land acquisition is going on... Women have never before felt this insecure like in Bihar today," he claimed.

Bhattacharya said issues such as unemployment, rural employment and social justice could trigger wider political mobilisation in the state. "Bihar is very sensitive and alive to the agenda of social justice. I can see a greater churning among the people on these issues," he said.

On the possibility of leadership change in the state, he said the transition might not be smooth, especially if the BJP tried to install its own chief minister. "There is already a lot of disquiet within the JDU. If the BJP wants to impose its own chief minister, I'm sure it's not going to be smooth at all. It may be quite rough," he said. (PTI)

'Grew up in a family where women were bosses': Rahul tells students

NEW DELHI, March 8: "I grew up in a family where the women were the bosses," Congress leader Rahul Gandhi told students during an interaction in Kerala recently, while asserting that women are generally more intelligent than men.

On International Women's Day, Gandhi posted a video of his interaction with the students on his YouTube channel on Sunday and said that a few days ago, he met some young women students in Kerala during a lunch interaction and had a very interesting conversation with them.

"I was deeply impressed by each student's dreams, curiosity, and confidence. Such conversations remind us that when women recognise their potential and move forward with an open mind, they can bring about extraordinary change," the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha said.

"Every woman is unique. Their sensitivity, understanding, and emotional intelligence provide balance and direction to society. Women also wield power in their own unique ways - with patience, long-term vision, and empathy," Gandhi asserted in his post in Hindi, accompanying the video.

"Therefore, they should have every right to move forward according to their identity, personality, and aspirations, rather than being bound by society's restrictive norms," he said.

"Heartiest greetings to all women on International Women's Day. May your strength, courage, and dreams continue to propel society toward a positive future," Gandhi said.

Posting the video on X, Gandhi said interacting with some young students in Kerala was incredibly inspiring. "Their confidence and belief in their dreams demonstrate that women are the ultimate force for change," he said.

In the video, Gandhi is seen having a free-wheeling chat with the women students.

"I grew up in a family where the women were the bosses. So the boss of my family was my grandmother and I have always in my family, like on this table, been outnumbered by women," Gandhi tells the students.

"Women are generally more intelligent than men for the most part. Men are in a hurry and men get blinded by silly things.Women think longer term, they don't apply direct power they apply indirect power, it is more effective," he says. Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge shared on X a quote by BR Ambedkar on gender equality - "You are not born to suffer. You are born to rise"

"Women are not merely participants in development. They are its driving force. Through their wisdom, resilience, compassion, and determination, women strengthen communities, and build stronger nations," Kharge said on X.

"On International Women's Day 2026, we celebrate the courage, leadership, and countless contributions of women everywhere. True progress will come when equality is not an aspiration, but a lived reality for every woman," the Congress chief said. Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra also greeted women on International Women's Day.

"On this Women's Day, may every woman realise her strength, her rights and her power to shape the future. You matter. Your voice matters. Your dreams matter," she said on X. (PTI)

Women are strong, no less than others: President Murmu

NEW DELHI, March 8: President Droupadi Murmu on Sunday lauded women's strength and achievements, and exhorted them to realise their full potential, saying, "We are no lesser beings."

Addressing an event organised here by the Ministry of Women and Child Development to mark the International Women's Day, the president said the occasion was not only to honour women's achievements but also to reaffirm the nation's commitment to their empowerment.

Murmu highlighted women's pioneering roles in education, administration, judiciary, armed forces, medicine, science, technology, arts, entrepreneurship and sports. She noted that rural women are becoming economically self-reliant through self-help groups and providing leadership in village development, while women continue to emerge as leaders in employment, start-ups, and the corporate sector.

"With opportunity and support, women can excel in every sphere," she said, adding, "Mahilao mei dam hai, hum kisi se kam nahi. Hum mei bhi dam hai (Women are powerful, we are no less than others. We, too, have strength)."

The president underscored that while many achievements have been made, several obstacles still exist in ensuring women's equal participation in society. "These challenges cannot be resolved by law alone. It is necessary to change our mindset," she said.

She emphasised that parents must not discriminate between daughters and sons at home. She said mothers-in-law should not discriminate between their own daughters and daughters-in-law, and daughters-in-law should be treated as daughters.

"True equality begins with recognising every woman as a daughter, irrespective of her role in the family," she added.

She congratulated the Ministry

of Women and Child Development for organising the 'Shakti Walk - SheLeadsBharat' on Sunday as part of the International Women's Day celebrations. The event featured a walk from India Gate to Vijay Chowk.

Murmu also lauded the dedication of women from across the country who participated in the event, highlighting their commitment to India's progress and the empowerment of women nationwide. Recalling Dr B R Ambedkar's words, she said, "I measure the progress of a community by the degree of progress women have achieved."

The president expressed satisfaction that the government of India has taken significant steps to prioritise women's empowerment, highlighting various programmes including Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao; Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana; Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana; Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana; Mission Shakti and the Viksit Bharat - Employment and Livelihood Mission (Rural), which includes women-focused provisions.

She also spoke about expanding women's participation in STEM education, leadership roles in rural and urban sectors and initiatives such as Skill India and Startup India.

"...Women are increasingly becoming job creators. More than half of the start-ups supported under Startup India have at least one woman director. On the government e-Marketplace, over two lakh women-owned MSMEs are currently active," Murmu said.

To provide better market access for products made by self-help groups and rural women, the SHE-Mart initiative was launched in the 2026-27 Budget, which will establish community-run retail outlets in every district, she said. (PTI)

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Call for respect, equality and women empowerment

NE leaders greet women on Women's Day

ITANAGAR/ NAMSAI/ GANGTOK, March 8: Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu on Sunday extended warm greetings on the occasion of International Women's Day, calling for renewed commitment towards respect, equality and empowerment of women.

In a post on X, Khandu said the day is an opportunity to recognise the strength and achievements of women and reaffirm collective efforts to ensure dignity and equal opportunities for them.

"Warm wishes on International Women's Day. Let us celebrate the power, grace and achievements of women and reaffirm our commitment to respect, equality, and empowerment," the chief minister said.

Deputy Chief Minister Chowna Mein also greeted women on the occasion, highlighting their resilience and growing role in shaping society.

"Today, on International Women's Day, we celebrate the strength, resilience and achievements of women across Arunachal Pradesh and the nation," Mein said in a social media post.

He observed that women continue to play a crucial role in different spheres of life, contributing to families, communities and the economy.

"From nurturing families to leading communities, from classrooms and farms to businesses and public service, women are shaping the future with courage and determination. Their contributions continue to inspire progress and build a more inclusive society," he said.

Calling for stronger commitment towards gender equality, Mein said, "Let us reaffirm our commitment to empowering every

woman and girl with equal opportunities, dignity, and support to pursue their dreams."

He also paid tribute to women who inspire change and transformation in society, saying, "Salute to the incredible women who lead, inspire, and transform our society every day."

International Women's Day was celebrated at the Women Welfare Society Office, Namsai. The programme was organised by the Department of Women & Child Development in collaboration with the District Information & Public Relations, Namsai under the Field & Press Publicity Awareness Campaign and Women Welfare Society, Namsai.

The event was graced by Er M Seema, Executive Engineer (DUDA), as the Chief Guest, while Nang Urmila Mancheykhun, Former ZPC, attended the programme as the Guest of Honour.

Speaking on the occasion, Er M Seema highlighted the vital role played by women in nation building and stressed the need to ensure equal opportunities, respect and empowerment for women in all spheres of life. She also described the celebration as a tribute to womanhood and the invaluable contributions of women in society.

