

NATIONAL/INTERNATIONAL

In a first, bust of Mahatma Gandhi unveiled in US state of Montana

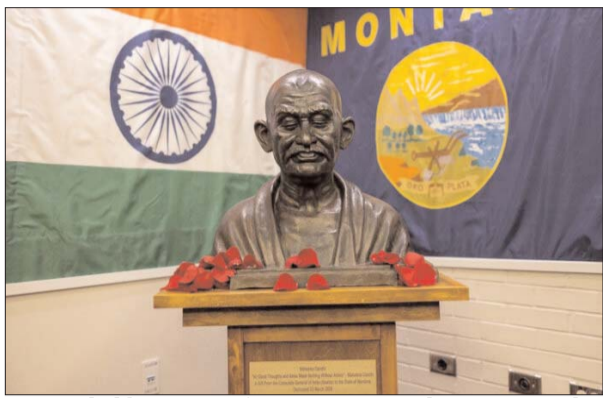
NEW YORK/SEATTLE, MAR 5: In a first, a bust of Mahatma Gandhi has been unveiled in the US state of Montana, as authorities underscored that the ideals of nonviolence espoused by him are much needed in the current world order.

Montana Governor Greg Gianforte, along with Consul General of India in Seattle Prakash Gupta jointly unveiled the bust, which is a gift from the Government of India to the state of Montana.

The bust has been installed at the prestigious Mike Mansfield Centre of the University of Montana in Missoula on Tuesday, a press release by the Consulate General of India in Seattle said.

Addressing the gathering, Gianforte expressed gratitude to the Consulate for the gift of the bust.

While acknowledging strengthening ties between India and Montana, Gianforte praised the ideals of nonviolence that Mahatma Gandhi espoused, as much needed values in the world order today, the release said.



Founded by an act of US Congress in 1983, the Mansfield Centre at University of Montana aims to foster globally minded leaders of integrity and supports youth and communities through civic and international education guided by ethical leadership, civic responsibility and unconditional commitment to public good, it added.

The event was attended by leading officials from Montana state, including faculty and students of University of Montana, as well as members of the Montana World Affairs Council.

Later in the evening, students at the University of

Montana also participated in another unique event celebrating the Holi festival of colours — Holi.

Both the installation of the Gandhi bust and the celebration of the Holi in Montana added further momentum to strengthening cultural and people-to-people ties between India and the US state.

Executive Director of the University Deena Mansour welcomed the first Holi celebrations in Montana as marking "the arrival of spring and embracing unity".

Bilateral ties between India and Montana have deepened significantly, particularly since the establishment of the Indian Consulate in

Seattle in November 2023.

In June 2025, a 10-member delegation of young high-school students visited India on a two-week cultural immersion program.

Subsequently, a 50-member delegation from Montana, including business executives, educationists and technology experts, participated in the second edition of the Invest India Business Forum organised in Seattle in January this year.

Under the leadership of the Seattle Consulate, the bust of the Mahatma unveiled at the Mansfield Centre in Montana is the fourth such Gandhi statue to be installed in the US Pacific Northwest in states that come under the Consulate's jurisdiction.

Gandhi statues have been installed by the Consulate at the Base of Space Needle in Seattle (October 2024) and the State Capitol in Lincoln, Nebraska (December 2024). The earliest Gandhi statue was installed at the Bellevue Public Library in October 2009. (PTI)

India needs steady hand at the wheel but has 'compromised PM': Rahul

NEW DELHI, MAR 5:

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Thursday attacked Prime Minister Narendra Modi, saying the West Asia conflict has reached India's backyard but he has not spoken, and while the country needed a steady hand at the wheel, it has a "compromised PM who has surrendered our strategic autonomy".

Gandhi said the world has entered a volatile phase and "stormy seas lie ahead".

"India's oil supplies are under threat, with more than 40% of our imports transiting the Strait of Hormuz. The situation is even worse for LPG and LNG," he said on X.

"The conflict has reached our backyard, with an Iranian warship sunk in the Indian Ocean. Yet the Prime Minister has said nothing," Gandhi said.

