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**7** **NATION**

- Iran, US begin second round of negotiations
- China holds world's first robot half-marathon
- Congress condemns Bangladesh Hindu leader's murder
- 4 dead, several trapped in multi-storey building collapse



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Delegation of 50 from 18 Indian states joins ASEAN-India tourism year celebrations

## India showcases Northeast at MATTA Fair 2025, Assam takes centre stage

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, April 19: India put its best foot forward at the MATTA Fair 2025 in Kuala Lumpur, with a vibrant pavilion led by Assam that spotlighted the tourism potential of Northeast India.

The India Pavilion was inaugurated at Malaysia's largest travel and tourism exhibition by Union Minister of State for External Affairs and Textiles Pabitra Margherita and Dato Seri Sanusi Bin Md. Noor, Chief Minister of Kedah Darul Aman.

The event was held at the Putra World Trade Centre (PWTC) in the presence of the High Commissioner of India to Malaysia, B.N. Reddy, and Padmapani Bora, Managing Director of Assam Tourism



Development Corporation Ltd. (ATDC), alongside dignitaries and travel trade representatives from both countries.

"This platform gives us an opportunity to present India's cultural

and geographical richness to a global audience," said Margherita.

"Our presence at MATTA Fair reaffirms India's commitment to strengthening tourism ties with ASEAN countries. Assam and the

entire Northeast region have distinctive offerings; from wellness retreats and river cruises to wildlife experiences and community-led travel models. This year, we are bringing these stories to the forefront," he added.

India's participation in the MATTA Fair, a key event in the ASEAN-India Year of Tourism 2025, was coordinated by ATDC with support from the High Commission of India in Malaysia.

A delegation of 50 representatives from 18 Indian states and union territories—including Assam, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Sikkim, Mizoram, Delhi, Gujarat, Kerala, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Jammu & Kashmir, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## PM accepts Bhupen centenary invite

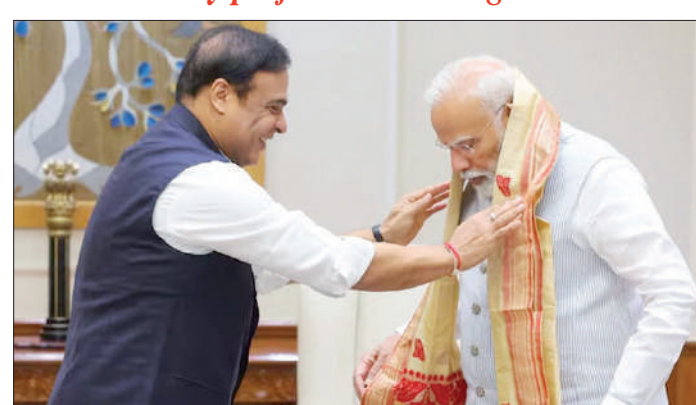
Himanta calls on Modi in Delhi ● Key projects to be inaugurated: CM

NEW DELHI / GUWAHATI, April 19: Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday called on Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi and invited him to inaugurate the yearlong birth centenary celebrations of music maestro Bhupen Hazarika.

During the 20-minute meeting at the prime minister's official residence, Sarma also invited Modi to inaugurate the Assam bio-ethanol plant and lay the foundation stones for two major infrastructure projects — the ₹ 5,700 crore Guwahati Ring Road project and the Darrang Medical College and Hospital, according to an official release.

"The Hon'ble Prime Minister has agreed to grace these important occasions on September 8," Sarma said.

Hazarika was born on September 8, 1926, and the Assam cabinet had recently decided to hold a year-long celebration of the Bharat



Ratna awardee's birth centenary. Events across India, release of Hazarika's biography, and a commemorative coin, among others, have been planned.

"It was my privilege to meet Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri @narendramodi ji in New Delhi today," Sarma later posted on X. "I had the honour of inviting him to Assam as the Chief Guest for the

inaugural ceremony of the year-long celebration of Bharat Ratna Dr Bhupen Hazarika's birth centenary."

The Chief Minister added, "I also took the opportunity to request his gracious presence for the inauguration of the Assam Bio-Ethanol Plant, with a production capacity of 49 KTPA ethanol, using 300 KTPA (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## India condemns killing of Hindu minority leader in Bangladesh

NEW DELHI, April 19: India on Saturday condemned the alleged abduction and killing of a Hindu minority leader in Bangladesh and called on the interim government in Dhaka to live up to its responsibility of protecting the minorities.

In a social media post, External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said the "brutal killing" of Bhabesh Chandra Roy follows a "pattern of systematic persecution" of Hindu minorities in Bangladesh.

"We have noted with distress the abduction and brutal killing of Shri Bhabesh Chandra Roy, a Hindu minority leader in Bangladesh," he said.

"This killing follows a pattern of systematic persecution of Hindu minorities under the interim gov-

ernment even as the perpetrators of previous such events roam with impunity," Jaiswal said.

"We condemn this incident and once again remind the interim government to live up to its responsibility of protecting all minorities, including Hindus, without inventing excuses or making distinctions," he added.

There has been a sharp downturn in India-Bangladesh relations after deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina fled Dhaka in August last year in the face of a massive anti-government protest.

The relations nosedived dramatically after the interim government headed by Muhammad Yunus failed to contain attacks on minorities, especially Hindus, in that country. (PTI)



## Bhutan king visits under-construction international logistics park in Assam

GUWAHATI, April 19: Bhutan King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuk visited Assam on Saturday to inspect the under-construction international multimodal logistics park and the inland water transport terminal in Bongaigaon district's Jogighopa.

The logistics park is being developed under the Bharatmala project on the banks of the Brahmaputra, while the terminal adjacent to it was inaugurated on February 18. The projects, considered crucial for the Himalayan kingdom, are located near the India-Bhutan border.

Union Shipping Minister Sarbananda Sonowal said this visit further deepened the long-standing friendship and trust between the two countries.

"The visit of the King of Bhutan to the recently inaugurated IWT Jogighopa terminal as well as the Jogighopa Multi Modal Logistics Park is historic," he said.

Sonowal said the projects are



aligned with the vision of PM Narendra Modi's 'Act East policy' for inclusive growth and sustainable development.

Assam's CM Himanta Biswas Sarma said the projects will be a game-changer for the region, and ensure seamless trade and logistics movement, besides aiding the development of the Gelephu Mindfulness City in Bhutan.

Wangchuk's helicopter landed inside the logistics park, where he

was received by Assam Public Health and Engineering Minister Jayanta Malla Baruah.

Baruah said the king inspected both the projects.

He said the park, being developed by the National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Ltd (NHIDCL), will seamlessly integrate road, rail, air and waterways upon completion. "Spread across 317 acres on the banks (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Tripura alarm over Bangladesh dyke

AGARTALA, April 19: Tripura PWD Secretary Kiran Gite is set to visit Ballamukh and Ishan Chandranagar in Belonia subdivision on Sunday following concerns raised by villagers regarding the reconstruction of an embankment at Kalikapur in Bangladesh, an official said.

Bangladesh has nearly completed the renovation of an embankment in Kalikapur, located in Feni district, to prevent floodwaters from flowing in from the Indian side.

"To protect Kalikapur and its adjacent areas, Bangladesh has been constructing an embankment with a height of 8 to 9 feet. However, this has raised serious concern among Indian villagers living in three villages — Uttar Belonia, Ballamukh, Ishan Chandranagar — and nearby localities," MLA Dipankar Sen told PTI. Sen said that during his visit, villagers expressed deep concern, warning that the low-lying areas

of three to four Indian villages could be severely affected by flooding due to the embankment on the Bangladeshi side.

Villagers have demanded the construction of a canal from Ballamukh to Kalikapur via Ishan Chandranagar to allow floodwaters to pass during monsoon, he added.

Earlier, the MLA met the District Magistrate (DM) of South Tripura, Muhammad Sajad P., and briefed him on the concerns raised by locals in light of Bangladesh's efforts to block floodwaters from the Indian side.

Contacted, South Tripura's Additional District Magistrate Pradeep K. confirmed the upcoming visit of Gite.

"Gite is scheduled to visit the affected locations on Sunday to gain firsthand knowledge of the concerns raised by the villagers," he said. "I can't give any official comment on the issue as this is an international matter," he said. (PTI)

## 47 win unopposed in Jorhat panchayat polls

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, April 19: In the run-up to the first phase of the Assam panchayat elections, 47 candidates from Jorhat district have been declared elected unopposed as Ward Members under 33 Gaon Panchayats. Jorhat Deputy Commissioner Jai Shivani handed over the official election certificates to the winners at a function held on Saturday at the conference hall of the DC office complex.

In addition to the Ward Members, one candidate who secured a seat in the Anchalik Panchayat (AP) without contest was also presented with a certificate of election.

Jorhat district is set to go to polls on May 2, along with several other districts (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Close down Parl if SC has to make law: Nishikant Dubey

NEW DELHI, April 19: Seasoned BJP parliamentarian Nishikant Dubey, one of the more vocal party MPs in the Lok Sabha, took aim at the Supreme Court on Saturday, saying Parliament building should be closed down if the apex court has to make the laws.

Dubey made the cryptic post on X in Hindi without elaborating. His comment came amid the ongoing hearing in the court over several pleas challenging the constitutionality of the Waqf (Amendment) Act, which was passed by Parliament in the first week of this month.

The central government has agreed not to implement some of its contentious provisions till the next date of hearing after the court



raised questions over them.

The apex court's recent decision to set a timeline for the President of India to take a decision on

the bills sent to her has also triggered a debate, with Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar voicing strong disapproval of the judgement.

On the other hand, opposition parties have lauded the court's direction to the President as well as the proceedings in the apex court in the Waqf (Amendment) Act matter.

"Kanoon yadi Supreme Court hi banayega to Sansad Bhavan bund kar dena chahiye," the BJP MP said in post in Hindi on X.

Dubey, an MP from Godda in Jharkhand, is often in the vanguard of the BJP's political attacks on its rivals in the Lok Sabha and in articulating the ruling party's stand on various issues. (PTI)

## Three-day 'Setubandh' journey ends, Sabha seeks greater public involvement



HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, April 19: The three-day third phase of 'Setubandh', a statewide outreach initiative by Asam Sahitya Sabha, concluded on April 20 in Dhubri, following its flag-off from the Sabha's Guwahati headquarters on Friday. Led by President Dr Basanta Kumar Goswami, the journey aimed to strengthen the literary body's connection with various sections of so-

ciety and to gather feedback for the organisation's future course.

Dr Goswami was accompanied by Vice President Padum Rajkhowa, Principal Secretary Debojit Bora, and other senior members and activists of the Sabha. The journey, which began at 8 am from Bhagawati Prasad Baruah Bhaban in Guwahati, covered Kamrup (Metro), Kamrup, Nalbari, Baksa, Chirang, Bongaigaon, and Dhubri districts, engaging with local communities and Sahitya Sabha units.

On the first day, the team participated in 'Mon Juruwa' and 'Setubandh' programmes at Nalbari and Baksa, organised by the respective district Sahitya Sabhas. The event at Nalbari, held at Subhadra Choudhuri Bhawan, was chaired by Dr Biren Kumar Chakraborty, President of Nalbari Zila Sahitya Sabha.

Addressing the gathering as Chief Guest, Dr Basanta Kumar Goswami recalled the contribution of Sarat Chandra Goswami, the first Principal Secretary of the Sabha, and called for broader public support. "I urge all sections of the people of Assam to extend wholehearted cooperation (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## India's first prototype fast-breeder reactor to be commissioned by September 2026

NEW DELHI, April 19: India's first prototype fast-breeder reactor in Tamil Nadu's Kalpakkam is expected to be commissioned next year, nearly two years after it got the go-ahead from the nuclear regulator, officials have said.

The commissioning of the Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor (PFBR) will mark the second stage of India's three-stage nuclear programme that aims to recycle spent fuel to reduce the inventory of radioactive waste.

The PFBR being developed in Kalpakkam is the first-of-its-kind nuclear reactor to use plutonium-based mixed oxide as fuel and liquid sodium as coolant. It will also utilise the spent fuel of Pressurised Heavy Water Reactors, which form the mainstay of nuclear power in India at present.

While the state-run Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL) operates nuclear power plants in the country, the PFBR in Kalpakkam is being developed by the Bharatiya Nabhikiya Vidyut Nigam (BHAVINI).

"BHAVINI's 500 MW PFBR is in the advanced stage of integrated commissioning, with expected first criticality by 2025-26," Depart-

ment of Atomic Energy officials recently told the parliamentary standing committee on science and technology.

They had told the committee that the first criticality of the PFBR was expected to be achieved in March and the plant would be completed by September 2026.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi witnessed the commencement of core loading in the nuclear reactor in March last year.

Last July, the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB) granted permission for loading of fuel, first approach to criticality and conducting low-power physics experiments for the PFBR.

PFBRs are critical for India's nuclear programme as the spent fuel from these reactors will be used to power the thorium-based reactors that form the third stage of the closed fuel cycle.

The government has announced a nuclear energy mission that aims to produce 100 GW electricity through nuclear power.

At present, India's installed nuclear power capacity stands at 8.18 GW. An additional 7.30 GW nuclear energy projects are under construction or (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Pollution, poverty fuel river crisis; govt eyes reward-based recycling

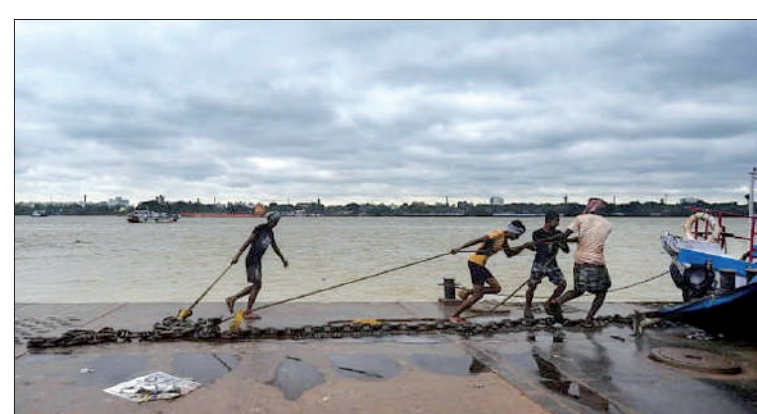
### Govt-funded study proposes incentive-based plan to tackle Ganga's 'ghost gear' crisis

NEW DELHI, April 19: In a bid to combat escalating plastic pollution in the Ganga, a government-funded study has proposed a "cash-for-nets" scheme aimed at incentivising fishers to return worn-out or abandoned fishing nets.

These abandoned, lost or discarded synthetic nets -- referred to as "ghost gear" -- pose a severe, long-term threat to aquatic ecosystems.

Conducted over five years by the Wildlife Institute of India, the study forms part of the long-term conservation initiative -- Planning and Management for Aquatic Species Conservation and Maintenance of Ecosystem Services in the Ganga River Basin for a Clean Ganga.

Based on extensive riverine and socioeconomic surveys, the study recorded 72 incidents of aquatic



species becoming entangled in fishing gear -- both active and abandoned. The researchers documented fishing gear and materials every five kilometres along the river.

For the socioeconomic survey, 150

key informant interviews, 10 focal group discussions with fishers, and personal observations were used.

The 'vulnerable' Indian flapshell turtle accounted for the highest number of entanglements with 21, fol-

lowed by the 'critically endangered' gharial with 11.

However, the study cautioned that these figures likely underrepresented the actual scale as it was limited to incidents observed during the brief survey window (30 days per year) or reported by local communities.

Approximately 40 per cent of the respondents reported witnessing aquatic species trapped in ghost gear.

Low level of education among fishing communities was identified as a key barrier to awareness and access to information about the environmental and economic impact of ghost gear.

The report also pointed out systemic shortfalls -- none of the 20 block and panchayat offices surveyed across Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal had the infrastructure to collect, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



# India, US trade talks from Apr 23; pact's terms of reference includes about 19 chapters: Sources

**NEW DELHI, April 19:** Indian and US officials will hold three-day talks from April 23 in Washington for a proposed trade pact with terms of references (ToRs) covering around 19 chapters such as tariffs, non-tariff barriers, and customs facilitation, official sources said.