Sikkim Governor Om Prakash Mathur and Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang on Sunday greeted women on the occasion of International Women's Day and recalled their dedication and contributions to society.

Mathur said women of the Himalayan state are playing a leading role in all fields, such as education, politics, society and the economy.

Tamang emphasised that the day is a celebration of the courage, determination and remarkable achievements of women who continue to inspire and shape society.

"On the occasion of International Women's Day, I extend my heartfelt wishes to all women. The women of Sikkim are playing a leading role in every field - education, politics, society and the economy - and have become inspirations for leadership, innovation and social change today. Our mothers and sisters are the cornerstone of our progress," the governor said in a social media post.

Sikkim has provided 50 per cent reservation to women at the panchayat level in the state to significantly increase their participation in rural development, Mathur said, adding that it is a "matter of pride that the women of Sikkim are emerging as icons of self-reliance and social transformation".

"Let us all come together to provide them with more opportunities, respect and security, so they can reach even greater heights," the governor said.

The chief minister said, "On the occasion of International Women's Day, I convey my warm greetings and best wishes to all women for their strength, dedication and invaluable contributions to society."

In Sikkim, women have played a "vital role in strengthening our communities and contributing significantly in fields such as governance, education, healthcare, entrepreneurship, agriculture and social service", Tamang added. (PTI)

Manipur CM says ₹ 350 cr allocated in 2026-27 state Budget for welfare of 3.5 lakh women

IMPHAL, March 8: Manipur Chief Minister Y Khemchand Singh on Sunday announced that ₹ 350 crore has been allocated in the state Budget 2026-27, which would be tabled soon, for the welfare of 3.5 lakh women across the state.

Singh made the announcement at an International Women's Day programme here.

"To help mitigate the economic hardships faced by many families due to the recent unrest, a significant allocation of ₹ 350 crore has been made for the welfare of 3.5 lakh women in the state Budget to strengthen their livelihoods and support their continued role in rebuilding communities," he said.

Later, the CM, in a post on X, said, "Honoured to attend the International Women's Day 2026 celebration today at the City Convention Centre as the Chief Guest, in the gracious presence of ministers, MLAs and senior officials."

"On this important occasion, I reiterated that women are pivotal to the development process. Their meaningful participation across all sectors of the polity is essential to achieving inclusive growth and sustainable development," he said.

In Manipur, the strength of 'nari shakti' (women's power) is clearly visible, Singh added.

"Our women have not only contributed immensely to the state's progress but have also been at the forefront of building peace, trust and harmony among communities," the CM said.

He called for continued empowerment, support and creation of greater opportunities for women as equal partners in shaping a stronger and more prosperous Manipur.

The Budget session of the Manipur Assembly will commence on Monday and will continue till March 17. (PTI)

PFR work on Arunachal's Siang project to start soon: Minister

ITANAGAR, March 8: Arunachal Pradesh Panchayati Raj and Rural Development Minister Ojing Tasing on Sunday said work on pre-feasibility report (PFR) of the Siang Upper Multipurpose Project (SUMP) will start soon.

Talking to PTI, Tasing, who represents the Pangin assembly constituency, said the PFR activities will start as early as March 20.

Of the 21 project-affected habitations, 7 are in Siang district and they have given their consent for the PFR activities, he said.

He said the remaining project-affected habitations are in the state's Upper Siang district.

In Upper Siang, the minister said, almost all the villages have consented to the PFR activities, barring Geku.

He, however, maintained that the consent has been given by the people for the PFR activities only.

Villages including Parong, Riga, Riew, Pangkang, Sitang and Begging have already been approved for the PFR activities.

The national project faced stiff opposition from members of the Adi community, led by Siang Indigenous Farmers' Forum (SIFF) and others, who expressed concerns over displacement, environmental degradation and the violation of their rights.

Tasing said the people's participation and support for the SUMP has been due to their belief in the government and continued support from Chief Minister Pema Khandu and Deputy Chief Minister Chowna Mein.

The government is committed to ensuring that development is inclusive, transparent and aligned with the aspirations of the people, he said, adding that PFR activities are an important step towards assessing the project comprehensively. He reiterated the government's commitment to safeguarding environmental and community interests. (PTI)

Khandu lauds community effort in marketing forest produce in West Kameng

ITANAGAR, March 8: Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu on Sunday congratulated the communities of Mandala, Phudung, Khellong and Nyukmadung in West Kameng district of the state, for successfully marketing key non-timber forest products from their Community Conserved Areas (CCAs).

He described the initiative as a strong example of how community stewardship can generate livelihoods while protecting nature.

Khandu said the achievement highlights the role of sustainable harvesting and collective action in strengthening the rural economy while conserving forest resources.

"Congratulations to the communities of Mandala, Phudung, Khellong and Nyukmadung for successfully marketing important non-timber forest products from their community conserved areas," the chief minister said in a post on X.

The chief minister observed that through collective effort and sustainable harvesting practices, local collectors were able to market Khagi (Zanthoxylum species, commonly known as Sichuan pepper or Timur) and Lishi (Illicium griffithii, commonly known as Star Anise), generating significant income for local families while ensuring conservation of these valuable forest resources.

Khandu said the initiative demonstrates how local communities can build sustainable livelihoods by responsibly managing natural resources.

"Through collective effort and sustainable harvesting practices, local collectors have marketed Khagi and Lishi, generating significant income for local families while ensuring conservation of these valuable forest resources," he said. The chief minister also highlighted the role of institutional support and responsible market linkages in the initiative.

He said the effort was supported by World Wide Fund for Nature India and connected with responsible buyers such as Dabur India, Nahar Organics and North Eastern Regional Agricultural Marketing Corporation.

"This achievement, supported by WWF-India and linked to responsible buyers such as Dabur India, Nahar Organics and NERAMAC, is a wonderful example of how community stewardship can create livelihoods while protecting nature," Khandu said.

He extended his appreciation to the Community Conserved Area management committees and the families involved in the initiative.

"Heartfelt congratulations to all the CCA Management Committees and the more than 250 families involved. Such community-led initiatives strengthen the green economy of Arunachal Pradesh while preserving our rich ecological heritage," he added.

The marketing of non-timber forest products such as Sichuan pepper and star anise is increasingly being promoted in Arunachal Pradesh as a sustainable livelihood option for rural communities, officials said. (PTI)

ANSAM seeks clarification from MP Bimol Akoijam on Article 371C, ST demand

IMPHAL, March 8: The All Naga Students' Association Manipur (ANSAM) has sought clarification from Inner Manipur Lok Sabha MP Dr Bimol Akoijam over his reported remarks on forest land in the hill areas, the demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status for Meiteis and criticism of constitutional safeguards under Article 371C. In a statement issued on Saturday, ANSAM said the MP's comments, circulated widely on social media since January 14, 2026, raise concerns over the constitutional and historical rights of indigenous tribal communities in the State.

The student body stated that Article 371C was introduced during Manipur's transition to statehood to safeguard the rights of tribal communities over land, resources, culture and customs. It noted that the provision created the Hill Areas Committee (HAC) in the Manipur Legislative Assembly and entrusted the Governor with special responsibility for the administration of hill areas.

ANSAM also claimed that court rulings, including those of the Supreme Court, have affirmed that there is no government "khas land" in the hill areas and that land belongs to indigenous tribal communities under customary ownership. It said compensation for land use in the hills is therefore paid directly to tribal landowners.