At a moment like this, In-



dia needs a steady hand at the wheel, he said.

"Instead, India has a compromised PM who has surrendered our strategic autonomy," Gandhi alleged.

His remarks came a day after a US submarine torpedoed and sank an Iranian warship in international waters off Sri Lanka's coast when it was returning after participating in the Milan naval exercise, a multilateral wargame hosted by India.

US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth, confirming the strike, said at a Pentagon media briefing that it was the first sinking of an enemy warship by a torpedo since World War II. The Associated Press, quoting Sri Lankan Navy, reported that 87 bodies were recovered and that 32 people were rescued following the sinking of the warship IRIS Dena.

The incident marks a major escalation of the conflict

between the US and Iran outside of the Persian Gulf and throws up questions relating to maritime security in the Indian Ocean that is largely considered as the backyard of the Indian Navy.

The US and Israel launched military strikes on Iran on February 28, killing Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Following the military offensive, Iran has carried out a wave of attacks mainly targeting Israel and American military bases in several Gulf countries, including the UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait, Jordan and Saudi Arabia.

In the last few days, the conflict has widened significantly with attacks and counter-attacks by both sides. India has called for resolving the conflict through dialogue and diplomacy. (Agencies)

Amit Shah Unveils Mascots, Soft Launches 4 Digital Tools To Power Census-2027

NEW DELHI, MAR 5:

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Thursday soft-launched four digital tools that will drive the country's first fully digital Census, with the first phase starting April 1.

Shah launched the House-listing Block Creator (HLBC) web application for digital mapping using satellite imagery, which will ensure standardised geographic coverage across the country; the HLO mobile application, which is a secure offline mobile app for enumerators to collect and upload house-listing data; a Self-enumeration (SE) portal that will for the first time allow users to submit their household information online before field operations; and core of the Census, the Census Management and Monitoring System (CMMS) — a dedicated digital portal engineered to orchestrate one of the largest administrative exercises in the world.

"These mascots symbolise equal participation of women and men in fulfilling the resolve to make India a developed nation by 2047. Through these mascots, information, objectives and key messages related to Census-2027 will be disseminated in an effective and citizen-friendly manner across diverse sections of society," a government statement said.

The four digital platforms that will be at the centre of the Census exercise have been developed by the Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC) to facilitate enumeration operations across the country, it said.

In a list of firsts, the Rs 11,718 crore mega exercise for conducting the 16th head count of the country will include caste enumeration, a fully digital exercise offering citizens the option of self-



enumeration.

Originally scheduled for 2021, the decadal exercise was postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Census will be conducted in two phases — houselisting and housing census from April to September 2026, and population enumeration (PE) in February 2027.

The houselisting and housing census will systematically list all structures, houses and households throughout the country to provide a sound framework for the conduct of the population enumeration.

The set digital platforms include the HLBC web application, which will provide officials with a web-map application, enabling them to digitally create houselisting blocks using satellite imagery, ensuring standardised geographic coverage across India.

The second crucial application is the HLO mobile application, replacing clipboards and carbon copies with handheld devices equipped with this secure, offline mobile application to collect and upload houselisting data.

"Only enumerators registered on the CMMS portal can access the application. The app enables direct field-to-server data transmission, eliminating traditional paperwork.

All houselisting data will be collected through this app, which can only be operated using registered mobile numbers. The application is compatible with Android and iOS platforms, and can be operated in 16 regional languages," the statement said. The third digital platform is the Self-enumeration portal, which will, for the first time, give the citizens the option of self-enumeration.

"The SE portal is a secure web-based facility that allows eligible respondents within a household to submit their household information online before field operations. Upon successful submission, a unique self-enumeration ID (SE ID) will be generated. This SE ID will be shared with the enumerator, based on which enumerator will be able to verify the information," the statement said. The self-enumeration option will be available for a 15-day window preceding the 30-day houselisting and

housing census.

At the heart of the exercise will be the CMMS — a dedicated portal engineered to orchestrate one of the largest administrative exercises in the world.