The Indian official team is visiting the US to give further impetus to the negotiations in the 90-day tariff pause window and discuss these ToRs to iron out differences on certain issues before formally launching talks for the bilateral trade agreement (BTA).

India's chief negotiator, Additional Secretary in the Department of Commerce Rajesh Agrawal, will lead the team for the first in-person talks between the two countries. Agrawal was appointed as the next commerce secretary on April 18. He will assume office from October 1.

"Both sides will discuss the level of ambition. The ToRs will be further developed and discussed. What will be the pathway for talks? The ToRs will include issues like tariffs, non-tariff barriers, rules of origin, goods, services, custom facilitation and regulatory issues," the official said, adding general contours of the pact will be discussed, besides scheduling, so that things can be finalised in 90 days.

The three-day deliberations assume significance, as a senior government official had recently stated that an interim trade agreement between the two countries could be finalised in the 90-day



tariff pause announced by the Trump administration if it is a "win-win" for both sides.

In international trade parlance, the level of ambition refers to the extent to which two countries are willing to commit to specific trade liberalisation measures.

The visit also follows senior official-level talks held between the two countries last month here.

Brendan Lynch, the Assistant US Trade Representative for South and Central Asia, was in India from March 25 to 29 for crucial trade discussions with Indian officials.

The two sides are keen to utilise the 90-day tariff pause, announced by US President Donald Trump on April 9, to push the talks.

On April 15, Commerce Secretary Sunil Barthwal had stated that India will try to close the negotiations as quickly as possible with the US.

India and the US have been engaged in negotiating a bilateral

trade agreement since March. Both sides have targeted to conclude the first phase of the pact by the fall (September-October) of this year, with an aim to more than double the bilateral trade to USD 500 billion by 2030, from about USD 191 billion, currently.

In a trade pact, two countries either significantly reduce or eliminate customs duties on the maximum number of goods traded between them. They also ease norms to promote trade in services and boost investments.

While the US is looking at duty concessions in sectors like certain industrial goods, automobiles (electric vehicles particularly), wines, petrochemical products, dairy, and agriculture items such as apples, tree nuts, and alfalfa hay; India may look at duty cuts for labour-intensive sectors like apparels, textiles, gems and jewellery, leather, plastics, chemicals, oil seeds, shrimp, and horticulture products.

From 2021-22 to 2024-25, the US was India's largest trading partner.

In the last fiscal, India's exports to the US rose by 11.6 per cent to USD 86.51 billion as against USD 77.52 billion in 2023-24. The imports were up by 7.44 per cent in 2024-25 to USD 45.33 billion against USD 42.2 billion in 2023-24. With America, India had a trade surplus (the difference between imports and exports) of USD 41.18 billion in goods in 2024-25.

America accounted for nearly 19.78 of India's total exports and 6.29 per cent of the total imports.

To address the gap and boost manufacturing, the Trump administration announced sweeping tariffs on April 2, including 26 per cent on India. It was later suspended for 90-day till July 9.

In 2024, India's main exports to the US included drug formulations and biologicals (USD 8.1 billion), telecom instruments (USD 6.5 billion), precious and semi-precious stones (USD 5.3 billion), petroleum products (USD 4.1 billion), gold and other precious metal jewellery (USD 3.2 billion), ready-made garments of cotton, including accessories (USD 2.8 billion), and products of iron and steel (USD 2.7 billion).

Imports included crude oil (USD 4.5 billion), petroleum products (USD 3.6 billion), coal, coke (USD 3.4 billion), cut and polished diamonds (USD 2.6 billion), electric machinery (USD 1.4 billion), aircraft, spacecraft and parts (USD 1.3 billion), and gold (USD 1.3 billion). (PTI)

## HDFC Bank Q4 profit rises 6.6 pc to ₹17,616 cr



**NEW DELHI, April 19:** HDFC Bank on Saturday posted a 6.6 per cent increase in standalone profit at ₹17,616 crore in the fourth quarter of 2024-25.

The country's biggest private sector lender had earned a net profit of ₹16,512 crore in the same quarter a year ago.

Total income increased to

₹89,488 crore during the quarter under review, as against ₹89,639 crore in the same period of last year, HDFC Bank said in a regulatory filing.

The bank reported interest income of ₹77,460 crore during the January-March quarter of 2024-25, compared to ₹71,473 crore in the same period a year ago.

The board of the bank recommended a dividend of ₹22 per equity share of Re 1 each for the year ended March 31, 2025.

As regards asset quality, the bank witnessed slight deterioration, with gross Non-Performing Assets (NPAs) rising to 1.33 per cent of the gross loans by the end of March 2025, from 1.24 per cent a year ago.

Similarly, net NPAs or bad loans rose to 0.43 per cent, from 0.33 per cent at the end of the fourth quarter of the previous fiscal year.

On a consolidated basis, the bank clocked a growth of 6.8 per cent in net profit to ₹18,835 crore, as against ₹17,622 crore in Q4 FY24.

The bank's total Capital Adequacy Ratio (CAR) as per Basel III guidelines was at 19.6 per cent as on March 31, 2025.

Total balance sheet size as of March 31, 2025 was ₹39.10 lakh crore, as against ₹36.17 lakh crore as of March 31, 2024, it added. (PTI)

## ICICI Bank net profit up 15.7 pc to ₹13,502 cr

**MUMBAI, April 19:** ICICI Bank on Saturday reported a 15.7 per cent jump in March quarter consolidated net profit at ₹13,502 crore.

On a standalone basis, the second largest private sector lender's net profit for the January-March quarter came at ₹12,630 crore, up 18 per cent, as against ₹10,708 crore in the year-ago period.

The core net interest income moved up 11 per cent to ₹21,193 crore, from the year-ago period's ₹19,093 crore.

The non-interest income excluding treasury increased 18.4 per cent to ₹7,021 crore.

Provisions came at ₹891 crore in the March quarter, as against ₹718 crore in the year-ago period.

The gross non-performing assets ratio improved to 1.67 per cent at the end of March 2025, from 1.96 per cent in December 2024. (PTI)

## Pralhad Joshi visits integrated renewable energy project in AP

**NEW DELHI, April 19:** Union Minister Pralhad Joshi visited an integrated renewable energy storage project at Pinnapuram in Andhra Pradesh that is designed to support steel, aluminium and hydrogen industries, according to a release.

Joshi, Union Minister of New and Renewable Energy and Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, took an aerial tour of the facility and visited various

components of the mega integrated renewable energy project.

The facility is being developed by Greenco Group with a total investment of USD 4.2 billion, comprising USD 1.2 billion for the pumped storage component and USD 3 billion for the solar and wind generation infrastructure.

The GW-scale Integrated Renewable Energy Project includes 4,000 MW of solar, 1,000 MW of wind, and 1,680 MW of pumped



hydropower generation. With a storage capacity of 10,080 MWh

per day in a single cycle, the dispatchable, carbon-free energy generated from the project will support industries such as green steel, green aluminium, and green hydrogen production.

Anil Chalamalasetty, Group CEO and MD of Greenco said this initiative, which combines solar, wind, and pumped storage power, will make a vital contribution to global efforts to decarbonize hard-to-abate industries. (PTI)

## IIA Assam Chapter launches 'Building Solution 2025' in Guwahati

**HT Bureau GUWAHATI, April 19:** The Indian Institute of Architects (IIA) Assam Chapter officially launched its plans for "Building Solution 2025" at a grand event hosted by Interiors Solution at Hotel Vishwaratna in Guwahati. The event brought together architects, industry professionals, and IIA members in a celebration of innovation and collaboration in the region's architectural sector.

The ceremony began with a welcome address by master of ceremonies Gaurav Pansari, followed by the formal formation of the dais. Among the dignitaries present were President of Interiors Solution Ashish Goyal, Chairman of IIA Assam Chapter Ar. H.K. Rajkhowa, Vice Chairman Ar. Budhin Borthakur, Treasurer Ar. Pankaj Phukan, Joint Secretary Ar. Pritam Nath, and Secretary of Interiors Solution Sumit Podar.

Ashish Goyal welcomed the gathering and introduced Interiors Solution, highlighting the organisation's commitment to supporting the event. "We are excited to collaborate with the IIA Assam Chapter and make Building Solution 2025 a resounding success," he said.

The highlight of the evening was the official unveiling of the Building Solution 2025 plans and event poster. The initiative, described as a landmark effort to transform the architectural and construction landscape of the Northeast, is scheduled to be held at the Maniram Dewan Trade Centre in Betkuchi, Guwahati, from June



13 to 15, 2025. Ar. Budhin Borthakur, Vice Chairman of the IIA Assam Chapter, addressed the audience and stressed the importance of collaboration and forward-thinking approaches in the field of architecture. "Innovation must be at the core of our work. Events like these provide the platform to share ideas and build lasting networks," he said. A felicitation ceremony followed, honouring IIA awardees for their outstanding contributions to the profession. Speaking at the event, Ar. H.K. Rajkhowa, Chairman of the IIA Assam Chapter, underscored the institute's role

in nurturing excellence. "The IIA is committed to promoting architectural integrity and encouraging meaningful advancements in our built environment," he said.

Founder of Interiors Solution Siddharth Nawalgaria added that renowned architect Ar. Amitabh Sharma would conduct awareness seminars during the exhibition. "Interiors Solution will assist the IIA Assam Chapter throughout the event to ensure its grand success," he said. The evening concluded with a vote of thanks, acknowledging the support and participation of all guests, stakeholders, and attendees.

Contd. from Page 1...

## India showcases Northeast at

and the Andaman & Nicobar Islands—joined the event to showcase regional tourism potential. With more than 180,000 visitors and business transactions exceeding RM 300 million in each edition, MATTA Fair remains one of Southeast Asia's most impactful tourism platforms.

The India Pavilion featured immersive destination showcases, cultural performances, film screenings, and B2B interaction zones focused on promoting spiritual tourism, eco-tourism, and emerging travel circuits from the Northeast.

Padmapani Bora said ATDC was honoured to lead India's presence at the event.

"ATDC is proud to implement India's participation in this landmark event and grateful to the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, for nominating us as the implementing agency," he said. "We are not only representing Assam but also coordinating efforts to position Northeast India as an integral part of India's global tourism identity. Beyond exhibitions, this is a space for building relationships, exchanging ideas, and opening new channels of growth for regional tourism stakeholders."

India's participation is part of the Tourism Professionals Exchange Programme 2025, a two-phase initiative aimed at enhancing cooperation between India and ASEAN nations.

The first phase included a visit by ASEAN tourism professionals to Assam earlier this year.

The second phase, currently underway, involves collaborative promotional activities at the MATTA Fair between Indian and ASEAN tourism stakeholders.

The initiative follows Prime Minister Narendra Modi's announcement at the 21st ASEAN-India Summit in Lao PDR, designating 2025 as the ASEAN-India Year of Tourism.

The collaboration is aimed at fostering mutual learning, developing market-driven tourism offerings, and promoting sustainable travel practices.

Key areas of ongoing ASEAN-India tourism cooperation also include the creation of shared resources for tourism education, culturally informed destination experiences, and strengthened crisis communication systems for the tourism sector.

The India Pavilion will remain open to public and trade visitors until April 20, 2025.

## PM accepts Bhupen centenary

bamboo as feedstock." Assam Bio Ethanol Private Ltd (ABEPL), the first bio-refinery in India to produce fuel-grade ethanol from bamboo biomass, is a joint venture between Numaligarh Refinery Ltd (NRL) and two Finnish companies, Fortum and Chempolis Oy.

"In addition, I also requested him to lay the foundation stones of two key infrastructure projects — the Rs 5,700 crore Guwahati Ring Road project and the Darrang Medical College and Hospital," Sarma said.

He conveyed his "heartfelt thanks to Modi for accepting the invitations." (PTI)

## Bhutan king visits under-construction

of the Brahmaputra, this project will unlock immense economic potential for our state by facilitating trade with neighbouring countries like Bhutan and Bangladesh," he said.

"The strategic proximity of Bhutan's visionary urban development initiative -- Gelephu Mindfulness City, will also undoubtedly contribute to the success of the park," he added.

Built at a cost of ₹82 crores, the terminal is expected to handle cargo of 1.1 million tonnes per annum, according to officials.

Security was heightened in the area with police personnel from Bhutan deployed, and the press was also barred from entering the logistics park and the terminal during the king's visit.

The king returned to Bhutan following the day-long trip. (PTI)

## 47 win unopposed in Jorhat

in Assam, as part of the first phase of the panchayat elections.

Following the recent delimitation exercise, the structure of rural local bodies in the district has been slightly altered.

The number of Zila Parishad Constituencies (ZPCs) has come down to 16 from 19, while the number of Gaon Panchayats has been revised to 86 from 90.

The total number of Anchalik Panchayats remains unchanged at six.

## Three-day 'Setubandh' journey

so that the Sabha can move forward in the interest of language, literature and society," he said. He also appealed to the public to become permanent members of the Sabha and requested district and branch committees to take active steps in this direction.

Vice President Padum Rajkhowa highlighted the importance of grassroots participation. "People's involvement and sincere organisational activities at the local level are crucial for the overall well-being of the Sabha in the coming days," he noted.

Principal Secretary Debajit Bora emphasised the link between a strong Sabha and a strong Assamese identity. "The Assamese nation will grow stronger only if the Assam Sahitya Sabha remains strong. We must all come forward and support this cause," he urged.

Prominent attendees included Sabha steering committee member Dhiren Sarma, Guwahati regional office secretary Dr Sanjeeb Kumar Sarma, Director of the Sabha's translation project Hridayananda Gogoi, Corpus Fund Convenor Gobinda Kalita, and others including representatives from AASU, Sadou Assam Karmachari Santha, and noted writers and local intellectuals. The meeting was conducted by Dhruvajyoti Sarma, Convenor of the Sabha's Natya Sammilan sub-committee.

On the second day, the team attended a 'Mon Juruwa Anusthan' at Barpeta Sahitya Sabha premises, presided over by Barpeta Sahitya Sabha President Hiran Saikia. Speaking at the programme, Principal Secretary Debajit Bora stressed the Sabha's role in shaping social discipline. "It is the prime responsibility of Sabha members to help regulate and bring discipline to a society troubled by misdeeds," he said. He also called for public membership to support the Sabha's financial independence.

Vice President Padum Rajkhowa appealed to citizens to actively contribute their suggestions. "During times of crisis in our language, literature, and culture, every conscious citizen must play their part," he said. The event was attended by several noted personalities including Hridayananda Gogoi, Dr Abdul Kuddus Sikdar, Bipul Sarma, and Nayanmani Choudhury, along with local intellectuals and Sabha members.

Earlier that morning, the team visited Bamuna Satra, Sundaridiya Satra, and Barpeta Satra to strengthen engagement with the Satra community.

The final leg of the Setubandh journey began from BRPL Manas Guest House on the morning of April 20, with the team heading to the Dhubri regional office of the Sabha. A highlight of the concluding programme was the conferring of the 'Simanta Prahari' Samman to noted lawyer and former Vice President of the Sabha, Pachugopal Chakraborty. The team also engaged with local organisations, writers, intellectuals, and netizens of Dhubri district to conclude the mission.

## India's first prototype fast-breeder

commissioning and 7.00 GW have been sanctioned and are currently undergoing pre-project activities.

Upon completion of these projects, India's nuclear power capacity is expected to reach 22.48 GW by 2031-32.

Beyond this, NPCIL plans to add another 15.40 GW through indigenous Pressurised Heavy Water Reactors and 17.60 GW through Light Water Reactors with foreign cooperation, bringing the total installed capacity to 55 GW.

Additionally, BHAVINI is expected to contribute 3.80 GW through Fast Breeder Reactors while the remainder of the capacity will come from Small Modular Reactors, Bharat Small Reactors, and other advanced nuclear technologies developed with private sector collaboration. (PTI)

## Govt-funded study proposes

store or recycle ghost gear. The abandoned nets can take up to 600 years to decompose, continuing to entangle fish, turtles and other riverine species long after their use.

As they degrade, they break down into microplastics, polluting the food chain and further deteriorating water quality. Pollution levels were found to be particularly severe in West Bengal, where more than 4,600 abandoned nets were documented in a single survey area.