Contrasting this with the valley areas, ANSAM said land in the valley became state property after Manipur's merger with India in 1949 and is administered under statutory land revenue laws, unlike the customary land systems in the hills. The organisation said statements suggesting that forest land in hill areas could be claimed by communities outside traditional tribal inhabitants undermine established legal and constitutional frameworks. ANSAM also questioned whether the MP's remarks reflect his personal views or the official position of the Indian National Congress. It further criticised the demand for ST status for Meiteis, calling it "a paradox" for a community claiming a long civilisational history. The student body urged the MP to issue a clear public clarification on his stand regarding Article 371C, tribal land rights in the hill areas and the implications of extending ST status to non-tribal communities.

It warned that failure to clarify the position could lead ANSAM to consider both the MP and the Congress party as "anti-tribal."

The Naga student body then said they issued this in the interest of protecting the constitutional rights, land and identity of the tribal peoples of Manipur. (NNN)

Mangan district admn to issue permits to tourists to visit Lachen

GANGTOK, March 8: The Mangan district administration and Tourism department will issue permits to tourists to visit popular North Sikkim destinations like Lachen and Gurudongmar lake from March 9, an official said on Sunday.

Tourists and travel agencies may apply for permits through the district collectorate in Mangan or through authorised travel operators as per government guidelines, he said.

Mangan District Collector Anant Jain said permits will be issued to tourists for trips to Lachen and other areas in North Sikkim from Monday by the district administration and the tourism department. The Mangan district had stopped issuing permits to tourists to visit Lachen and Gurudongmar lake and many areas in North Sikkim after a glacial lake flood outburst hit the area in 2023 and damaged roads and bridges.

The district administration has also issued a traffic advisory related to the newly completed bailey suspension bridge built over the Taram Chu. The bridge is on the Chungthang–Lachen Road and is expected to play an important role in restoring connectivity to the region.

The 400-foot-long bailey suspension bridge, constructed with a load capacity of 12 tonne was opened for regulated vehicular movement last month by Minister of State for Defence Sanjay Seth.

In order to ensure safety and protect the structural integrity of the bridge, specific traffic restrictions have been put in place.

As per the guidelines issued by the district collector, only light vehicles within the permissible load capacity will be allowed to cross the bridge.

Additionally, only one vehicle will be permitted to cross the bridge at a time to prevent structural stress and ensure safe passage, it said.

The Superintendent of Police, Mangan, has been directed to deploy adequate police personnel in and around the bridge to regulate traffic and ensure strict compliance with the restrictions. (PTI)

Manipur CM condemns TMC govt for showing 'blatant disrespect' to Prez Murmu

IMPHAL, March 8: Manipur Chief Minister Y Khemchand Singh on Sunday condemned the Trinamool Congress government in West Bengal for showing "blatant disrespect" to President Droupadi Murmu and ignoring established protocol during her Siliguri visit.

In a post on X, Singh said, "The utter disregard for constitutional propriety displayed by the All India Trinamool Congress government in West Bengal by showing blatant disrespect to the President of India and ignoring established protocol is deeply condemnable."

President Murmu on Saturday expressed dismay over a low turnout at a tribal community event near Bagdogra airport and questioned the decision to shift the venue from Bidhannagar.

She also noted the absence of West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and her ministers during her visit.

The Manipur CM said, "Such conduct is not merely irresponsible; it is profoundly shameful and reflects the growing arrogance and declining standard of governance of TMC. Institutions and constitutional offices must always be treated with the highest regard, irrespective of political differences."

He said what makes the incident even more distressing is that it occurred during a programme involving our tribal brothers and sisters and the dignity of the office of the President of India must never be compromised under any circumstances. He called on to respect constitutional institutions as they are the foundation of democracy and any deviation from the principle is unacceptable. Former chief minister N Biren Singh also called the incident "outrageous and deeply condemnable".

The former CM said he joins "Fellow Indians in mourning this grave injustice", adding President Murmu's "words of hurt and dismay, spoken with the dignity and strength she represents, reflect the pain felt by millions across the nation." (PTI)

Northeast witnessing connectivity development: VP Radhakrishnan

AGARTALA, March 8: Vice President C P Radhakrishnan on Sunday said the Northeast has been witnessing connectivity development over the past decade, boosting economic activities in the region.

Addressing the convocation of Tripura Central University at Suryamaninagar in West Tripura, he said that in the past decade, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has relentlessly tapped the potential of the Northeast.

"I hail from Chennai, and it was difficult to travel from Chennai to Agartala on the same day. Now, with better infrastructure in place, many long-distance trains connect Agartala. Today, we can travel from Kohima to Agartala on the same day, which is a symbol of a more connected India," he said.

Radhakrishnan said, "In the past decade, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has relentlessly tapped the potential of the Northeast. The economy is also circulating at a faster pace in the Northeast."

He said the foundation stone for the Matabari tourist circuit was laid in January 2026 at Udaipur in Gomati district

to boost tourism.

"I was told by the Collector of Gomati that the tourist footfall has increased from 3.5 lakh to 8.50 lakh (annually) at Maa Tripurasundari temple. It will surely add local employment. A stagnant economy will never grow until we push it for circulation," he said.

Radhakrishnan also mentioned the state's move to launch the State Innovation Mission (SIM) under the Atal Innovation Mission for the first time by any state government.

"I thanked Chief Minister Manik Saha and his team for launching the State Innovation Mission (SIM) under the Atal Innovation Mission. It is a significant step towards embedding innovation and entrepreneurship for a long-term development framework," he said. Radhakrishnan also exhorted the university authority to continue producing high-quality research papers for innovation.

"The Tripura Central University has been making steady progress in high-quality research work. This should be continued with innovation and the number of intellectual properties should increase. Participating in the national research platform is the signal of arrival on the national academic landscape," he said.

Emphasising proper time management to achieve success, the Vice President said individuals meet several failures before becoming successful.

Radhakrishnan exhorted the students to double their efforts instead of being disheartened by failure to achieve success; success will be at their doorstep.

Governor N Indrasena Reddy, Chief Minister Manik Saha and Vice Chancellor Shyamal Kumar Das also addressed the event. (PTI)

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

NO ACEIICS/AAP/97/2025-26/03 Dated.07/03/2026.

PRESS NOTICE

Director-Cum-Additional Chief Engineer. PWD (R&B), Hills Assam, Diphu on behalf of the Governor of Assam, invites Bids from registered Contractors Roads for the work "Construction of Road from Hidim Timung near Little Flower to Chelan Tisso" under AAP for the year 2025-26 "under the E.E... PWD. Diphu Roads Division, Diphu. The details may be seen in the office of the undersigned during office hours.

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

Memo No. ACEH/CS/AAP/97/2025-26/03-(A) Dated.07/03/2026.

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Delhi got rid of AAP's 'less work-more excuses' model, development accelerated under BJP: Modi

NEW DELHI, March 8: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said the pace of all-round development in Delhi has accelerated since the BJP government was formed a year ago and alleged that under AAP's rule, works were stalled due to excuses and projects "died in files".

Addressing a gathering at Burari ground after inaugurating and launching projects worth ₹ 33,500 crore, including two new Metro corridors, Modi said that Delhi is not only the capital of the country, but is also the identity of India and a symbol of its energy.