"The CMMS is a centralised, web-based digital platform designed to plan, manage, execute and monitor all census-related activities across administrative levels. Officers at sub-district, district and state levels can track enumeration progress, field performance and operational readiness in real-time through an integrated dashboard," the statement said.

The bespoke software backbone, designed to monitor the exercise in near real time, will allow 3.2 million field functionaries — enumerators and supervisors — to capture granular demographic, social and economic data from hundreds of millions of households using handheld devices.

The data can be transmitted, aggregated and validated through the CMMS architecture, significantly reducing the time required for compilation and error correction.

Tribunal awards Rs 46 lakh to family of man killed in 2017 road accident

THANE, MAR 5: The Motor Accident Claims Tribunal (MACT) in Thane has awarded a compensation of Rs 46.55 lakh to the family of a man who died in a road accident over eight years ago. In its order dated February 26, a copy of which was made available on Wednesday, the tribunal directed the insurer to pay the amount first and recover it from the owner of the vehicle responsible for the fatal crash. Pramod Namdev Naik (35) was travelling in a jeep when it collided with a "Hyva truck" being driven in a rash and negligent manner in Palghar district.

MACT matters from the district are heard in neighbouring Thane.

Presiding tribunal member RV Mohite held that the truck driver did not even have a valid driving licence at the time of the accident. "The accident occurred due to absolute negligence on the part of the driver of Hyva vehicle," the tribunal ruled. Considering Naik's monthly income of Rs 20,489 at the time, the tribunal awarded a compensation of Rs 46.55 lakh along with 9 per cent annual interest from the date of the petition till the amount is deposited.

China hikes defence budget by 10 per cent to USD 275 billion

BEIJING, MAR 5: China on Thursday hiked its defence budget by a little over 10 per cent to USD 275 billion, about USD 25 billion more than last year as it ramped the modernisation of armed forces to catch up with the US military.

Roughly 1.9 trillion yuan (about USD 275 billion) will be allocated to national defence, Chinese Premier Li Qiang announced in his work report presented to the National People's Congress (NPC) on Thursday.

The report said China's defence spending remains com-

paratively modest across key relative indicators, including its share of GDP, per capita defence expenditure, and defence expenditure per military personnel.

Last year China announced a 7.2 per cent increase for its national defence budget to USD 249 billion for 2025 which is a USD 17 billion rise compared to 2024. China's defence spending, only second to that of the US, has been growing over the years putting enormous pressure on India and other neighbouring countries to scale up their defence budgets in the

face of economic challenges. In 2024, China increased its defence budget by 7.2 per cent to about USD 232 billion (1.67 trillion yuan) — over three times that of India — as it continues with the massive modernisation of all its armed forces. China's defence budget figures are viewed with scepticism in the light of massive military modernisation, including building aircraft carriers, rapid construction of advanced naval ships and modern stealth aircraft being carried out at a feverish pitch by the Chinese military.

Meanwhile, China on Thursday lowered its GDP target to 4.5 to 5 per cent for this year in the face of Trump's trade tariff war, the worsening global crisis following the US-Iran war and headwinds in the domestic economy, owing to property market slump and unemployment crisis.

China has been setting a five per cent target for the GDP for the last three years amid growing domestic economic challenges. This year, the target is lowered to 4.5 per cent to 5 for the first time. (PTI)

More than 1,200 booked for drunk driving during Holi celebrations in Delhi

NEW DELHI, MAR 5: Delhi Traffic Police booked more than 1,200 motorists for drunk driving during a special enforcement drive carried out across the city on Holi, with the highest number of such violations reported from the western range, an official said on Thursday.

According to data released by the traffic police, a total of 3,725 were penalised for other traffic violations, besides the 1,204 challans issued to motorists for drunken driving during Holi celebrations on Wednesday.

The western range that covers Dwarka, Outer and West districts saw intensive enforcement and recorded the highest number of drunken driving cases at 297.

The central range reported 257 cases of drunken driving,

closely followed by the northern range with 256 violations. The eastern range recorded 208 cases, while the southern range reported 117 drunken driving challans. The New Delhi range registered the lowest number with 69 cases, the data showed.