"The highest concentration of fishing nets was observed in the lower stretches of the river, with West Bengal (4,690) leading, followed by Uttar Pradesh (2,131), Bihar (1,194), and Jharkhand (191)," according to the report. With nearly 30 lakh fishers relying on the Ganga for their livelihoods, the study underscored a critical knowledge gap.

Despite being directly affected by the problem, most fishers are unaware of the long-term damage caused by abandoned gear.

While about 80 per cent of the respondents admitted to having lost fishing gear, only 25 per cent understood the environmental consequences of "ghost nets".

The study also highlighted economic pressures -- poverty, a lack of alternative livelihoods and rising demand -- exacerbating unsustainable fishing practices.

"The cost of fishing gear plays a crucial role in usage patterns. Traditional gear with larger mesh sizes is more expensive. Therefore, lowering the cost of sustainable, natural fibre-based alternatives and offering incentives could encourage eco-friendly practices," the Wildlife Institute of India said in its study report.

The proposed "cash-for-nets" scheme suggests rewarding fishers for depositing worn-out or abandoned nets to designated collection points, potentially managed through the existing network of fair price shops. The nets would then be transferred to block-level processing units and subsequently consolidated at the district level.

Identified recycling partners appointed by the government would collect the nets for upcycling and recycling. The model calls for a multi-stakeholder, multi-tiered approach backed by robust policy measures to create strong upstream and downstream linkages.

Beyond one-time payments, the initiative proposes a rewards-based system -- fishers who responsibly use nets could access subsidised rates for replacements -- tracked through biometric IDs.

The longer a net is appropriately used, the greater the subsidy on its replacement -- promoting both economic and ecological benefits. The plan also envisions broader community participation.

The Wildlife Institute of India suggested involving self-help groups (SHGs) in the collection, sorting and recycling process, creating income opportunities while supporting river conservation.

The revenue generated from recycling would be reinvested into local cleanup and sustainability initiatives, forming a self-reinforcing funding cycle.

While the model presents logistical and implementation challenges, including training, infrastructure and market development for recycled products, officials remain cautiously optimistic about its potential to address one of the Ganga's most persistent ecological threats.

The research was among several key documents unveiled on a new portal launched by the Union Jal Shakti ministry this week to promote access to ecological data and conservation insights.

The article was published in September in Frontiers Media SA, a peer-reviewed, open access and scientific journal. (PTI)



## Slogan against WB government for failing to protect the rights of Hindus Viswa Hindu Parishad demands president's rule in West Bengal

**HT Bureau**  
**GUWAHATI, April 19:** The Nagaon district unit of Viswa Hindu Parishad (VHP) staged a protest against the recent violent incidents in Murshidabad, West Bengal and demanded immediate imposition of President's rule in West Bengal on Saturday here.

Several hundreds of members from the organisation participated in the demonstration and shouted various slogans near at the office of district commissioner's office. The demonstration was led by senior VHP leader Brajen Kakoti, Pradeep Kumar Laskar and Parthajit Das, the president and secretary of the district unit of the organisation respectively.

Following the demonstration, the agitators submitted a memorandum with six key demands including imposition of President's rule in West Bengal to maintain law and order, investigation into violent incidents in Murshidabad, West Bengal, identification and deportation of infiltrators, to the President of India, through district commissioner, Nagaon.

In Dibrugarh, VHP also staged protest in front of Dibrugarh District Commissioner's office demanding President's rule in West Bengal. The members of VHP took out a protest rally from Chowkidingee and assembled in front of Dibrugarh DC office in protest against the atrocities on Hindus in West Bengal.

The members holding placards and banners raising slogan against the West Bengal government for failing to protect the rights of Hindus in Bengal.

"We demand President's rule in West Bengal due to the increasing violence incidents on Hindus. The Mamta Banerjee government have failed to protect the Hindus. Every day the Hindus are facing facing atrocities in Bengal, their houses were torched, properties were vandalised. The Murshidabad communal violence has proved that the government of West Bengal has failed to protect the Hindus and for vote bank they are not doing anything against the miscreants," said Dimbeswar Hazarika, president of VHP, Dibrugarh.

Hazarika said, "We have submitted memorandum to President's of India through Dibrugarh District Commissioner Bikram Kairi. The Mamta Banerjee government is not taking any action against the miscreants. The police in Bengal have failed to control the unruly mob who vandalised public property."

"After the violence the Hindus are started fleeing from Murshidabad because their life is in danger. President's rule is the only solution to bring peace and stability in West Bengal," Hazarika said.

The Jorhat district unit of Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) as part of protests that took place at other parts of the state staged a demonstration in front of the Jorhat District Commissioner's office to protest against the recent violence in West Bengal.

The violence witnessed attacks on people of Hindu community leading to loss of lives, property and forced them to take shelter in relief camps.

The protesters, which included State BJP vice-president Rana Goswami, a former Jorhat MLA,

Jorhat district unit BJP president Santanu Puzari, while holding placards and banners, shouted slogans against the Mamata Banerjee-led TMC Government for alleged inaction and tacit support in attacks unleashed on Hindu community following a protest against the recent passing of the Waqf Amendment Act by the Parliament turning violent.

They alleged Government completely turned a blind eye when the attacks against Hindus been orchestrated. In the process their property, religious places destroyed which forced Hindus to flee from their homes.

Condemning the atrocities on the Hindus they demanded undertaking of prompt measures by the State Government to provide protection and security to the Hindu community and let them return to their homes. The protesters later, through the Jorhat DC office sent a memorandum to the President of India seeking protection to the Hindus in West Bengal and strong action against the perpetrators of the attacks.

## Cachar district admin bats for free, fair and inclusive electoral exercise

District now houses a total of 10,60,155 registered voters

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, April 19:** Cachar District Commissioner Mridul Yadav laid out an extensive roadmap of the district's readiness for the upcoming Panchayat Election 2025 on Saturday. Addressing the media Yadav reaffirmed the administration's unwavering commitment to conducting a free, fair, inclusive, and peaceful electoral exercise, reflecting the spirit of democratic governance in the Cachar district.

Shedding light on the voter demographics, the District Commissioner informed that the district now houses a total of 10,60,155 registered voters, which includes 5,31,661 male voters, 5,28,479 female voters, and 15 voters from the third gender category. To facilitate smooth voting, a total of 1,706 polling stations have been arranged across the district. Of these, 1,620 are situated within Cachar proper, supplemented by 86 auxiliary booths. Additionally, the Lakhipur subdivision will see the setup of 310 polling stations, bolstered by six auxiliary booths. Notably, 274 polling stations, including 19 in the Lakhipur subdivision, will be exclusively operated by women officials, underlining the administration's drive toward gender inclusion and empowerment. The district will also host 490 polling stations classified under the P-2 category.

The briefing further outlined the status of nominations received across the three tiers of the Panchayat Raj institutions. In the Zila Parishad segment, 64 nominations have been validated, with two candidates already declared elected unopposed and no rejections recorded. For the Anchalik Panchayat Member posts, 381 candi-



dates have been found valid following the rejection of 13 nominations, while 35 candidates have secured their seats uncontested. At the Gram Panchayat Member level, 4,051 candidates are in the contest after 106 nomination papers were cancelled, and 319 candidates have been elected unopposed.

Ensuring operational smoothness, the administration has deployed a well-structured team comprising 25 Zonal Officers and 125 Sector Officers to oversee the electoral proceedings across the district. Logistical arrangements have been strategically planned, with the ISBT complex in Ramnagar designated as the central ballot box receiving and submission point for the UdhARBond and Sonai Legislative Assembly segments, as well as for the remaining four assembly constituencies. For the Lakhipur segment, these operations will be managed from the office of the Lakhipur Block Development Officer.

Complementing the administrative readiness, Superintendent of Police, Cachar, Numal Mahatta addressed the media on the comprehensive security architecture laid out by the district police. "Our

objective is to ensure that the entire polling and counting process is conducted in an environment of absolute safety and impartiality. We have undertaken elaborate area domination exercises, intelligence coordination, and vulnerability mapping. Special emphasis is being laid on sensitive and hyper-sensitive polling stations, where additional forces will be deployed. Adequate patrolling teams, Quick Response Teams (QRTs), and mobile surveillance units will remain active throughout the district. Moreover, preventive actions under relevant legal provisions are already underway to ensure no disruption to public peace during the electoral process," SP Mahatta affirmed.

The meeting was also attended by the Election Observer, Abul Laice Choudhary, District Development Commissioner, Norsing Bey, Additional Superintendent of Police, Subrata Sen, Additional District Commissioner, Van Lal Limpua Nampui, Election Officer, Mesi Topno, Assistant Commissioner cum incharge Deputy Director of Information & Public Relations Barak valley Zone Silchar Assam, Bonnykha Chetia and other officials.

## Fake DU professor's identity revealed Residential dormitory for weavers in Kokrajhar under NTPC's initiative

**HT Correspondent**

**SIVASAGAR, April 19:** The true identity of a social media master blaster critic, writer and the fictitious professor of Delhi University and that too of Physics, Paridhi Sharma has been revealed by the state CID on Thursday.

The real person behind the facade is an unassuming and tricky home-tutor of Bharaluwa gaon, Dikhowmukh in Sivasagar district-Dhrubajyoti Saikia who has been making a name as a serious writer commentator on variety of social and educational issues. A case was registered in Gaurisagar PS (Case no 8/2025) for cheating people by opening a fake facebook account. The cheat used a photo of a lady IAS officer of Karnataka cadre in his account. OC Gaurisagar, Tikheswar Narah told this correspondent on Saturday that a CID officer from Guwahati has been investigating the case after an FIR had been filed against Saikia by one Polish Ranjan Baruah of Guwahati. Dhrubajyoti Saikia however, now tendered unconditional apology to his readers for impersonating a university professor and cheating his readers.

Saikia had been making a name among the intellectuals in various media as a writer under the pseudonym Dr Paridhi Sharma, a fictitious professor of Physics in Delhi University, has finally been cornered.

**HT Correspondent**

**KOKRAJHAR, April 19:** A residential dormitory for weavers at Bodoland Silk Park, Kokrajhar has been inaugurated under NTPC Bongaigaon's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programme on Saturday.

The dormitory, aimed at supporting livelihoods in the Bodoland region, was inaugurated by Abha Jadli, Senior Member, Sanyukta Mahila Samiti, in the presence of Kasturi Maitra, President, Bardwi Shikla Ladies Club, Anjan Kr Chakraborty, Director, Bodoland Silk Park, and Soumya Kar, Vice President, Bardwi Shikla Ladies Club and office bearers of the club.

In her address, Jadli expressed her pride in being associated with this impactful initiative in partnership with the Department of Sericulture. She highlighted NTPC's approach of going beyond profit to focus on people and the planet, reiterating that such collaborations reflect NTPC's deeper commitment to nation-building. She also noted that this initiative was a part of a larger plan that seeks to benefit nearly 10,000 weavers and weavers across the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR).

As part of her visit, Jadli also toured the sericulture unit, gaining firsthand insight into the weaving



processes and appreciating the sustainable practices promoted in the region. She lauded NTPC's continued efforts in empowering communities through such forward-looking and inclusive programmes.

Earlier, Jadli visited the Entrepreneurship and Skill Development Centre operated under the CSR wing of NTPC Bongaigaon in collaboration with the Bardwi Shikla Ladies Club and Tusti Foundation. She interacted with trainees, understood the process of sustainable product-making, and distributed umbrellas to support the skill development efforts of the participants.

The day also included a General Body Meeting at the Bardwi Shikla Ladies Club where Jadli addressed members and emphasized the growing role of Ladies

Clubs in supporting CSR-led initiatives. She encouraged the members to strengthen their involvement in social, cultural, and developmental programmes within the township and nearby areas.

During the meeting, Kasturi Maitra, President of the Club, shared the range of initiatives being undertaken under the Awaan scheme—an umbrella programme of NTPC that focuses on mental wellness, social awareness, women empowerment, livelihood support, and cultural preservation. Maitra also spoke about ongoing skill development drives, health and hygiene awareness programmes, and support to self-help groups and family members, all of which are helping create a more inclusive and socially conscious township ecosystem.

## Training for presiding officers in Morigaon

**HT Correspondent**

**MORIGAO, April 19:** The first phase of training for presiding and first polling officers for the upcoming panchayat elections started in Morigaon recently.

The training was conducted at Morigaon College, GKB College and Morigaon Higher Secondary and Multipurpose School. The training was attended by District Commissioner Devashish Sharma, Election Observer Udayaditya Gogoi, Additional District Commissioners Anusua Sharma and Sukshana Barpathraghain and several officers, trainers and master trainers of the district administration.

The training of more than 2,000 presiding and first polling officers was completed recently. During the training, the polling officers were briefed in detail on their responsibilities and duties. The training of more than 2,000 second and third

polling officers was held at a similar venue today. The training of 188 women presiding and polling officers will be held at Morigaon College from 10 am on April Training for Zonal and Sector Officers will be held from 1.30 pm. The second phase of team training will be held on April 23 and team training of women polling officers will be completed on April.

The second phase of the panchayat elections will be held on May 7 from 7.30 am to 4.30 pm at 972 polling stations for 840 wards in 12 Zila Parishads, five Anchalik Panchayats and 84 Gaon Panchayats. 84 Sector Officers and 12 Zonal Officers, 1166 Presiding Officers and 1166 Polling Officers have been deployed in Morigaon district for the panchayat elections. 5,346 officers and employees will be deployed throughout the election process with 10 per cent reservation.

## Awareness programme on adolescent mental health

**HT Correspondent**

**JAGIROAD, April 19:** The Morigaon District Administration on Saturday organised an awareness program at Jagiroad College in collaboration with Dilip Barua Memorial Trust to create awareness among students, teachers and parents about mental health during adolescence. The awareness programme was attended by more than 150 students, parents and teachers.

Morigaon District Commissioner Devashish Sharma delivered a welcome speech and said that mental health problems in adolescents has been a very serious issue nowadays. However, he said such issues were often ignored and urged the students not to feel inferior by comparing themselves with others.

"You should never feel depressed because you come from a small place or a financially weak household," he said. He insisted that such factors can never be an obstacle to achieving success. He urged the students not to lose their morale for small things and move forward with determination. The District Commissioner invited everyone to sing Sudhakanth's song "Manuhe Manuhor Babe" in unison and created a unique atmosphere. Jayant Das, who participated as a resource person at the meeting, said that by 2030, mental disorders would be the main problem for us. He said the purpose of the workshop would be achieved only if people talked about mental health openly and not hide it. The event was attended by Laya Agarwal, Suresh Chakraborty, Neelima Bhagwati, Abhijit Bhattacharya, Brinda Barua Sharma and several other distinguished persons as resource persons. The event was attended by Bhagen Chandra Neog, Principal of Jagiroad College, Dilip Barua Memorial Trust President Nilimesh Barua and several other dignitaries. The programme was moderated by Archana Bhattacharya.

## Chartered Accountants of Guwahati Branch of ICAI celebrate Rongali Bihu

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, April 19:** The Managing Committee of Guwahati Branch of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) under the leadership of their inclusion-forward Chairperson CA. Raginee Goyal organized Rongali Bihu Celebration for Chartered Accountants of Guwahati. The event started with the lighting of the lamp and CA. Jay Prakash Gupta, Secretary of the Branch anchored the event and CA. Raginee Goyal, Chairperson gave the welcome address and extended warm greetings of the festival to the members.

A colourful tribal folk dance sequence was followed by a traditional Bihu performance by the artists of Milijuli Sangskrtik Gushthi and renowned influencer Syed Maruf Hussain of Parishay Assam graced the event as Chief Guest. The co-ordination of the event was done by CA. Rita Rajkumari and she also organized the traditional "Tekeli Bhangra" game for the members which

was enjoyed by the Chartered Accountants.

CA Anjani Kumar Mundhra, CA. Piyush Birmiwai, CA Vikash Choudhury were also present along with many senior Chartered Accountants of the Branch. CA. Kumar Victor Saha gave the formal vote of thanks and the program ended with the chanting of the State Anthem.

The Chartered Accountants including a number of past Chairmen of the Branch enjoyed the traditional performances and games and also danced their hearts out with the artists and also the staff of the Branch, while celebrating Bihu, the festival of joy, which signifies inclusiveness and togetherness of the communities and tribes of the region. A sumptuous Hi-tea feast was shared by all present to relish the delicacies and sweets of Assam. The event exemplified the commitment of Chartered Accountants to community engagement, cultural preservation, and nurturing professional bonding and brotherhood.