He said that there was a time when Delhi was often criticised for its inefficient transportation system. "Commuting from one part of the city to another would take hours, and women frequently had to wait at bus stops for long periods, hoping to catch a bus or auto-rickshaw. However, the situation in Delhi is rapidly changing," he said.

He pointed out that just a few days ago, the city was connected to western Uttar Pradesh via the Namo Bharat train, significantly easing travel between the two regions.

Additionally, with the launch of Metro Phase 4, the Delhi Metro network has now expanded to over 375 kilometres, further improving connectivity and convenience for residents, the prime minister said.

"Whenever anyone in the world thinks about India, the image of Delhi often comes to mind... Delhi is not only the capital of India, but it is also the identity of India and a symbol of its energy," he said.

He asserted that the development of Delhi is not just the development of a city and is connected with the image of the entire country. "The result of the new hope and resolve with which you formed a BJP government in Delhi a year ago is visible here today. I extend my heartfelt congratulations to all the citizens of Delhi for this uninterrupted stream of development," he said while addressing the gathering.

Modi slammed the previous AAP dispensation, saying the "AAPda (disaster) government" halted all development work in Delhi for 10 years.

"Their way was to do less work and make more excuses. Today, Delhi has a model of development --- excuses have stopped and work has begun.

"Earlier, projects used to die in files and today, projects are being implemented on the ground. "Now, our government is operating in mission mode to address the challenges facing Delhi," he said.

The prime minister inaugurated and laid the foundation stone of projects worth ₹ 15,200 crore under the General Pool Residential Accommodation (GPRA) redevelopment plan.

PM Modi, accompanied by Union Housing and Urban Affairs Minister Manohar Lal Khattar, visited GPRA Type-5 quarters in Sarojini Nagar and handed over the keys to female allottees. He also interacted with some women labourers.

He inaugurated the 12.3-km Majlis Park-Maujpur-Babarpur corridor of the Pink Line and the 9.9-km Deepali Chowk-Majlis Park corridor of the Magenta Line.

The Majlis Park-Maujpur-Babarpur stretch will benefit areas such as Burari, Jagatpur-Wazirabad, Khajuri Khas, Bhajanpura and Yamuna Vihar, strengthening connectivity in north and east Delhi.

The Deepali Chowk-Majlis Park section is an elevated extension of the Magenta Line and will connect areas including Madhuban Chowk, Uttar Pitampura-Prashant Vihar, Haid Badli Mor and Bhalaswa.

With the addition of these stretches, the Pink Line and Magenta Line networks will expand further, improving last-mile connectivity and easing travel for daily commuters across the capital, according to the statement.

PM Modi also laid the foundation stone for three new Delhi Metro corridors under Phase V-A of the expansion plan, covering a total route length of around 16.1 km. These include the Ramakrishna Ashram Marg-Indraprastha corridor, the Aerocity-Indira Gandhi International Airport Terminal-1 corridor and the Tughlakabad-Kalindi Kunj corridor, which are expected to improve connectivity between central Delhi, south Delhi, Noida and the airport.

The scope of these projects is extensive, ranging from the growth of the Metro network to the establishment of modern residential complexes for thousands of government employees, Modi said.

"The people of Delhi, with new hope and a new resolve, formed the double-engine government here a year ago, and its result is visible today in these development works," Modi emphasised.

The prime minister stressed that under the double-engine governance model, every transport facility in the national capital is being systematically upgraded to ensure clean, comfortable and modern travel for the lakhs of citizens who rely on bus services daily.

"While over four thousand electric buses provided by the Centre are already operational, an additional 1,800 new buses have been deployed in the last year alone, including hundreds of 'Devi Buses' designed to enhance last-mile connectivity across Delhi's colonies and neighbourhoods", Modi said. (PTI)

SIR adds new dimension to electoral arithmetic

Bengal polls: Women voters emerge as decisive bloc

KOLKATA, March 8: The Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls in West Bengal has introduced a new political variable ahead of the assembly polls, with Election Commission data showing a marginally sharper decline in women electors than men - a shift analysts said could influence outcomes in closely fought constituencies.

Women voters, who constitute nearly half of the state's electorate and have increasingly turned out in greater numbers than men, have emerged as the most decisive electoral bloc in the state's politics over the past decade.

With cohesive voting patterns, a steady rise in turnout and welfare-driven political mobilisation, women voters now form the backbone of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's electoral coalition - a support base the BJP is aggressively trying to breach.

According to EC data following the SIR of electoral rolls, the number of women electors stands at around 3.44 crore, down from 3.77 crore when the process began in November, while male voters declined from 3.89 crore to 3.60 crore. Overall, women account for nearly half of the state's 7.04 crore electorate.

The drop among women voters is 8.7 per cent, marginally higher than the roughly 7.5 per cent decline among male electors. Turnout data over the past two decades underscores their growing political weight. Women's turnout stood at 80.75 per cent in 2006, rose to 84.45 per cent in 2011, climbed to 94.42 per cent in 2016, and in 2021 again slightly exceeded men's participation, with women voting at 81.75 per cent compared to 81.37 per cent for men.

In several seats, the gender gap has been striking. In English Bazar, female turnout exceeded male participation by more than 21 percentage points in 2021, while some others recorded gaps of 17–19 percentage points.

Survey-based estimates from the 2021 assembly polls suggest the TMC secured more than 50 per cent of the women's vote, while the BJP captured about 37 per cent.

"Any disproportionate deletions among women voters, even if marginal, could have implications in tightly contested seats where turnout differences often determine outcomes," political scientist Biswanath Chakraborty said.

"Women voters in Bengal are no longer peripheral participants; they have become the most cohesive electoral bloc in the state. Welfare schemes, direct cash transfers and a sense of empowerment have created a strong political relationship between women voters and the state government," said political analyst Suman Bhattacharya.

Economists described this trend as "Didi effect", Banerjee's personal appeal combined with a network of women-focused welfare programmes.

"These schemes have provided economic empowerment to women in lower-income households. When financial support reaches women directly, it often translates into political trust," said an economist.

Central to the TMC's strategy has been the Lakshmir Bhandar scheme, under which women receive monthly financial assistance. The state recently increased the grant by Rs 500, raising the allowance to Rs 1,500 for women in the general category and Rs 1,700 for SC/ST beneficiaries. The scheme currently covers about 2.50 crore women.

Senior TMC leaders said the party's response to blunt the impact of deletions will be to intensify mobilisation among women voters. "Our goal will be to increase voter turnout. If turnout increases, and if women and Muslim voters vote in large numbers, then the BJP's game is effectively over. We are organising our campaign sector-wise, focusing on social groups and governance issues, whereas the BJP is approaching it primarily through religious polarisation," said state TMC vice-president Jaiprakash Majumdar.

Women voters have long formed one of the strongest pillars of the TMC's support base, alongside minorities who account for about 30 per cent of the electorate. However, the opposition believes cracks may be emerging.

The Sandeshkhali controversy, which triggered protests over alleged atrocities against women, and the rape and murder of a junior doctor at RG Kar hospital, have sharpened the law-and-order debate and provided the opposition with potent campaign issues.

A senior BJP MLA admitted that the party had earlier struggled to connect with women but said the political mood could shift. "Concerns about safety and dignity are now central political questions, and we believe women voters will respond to them," she said.

The BJP has attempted to counter the TMC's welfare pitch by promising expanded financial support for women and indicating that the Lakshmir Bhandar allowance could be raised to Rs 3,000 if it comes to power.

Aware that women voters form the bedrock of the TMC's electoral strength, the BJP has also drawn up a strategy targeting beneficiaries of central welfare schemes such as free rations and housing.