Police said multiple checkpoints were set up across key roads and intersections where drivers were subjected to breath analyser tests to ensure road safety during the festival.

Apart from drunken driving, traffic police also booked a large number of motorists for other violations during the special Holi enforcement drive.

According to traffic data, 3,725 challans were issued for offences such as driving without seat belts, triple rid-

ing, riding without helmets, dangerous driving and other traffic rule violations across the city.

The eastern range recorded the highest number of such violations at 740, followed by the western range with 672 cases and the southern range with 646 cases. The central range reported 627 violations, while the northern range recorded 504 cases.

The New Delhi range registered 536 violations, the data showed, indicating widespread enforcement action across multiple districts during the festive checks.

Officials said the drive was conducted on March 4 as part of a citywide special campaign to check drunken driving, speeding and other traffic violations on Holi celebrations.

Traffic police teams were deployed at several strategic points, including arterial roads and areas known for heavy festive gatherings, to monitor motorists and prevent accidents.

"Strict action was taken against motorists found driving under the influence of alcohol. The aim of the special drive was to deter violations and ensure the safety of road users during the festive period," a traffic police official said.

Police said drunken driving significantly increases the risk of accidents and urged motorists to avoid driving after consuming alcohol.

The traffic police also appealed to citizens to celebrate Holi responsibly and follow traffic rules to prevent mishaps on the roads. (PTI)

CJI Surya Kant meets Bhutan king in Thimphu, offers support in digitalisation of judicial processes

NEW DELHI, MAR 5: Chief Justice of India Surya Kant on Thursday met the King of Bhutan, Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, in Thimphu and offered comprehensive support for technical assistance and development of best practices in the digitisation and digitalisation of judicial processes in the Himalayan nation.

The CJI also met Bhutan's Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay on Wednesday to discuss judicial cooperation, legal education, technological challenges and bilateral ties between the two countries, officials said.

A press statement issued by the Supreme Court said CJI Kant received an audience with the king and both exchanged views to further enhance and strengthen bilateral ties between India and Bhutan.

"They discussed the deep and long-lasting relationship shared by the two countries and expressed a commitment to taking the coop-

eration forward in the shape of judicial partnerships," the statement said.

"CJI Kant offered extensive and comprehensive support for technical assistance and development of best practices in the digitisation and digitalisation of judicial processes in Bhutan," it said.

A separate press release said the discussions between the CJI and Prime Minister Tobgay addressed the emerging challenges posed by cybercrime and digital fraud.

"Both sides acknowledged that rapid technological advancement has enabled transnational criminal activities, often targeting vulnerable populations such as the elderly and economically disadvantaged," it said.

It was emphasised that conventional law-making struggles to keep pace with such developments, and that judicial systems must evolve to interpret and apply existing laws in ways that protect the spirit and intent of the

legal framework, the release added.

"Strengthening judicial awareness, cross-border cooperation, and technological capacity were identified as key priorities in this regard," it said.

"The CJI also highlighted the ongoing efforts to support technological modernisation in the judiciary of Bhutan, including digitisation and e-filing systems and incorporating artificial intelligence as a powerful tool for improving procedural assistance in the realm of judicial administration, the release said.

It added that both CJI Kant and Prime Minister Tobgay reaffirmed that strong cooperation between India and Bhutan, anchored in shared values, institutional collaboration, and people-to-people engagement, would continue to play an important role in addressing the emerging challenges while advancing development and justice in the re-

gion.

During the deliberations, CJI Kant offered to facilitate internship opportunities for students from the JSW School of Law in Bhutan.

"These internships would provide exposure to the functioning of courts, legal drafting, pleadings and advocacy, as well as insights into how senior lawyers prepare and argue cases," the release said.

The statement on the CJI's meeting with the king of Bhutan said both leaders also deliberated on the emergent proliferation of cybercrimes and how India and Bhutan can make joint efforts to prevent and prosecute such offences.

"The conversations reaffirmed the cultural, spiritual and intellectual bond between the two countries and the resolve to sustain the exchange of ideas, philosophies and support," the statement said. (PTI)