## New escort hall and CCTV facility at Guwahati Railway Station



**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, April 19:** In a momentous development aimed at fortifying railway safety and boosting operational efficiency, Shri Manoj Yadava, Director General of the Railway Protection Force (RPF), inaugurated the newly constructed Escort Mobilization Hall and the extensively upgraded CCTV Surveillance Room at Guwahati Railway Station on Saturday. The inauguration ceremony was held in the esteemed presence of Chetan Kumar Shrivastava, General Manager of Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR), along with a host of senior railway officials and RPF personnel.

This initiative represents a transformative step in strengthening the safety architecture of one of the busiest stations under the NFR jurisdiction. The Escort Mobilization Hall, now fully operational, is envisioned as a centralized coordination hub that will significantly enhance the deployment and mobilization of RPF escort personnel. With this dedicated facility, the RPF is better equipped to

manage escort duties with greater efficiency, precision, and rapid response in emergency scenarios.

Complementing this facility is the newly augmented CCTV Surveillance Room, outfitted with the latest state-of-the-art surveillance technology. The upgraded system provides comprehensive monitoring coverage of the entire station premises, enhancing the ability to detect and deter criminal activities, ensure real-time situational awareness, and ultimately safeguard the wellbeing of thousands of passengers who traverse through Guwahati station every day.

During the event, Yadava highlighted the RPF's unwavering commitment to adopting modern security practices and infrastructure that align with the growing needs of the Indian Railways and its passengers. Shrivastava echoed this sentiment, emphasizing the crucial role of technology and coordinated security efforts in elevating the standards of railway travel safety.

The event saw the participation of senior officials, staff members, and security personnel, all of whom reaffirmed their dedication to ensuring a secure, passenger friendly environment across the railway network. The inauguration of these two vital facilities marks a significant stride in the ongoing journey toward smarter, safer and more responsive railway operations in the Northeast region.

This landmark occasion not only underscores Northeast Frontier Railway's proactive approach to safety and security but also reflects its continuous investment in infrastructure that empowers personnel, supports modern surveillance, and builds public trust in the nation's rail network.

## Pioneer Arts College celebrates Bohag Bihu in Nagaon

**HT Correspondent**

**NAGAON, April 19:** Pioneer Arts College, a leading private higher educational institution in Nagaon town, celebrated Bohag Bihu, the traditional Assamese New Year festival, with great enthusiasm at the college premises on Saturday here.

The event was marked by a seminar on "Bihu culture, Bihu songs, and Globalization," where Dr Achyut Kumar Saikia, a professor from Government Model College, Baksa, delivered a keynote address while Padum Prasad Saikia, noted Bihu expert and Bharat Bhushan award recipient was present as the chief guest. The entire programme was initiated as well as mentored by Uma Kanta Das, senior faculty from Assamese Department of the college.

While addressing the occasion, Dr Achyut Kr Saikia highlighted the significance of Bihu in Assamese culture, stating that despite the increasing influence of modern technology, Bihu has gained global popularity, which is a matter



of pride for the people of Assam.

On the other hand, Padum Prasad Saikia, delivered a lecture on the topic and also entertained the students with traditional Bihu songs.

Over hundred students, including faculty mem-

bers and staff, participated in the event, showcasing their cultural heritage through traditional dance performances, Bihu songs, and folk instruments. Students also displayed traditional Assamese attire and served local delicacies.

## Sachin Tendulkar Foundation joins hands with Meghalaya govt for children's welfare

Real change takes root when compassion and action come together

**SHILLONG, April 19:** Cricket legend Sachin Tendulkar has announced his support for the Meghalaya government in securing a healthier future for children through his foundation, officials said on Saturday.

Tendulkar made the announcement on his social media handle following his recent visit to the state, they said.

"A step forward in our journey as the Sachin Tendulkar Foundation, Gates Foundation and the Government of Meghalaya partner to work together to support a healthier future for children," he posted on Instagram.

"We were reminded that real change takes root when compassion and action come together," he added, posting a video of him admiring particularly the living root-bridge and the crystal-clear waters at Mawlynong village in East



Khasi Hills district.

The cricket maestro visited the cleanest village in Asia and had met Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma at a resort near the scenic Umiang Lake.

The official, however, did not divulge what kind of support the Sachin Tendulkar Foundation will

extend to the state government.

Adoring the life and resilience of the people in the hills, he said, "The strength of children, the resilience of families, and the dedication of local teams continue to inspire us as we embark on this journey with a shared vision." (PTI)



## Editor's pick

## What a post-Assad Syria means for China

By: Kabir Taneja

Over the past two years, China's foreign policy has been consistent in the manner of largely supporting the Arab positions over Gaza, which included hosting Hamas in Beijing, amongst other Palestinian entities, to try and mediate. Its position in Arab hearts and minds has grown and recent surveys have put the United States below its eastern competition in popularity. However, the fall of Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria has opened a core security crisis for the Chinese by way of a stronger political position for Uyghur militants in the 'new' Damascus under President Ahmed al-Sharaa.

## Getting a safe space

As in multiple reports, Uyghur militants belonging to the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM)—also known as the Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP)—have scored prominent positions in the revised Syrian army. Ahmed al-Sharaa took over in a largely unchallenged juggernaut when his group, the Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), arrived in the Syrian capital without any major battles. The HTS has been at the centre of the anti-Assad movement since the initial stages of the Arab Spring led by Al Sharaa (better known then as Abu Mohammed al Jolani, and his cohort of fighters from across the world). This was a time when Syria was a hotspot of global jihadist movements and the so-called Islamic State (IS) controlled large swathes of territory across the Levant region.

Al Sharaa, who has had stints with the IS and al Qaeda, developed his own support base over time. The HTS also offered safe space for those who were seeking shelter or ideological patronage. Here, Uyghurs militias found the opportunity to construct their own sanctuary while offering tactical backing to the HTS. During the period beginning 2011, Uyghur militias were intricately woven into IS ecosystems. Propaganda videos and publications featuring Uyghur fighters were actively promoted—these ranged from well produced videos of Uyghur fighters taking on Assad's military to ideological propaganda translated into the Uyghur language in audio and text formats. More recently, in 2017, the IS released a targeted video showing Uyghur fighters in training and threatening 'rivers of blood' against the Chinese state. In the immediate past, China has seldom featured in IS propaganda as the Washington-Beijing contestation has taken centre stage.

Fast forward to 2025, and Syria's military and polity are being rebuilt. The first is arguably a more delicate endeavour than the second, with bringing a wide variety of warring factions to rally behind one leader being easier said than done. In Syria's 'new' military, those who fought alongside Al Sharaa have been given precedence irrespective of their nationality. The journey, from jihadists to generals for many, has been taking place swiftly since January. One of the biggest representations overall is by the Uyghurs—nearing 2,000 in number by some estimates. At least one of the known 50 high-ranking commander-level appointments is an Uyghur—Abdulaziz Dawood Khodabardi (known as Zahid), who has been recognised as a former commander of ETIM in Syria.

## Impact of big power competition

For Beijing, this elevation opens an automatic fault line with Damascus, with which it has enjoyed friendly relations in the past. One of the core reasons why China rallied behind America's 'war on terror' narrative was to use American hegemony to deliver on its own counter-terror interests. In 2002, the U.S. had classified ETIM as a terror organisation, only to remove it in 2020 based on the argument that no credible evidence of ETIM's existence was available for over a decade and that China was using it as a bogey to clamp down on Uyghurs in its restive Xinjiang province. The advent of big power competition between the U.S. and China has in fact only given militant groups more manoeuvring space globally. Previously, Beijing has made handling of ETIM a top priority in its relations with the new Taliban-led government in Afghanistan. However, most militant groups now in charge of para-states, tend to always first prioritise their support for those who fought with them in the trenches. Soon after the Taliban took charge of Kabul in August 2021, it was reported that the group had relocated Uyghur militants away from Afghanistan's narrow 76-km long border with China in the Badakhshan province. Unlike the Taliban, the new regime in Syria has taken a different approach—elevating the Uyghurs to official ranks.

## The western game plan

The Chinese government has raised this issue in the United Nations as western and regional powers alike rush to engage with Al Sharaa. The western engagements in play are to solidify two fronts. First, to place basic security in the embattled state and stem any mass migration. Second, to make sure Russia, Iran, and, by association, China remain in the peripheries and maintain minimal influence. These larger geopolitical aims have allowed now former designated terrorists to metamorphose into statesmen overnight.

The challenge for Chinese diplomacy continues here. One of the main regional powers that is still kinetically and overtly active in Syria is Israel. But both China and Israel have been at odds over China's stance on Gaza and the issue of Palestine. Even on the Arab side, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, amongst others, who have previously given Beijing a pass over Xinjiang, have accepted Al Sharaa, thus limiting Beijing's options and forcing a strategic re-think moving forward. (Courtesy: ORF)

## A strong Indian economy based on equity and jobs can only take on Trump's tariff war

By: Prabhat Patnaik

Donald Trump has put off his proposed tariffs by ninety days; but countries like India have to respond to Trump's measures whether now or after ninety days. These measures are not just an episodic act. Trump clearly threatens with tariffs any country that dares to act in a manner not approved by him; he is weaponising tariffs to assert US hegemony, quite apart from using them for economic ends like raising domestic activity and reducing the US current account deficit. We are in short witnessing a new phase of world capitalism; and for countries like India to pretend otherwise and carry on with "business as usual" would be absurd. "Business as usual" had brought great suffering to the working people of the country even in its heyday; to persist with it in the new situation will bring even greater suffering and even greater subservience to American dictates.

"Business as usual" had meant accepting the premise that the world market was growing rapidly, and countries like India would grow rapidly if they took advantage of this fact by "opening up" their economies and eschewing a dirigiste strategy, that is, a strategy of State intervention to enlarge their domestic markets for larger growth. This was the formal argument behind neoliberalism; and this argument, absurd at the best of times (for reasons we need not discuss here), and particularly invalidated by the world economic slowdown following the collapse of the US "housing bubble", has now been openly and effectively blown away by Trump's bellicosity. Not to recognise this and persist with "neoliberalism" will bring disaster to the Indian people, to their lives and to their hard-won independence.

It may be thought that since the US and China are engaged in a tariff war, which virtually rules out their mutual trade, this is the time for countries like India to replace China in the American market, that instead of moving away from a neoliberal strategy, India should gain particularly from it now. In fact neoliberal spokesmen in India have been suggesting this. But even if we accept for argument's sake that India's exports to the US could rise in the short-run if it ingratiate itself with Trump, the fact remains that Trump's objective is not just to replace China by other countries as America's trading partners; it is also to reduce the US current account deficit, which means that any such short-term export gain at the expense of China cannot be sustained over time.

What is more, even to obtain this short-term gain so that other countries do not grab it (in fact countries would be competing against one another for grabbing China's share of the US market by devaluing their currencies), there will be some depreciation in the exchange rate of the rupee. The rupee has already been depreciating and this will be further strengthened. Thus if India does not take steps to raise its own tariffs against the US in retaliation against Trump's tariffs, where the basic 10 per cent tariff will continue in any case, then it will be witnessing a fur-



ther exchange rate depreciation; and this is what even our own neoliberal spokesmen have been advocating.

Now, there is an aspect of exchange rate depreciation that is usually completely missed, namely that it works by depressing real wages. An example will make the point clear: suppose a country was producing a good worth ₹ 220, of which ₹ 100 of constituted imported inputs, ₹ 100 wage cost and ₹ 20 profit mark-up. Now if there is a 10 per cent nominal exchange rate depreciation, then the value of imported inputs (which could include oil imports) will go up by 10 per cent to ₹ 110; if real wages and profit mark-up remain unchanged then money wage cost will go up to ₹ 110 and profit mark-up to ₹ 22, i.e., by 10 per cent, the overall price will go up to ₹ 242, which is 10 per cent higher than before. But this means that since the rupee has depreciated by 10 per cent, the dollar price of the good would have remained unchanged, so that there would have been no real effective exchange rate depreciation even though there was a nominal depreciation of 10 per cent. For a nominal depreciation to lead to a real effective exchange rate depreciation therefore either the real wage must fall, or the profit-margin must fall; but since the profit-margin is enforced by the capitalists in a capitalist economy, real

effective exchange rate depreciation necessarily requires a fall in real wages. Tariffs on the other hand, because they are selectively imposed, do not have this effect; they do not necessarily lead to a fall in real wages if they are not imposed on imported inputs or on imported wage goods.

The neoliberal spokesmen who want "business as usual" to continue despite Trump's tariffs, by eschewing any tariff increase on the part of countries like India but suggesting a currency depreciation instead, are basically suggesting an additional deliberate squeeze on the workers. They want neoliberalism to continue in the face of Trump's tariffs, but they want the workers to pay the price for it. And if Trump does not want other countries' exports to replace Chinese exports, then the fall in real wages in countries like India will not even be accompanied by any increase in activity and employment. (It could even lead to a lowering of employment if sellers of India's imported inputs who become better off at the expense of Indian workers have a lower propensity to buy Indian goods than Indian workers).

Moreover, if the US does not want to replace imports from China by imports from other countries, while other countries depreciate their currencies at the expense of their own workers for getting a

chunk of the US market that China has vacated, then this depreciation will go on and on; and if speculators, anticipating depreciation, start taking money out of the country, then that will only further contribute to the fall of the currency, making life even more difficult for the workers. Neoliberal spokesmen who advocate a currency depreciation in response to Trump's tariffs are either unaware of or unconcerned about the fate of workers following a depreciation.

Trump's tariffs in fact provide an opportune moment to get out of the entire neoliberal regime, to impose retaliatory tariffs against the US, to maintain the exchange rate in order to prevent an import-cost-push inflation, and, in the event of balance of payments difficulties, to impose trade and capital controls. All this has to be supplemented by an increase in the domestic level of activity and employment through an increase in government spending, above all on "welfare state" measures, financed by wealth taxation which ironically has disappeared in India. This would mean a reversion to a dirigiste regime of home market-based growth.

Any talk of such a reversion fills neoliberal spokesmen with dread; and such is the influence of their position, backed by the IMF, the World Bank and other such organisations, and pushed through the monopoly-controlled media, that even common people look upon a return of dirigisme with some scepticism.

Second, even what had prevailed earlier had been better than what neoliberalism has entailed in the matter of basic food-grain consumption. There has been a shooting up of absolute poverty, defined in terms of nutritional deprivation, in the neoliberal period compared to earlier. This is especially true of rural India where the proportion of total population unable to access even 2200 calories per person per day reached a staggering 80 per cent in 2017-18.

And third, the extent of income and wealth inequality even under the earlier dirigiste regime was much lower than what neoliberalism has been associated with. The figures provided by the World Inequality Database show that the share in national income of the top 1 per cent of the population had been brought down to around 6 per cent by 1982 (from around 12 per cent at the time of independence); this share now exceeds 23 per cent, which suggests a staggering growth of inequality. A necessary condition for the working people to take charge of their destiny is the transcending of neoliberalism for which Trump's aggression gives an opportunity. (IPA Service)

# 'Rise to Prominence' Germany's renewed focus on India marks a diplomatic recalibration

By: Hitesh Kalita

Dilip Saikia is a prominent figure in Assam's political and socio-cultural landscape whose journey from a grassroots worker in the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) to becoming the State President of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Assam exemplifies dedication and leadership. His rise is a testament to his commitment to service, discipline and unwavering belief in the principles of nationalism and development. Born and raised in Nalbari district of Assam, Dilip Saikia grew up witnessing the socio-political challenges of the state including issues like illegal immigration, unemployment and cultural erosion. These challenges influenced his early ideological alignment with the RSS, an organization dedicated to nation-building and cultural preservation. Dilip Saikia's association with the RSS began in his youth. As a Pracharak (full-time worker), he immersed himself focusing on fostering unity and cultural identity among the people of Assam. Dilip Saikia's transition from the RSS to politics was a natural extension of his service-oriented mindset. Joining the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), he quickly became a trusted organizer and strategist, earning respect for his ability to connect with people at the grassroots level. His journey within the party reflects his organizational skills, leadership, and dedication to the BJP's vision of inclusive governance and nationalism. Below are some of his key roles in the BJP:

1. State General Secretary, BJP Assam Pradesh
- As the General Secretary of the BJP Assam Pradesh, Dilip Saikia played a critical role in strengthening the party's organizational structure at the grassroots level.
- Organized events to connect with the youth and marginalized communities.
- Built networks that significantly contributed to the BJP's success in Assam's electoral politics.
- Dilip Saikia was a key candidate for Nalbari Assembly constituency in 2016 Assam Assembly Elections but his focus on party's organizational activities gave

him an extra mileage to prove him as a "Dedicated Soldier"/"Samarpit Sainik".