Chakraborty said, "The contest for women's votes could ultimately determine poll outcomes. Women voters cutting across caste, class and community divides have shown remarkable consistency in recent elections. If even a small portion of this bloc shifts, it can significantly alter the electoral arithmetic."

Within the women electorate itself, analysts identify multiple layers: minority, rural and subaltern women, general caste women, and SC/ST voters, each carrying distinct political preferences.

"We do not look at women merely as a vote bank like the BJP. Our government has focused on economic and social empowerment," said state minister Chandrima Bhattacharya. (PTI)

Uttam Nagar Holi death: 7 nabbed, including minor; police invoke Dalit atrocity Act

NEW DELHI, March 8: Seven people, including a minor, were apprehended in connection with the death of a 26-year-old man in a clash between two neighbouring families with long-standing disputes during Holi celebrations in southwest Delhi's Uttam Nagar, police said on Saturday.

Provisions of the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act were also added to the FIR on Saturday, they said.

The incident, which took place on March 4, sparked tensions in the area with an angry mob damaging several vehicles and setting them on fire. Protests over the past two days prompted heavy deployment of police and paramilitary personnel in the area.

On Wednesday, around 11.09 pm, a call was made to the Uttam Nagar Police Station, reporting a quarrel between neighbours belonging to different communities in the area's JJ colony.

The two families had known each other for the past five decades and got into rows over parking and garbage disposal, among other things, Deputy Commissioner of Police (Dwarka) Kushal Pal Singh said.

"Both families are originally from Rajasthan. Earlier, they used to live in the Rajendra Nagar slum and shifted here after 2004," Singh said.

An initial inquiry revealed that the dispute began after a girl from one family accidentally threw a water balloon that hit a woman from the other. Soon, both parties came to blows.

The police said eight people sustained injuries in the clash — three from one side and five from the other – and most were discharged from the hospital the same day. Tarun, 26, however, was admitted with serious injuries.

An FIR was initially registered under sections 110 (attempt to commit culpable homicide) and 3(5) (common intention) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, and police arrested four people and apprehended one minor. "On March 5, Tarun succumbed during treatment, following which the section related to murder was added to the case," the officer said.

With the arrest of two more accused, the total number of people held in this connection has risen to seven, including six adults and a minor, they said.

The accused have been identified as Umardeen, 49, and Jummadeen and Kamruddin, both aged 36. Besides the juvenile, the other three were Mustaque, Muzzafar, and Tahir, aged 46, 25, and 18.

The police warned of action against anti-social elements attempting to give the incident a different colour or disturb law and order.

On Friday, tensions rose in the area when a car and a motorcycle were set on fire, and a protest by Hindu political outfits blocked traffic for several hours, demanding justice for Tarun. (PTI)

Ranji triumph energises J-K youth, reflects democratisation of opportunities: Jitendra Singh

JAMMU, March 8: Union minister Jitendra Singh on Sunday said that the historic Ranji Trophy victory of the Jammu and Kashmir cricket team has energised youngsters and reflected the democratisation of opportunities that have led to a renewed sense of aspiration and self-confidence among them in the region.

The minister of state in the prime minister's office was speaking to the media after hosting the winning team at his residence here. The minister felicitated the players, coaching staff and officials for their remarkable campaign in India's premier domestic cricket tournament and congratulated them for bringing laurels to the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir.

The Union territory bagged their maiden Ranji Trophy title, holding eight-time champions Karnataka to a draw in which the former gained a 291-run first innings lead at Hubballi on February 28.

Talking to reporters, Singh described the victory as a proud moment and said the achievement proved that there was never any shortage of talent or potential among the youngsters of Jammu and Kashmir. "Our boys have won the Ranji Trophy. This proves there was never a shortage of talent, ability or potential among our children. When they are given the right opportunity at the right time, they display confidence, focus and a strong spirit of hard work," he said.

Sharing the felicitation moments on X, the minister wrote, "…their remarkable achievement has not only energised the entire youth community of this region but also vindicated the belief that democratisation of opportunities and a level playing field, provided under the dispensation headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has led to an aspirational surge and renewed self-confidence among the youth."

The minister also lauded the role of the team's support staff and administrators, including BCCI president Mithun Manhas

and member administration, JKCA, Brig (Retd) Anil Gupta, saying they deserved appreciation for guiding the team and ensuring a fair and professional environment.

"Earlier, there had been concerns about the functioning of the Jammu and Kashmir Cricket Association, particularly regarding the selection process, but this time the selections were carried out without discrimination or bias, and the players were trained in a focused manner by the coaching staff," the minister said.

Singh said the team's success also reflected broader changes taking place in Jammu and Kashmir, adding that increased opportunities for youngsters had led to a rise in aspiration and self-confidence across the region.

Highlighting examples of youth achievements, he referred to recent civil services examination results, noting that candidates from humble backgrounds in the Kashmir Valley had secured top ranks, while earlier, a student from Poonch had also emerged among the top performers in the country. (PTI)

Delhi govt worked in 'mission mode' over past year, launched several welfare initiatives: CM Gupta

NEW DELHI, March 8: Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on Sunday said the expansion of the metro network will make daily travel safer and easier for women as Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated two metro corridors.

Prime Minister Modi inaugurated two metro corridors and laid the foundation stone of three more.

Addressing the event, Gupta said the Delhi government has tried to serve residents with "truth and honesty" while focusing on key civic issues. The government worked in "mission mode" over the past year and launched several welfare initiatives aimed at helping the poor and workers in the national capital, she said.

Gupta said 70 Atal canteens were opened across Delhi, where meals are provided for ₹5 to the poor, the needy and workers. Around 70,000 people receive food in these canteens every day, she added. The government has taken steps to tackle pollution and waterlogging and brought a new drainage master plan for the city after 50 years to address these long-standing issues, she said.

The chief minister also said the government used unclaimed funds to provide ₹ 200 crore to the daughters of Delhi, while ensuring that the benefits of earlier schemes reach the needy.

Highlighting administrative reforms, Gupta said all departments of the Delhi government have been digitalised.

She listed initiatives such as the e-file system, digital hospital records, online OPD booking, digital asset management, project management portals and the CM Jansunwai app. She further said that schools in Delhi have been equipped with 7000 smart classes, 275 computers and 100 digital libraries.

Union Minister of Housing and Urban Affairs Manohar Lal Khattar said the metro network has become a "lifeline" for Delhi, saving time and money for passengers while helping reduce pollution.

Recalling the first metro inauguration on December 24, 2002, by former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Khattar said the project was once a dream but has now become a major part of urban transport. (PTI)

From operational planning to aviation safety, women take on key roles at upcoming Noida airport

NOIDA/LUCKNOW, March 8: Women professionals are playing a key role in the development and operational planning of the upcoming Noida International Airport, contributing across leadership, technical and aviation safety functions as the greenfield project prepares to begin passenger operations.

The airport, which recently received its aerodrome licence from the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), is expected to begin passenger services within the next one-and-a-half to two months, officials said.

Spread across more than 1,300 hectares in its first phase, it has been developed with a single runway and terminal building capable of handling around 12 million passengers annually.

Airport authorities noted that the project has enabled the organisation to build a diverse workforce from the ground up, ensuring that women participate not only in leadership roles but also in technical, safety and operational functions critical to running a modern international airport.