2. National General Secretary, Central BJP

Dilip Saikia's hard work and strategic capabilities earned him the position of National General Secretary of the Central BJP. This role placed him in a key decision-making position within the party enabling him to oversee and coordinate BJP's activities across India.

- Played a pivotal role in election campaigns, especially in the Northeast, Jharkhand, Himachal and beyond. Dilip Saikia has been a key strategist and campaigner for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), particularly during elections in various states.

- Represented the party's vision and policies at national forums.

3. Member of Parliament (Lok Sabha)

In 2019 and 2024, Dilip Saikia contested the Mangaldoi Lok Sabha seat on a BJP ticket and won with a decisive margin. His victory underscored his popularity and the trust of the people in his leadership. As an MP from the Mangaldoi constituency, Dilip Saikia also contributes to BJP's parliamentary strategy. His dual role as a parliamentarian and a senior party leader ensures that the concerns of Assam and the Northeast are given prominence in the national discourse. As an MP, Saikia has focused on addressing the developmental needs of his constituency and Assam as a whole.

- Railway Connectivity: Promoted the modernization of railway stations within the constituency.

- Road and Highway Projects: Advocated for the development of national highways passing through Mangaldoi for smoother transportation and trade.

- Bridges and Waterways: Supported the construction of bridges over rivers like the Brahmaputra to reduce travel time and improve accessibility for remote areas.

- Skill Training Centers: Promoted the establishment of skill training centers to prepare the youth for employment in various sectors.

- Subsidies and Farmer Support: Facilitated the implementation of central schemes like PM-KISAN, providing fi-

nancial assistance to farmers.

- Disaster Management and Flood Control: Given the frequent floods in Assam, Saikia has worked on initiatives to mitigate their impact in Mangaldoi.
- 4. Election Strategist for BJP Assam Pradesh

Dilip Saikia has been an important strategist for the BJP in Assam during both state assembly and general elections.

- Coordinated with local leaders, State Prabhari and volunteers to ensure effective campaigning.

- Contributed to BJP's historic victories in Assam, including the formation of the first BJP-led government in the state in 2016 and 2021.

As Dilip Saikia takes on the role of BJP State President for Assam, expectations from him are high, both within the party and among the general public. His leadership will be crucial in shaping the party's fortunes addressing expectations and significant challenges inside the party. Here are some of the key focus areas in this new capacity:

- Strengthening BJP's Grassroots Network

- Ensuring Strong Party Unity and Discipline

- Preparation for Upcoming Elections

- Improving the Party's Image and Outreach

- Opportunities to upcoming young educated qualified Karjyakarta under his leadership

- Balancing Regional and Central Priorities

- Anti-Incumbency Sentiment

- Social Media Outreach

His ability to address these hurdles with strategic planning, inclusivity, and strong leadership will determine not only his success but also the BJP's future in Assam. By balancing development goals and party unity, Dilip Saikia has the potential to solidify the BJP's position in the state while ensuring progress for its people. The success of his leadership will definitely count on such challenges in upcoming days and wish him a great success in this journey. (The author can be reached at 9476652527)

By: Dipak Kurmi

Germany's newly-formed government is signaling a significant recalibration of its foreign policy, one that places India at the center of its diplomatic, strategic, and economic outreach. This pivot, as articulated by Germany's Ambassador to India and Bhutan, Dr. Philipp Ackermann, reflects a growing recognition in Berlin of India's ascendant global role and its value as a reliable, democratic partner amid turbulent geopolitical currents. The shift comes at a time when the global order is undergoing dramatic transformations, compelling nations to diversify partnerships, fortify strategic alliances, and seek stability in an increasingly fragmented world. India's inclusion in Germany's coalition agreement—a foundational document that guides governance priorities—marks a watershed moment in Indo-German relations. Coalition agreements in Germany are more than symbolic; they outline actionable legislative plans and serve as the roadmap for the government's term. The explicit reference to India in the new agreement underscores not just rhetorical admiration but an actionable agenda to deepen bilateral cooperation. Ambassador Ackermann's assertion that "India will be playing a major role in our foreign policy" affirms the centrality of this relationship in Germany's global strategy.

This realignment follows the electoral success of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) under the leadership of Chancellor-in-waiting Friedrich Merz. Forming a new centrist coalition, the CDU is tasked with navigating Germany through economic uncertainty, energy transition, and complex global tensions. Within this broad strategic imperative, India emerges as a linchpin—an economic powerhouse, a geopolitical stabilizer in the Indo-Pacific, and a partner in democratic values. Strengthening ties with India is not only a geopolitical necessity but also an economic strategy as Germany seeks to insulate itself from over-dependence on China and mitigate risks arising from the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

India's appeal lies in its multifaceted profile. It is among the fastest-growing major economies, with a large and increasingly affluent consumer base, a dynamic startup ecosystem, and a growing influence in global governance platforms such as the G20 and BRICS. For Germany, whose economy thrives on industrial exports and global market integration, India presents a vast and promising frontier for economic collaboration. The demand for high-end machinery, automotive components, renewable technologies, and digital solutions aligns seamlessly with Germany's export profile. Beyond economics, India's democratic

resilience and strategic posture in the Indo-Pacific make it an attractive partner for Berlin's broader foreign policy ambitions. As Germany and the European Union begin to adopt a more assertive stance in the Indo-Pacific—largely in response to China's growing influence and Russia's destabilizing actions—India emerges as a natural ally. Its commitment to multilateralism, its naval presence in the Indian Ocean, and its growing defense capabilities offer a foundation for deeper strategic cooperation.

Defense, once a secondary aspect of Indo-German relations, is now poised to take a central role. Over the past decade, Germany has shown growing interest in the security dynamics of the Indo-Pacific, including naval cooperation and defense technology exchanges. This trend is likely to intensify, with Berlin indicating its willingness to elevate military-to-military engagements and explore joint ventures in defense manufacturing. Germany's defense industries, with their expertise in advanced systems and precision engineering, can find in India not just a market but a partner for co-development and innovation.

One of the most tangible arenas for immediate progress is the India-European Union Free Trade Agreement (FTA), which has languished in negotiations for over a decade. The German envoy's emphasis on the importance of the FTA, coupled with expressions of strong support, indicates that Berlin is ready to play an active role in pushing the deal forward. Dr. Ackermann's remarks that Germany is "very keen on the free trade agreement" and hopes to see it concluded "as soon as possible" reflect a renewed urgency in overcoming past hurdles.

The FTA negotiations have historically been hampered by disagreements over tariff structures, market access, labor rights, and environmental standards. However, recent political momentum on both sides has revitalized the process. European Union Ambassador Herve Delphin's confirmation that the two negotiating teams are "working towards a meaningful agreement by the end of 2025" suggests that diplomatic will is converging at the highest levels. With Germany, the EU's economic engine, lending vocal and strategic support, the prospects for a breakthrough have never been brighter.

Germany's enthusiasm for the FTA is rooted in more than just trade figures. It reflects a strategic calculus to anchor the EU's presence in South Asia and expand its normative influence through economic diplomacy. A successful FTA with India would send a powerful message about Europe's commitment to engaging with large democracies and emerging powers on equitable and forward-looking terms.

The backdrop to this diplomatic flurry is the

broader realignment of global power dynamics. Europe's disillusionment with authoritarian regimes—exacerbated by Russia's aggression in Ukraine and increasing friction with China—has prompted a recalibration of its external engagements. In this new geopolitical schema, India offers a confluence of economic opportunity, political stability, and shared values. It is a partner that can help Europe de-risk its trade dependencies, diversify supply chains, and maintain a rules-based international order.

Moreover, India's domestic priorities dovetail with Germany's technological strengths. Both countries are looking to harness innovation, digital transformation, and sustainable development. Joint ventures in green hydrogen, solar technology, electric mobility, and AI are likely to gain traction. Berlin's focus on climate change mitigation and digital infrastructure aligns well with India's developmental ambitions under initiatives like "Digital India" and "Make in India." These synergies offer a rich canvas for long-term, multidimensional cooperation.

The renewed emphasis on Indo-German relations is not merely a bilateral undertaking; it is also a statement of intent by Germany to expand its global footprint in a manner consistent with its values and strategic interests. By investing in its partnership with India, Germany is demonstrating that foreign policy today must be resilient, diversified, and rooted in partnerships that can withstand the pressures of an unpredictable world order. To make this partnership truly transformative, both sides must now translate intent into action. This will require agility in negotiations, alignment in strategic objectives, and the institutional capacity to implement agreed-upon frameworks. Frequent high-level visits, structured dialogues, and sectoral task forces could help maintain momentum and ensure continuity.

Germany's pivot toward India may have been catalyzed by geopolitical necessity, but it is also a recognition of a deeper reality—that the 21st century's challenges and opportunities will be shaped by partnerships between open societies, innovative economies, and responsible global actors. As two of the world's leading democracies and economic powers, India and Germany are well-placed to shape a future that is stable, inclusive, and forward-looking.

In this new chapter, the Indo-German relationship is no longer peripheral to either country's foreign policy—it is a central axis around which mutual growth, security, and global leadership can revolve. If nurtured with vision and resolve, this partnership could serve as a model of cooperation in an age marked by complexity and change. (The writer can be reached at dipakkurmi@gmail.com)





## Bihu dance : Rhythm of life and love

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

The dance of Assam's Bihu is a realization of the emotional richness and cultural vitality of the region. An essential component of the Bihu festival celebrated throughout the year, it is just not a means of dance—a way of appreciating life and love and what binds the residents of Assam to their environment. Each step, each drummer's beat, and each of the melodies in the songs that accompany them talk of the timeless connection between earth and people, of fertility, youth, and rebirth. Based on the agricultural rhythms of Assamese people, Bihu dance still manages to capture the essence of the festival, representing the delight and abandon that come with spring's arrival. Fundamentally, Bihu dance is a celebration of the Assamese agricultural cycle. The dance is done dur-

ing the major Bihu festival, Bohag Bihu (Rongali Bihu). The festival is the Assamese New Year and the start of the sowing season. The coming of spring is a time of renewal, and Bihu dance embodies this spirit. The dynamism of the dancers—young women and men in traditional dress, dancing in rapid and elegant steps—echoes the vitality of the season. The dance is a metaphor for the fertility of the earth, as well as the blooming of new life in nature and in the hearts of young couples.

Bihu dance is usually danced in groups, and the members tend to get together in circles or lines, held together by a common sense of celebration. The dance movements are spontaneous, free-flowing, and jubilant, with the dancers radiating an infectious energy that is felt across the entire community. The rhythms of the dhol, taal, pepa and gogona

are played behind the dance, giving rhythm and energy to the act. The instruments and rhythms represent the pulse of nature itself—the relentless, inexorable current of time that regulates human life and the cycles of agriculture.

One of the most notable aspects of the Bihu dance is its focus on youth and love. The young dancers, especially the women, convey their youthfulness through their elegant hand movements and rapid footwork, and the men join them with similar energetic movements. The dance usually represents courtship, flirting, and the development of romance. The accompanying Bihu melodies, or Bihu geet, are full of love, yearning, and emotional frivolity. These melodies, which are usually sung by the dancers themselves, talk of the exhilaration of young romance and the promise of new unions. The lyrics of the songs

also project the social dynamics of Assamese society, emphasizing love and marriage as key elements in the cultural life of the community.

As the dance unfolds, it becomes apparent that the dance is not just a celebration of romantic love but also fertility, both natural and human. The rhythmic clapping, stamping, and circular movement characteristic of Bihu dance have been interpreted as symbolic movements designed to call for blessings for an abundant harvest. The dancers' feet, stamping together in unison, repeat the rhythms of nature, calling on the energies of the earth to ensure prosperity to the fields and its people. In the dance, the people are unified in a group prayer for bounty and health, enhancing the bonds of kinship and solidarity that are fundamental to the Assamese way of life.

Bihu dance, in its most traditional sense, is a reflection of the rural way of life that has characterized Assam for centuries. It is a group activity that unites people from all walks of life, from young to old, from rich to poor. In villages, the Bihu dance is usually done in open courtyards or fields, and everyone joins in the merriment. The social organization of Assamese society, which is rooted so strongly in land and agriculture, expresses itself through the communal aspect of the dance. It is a celebration that is not about individualism, but rather the need for community, cooperation, and shared pleasure.

The Bihu dance is popular not only because of its cultural depth, but also because it is versatile. Al-

though the dance has been rooted in tradition, it has also developed over time, accommodating contemporary tastes and environments. In urban areas and at mass performances, Bihu dance is typically performed on stage under professional choreography, elaborate costumes, and advanced lighting and sound equipment. This contemporary take on the dance has brought new elements along with retaining the traditional rhythms and movements that characterize it. The employment of traditional instruments continues to be at the heart of the dance, but the performance now includes modern influences, mixing tradition with contemporary elements.

This evolution has enabled Bihu dance to gain wider exposure, both domestically in India and globally. Over the last few years, the dance has become a symbol of Assamese pride, being featured at cultural festivals, state events, and even on the international stage. The Bihu dance performance at global events, like the 2023 Guinness World Record-breaking performance in Assam, in which thousands of dancers took part, is evidence of the increased visibility of the dance. These events bring to the fore the global appeal of the Bihu dance and its ability to bring people together from different countries, celebrating not only the culture of Assam, but also the universal concepts of love, life, and human bonding.

While the international platform has opened up new avenues for Bihu dance, it has also brought to the fore issues of authenticity preservation. According to some

critics, the commercialized forms of the dance, especially those that appear in Bollywood movies or contemporary performances, could water down its original cultural meaning. The development from a raw folk performance to a highly choreographed and sometimes commercialized performance is cause for concern that the raw, unpolished energy that characterized the dance is lost. Yet others defend the dance as an evolution that must conform to the times if it is to be relevant.

These controversies aside, the nature of the Bihu dance itself has not changed. At its core, the dance still embodies the essence of Assamese life—joyous, vibrant, and deeply rooted in the land. Whether danced in a village square or a large stage, Bihu dance is a celebration of life's most basic experiences: the nurturing of love, the beat of the seasons, and the cycle of the earth. It is a celebration of fertility—of the earth, of relationships, and of the cycle of life itself that is eternal.

Bihu dance is not a mere performance; it is a vital tradition that thumps in unison with the Assamese heartbeat. Its movement and rhythms convey the character of Assamese being and its sustaining sense of unity with nature, with community, and with the ebb and flow of life. So long as the seasons move, and so long as Assamese people keep on dancing in celebration and worship, Bihu will live on as an authentic manifestation of their cultural consciousness. (The author can be reached at himangshur1989@gmail.com or 9954812261, 9864000260)

## Banikanta Kakati: A pioneer of Assamese studies

By: SATYABRAT BORAH

Banikanta Kakati was a remarkable scholar, writer, and teacher from Assam, known for his deep commitment to the study of Assamese language, literature, and culture. Born in 1894 in Barpeta, Assam, Kakati dedicated his life to understanding and preserving the cultural heritage of his people. His works laid the foundation for Assamese linguistics and literary studies and remain relevant to this day.

Kakati grew up in a modest family, but his passion for learning led him to pursue higher education. After completing his schooling, he studied at Cotton College in Guwahati and later went to the University of Calcutta, where he specialized in Assamese literature and language. His deep interest in the Assamese language became the focus of his life's work, and he soon became recognized as an authority on the subject.

One of Banikanta Kakati's most influential works was Assamese: Its Formation and Development, published in 1941.

traditions of Assam. In his book Vaisnavism in Assam, Kakati studied the impact of the Vaisnavism movement on Assamese culture and literature. Vaisnavism, which became popular in Assam during the medieval period, had a profound influence on the region's cultural identity. Kakati's work examined how this religious movement shaped Assamese society and its literature, and he provided a clear understanding of the cultural transformations that took place during this time.

Kakati was also drawn to the religious practices associated with the worship of the goddess Kamakhya. His book The Mother Goddess Kamakhya explored the religious and cultural significance of the Kamakhya temple in Assam. In this work, Kakati analyzed the myths, rituals, and history surrounding the worship of the goddess Kamakhya. This book provided an important understanding of Assamese religious traditions and showed how they were closely tied to the cultural life of the people.

In addition to his work on language and religion, Banikanta Kakati also wrote Aspects of Early Assamese Literature, in which he explored the early stages of Assamese literary development. This book focused on different literary forms and genres that emerged in Assam during its early history. Kakati's analysis helped to shed light on the rich variety of literary works that had been produced in Assam over the centuries. His work not only preserved these early literary traditions but also encouraged new generations of writers and scholars to explore their own literary heritage.

Kakati's contributions were not limited to scholarly research. He was a devoted teacher who spent many years teaching at Cotton College and other institutions. His students admired him for his ability to explain complex ideas in simple terms, and many of them went on to become prominent scholars in their own right. Kakati believed strongly in the power of education to uplift society, and he worked tirelessly to promote literacy and education in Assam.

Throughout his life, Banikanta Kakati remained humble despite his many achievements. He never sought fame or recognition but was driven by a deep love for Assamese culture and a desire to preserve it for future generations. His works on the Assamese language, literature, and culture are still considered essential reading for anyone interested in understanding the history and identity of Assam.

Banikanta Kakati passed away in 1952, but his legacy lives on through his writings and the impact he had on Assamese studies. His works continue to inspire scholars and students, and his dedication to preserving Assamese culture is remembered with great respect. Today, he is celebrated as one of Assam's most important intellectual figures, and his contributions have helped shape modern Assamese identity. Through his life's work, Kakati ensured that the rich history of Assam's language and culture would never be forgotten.



This book is considered a landmark in the study of the Assamese language. In it, Kakati traced the origins of Assamese and explored how the language evolved over time. He examined the language's roots, drawing connections with other languages like Bengali and Sanskrit. His research helped solidify Assamese as a distinct language with its own rich history. The book remains a cornerstone for anyone studying Assamese linguistics.

Another important work by Kakati was Purani Asamiya Sahitya or Old Assamese Literature. In this book, he explored the early phases of Assamese literary traditions. Kakati's detailed analysis of ancient texts provided valuable insights into the development of literature in Assam. By looking at these old texts, he showed how Assamese literature had a long and rich history that was often overlooked. His work helped revive interest in these early literary forms and preserved them for future generations.

Kakati's interest in Assamese culture extended beyond language and literature. He was also fascinated by the religious

## Chalachitra Tattwa Aru Dhara: Bridging the gap in Assamese literature

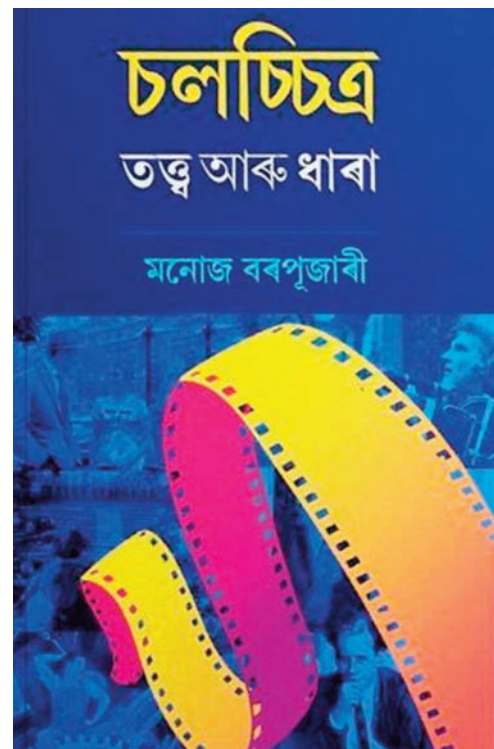
By: Prabin Bora

It has been a long-standing demand of teachers and students of Assamese literature that many texts of literary criticism are not easily accessible due to their being written in English. However, not much effort has been dedicated to translating these works into Assamese to make such critical literature more available and accessible to students of Assamese literature. In an effort to bridge such a gap, publisher Ranjan Sarmah of Bandhav has published a new book on film theories and film movements in Assamese, written by National Award-winning film critic Manoj Barpujari. The book, titled Chalachitra Tattwa Aru Dhara, was released on March 11, 2025 and covers a wide range of both popular and niche concepts and theories of cinema.

As audiences although everyone watches films, not everyone is able to critically engage with the medium. This is because of a poor exposure to academic concepts behind cinema and an understanding of film theories. Since its history film has been regarded as a powerful medium of mass communication and it still stands true. Therefore, to better engage with the nuances of the medium, film theories are important. They not only provide a framework for understanding how films communicate meaning, but also says a lot about how they affect audiences, and how they reflect and influence the society.

Noted author and National award-winning film critic, Apurba Sharma noted that there are very few books on Assamese literature about cinema and film theory, leaving a huge gap that has yet to be filled. He also pointed out that the lack of a comprehensive discussion on cinema, which signals a weak film culture in the region, can also be attributed to the absence of elaborate writings on cinema in Assamese literature. Therefore, in his opinion of the new book, he appreciated author Manoj Barpujari's effort to fill this gap and expressed hope that the book would be beneficial for students, teachers, authors, filmmakers, and journalists alike.

Film theories and film movements across the



world offer us a look into the past and see how cinema has evolved over time. It gives us an idea of how different filmmakers responded to social, political, and technological changes of their time. An understanding of such evolution will definitely aid our knowledge of the past, present and the future of cinema and helps us understand how global influences and cultural shifts can affect cinema and vice versa.

During the book release event, author Manoj Barpujari had acknowledged that each of the topics presented in the book has such a wide array of information—considering its history and development over time—that each chapter could be a book in it-

self. Hence, he has tried to compress all the information and made it easily accessible for Assamese readers for effortless understanding of the various aspects of film theory and movement. Additionally, he has also not limited himself to Western perspectives alone but has broadened the topics with multiple viewpoints and analyzed them through various angles.

Since history is tied to facts and information, each chapter includes an equal share of factual information. The film theories and movements are also closely linked to specific films and filmmakers, so those relevant films and some more are analysed in the book as well. Additionally, author Barpujari has also mentioned that the book also focuses on lesser-known film movements from around the world, such as Dogme 95, Cinema Novo, and many others.

He also said that the book mentions a new wave in Palestinian cinema and has identified the Sixth Generation of Chinese Cinema as a new wave. He has also traced the roots of New Hollywood to independent cinema, along with experimental and avant-garde films of the period. Furthermore, he has contextualized it with the underground film movement in the U.S., as separated from the studio system.

Apart from that, there are discussions on Soviet parallel cinema, Glasnost-Era Movies, along with Ukrainian poetic cinema and Ukrainian filmmakers. Among the theories, the book discusses a wide range of both basic and critical film theories, including less-discussed theories like Screen Theory and Schreiber Theory, alongside more popular ones such as Auteur Theory, Psychoanalytic Film Theory, Marxist Film Theory, and Queer Theory.

The language of the book is moderately easy and the concepts are simplified for basic understanding of such readers who are not the usual suspects when it comes to questions about the medium of cinema. Chalachitra Tattwa Aru Dhara will definitely promote critical engagement with cinema and inspire a thoughtful discourse on the medium's cultural and artistic evolution.

### Poem

#### It's Raining

By: Mowsam Hazarika

It's raining—

Soft and slow,

A lullaby sung by the sky.

The soil drinks in silence, deep—

Can you hear the earth breathe?

Rain slips through trembling leaves,

Kissing each branch in quiet grace.

It wraps the trees in silver veils—

Don't you long to give a love that flows this gently?

Rainwater gathers, becomes rivers,

Winding through forgotten fields,

Carrying life in its restless tide—

Do you dream of making the earth bloom?

Sometimes the shy sun peeks through,

A blush of red behind the clouds—

Do you laugh with the rhythm of that playful light?

It's raining at night.

The sky, a whispering enigma.

A tender rhythm echoes in the heart of the earth.

Every drop a secret in the dark—

Do you find beauty in the mystery?

The earth lies wrapped in the arms of rain—

Old lovers, reunited in the storm.

Mud and water,

Roots and sky—

Do you yearn for an embrace that holds the world?

#### If Repentance Help Any Plotter Seek Mercy

By Bipul Chandra Kalita

Some forgotten moments cheated me cruelly;  
Can't remember where  
But I am sure I know the culprits  
Whose ugliest thoughts misled their own blood.

Their shawl can't conceal any burning firewood,  
Festering wounds will smell badly,  
And sadness for being exploited hurt my heart;  
Now their endeavour to be sincere lose its brightness,  
Fakeness shines in their fiscal world,  
Compelling conscience to leave solemn chambers.

I need not mention who and what they are,  
Their siblings' futurity matters a lot;  
They are hiding faces  
Behind counterfeited glee,  
To save huge aristocratic images  
To save easy-busy life-style without labour  
In the same globe  
Dancing quite widely before my teary eyes!

I can't help sobbing for the loss of trust,  
Ignoring what they robbed  
To implore  
Futurity  
To be honest and kind  
To forgive  
If repentance help any plotter seek mercy.



## Negotiations will again be mediated by Omani Foreign Minister Badr al-Busaidi

### Iran, US begin second round of negotiations over Tehran's nuclear programme in Rome

ROME, April 19: Iran and the United States began a second round of negotiations Saturday over Tehran's rapidly advancing nuclear programme in Rome, US and Iranian officials said.

The US official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the closed-door negotiations at the Omani Embassy in Rome's Camilluccia neighbourhood.

Iranian state media also reported the talks starting just before noon Saturday as journalists watched outside.

The talks in Italy over Easter weekend again will hinge on US billionaire Steve Witkoff, the US Mideast envoy of President Donald Trump, and Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi.

Whether the two men find common ground in the high-stakes negotiations could mean success or failure in the talks.

The negotiations will again be mediated by Omani Foreign Minister Badr al-Busaidi.

Talks are even happening represents a historic moment, given the decades of enmity between the two countries since the 1979 Islamic Revolution and the US Embassy hostage crisis.

Trump, in his first term, unilaterally withdrew from Iran's nuclear deal with world powers in 2018, setting off years of attacks and negotiations that failed to restore the accord that drastically limited Tehran's enrichment of uranium in exchange for the lifting of economic sanctions.

At risk is a possible American or Israeli military strike on Iran's nuclear sites, or the Iranians following through on their threats to pursue an atomic weapon.

Meanwhile, tensions in the Middle East



have spiked over the Israel-Hamas war in the Gaza Strip and after US airstrikes targeting Yemen's Iranian-backed Houthi rebels killed more than 70 people and wounded dozens more.

"I'm for stopping Iran, very simply, from having a nuclear weapon," Trump said Friday. "I want Iran to be great and prosperous and terrific."

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmaeil Baghaei wrote Saturday on the social platform X that Iran "always demonstrated, with good faith and a sense of responsibility, its commitment to diplomacy as a civilised way to resolve issues".

"We are aware that it is not a smooth path, but we take every step with open eyes, relying also on the past experiences," he added.

Araghchi met Saturday morning with Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani ahead of "indirect" talks with Witkoff, Iranian state

television reported.

**Araghchi, Witkoff both travelled ahead of talks**

Both men have been travelling in recent days. Witkoff had been in Paris for talks about Ukraine as Russia's full-scale war there grinds on. Araghchi will be coming from Tehran, Iran, after a visit to Moscow, where he met with officials, including Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Russia, a member of the world powers involved in Tehran's 2015 nuclear deal, could be a key participant in any future deal reached between Tehran and Washington.

Analysts suggest Moscow could potentially take custody of Iran's uranium enriched to 60 per cent purity — a short, technical step away from weapons-grade levels of 90 per cent.

Oman, a sultanate on the eastern edge of the Arabian Peninsula, has long served as an

interlocutor between Iran and the West. Muscat hosted the first round of negotiations between Araghchi and Witkoff last weekend, which saw the two men meet face to face after indirect talks.

**Iran seeks a deal to steady troubled economy**

Iran's internal politics are still inflamed over the mandatory hijab, or headscarf, with women still ignoring the law on the streets of Tehran. Rumours also persist over the government potentially increasing the cost of subsidised gasoline in the country, which has sparked nationwide protests in the past.

Iran's rial currency plunged to over 1 million to a US dollar earlier this month. The currency has improved with the talks, however, something Tehran hopes will continue.

Meanwhile, two used Airbus A330-200 long sought by Iran's flag carrier, Iran Air, arrived at Tehran's Mehrabad International Airport on Thursday, flight-tracking data analyzed by The Associated Press showed. The planes, formerly of China's Hainan Airlines, had been in Muscat and re-registered to Iran.

The aircraft had Rolls-Royce engines, which included significant American parts and servicing. Such a transaction would need approval from the US Treasury given sanctions on Iran. The State Department and Treasury did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Under the 2015 deal, Iran could purchase new aircraft and had lined up tens of billions of dollars in deals with Airbus and Boeing Co. However, the manufacturers backed away from the deals over Trump's threats to the nuclear accord. (AP)

## China holds world's first robot half-marathon



BEIJING, April 19: China on Saturday held the world's first marathon of humanoid robots running together with human runners, showcasing progress in AI technologies amid Beijing's deepening rivalry with the US in robotics.

Twenty-one humanoid robots, accompanied by their tech handlers from top universities and firms ran over a 21-km race through Beijing's Economic-Technological Development Area.

The robots in different shapes and sizes running along with humans created a spectacle, drawing greeting from large crowds gathered on the sidewalks.

The robots were launched sequentially at intervals exceeding one metre, confined to dedicated tracks where battery swaps mirror Formula 1's pit stops.

In the end, awards were distributed not just for speed but for categories like Best Endurance, Best Gait Design, and Most Innovative Form - celebrating both athletic performance and engineering ability.

State-run Xinhua news agency, which described it as the world's first such race, also released a video footage in which several robots including one wearing a black sun hat and white gloves ran in along with the competitors.

However, videos posted on social media showed that it was not a smooth race as some robots ex-

perienced technical hitches at the start and even crashed.

Among 20 competing teams, Tiangong Ultra from the Tiangong Team won the race among the robots with a timing of two hours 40 minutes, slower than over an hour and two minutes clocked by Elias Desta of Ethiopia who was declared the winner of the men's race.

The marathon for the robots was regarded as a test of their core algorithms as they had to navigate complex terrains like slopes and turns which demanded exceptional stability, reliability, and battery life, Xiong Youjun, CEO of the Beijing Humanoid Robot Innovation Centre told Xinhua.

The China Electronics Society forecasts that China's humanoid robot market could reach approximately 870 billion yuan (about USD 119 billion) by 2030. "Robots completing the race isn't the finish line. It's the starting point for industrial growth and cross-disciplinary learning," said Liang Liang, Deputy Director of Yizhuang's Administrative Committee. "Their small steps today will become giant leaps for human technological progress tomorrow," Liang added.

China's robot race was seen as an attempt to showcase its progress in AI tools amid its intensifying race with the US in the new emerging technologies. (PTI)

## Elon Musk to visit India later this year



WASHINGTON/NEW YORK, April 19: Tesla and SpaceX CEO Elon Musk on Saturday said he is looking forward to visiting India later this year.

The tech billionaire's remarks came a day after he and Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke and discussed the immense potential for collaboration in technology and innovation.

"It was an honor to speak with PM Modi. I am looking forward to visiting India later this year!" Musk said in a post on X.

Musk is considered one of the most influential persons in the Donald Trump administration and is spearheading the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) aimed at cutting government expenditure and reducing the federal workforce.

After their talk on Friday, Modi took to X and said, "Spoke to @elonmusk and talked about various issues, including the topics we covered during our meeting in Washington DC earlier this year. We discussed the immense potential for collaboration in the areas of technology and innovation."