"From leadership positions to frontline operational teams, women today contribute across a wide spectrum of airport functions including operations planning, architecture and design, finance, digital systems, regulatory functions and commercial operations," an official associated with the project said.

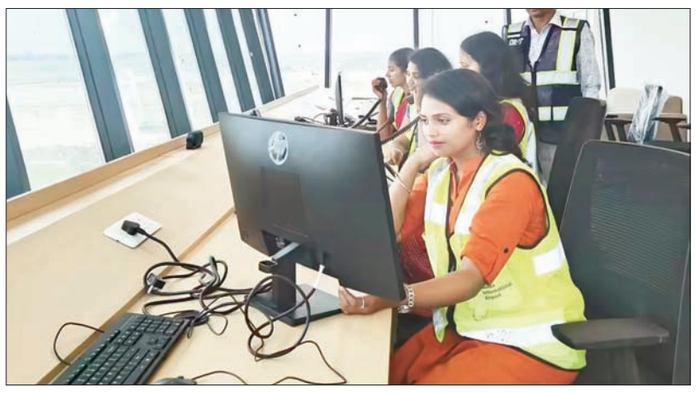
The airport's leadership structure includes several senior positions held by women, reflecting an effort to integrate gender diversity into the project's organisational framework from its early stages.

Chief Operating Officer Kiran Jain, who leads airport operations, brings more than three decades of experience in aviation and hospitality across India and the United States.

She has been closely involved in planning operational systems, coordinating airline partnerships and preparing the airport for live operations.

Financial strategy and governance are overseen by Chief Financial Officer Nitu Samra, who has more than 25 years of experience across financial services and asset management. Her role includes overseeing financial planning, regulatory coordination and long-term financial management for the airport.

Head Human Resources (HR) Mili Saxena, who handles HR strategy and workforce, has been involved in shaping recruitment processes, talent development and diversity initiatives as the airport builds its operational workforce ahead of launch.



Women also hold key positions across other functional areas such as regulatory coordination, facilities management, aviation safety, aero-commercial operations, infrastructure readiness and digital systems management, officials said.

"Women hold several critical leadership positions at the airport, including roles such as COO, CFO and Head HR, reflecting how women are helping shape both strategic decisions and operational readiness," the official said.

They are also engaged in core technical and operational verticals essential to airport functioning. Currently, around 45 women are working across areas such as architecture and terminal design, airside compliance, operational command functions, regulatory oversight and digital systems management.

Women professionals are managing responsibilities including Lead Airport Operations Control Centre (APOC), lead flight operations, senior architect, lead compliance and audit, lead airside compliance and IT service desk management.

Given the nature of airport functioning, many of these roles operate in shift-based environments, where teams work extended hours to ensure systems monitoring, operational readiness and coordination ahead of the airport's launch.

Women are also part of the airport's Aircraft Rescue and Fire Fighting (ARFF) unit, which is responsible for emergency response and aviation safety, officials said. Five women serve in the ARFF team presently and undergo the same specialised training and preparedness protocols required for aviation emergency response.

Additionally, women are involved in internal security functions supporting surveillance, access control and operational coordination within the airport ecosystem.

Authorities said once airport operations begin, personnel from the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) will take charge of airport security.

Women also played a notable role during the airport's construction phase, particularly in engineering and safety functions.

Officials said female professionals accounted for 16 out of 30 engineering staff associated with key project activities, while six women were part of the environment, health and safety (EHS) teams.

Their participation highlights the increasing involvement of women in infrastructure development and construction management, sectors that have traditionally had lower female representation.

Airport authorities said several organisational measures have also been introduced to support employees working in a 24x7 operational environment. These include secure transport arrangements, clearly defined shift protocols, provisions for creche facilities for working parents and formal grievance redressal mechanisms. The aim is to build a workplace culture based on equal opportunity, diversity and inclusion, officials added.

"As a greenfield project, the airport has had the opportunity to build an inclusive workforce from the outset, where women are represented across leadership, operational and technical roles," an official said. (PTI)

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J&K Ranji triumph result of collective effort, years of hard work: Players, coach

JAMMU, March 8: Members of the Jammu and Kashmir cricket team on Sunday described their historic Ranji Trophy triumph as the outcome of years of hard work, collective belief and improved support systems, saying the achievement has boosted confidence among players and inspired youngsters across the union territory.

Jammu and Kashmir bagged their maiden Ranji Trophy title, holding eight-time champions Karnataka to a draw in which the former gained a 291-run first innings lead at Hubballi on February 28.

Talking to PTI videos on the sidelines of the team's felicitation by union minister Jitendra Singh here, captain Paras Dogra said the victory marked the culmination of a long journey and credited the entire support structure of the team for the success.

"It has been a long journey. Many people have contributed and a lot of hard work has gone into this achievement. The boys always had the talent; they just needed the right direction and unity. When everyone came together — the players, the selection committee and the association — we were able to achieve this result," he said.

Cricketer Aqib Nabi said the win was particularly significant as the team had worked consistently over the past few years to reach this level.

"This victory is very important for us because earlier we did not get much recognition. Over the last three to four years we have worked very hard. We started playing more practice matches and travelled to different places to compete in varied conditions. This result reflects the collective effort of the entire team and the support of the association," Nabi said.

Another player, Kanhaiya Wadhawan said the achievement was not the result of individual effort but the combined work of the team, administrators and the wider cricket fraternity in the region.

"It is the effort of the entire team, the association and the administration. I would say it is the collective work of the whole Jammu and Kashmir cricket fraternity. Their support is the reason we have reached here," he said.

The team's coach Ajay Sharma also credited the players' belief and the positive environment created within the squad for the historic triumph.

"We did not have big star players but we had belief. The boys were made to believe that they had the talent to achieve something big. We created a positive team environment where players supported each other, even when someone was going through a tough phase," he said.

According to the coach, the victory has instilled confidence among the players and placed Jammu and Kashmir cricket firmly on the national map.

"No team will take Jammu and Kashmir lightly anymore. The players now know they can compete with the best. This success will inspire many youngsters in the region and encourage families to support children who want to pursue cricket professionally," he said.

He also expressed hope that improved infrastructure, including a proposed international stadium in the region, would further strengthen the growth of cricket in Jammu and Kashmir.

Members of the Jammu and Kashmir squad also extended their best wishes to the Indian cricket team for the ICC Men's T20 World Cup final against New Zealand in Ahmedabad on Sunday, expressing confidence that the home side would emerge victorious.

Dogra said there was "no doubt" that India would lift the trophy again, while other players highlighted the form and confidence of the home side. (PTI)

Australia outclass India by 10 wickets in one-off women's D/N Test

PERTH, March 8: Australia translated their overwhelming dominance over the last three days into a lop-sided 10-wicket win over India in the one-off women's day-night Test here on Sunday.

Australia earlier did the ground work for their victory, bowling out India for 149 in their second innings, and then scaled down a nominal target of 25 without any ado.

It was also a fitting farewell for skipper Alyssa Healy, who ended her career in Baggy Green with a magnificent win over a rival against whom she always excelled.

Writing was very much on the wall once India started the third day at 105 for six. Overnight India batters Pratika Rawal (63) and Sneh Rana (30) took India to 132.

Rawal showed excellent temperament during her fifty but the task was way too tall for her to manage.

Once Rana was ousted by Ash Gardener with a quick delivery taking out the batter's off-stump, India combusted quickly.

A combination of Gardner and Player of the Match Annabel Sutherland fittingly ended India's innings. Sutherland took a fine tumbling catch at the edge of the circle when Rawal's mistimed pull off the off-spinner failed to find power or distance.

It also signalled the end of India's second innings.

Australia openers Georgia Voll and Phoebe Litchfield were never going to be challenged by a target of 25, and the pair did the job with ease in just 4.3 overs.

"We started well in T20Is with a series win, but could not continue the good work in ODIs and Tests but playing a full series in Australia was a good experience. The Pink Ball Test was a different challenge," said India skipper Harmanpreet Kaur said after the match.

Her Australian counterpart Healy said: "Bouncing back from the T20 series defeat was unbelievable and proud of the bunch.

"I am going to sing that team song one last time, but happy to see this team going forward and get some good results. The last week or so has been amazing," said Healy. (PTI)

Arshdeep wins 25m pistol T3 finals

NEW DELHI, March 8: Arshdeep Kaur secured the top spot in the finals of 25m pistol women event in a high-quality field of the National Selection Trials (Group A) that also featured double Olympic medallist Manu Bhaker. The Punjab markswoman, who qualified in eighth position, edged out the experienced Divya T.S 37-36 to finish on top in the eight-shooter final.

Former Asian Games champion Rahi Sarnobat secured the third place with 33 hits, after Divya prevailed over her in a shoot-off.

Rhythm Sangwan finished fourth, followed by Niveditha V. Nair,

Bhaker, nationals bronze medallist Anjali Choudhary and Chinki Yadav, who completed the top eight.

Bhaker qualified for finals in top spot after two days of qualification in the precision and rapid stages with a combined score of 582-17x (Precision 287, Rapid 295).

Rahi followed with a score of 580-20x (Precision 292, Rapid 288) and Divya T.S qualified in third place with a score of 580-13x (Precision 290, Rapid 290). Niveditha V. Nair (577-23x, Precision 288, Rapid 289), Rhythm Sangwan (577-16x, Precision 285, Rapid 292), Anjali Choudhary (576-12x, Precision 287, Rapid 289), Chinki Yadav (575-20x, Precision 280, Rapid 290) and Arshdeep Kaur (575-19x, Precision 285, Rapid 290) completed the top eight.

The qualification and finals of 50m Rifle 3 Positions for both men and women along with the qualification and finals of 10m Air Pistol men will be held on Monday. (PTI)

AASPA condoles demise of Sanjiv Saikia

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, March 8: Members of the All Assam Sports Pensioners' Association (AASPA) have expressed deep sorrow over the sudden demise of former nationally acclaimed footballer and sports pensioner Sanjiv Saikia, who passed away at the age of 69 at Apollo Hospital Guwahati on March 8.

Saikia is survived by his wife, one son and a host of relatives.

Members of the association recalled his immense contribution to the game of football in Assam and prayed for the eternal peace of the departed soul.

They also conveyed heartfelt condolences to the bereaved family and wished them strength to bear the irreparable loss.

The last rites of Saikia were performed at the Navagraha Cremation Ground on March 8 in the presence of family members and well-wishers.

Happy for the fight that we showed: Muzumdar

PERTH, March 8: India head coach Amol Muzumdar hailed his team's character despite a crushing defeat to Australia Women in the pink-ball Test, saying the players showed commendable fight in difficult conditions here.

India lost the one-off Test by 10 wickets inside three days as only Jemimah Rodrigues and Pratika Rawal could score fifties while other big guns like Smriti Mandhana and skipper Hamanpreet Kaur struggled in bowler friendly conditions at the WACA.

"A bit disappointing with the result, but really happy for the fight that we showed for the last three days. There were tough conditions but credit to Australia, they were brilliant in this Test match," Muzumdar said at the post-match press conference.

The Mumbai stalwart lauded the effort of the debutants, highlighting the determination shown by the younger players despite the team ending up on the losing side.

"Somebody like Pratika showing the guts and determination, getting a half century here at WACA in the second innings. Kranti bowled her heart out and also Kashvi and Sayali in the first innings picked up those wickets. It was really heartening to see all the debutants," he said.

Muzumdar said the team's packed schedule leading into the Test was

challenging, though he refused to use it as an excuse for the result.

"The women's team came in after playing five T20s against Sri Lanka, then there was the WPL, and immediately we flew out to Australia and played the T20 series before the multi-format leg. It's a tough one but at the same time there are no excuses," he said.

He, however, suggested that an additional practice game before a Test would be beneficial for the side.

"If they can add another practice game, nothing like it," he added.

Muzumdar also expressed the team's eagerness to play more Test cricket, saying the longer format remains vital for the growth of the women's game.

"We love playing this format of the game. Everyone in the dressing room was looking forward to this pink-ball Test in Perth. The more Test matches we play, the better it is for the game," he said.

"I have always believed that a four-day or a five-day Test match in the international calendar is always a healthy sign for cricket."

Speaking about the challenges of the pink-ball Test, Muzumdar said the ball moved considerably under lights but added that adapting to such conditions was part of the challenge.

"The pink ball was a different challenge. The ball moved quite considerably under lights, but that's the way it is. It was the same for both teams and you have to adjust to the conditions," he said.

"A pink-ball Test brings a lot of excitement. Spectators can come after work in the evening as well, so you have to consider those aspects."

Reflecting on the match situation, Muzumdar said the toss played a role but admitted Australia had clearly outplayed India.

"Obviously Australia won the toss and put us in. We would have done the same thing had we won the toss because the ball was swinging and seaming around at WACA.

"We probably could have played those first two sessions a little differently and put a better score on the board in the first innings," he said.

Muzumdar added that the message to the players before the third day was to keep fighting and try to make a contest of the match.

"The message was plain and simple: fight it out. We thought even if we got around 125 in the second innings we could still make a match out of it with the lights coming into play. But Australia were terrific in this game and they outplayed us," he added. (PTI)

Aditi Ashok finishes tied third in Blue Bay LPGA

HAINAN ISLAND (CHINA), March 8: Aditi Ashok dropped three bogeys in a row in the middle of the round but still managed to hold on for an even par 72 that helped her finish tied-third in the Blue Bay LPGA here.

Aditi birdied the third but gave away shots on the seventh, eighth and the ninth before picking up strokes on the 15th and the 18th.

The Indian golfer's 72 saw her reach 8-under for four rounds and she finished three shots behind the winner, Mi Hyang Lee (73) of Korea.

This was Aditi's best finish since her T2 at the JM Eagle LA Championship in 2023.

Mi Hyang Lee overcame a strange front nine, which included two double bogeys, to secure her first LPGA Tour title in over eight years.

With a narrow one-stroke victory over Weiwei Zhang, Lee became only the second Korean to win the Blue Bay LPGA, joining 2015 champion Sei Young Kim.

The victory marks the 32-year-old's third career LPGA Tour title and her first since the 2017 ISPS HANDA Women's Scottish Open.

Lee carded a final-round 1-over 73 at Jian Lake Blue Bay Golf Course for an 11-under 277 total, finishing just ahead of People's Republic of China's Zhang.

Earlier Aditi, 27, carded a third round of 2-under 70 to move into T-4.

It was a rollercoaster final day for Lee. She entered the final round with a three-shot lead, but saw her lead dwindle with a rocky front nine.

After a birdie early the momentum stalled following a bogey at the second.

The up-and-down nature of her round continued with a double bogey on the par-4 5th, a bogey on the par-3 7th, and another double bogey on the par-4 9th hole.

By the turn, Lee had dropped to 8-under-par and found herself chasing Zhang.