"India remains committed to advancing our partnerships with the US in these domains," he added. (PTI)

## Russia retakes another village in Kursk region from Ukrainian forces

KYIV, April 19: Russia has pushed Ukrainian forces from one of their last remaining footholds in Russia's Kursk region, officials said Saturday. According to Russia's Defence Ministry, its forces took control of the village of Oleshnya, on the border with Ukraine.

"Units of the 'North' military group have liberated the village of Oleshnya in the Kursk region during active offensive operations," the ministry said in a statement. The

Associated Press was unable to immediately verify the claim and there was no immediate response from Ukrainian officials.

According to Russian state news agency TASS, Russia is still fighting to push Ukrainian forces out of the village of Gornal, some 11 kilometres south of Oleshnya.

"The Russian military has yet to push the Ukrainian Armed Forces out of Gornal ... in order to completely liberate the Kursk region.

Fierce fighting is underway in the settlement," the agency reported, citing Russian security agencies.

Russian and North Korean soldiers have nearly deprived Kyiv of a key bargaining chip by retaking most of the region, where Ukrainian troops staged a surprise incursion last year. In other developments, the Ukrainian Air Force reported that Russia fired 87 exploding drones and decoys in the latest wave of attacks overnight into Saturday. It

said 33 of them were intercepted and another 36 were lost, likely having been electronically jammed. Russian attacks damaged farms in the Odesa region and sparked fires in the Sumy region overnight, Ukraine's State Emergency Service said Saturday. Fires were contained, and no casualties were reported. Russia's Ministry of Defence, meanwhile, said its air defence systems shot down two Ukrainian drones overnight into Saturday. (AP)

## Nepal parliamentary panel finds massive graft worth billions in China-built airport

KATHMANDU, April 19: A Nepal parliamentary committee has uncovered a large-scale corruption worth around Nepalese ₹ 14 billion in the construction of the Pokhara International Airport, built by a Chinese company with a soft loan from China. A report by the sub-committee under the Public Accounts Committee of the House of Representatives (HoR) led by Member of Parliament Rajendra Lingden found irregularities in the airport's construction. The report highlighted an embezzlement of approximately ₹ 14 billion and called for investigations and action against several senior officials involved in the project. The Pokhara Regional International Airport was built from a loan of around ₹ 22 billion from the Exim Bank of China and was completed by the Chinese company on December 29, 2022. As per the agreement, Nepal is required to repay the loan at a 2 per cent interest rate for seven years after the completion of the airport construction and then clear the principal in the next 13 years.

The sub-committee termed it unnatural that while the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal (CAAN) had estimated the cost of constructing the airport at USD 145 million, the contract was signed with the Chinese company to construct the project at the cost of USD 215 million, adding USD 70 million. Irregularities during the project's construction also included granting tax exemptions of ₹ 2.22 billion and paying ₹ 320 million for removing 40 metres of Chhine Danda hill, which was never done.

The sub-committee also recommended the suspension of senior officials of the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal (CAAN), including Director General Pradeep Adhikari and others involved in the project, from the feasibility study to the completion of the airport's construction.

It recommended the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA) and the Department of Money Laundering Investigation investigate the chief of Pokhara International Airport Project Binesh Munakarmi, chief of administration Rajendra Prasad Paudel, CAAN Director and Engineer Baburam Paudel among others in the corruption case and take stern action against them, according to a member of the Public Accounts Committee of the HoR. (PTI)

## Israeli strikes on Gaza kill more than 90 people in last 48 hours

DEIR AL-BALAH (GAZA STRIP),

April 19: Israeli strikes in Gaza have killed more than 90 people in the last 48 hours, Gaza's Health Ministry said Saturday, as Israeli troops ramp up attacks to pressure Hamas to release its hostages and disarm.

The dead include 15 people who were killed overnight, among them women and children, some of who were sheltering in a designated humanitarian zone, according to hospital staff.

At least 11 people were killed in the southern city of Khan Younis, several of them in a tent in the Mwasi area where hundreds of thousands of displaced people are living, hospital worker said. Israel has designated it as a humanitarian zone.

Four other people were killed in separate strikes in Rafah city, including a mother and her daughter, according to the European Hospital, where the bodies were brought.

Israel has vowed to intensify attacks across Gaza and occupy large "security zones" inside the strip. For six weeks Israel also has blockaded Gaza, barring the entry of food and other goods.

This week, aid groups raised alarm say-



ing that thousands of children have become malnourished, and most people are barely eating one meal a day as stocks dwindle, according to the United Nations.

On Saturday, Dr. Hanan Balkhy, the head of the World Health Organisation's eastern Mediterranean office, urged the new US ambassador in Israel, Mike Huckabee, to push the country to lift Gaza's blockade so

medicines and other aid can enter the strip. "I would wish for him to go in and see the situation firsthand," she said.

In his first appearance as ambassador on Friday, Huckabee visited the Western Wall, the holiest Jewish prayer site in Jerusalem's Old City. He inserted a prayer into the wall, which he said was handwritten by US President Donald Trump. Huckabee said every effort was being made to bring home the remaining hostages held by Hamas.

The war began when Hamas-led militants attacked southern Israel on October 7, 2023, killing about 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducting 251. Most of the hostages have since been released in ceasefire agreements or other deals.

Israel's offensive has since killed over 51,000 Palestinians, mostly women and children, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which does not distinguish between civilians and combatants. The war has destroyed vast parts of Gaza and most of its food production capabilities. The war has displaced around 90 per cent of the population, with hundreds of thousands of people living in tent camps and bombed-out buildings. (AP)

## Google loses online ad monopoly case

SYDNEY, April 19: Tech giant Google has just suffered another legal blow in the United States, losing a landmark antitrust case. This follows on from the company's loss in a similar case last year.

Social media giant Meta is also currently embroiled in a landmark legal battle in the US that could change not only how it operates, but how millions of people around the world communicate.

Hearings in the Meta case commenced earlier this week in a court in Washington DC, after Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg failed to settle the case for USD 450 million.

Brought by the US Federal Trade Commission (FTC), the suit alleges Meta broke antitrust laws and illegally secured a monopoly over social media platforms.

Along with Google and Meta, Amazon and Apple are also currently facing significant antitrust challenges in the US.

All of these actions are continuing despite major changes in both the FTC and the US Department of Justice as a result of the election of Donald Trump.

Collectively, these cases represent a substantial regulatory push to examine and potentially curb the market power of big tech. So what are all of these cases about exactly? What are the next steps in each of them? And what might they mean for consumers?

**The cases against Google**

The case Google just lost was related to online advertising.

The US Department of Justice alleged Google had behaved anti-competitively to monopolise the complex digital adver-

tising technology market. This market facilitates the buying and selling of online ads.

The US district judge, Leonie Brinkema, agreed Google has a monopoly over the tools used by online publishers to host ad space, and the software that facilitates transactions between online publishers and advertisers.

In her ruling, Judge Brinkema said Google had "willfully engaged in a series of anticompetitive acts" which ultimately resulted in it obtaining "monopoly power in the open-web display publisher ad server market".

Google has said it will appeal the decision. The Department of Justice will ask the court to require Google to divest parts of its ad tech business when the remedies phase of this trial starts later this month.

The second case involving Google is related to internet search.

The Department of Justice argued Google used exclusionary agreements, such as paying Apple billions annually to be the default search engine on iPhones, to lock out competitors.

In August 2024, a federal judge ruled Google acted illegally to maintain its search monopoly.

The case has now moved to the remedies phase. A crucial remedies trial is scheduled to begin next week.

During this, the court will hear arguments on what actions should be taken against Google.

Potential remedies could be significant, with regulators previously suggesting measures such as restrictions on



Google's Android operating system or even forcing the sale of its Chrome browser.

Google has stated its intention to appeal this ruling as well.

**The case against Meta**

The FTC's case against Meta alleges the tech giant illegally maintained a monopoly in the market for "personal social networking services".

The core of the FTC's argument is that Meta employed a "buy-or-bury" strategy to eliminate competitive threats.

This allegedly involved acquiring nascent rivals, most notably Instagram in 2012 and WhatsApp in 2014, specifically to neutralise them before they could challenge Facebook's dominance.

The FTC points to internal communications as evidence of anticompetitive intent.

These include Mark Zuckerberg's statement, "It is better to buy than compete".

They also include an internal memo which showed Zuckerberg considered spinning off Instagram in 2018 over concerns about antitrust scrutiny.

The commission argues Meta's actions stifled innovation and harmed consumers by limiting choices. It's seeking to force Meta to divest, or sell off, both Instagram and WhatsApp.

Meta vigorously defends its actions. It argues it does not hold a monopoly, facing fierce competition from platforms

such as TikTok, YouTube and X (formerly Twitter).

The company contends the acquisitions of Instagram and WhatsApp were pro-competitive, allowing Meta to invest billions to improve and scale the apps, ultimately benefiting users. A key defence point is that the FTC itself reviewed and approved both deals over a decade ago.

The trial is expected to last eight weeks.

**The cases against Apple and Amazon**

In March 2024, the Department of Justice, along with several states, sued Apple, alleging it illegally maintains a monopoly in the smartphone market.

The lawsuit claims Apple uses its control over the iPhone ecosystem to stifle competition and innovation by, for example, degrading messaging quality between iPhones and Android devices and limiting the functionality of third-party digital wallets and smartwatches.

Apple filed a motion to dismiss the case in August 2024. The litigation is in its early stages and is expected to continue for several years.

In September 2023, the FTC, joined by numerous states, also sued Amazon.

The lawsuit alleges the tech giant unlawfully maintains monopoly power in both the market for "online superstores" (where consumers shop) and "online marketplace services" (for third-party sellers).

The FTC claims Amazon uses interlocking anticompetitive tactics. These include punishing sellers for offering lower prices elsewhere, coercing sellers into

using its services, degrading search results with excessive ads, and charging exorbitant seller fees.

In late 2024, the presiding judge largely denied Amazon's attempt to dismiss the core federal claims, allowing the case to proceed.

A trial is currently scheduled for October 2026.

**Major structural changes could come**

Taken together, these lawsuits represent the most significant antitrust enforcement push against major technology firms in the US in decades. They signal a fundamental re-examination of how competition laws apply to fast-evolving digital platforms and ecosystems.

The outcomes could potentially lead to major structural changes. These changes could include the forced breakup of companies such as Meta, or significant behavioural remedies restricting how these firms operate.

Regardless of the specific results, the decisions in these cases will likely set crucial legal precedents. In turn, these will profoundly shape the future competitive landscape for technology. They will also likely influence regulation globally, and impact innovation and investment across the digital economy.

What the cases do not reflect is the change in independence of regulatory bodies in the US, where consistency with White House policy is now paramount. The outcomes will surely test the relationship between Trump and the "tech bros" who've, quite literally, been at his side recently. (The Conversation)



# Congress condemns Bangladesh Hindu leader's murder

## Oppn demands govt to take up matter with Dhaka

**NEW DELHI, April 19:** The Congress on Saturday condemned the killing of a prominent Hindu leader in Bangladesh and demanded that the government take up the matter with Dhaka, saying silence and inaction were not options when such targeted violence was being allowed to take root.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said religious minorities, "especially our Hindu brothers and sisters", are constantly being persecuted in Bangladesh.

"The brutal murder of Bhabesh Chandra Roy, a prominent leader of the Hindu community, is proof that Narendra Modi ji's smiling meeting with the chief advisor of Bangladesh was a failure," he said in a post in Hindi on X.

In his first meeting with Muhammad Yunus -- chief advisor to the interim Bangladesh government -- on April 4, Modi had flagged India's concerns over the safety of minorities, including Hindus, and conveyed that any rhetoric that violated the environment was best



avoided.

India on Saturday condemned the alleged abduction and killing of Roy, a prominent Hindu minority leader in Bangladesh, and called on the interim government in Dhaka to live up to its responsibility of protecting the minorities.

Reacting to the killing, Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said the party stood in solidarity with the Hindu community in Bangladesh

and added the government should ensure efforts were made to ensure transparent action to bring the culprits to book.

"The Indian National Congress strongly condemns the brutal killing of Bhabesh Chandra Roy, a prominent leader of the Hindu community in Dinajpur, Bangladesh. The abduction and assault leading to his tragic death is a chilling reminder of the growing sense of insecurity among religious minorities

in the region," he said in a post on X.

Noting that this was not an isolated incident, he said there had been repeated and deeply disturbing instances of attacks on minority communities in Bangladesh over the past months -- from desecration of Hindu temples to targeted attacks on the homes and businesses of minorities.

"This pattern of intimidation and brutality cannot be ignored," Ramesh said.

The Congress urges the Centre to take up the matter with the highest urgency and prevail upon the government of Bangladesh to ensure a swift, transparent investigation and bring the culprits to justice, he added.

"We reiterate our demand that the safety, dignity and rights of religious minorities in Bangladesh be protected in letter and spirit. Silence and inaction are not options when such targeted violence is allowed to take root," the Congress leader noted.

"The Indian National Congress stands in solidarity with the Hindu community in Bangladesh and with all those who believe in secularism, justice and human rights," Ramesh said.

Kharge said that according to the government's reply in Parliament, there were 76 attacks on Hindus in the previous two months, leading to the deaths of 23 Hindus.

"Recently the chief advisor of Bangladesh made a very condemnable and disappointing comment about the northeastern states of India. The atrocities against religious minorities in Bangladesh, human rights violations and the attempt to eliminate the memories of the 1971 Liberation War are efforts to weaken the relations between India and Bangladesh," Kharge said.

From 1971 to today, the Congress president said, India had always sought peace and prosperity for all the people of Bangladesh as it was in the best interest of the subcontinent. (PTI)

# 4 dead, several trapped in multi-storey building collapse in northeast Delhi



**NEW DELHI, April 19:** A multi-storey residential building collapsed in northeast Delhi's Shakti Vihar area in the early hours of Saturday, killing four people and trapping several others under the debris, officials said. Around 11 people have been rescued by agencies who remain at the building collapse site in the Mustafabad area of the national capital.

Around 8-10 people are believed to be under the rubble, Additional Deputy Commissioner of Police (North East) Sandeep Lama said.

Police said they received information about the building collapse around 3.02 am at Dayapur police station. A police team rushed to Gali No. 1, Shakti Vihar, where the building was found to have collapsed.

Rescue teams from the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), Delhi Fire Services (DFS), and ambulance services were immediately pressed into action, officials said.

Police said around 22 people were reported to be trapped when the building collapsed. So far, 15 people have been rescued and shifted to GTB Hospital, where doctors declared four of them dead.

Six people were discharged from the hospital while five remain under treatment, they said.

"At present, two NDRF teams and fire services are involved in the rescue operation," Additional DCP Lama said.

"So far, 14 people have been rescued. Unfortunately, four people died, while 10 were admitted to a hospital," the police officer said. Later, police said another person was rescued alive.

NDRF DIG Mohsen Shahidi told PTI, "We call this a 'pancake collapse' -- a particularly dangerous type where chances of survival are minimal. Still, we hope there are lives that can be saved and we are actively searching." He added that debris is being cleared slowly as this is a highly congested area, making the rescue efforts challenging.

The use of heavy machinery to clear debris is limited due to space constraints. Apart from the NDRF and fire services teams, Delhi Police personnel and volunteers are working together in the rescue operation, he said. A police source said construction work in the "two-three shops" on the ground floor could have led to the collapse. The four-storey building's owner Teheen and his family live on the first floor while tenants live in the rest of the building.

Two of the owner's family members were also injured in the incident. His wife is receiving treatment at the hospital while his son was discharged.

Police said Chandni (23), Danish (23), Naved (17) and Reshma (38) died in the building collapse incident.

Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta ordered a probe into the building collapse and said agencies are engaged in rescue efforts.

"Arrangements have been made for proper treatment of all the injured," she said in a post on X.

"Deeply saddened by the tragic building collapse in Mustafabad. Orders have been given to investigate the incident and strict action will be taken against the culprits."

"My deepest condolences to those who died in the unfortunate accident. May God grant peace to the departed souls and give strength to the bereaved families to bear this irreparable loss," the chief minister said.

AAP supremo and former Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal also extended his condolences to the bereaved families.

"I appeal to all the party workers to fully cooperate with the administration in relief and rescue operations," he said in a post on X.