The veteran quickly found her rhythm on the back nine, carding birdies at the 10th and 13th to stay within striking distance. The momentum shifted when Zhang stumbled with a bogey at the 17th hole.

Lee capitalized, sealing the victory with a clutch birdie on the 18th hole to clinch the title.

Rounding out the top-five, defending champion Rio Takeda finished at 8-under-par in a four-way tie for fifth with Hye-Jin Choi, Yu Liu and A Lim Kim. (PTI)

Lahiri finishes 24th, Rahm wins in Liv Hong Kong

HONG KONG, March 8: In a tame finish, Indian golfer Anirban Lahiri returned a card of 69 to end up Tied-24th in Liv Golf Hong Kong, here Saturday.

Lahiri, who carded 66-65 at the Par-70 course on the first two days had 70 and 69 on the last two days for a 10-under total.

Jon Rahm produced a dominant performance of 6-under 64 at Hong Kong Golf Club to win his first individual tournament in 539 days. Dustin Johnson's 4Aces GC won their first team win in 974 days.

Rahm is the league's reigning two-time Individual Champion.

In the individual competition Thomas Detry (64-63-66-67) at 20-under finished second and Thomas Pieters (68-66-61-66) was third a 19-under.

Anthony Kim followed up his electric victory in Adelaide with a tie for 31st in Hong Kong. (PTI)

Sea of blue returns to Motera, but vibe is very different from 2023 heartbreak

AHMEDABAD, March 8: The blue wave is back at Motera, surging steadily towards the sprawling Narendra Modi Stadium for another global final -- the T20 World Cup summit clash. But amid the swelling tide of Indian jerseys and tricolours, a lone voice from the opposition camp quietly acknowledged the reality ---- New Zealand skipper Mitchell Santner greeted fans back home with a heartfelt message before his side takes on an Indian team that has carried an unmistakable aura of inevitability through the tournament.

"I am not one for big speeches or rallying cries ... but it's fair to say we are a bit outnumbered over here -- 1.4 billion Team India fans and all that ... But it's all good because we know back home you will have our backs," he said in a message to Kiwi fans on X.

Santner knows what awaits his side in the cauldron on Sunday night.

The atmosphere around the venue is very different from November 19, 2023 when India clashed with Australia in the T20 World Cup final, and lost.

Back then, Ahmedabad had woken up unusually early for a 1 pm match start, and the city buzzed with nervous anticipation from as early as eight in the morning.

This time the final begins at 7 pm and the crowds started streaming in only late in the afternoon, giving the build-up a far more relaxed, almost celebratory feel.

There is another subtle difference from that last summit clash played here.

On that day, many fans had carried a hint of anxiety, wary of the formidable Australian pace trio of Pat Cummins, Josh Hazlewood and Mitchell Starc. This time, however, the sentiment appears markedly different.

Most supporters seem prepared for what they believe is the inevitable, an Indian victory, and possibly by a comfortable margin.

Partly, it is because of the grit and conviction the Indian team has shown throughout the tournament, backed by truly spectacular performances. It also has something to do with the opponent. New Zealand, despite their competitive pedigree, are a team Indian fans have long learnt to admire but not fear.

The Black Caps command respect but do not have the intimidating aura of Australia, and are seen as "nice guys".

Among the thousands making their way into the venue were Tarun and Gautam, two tech professionals in their mid-20s working at a Bengaluru-based software MNC.

The duo had shelled out premium prices for both match tickets and hotel rooms just to witness the occasion.

"It's a once-in-a-lifetime experience," one of them said, shrugging off the steep costs.

Not everyone who planned to be here, however, could make it. With Dubai airspace temporarily shut due to the war against Iran, travel plans for many NRIs have gone haywire, disrupting what could have been an even larger overseas Indian presence in the stands.

As for the Kiwi fans, there is hardly any black shirt likely to be seen in the stands. Most will, however, be tuned to their television sets from 2.30 am Monday New Zealand time.

"Kia Ora Aotearoa," Santner wrote on X, greeting supporters in traditional Maori style, a phrase that translates to "Hello New Zealand".

"We get it. The match starts super early Monday morning. But set your alarm and get around us one more time. And if you are a bit late to school, pass on my message to your boss or teachers," he wrote. (PTI)

ICC postpones Doha meeting due to Middle East conflict

NEW DELHI, March 8: The International Cricket Council's (ICC) three-day meet from March 25 to 27 in Doha, Qatar has been postponed in the wake of the ongoing conflict involving US, Israel and Iran.

According to a ICC source, the meeting has been rescheduled for next month in the same continent.

The source said a formal communication was sent to ICC members on Saturday, a day before the T20 World Cup final between India and New Zealand in Ahmedabad.

The March 25-27 meeting was expected to be attended by ICC Board Directors, Chief Executives, Committee Members and senior leadership "as part of the organisation's ongoing governance calendar, providing an important opportunity to deliberate over key matters pertaining to the present and future of the global game."

The ICC chose Qatar as the venue for the meeting because of its growing engagement with cricket in Qatar.

"The ICC's support of and collaboration with the Qatar Cricket Association and Olympic Committee, Cricket in Qatar has fuelled remarkable progress for the sport in recent years," the ICC had said in a release on February 22. (PTI)

Ranji Triumph to inspire new generation of cricketers in J&K: Ajay Sharma

JAMMU, March 8: Head coach of the Jammu and Kashmir cricket team, Ajay Sharma, on Sunday said the side's historic victory in the Ranji Trophy has opened a new chapter for cricket in the Union Territory and expressed hope that the achievement will inspire more players from the region to reach the national stage.

Reflecting on the journey, the coach said the triumph was the result of belief, teamwork and a positive environment created within the squad.

"When I first came here, things were a little difficult, but today as a coach I feel proud. All the credit goes to the boys who created history. We did not have big star players, but we had belief.

"The players were made to realise that they are talented and if they want, they can do wonders," Sharma told PTI Videos here.

He said a strong team culture played a crucial role in the campaign, with players supporting each other through good and hard times.

"When a player performs well, everyone praises him, but when someone is struggling he needs support. We made sure that players who were down were backed by the team. That created an environment where the players were fighting for each other," he said.

The coach said the victory had given the team a new level of confidence and ensured that Jammu and Kashmir cricket would now be taken seriously across the country.

"The boys now know they can beat any team. Earlier some teams may have taken Jammu and Kashmir lightly, but that will not happen anymore," he said.

Looking ahead, he expressed hope that improved infrastructure, including the proposed international cricket stadium in the region, would further accelerate the growth of the sport.

"At present we do not have enough grounds, but once a modern stadium with proper facilities comes up it will give a big boost to cricket here," he said.

The coach also said the team's success could help more players from Jammu and Kashmir move closer to national recognition.

"When we play the Irani Cup against the Rest of India, it will be like knocking on the doors of the Indian team. Our players cannot be ignored now," he said, adding "even IPL franchises will start noticing them. Many of these boys have the talent to go on and represent India."

Sharing his emotional response to the achievement, the coach said the historic win had been a deeply personal moment for him as well.

"As a player I had success while playing for Delhi, but I also went through many struggles. These boys have given me a new life as a coach," he said.

The coach said the real impact of the victory would be felt in the coming months as it inspires a new generation of cricketers in the region.

"Earlier many families did not support their children in pursuing cricket seriously, but now things will change. Youngsters will see what these boys have achieved and will start believing that they too can make a career in cricket," he said. (PTI)

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