Leader of Opposition Atishi expressed grief over the incident and urged AAP workers in Mustafabad to support the authorities in the ongoing operations. (PTI)

# Badesatti becomes Chhattisgarh's first Naxal-free gram panchayat after introduction of Elvid scheme

**SUKMA, April 19:** Badesatti in Chhattisgarh's Sukma district has become the first gram panchayat in the state to become Naxal-free since the introduction of the Elvid Panchayat Yojana recently, under which such areas will get development projects worth Rs 1 crore.

Badesatti under Phulbagi police station limits, some 45 kilometres away from Sukma district headquarters, achieved the coveted feat after 11 ultras surrendered on Friday.

The Elvid Panchayat Yojana, part of the Chhattisgarh Naxal Surrender/Victim Relief and Rehabilitation Policy-2025, has a provision of sanctioning development works worth ₹ 1 crore to village panchayats that facilitate the surrender of Naxalites and pass a resolution declaring themselves Maoist-free, an official said.

"With the support of police, the local panchayat encouraged those linked with the banned outfit in our area to quit violence and join the mainstream. On Friday, 11 cadres from our panchayat surrendered. Now no person from our village is linked to the organisation and our village has become Naxal free," Badesatti sarpanch Kalmu Joga (33) told PTI over phone.

He said the resolution declaring it as Naxal-free will be passed soon in order to make the village eligible for Elvid Panchayat Yojana, Joga added.

"The village has no panchayat building and hospital while the school has classes only till standard eight. The (Elvid Yojana) money will be spent on roads, water supply and other infrastructure works", said Joga, who has



studied till Class XII.

Once infamous for Left Wing Extremism, Badesatti took its first step towards peace in 2021 after a Chhattisgarh Armed Force camp was set up there.

"After the camp was set up, a road was constructed in the area and development started taking place. Soon, Naxal activities started declining. Of the eight hamlets in the panchayat, six have power supply, while electrification work is underway in the remaining two. The panchayat has a population of 1700, of which 1400 are voters," said Jamuna Kumar Rajak, Company Commander of CAF's 1st battalion stationed in Badesatti.

"Under Jai Jeevan Mission, water pipeline laying work is underway while an overhead water tank has been erected and a borewell has been dug to supply water to the overhead tank. Badesatti has residential school till class 8th and another ashram (hostel) is being constructed," Rajak added.

Bastar Range Inspector General of Police Sundarraj P said Badesatti has not witnessed

any major LWE incident in the last few years, though movement of Maoists is reported occasionally.

In September, 2023, Naxalites had attacked a police team on patrol but no one was injured. In 2020, Naxalites dubbed three men of Singanpara locality in Badesatti as police informers and killed them. In November that year, Maoists damaged a newly-built health centre.

"With the surrender of these 11 Naxalites, Badesatti village is free of the menace and eligible for benefits of the new scheme. Police were in contact with local panchayat representatives for the last few days to encourage members of militia and revolutionary party committee of the banned outfit to surrender. It yielded success," the IG said.

"All the surrendered Naxalites were provided assistance of ₹ 50,000 each. They will be further rehabilitated as per the government's policy. Our aim to make the entire Bastar region free of the menace. More villages will be targeted in future (for such surrenders)," he said.

Bastar region comprises Bastar, Kanker, Kondagaon, Narayanpur, Bijapur, Dantewada and Sukma districts.

During his visit to Dantewada earlier this month, Union Home Minister Amit Shah had hailed the Elvid Panchayat scheme and requested people to start a campaign to make every village Naxal-free in Bastar region so as to get development works of ₹ 1 crore.

Shah has said the Narendra Modi government has resolved to eradicate Naxalism before March 31, 2026. (PTI)

# Former Cong MLA Sangram Thopte resigns, likely to join BJP

**PUNE, April 19:** Former Congress MLA Sangram Thopte has resigned from the party amid speculation that he will join the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Maharashtra.

Thopte, who had represented the Bhor constituency in Pune district three times, was defeated by NCP candidate Shankar Mandekar in the 2024 assembly polls.

Thopte, whose family is rooted in Congress' tradition, is the son of party veteran Anant Rao Thopte, who had represented Bhor six times.

"I have submitted my resignation to state Congress president Harshvardhan Sapkal and Maharashtra in-charge Ramesh Chennithala," Thopte told PTI over the phone on Saturday.

He resigned on Friday and removed the Congress logo from his cover image on his social media handles.

Asked about his plans, Thopte said he would discuss with his supporters on Sunday.

Reacting to Thopte's resignation, Maharashtra Congress president Harshvardhan Sapkal said, "Anant Rao Thopte is a senior leader of the party. The Thopte family has a long-standing Congress legacy. Sangram Thopte should carry that legacy forward". (PTI)

# Will not allow compulsion of Hindi in Maharashtra: Uddhav

**MUMBAI, April 19:** Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray on Saturday asserted that his party will not allow making Hindi compulsory in Maharashtra after the state government decided to make Hindi a mandatory third language for students of classes 1 to 5.

Addressing an event of the Bharatiya Kamgar Sena, the workers' wing of the Shiv Sena (UBT), Thackeray said his party has no aversion to the Hindi language but asked why it is being forced.

Thackeray claimed it is the ruling BJP's mission not to let people unite and to keep them under constant pressure so that they are occupied with their worries.

"We will not allow making Hindi compulsory in Maharashtra," he said.

His remarks come amid the opposition's outcry over the Maharashtra government's decision to make Hindi a mandatory third language for students of Classes 1 to 5 in Marathi and English-medium schools across the state, in a depart-

ture from the practice of studying two languages.

He said, "We will do everything if you ask (us) with affection, but if you impose anything, we will oppose it. Why this force for (learning) Hindi?"

The former chief minister pointed out that it was his government that decided to make learning Marathi in the state compulsory.

"You have to say Jai Maharashtra if you want to live in the state," Thackeray added.

Targeting Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis-led Mahayuti, he asked if the state government was working for those who want to finish off Maharashtra and Marathi.

He further slammed Deputy Chief Minister and Shiv Sena leader Eknath Shinde, saying how his party can be subservient to those doing injustice to Marathi and then claim to be the inheritors of Bal Thackeray's legacy.

Referring to senior RSS leader Bhaiyyaji Joshi's remarks earlier

that any individual coming to Mumbai may not necessarily learn Marathi, the Sena (UBT) chief said Marathi should be made compulsory in Ghatkopar, a predominantly Gujarati-speaking suburb of the city.

On the Waqf Amendment Act 2025, he said his party opposed the legislation because non-Muslims are appointed on the Waqf Board.

"Then my basic question is, what is the guarantee that you (the government) will not appoint non-Hindus to Hindu religious organisations? This is the same question the Supreme Court has asked the government on the Waqf Act," Thackeray remarked.

He further claimed that his government was toppled because, as a chief minister, he had stalled the implementation of labour codes in the state.

Thackeray said that in workplaces where the Bharatiya Kamgar Sena union has a presence, party men should be hired to fill vacancies. (PTI)

# VHP holds country-wide protests against Murshidabad violence

## Demands of President's Rule in Bengal

**NEW DELHI/KOLKATA, April 19:** The Vishva Hindu Parishad on Saturday staged protests in different parts of the country against the recent communal violence in West Bengal's Murshidabad over the amendments made to the Waqf law, demanding immediate imposition of President's Rule in the state.

The protests were held in Murshidabad, Delhi and Noida, among other places, with VHP members claiming a complete breakdown of law and order in the Mamata Banerjee-ruled state where clashes claimed at least three lives last week.

In Delhi's Nangloi Chowk, Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) general secretary Bajrang Bagda led a protest condemning the violence in West Bengal. In Noida, the VHP took out a rally raising slogans against the Trinamool Congress government in West Bengal led by its national spokesperson Vinod Bansal.

"Protests were held at multiple locations across the country, barring Punjab, because the Trinamool Congress is carrying out a cycle of oppression and repression of Hindus in connivance with Bangladeshi-Rohingya infiltrators," Bansal told PTI.

"The recent incident of violence in Murshidabad was only a 'gruesome form' of the ongoing oppression (of Hindus) in Bengal under Trinamool's watch. "In Bangladesh, what began as protests against reservation eventually went on to target Hindus. But we will not tolerate such Bangladeshi mindset in our country," Bansal said.

The VHP demands immediate imposition of President's Rule in West Bengal, fencing of borders in the state, adequate compensation to the victims of violence in Murshidabad, and ensuring the safety of Hindus in Bengal, the VHP leader said.

"The VHP also demands that land grabbing in the name of Waqf be immediately stopped and a high-level inquiry be ordered into the properties acquired in the name of Waqf," Bansal said. "We also demand that authorities identify the Bangladeshi-Rohingya infiltrators in West Bengal and drive them out (of the country). Strictest action should be taken

against the perpetrators of violence in Murshidabad," he said, adding that the VHP will hold similar protests across Delhi and Punjab on Monday.

Speaking to PTI Videos, Bansal claimed that Hindus are being compelled to flee their homes in Murshidabad where a father-son-duo was brutally murdered because they made idols. "We wonder from where such hatred against Hindus comes. The chief minister there invites 'jihad' forces for meetings but doesn't utter a word on the atrocities against Hindus. We condemn the way Hindus are being targeted in the name of Waqf," Bansal told PTI Videos.

A similar protest was taken out in Murshidabad condemning the "targeted" violence that rocked the district last week.

Speaking to PTI Videos, a VHP leader part of the protest said, "We are going to write to the president of India, requesting her to intervene in the volatile and volcanic situation prevailing in Bengal with the active support of the state government and its police force. (PTI)

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# MDMK leader Durai Vaiko quits party post

**CHENNAI, April 19:** MDMK leader and its founder Vaiko's son, Durai Vaiko on Saturday quit as the party's principal secretary, in an apparent fallout of internal squabbles.

Vaiko, Lok Sabha MP from Tiruchirappalli in the state, took to 'X' to announce his decision and blamed an individual as the reason for his stepping down. The party will take a call on Durai's stepping down on Sunday at its Administrative Council meeting, a senior party leader said.

Durai's move came days after Vaiko warned the party's district units against adopting any resolutions ahead of the April 20 meeting where key issues are likely to be taken up.

After he was elected as headquarters secretary earlier, one person who could not tolerate that has been for the last four years making accusations against the party and its leadership, Durai said.

Without naming the individual, he also accused that person of continuously feeding the media, information that brought 'disrepute' to Vaiko. The concerned person destroyed the party with such action, Durai alleged.

"I don't want to continue working as the principal secretary amid such a person. Therefore, I am relieving myself from the post of principal secretary," he added. (PTI)

# Patnaik becomes BJD president for 9th time, asks party workers to expose BJP's 'false' narrative

**BHUBANESWAR, April 19:** Former Odisha chief minister Naveen Patnaik, who was chosen as the BJD president for the ninth time in a row, on Saturday called upon party workers to expose the alleged false narrative of the ruling BJP.

BJD's organisational election returning officer PK Deb announced 78-year-old Patnaik as the party president at the state council meeting held at its state headquarters, Sankha Bhawan.

Addressing party leaders and workers after being named as the BJD president, Patnaik said, "We conceded defeat in the last assembly election by a narrow margin, even though our party got more votes. This is because we couldn't effectively counter the false narrative. Creating a false narrative is the main strategy against the BJD. We should be aggressive in exposing this, especially on social media."

The leader of opposition in the Odisha assembly also said, "We need to improve our social media presence. Technology should be used to tell the truth and the facts, and without technology, we cannot reach out to people."

Patnaik has been the founder president of the regional party and was the lone candidate for the post. "Patnaik was elected as the BJD president unopposed," Deb said.

In a veiled attack on the ruling BJP, the BJD chief said, "No one should underestimate the organisational strength of our party. The spirit of BJD workers remains very high. They are our real assets."

"I have full faith in BJD workers, brothers and sisters. They are the ones who will give a befitting reply to the propaganda. They will spread the message of our service to every village and city of Odisha," Patnaik said.

He described the 2000-2024 period as the 'golden age', as the BJD ruled Odisha during these years.

Commencing his speech with the 'Jai Jagannath' chant, Patnaik said that the ideology of his father, Biju Patnaik, continued to remain the guiding principle of the BJD.

"Our principles and ideals are our strength. Whether in the government or not, the Biju Janata Dal has always served the people of Odisha and will continue to do so," he said.

Claiming that the welfare of the people of Odisha is the BJD's focus, Patnaik said empowerment of women, farmers, youth, workers, tribals and regional development is his party's priority.

"The BJD has been working for the pride of Odisha and the state's interests. Our fight for the rights of the Odisha people will continue. Odisha's pride and the interests of the people are paramount to us," he said.

As soon as his name was announced as the BJD president, the party's district leaders greeted Patnaik and offered him flowers, paintings and Lord Jagannath's 'Anga bastra' and 'Maha Prasad'.

The party's state council has 355 members, and 80 of them were elected as state executives, Deb added. (PTI)

# South India's first AC EMU service launched in Chennai

**CHENNAI, April 19:** South India's first AC EMU chugged along the Chennai Beach-Chengalpattu corridor on Saturday, marking yet another significant episode in the suburban rail network that is often hailed by many as the transport lifeline of the city and its neighbourhoods.

This is the first such service in southern India, an official said. The Chennai division of Southern Railway operates the service.

The train is equipped with more features than the regular EMU rakes, such as automatic doors and passenger information system.

The maiden service was flagged off from Chennai Beach to Chengalpattu at 7 am and saw eager passengers enjoying the ride.

Many regular train commuters recalled the days of the iconic metre gauge that was phased out in 2004 to accommodate broad gauge rakes with more capacity, and expressed joy over the air conditioned Electric Multiple Unit (EMU) being introduced just during the peak summer.

According to Southern Railway, the initiative was aimed at provid-



ing hassle-free, pleasant travel experience for passengers.

The state-of-the-art 12-car AC EMUs, manufactured by Integral Coach Factory, are equipped with several modern features that "offer Metro-like comfort with a higher carrying capacity of around 5000 passengers."

"Key features include fully air-conditioned coaches, automatic sliding doors, sealed gangways for uninterrupted movement, stainless steel seating, panoramic wide glass windows, aesthetic lighting, GPS-

based LED displays, CCTV surveillance, and a passenger talk-back system for emergencies. The train also features energy-efficient regenerative Electro Pneumatic brakes that conserve up to 35 per cent of electrical energy and air spring suspension for superior riding comfort," an official release said. The AC EMU service was first introduced in the Mumbai suburban and witnessed steady patronage among commuters, especially office-goers and women travellers. (PTI)

# RENOVATION/MAINTENANCE & ANCILLARY WORKS

**Tender Notice No.: 17 of 2025, Dated:** 10-04-2025; E-Tender are invited by the undersigned for the following work: **Tender No.:** DCESTMLG-18-2025; **Name of Work:** At Shillong: Renovation of existing Officer's Rest House at Shillong including upgradation of facade and other ancillary works (Re-Tender). **Tender Value:** ₹1,86,55,080.99/-; **Earnest Money:** ₹2,43,300/-; **Tender No.:** DCESTMLG-19-2025; **Name of Work:** Annual horticulture maintenance of open areas of ORH complex at Lulligarh & Kamakhya, Officers bungalows at Maligaon & its open area. (Re-tender). **Tender Value:** ₹3,68,47,199.44/-; **Earnest Money:** ₹3,34,200/-; **Date & time closing/opening of above all tenders at 13:00 hrs. on 02-05-2025.** For complete information with the tender document of above e-tender will be available in website [www.irops.gov.in](http://www.irops.gov.in). **Dy.CE/Estimate, Maligaon** **NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY** *Serving Customers With A Smile*



## Change in strategy imminent for resurgent Mumbai Indians against CSK in IPL Clasico



**MUMBAI, April 19:** Chennai Super Kings' poor form may take the sheen off the return leg of this year's IPL Clasico but for Mumbai Indians, the contest will present a challenge to change strategy in order to maintain their winning run here on Sunday. Mumbai Indians have done well to resurrect their faltering campaign with two consecutive wins over Delhi Capitals and Sunrisers Hyderabad, but Hardik Pandya's seventh-placed side still needs to steer through mid-table traffic with several other teams in a similar situation.

Mumbai Indians were spot on with their planning an execution on a tricky pitch here at the Wankhede Stadium on which they took apart SRH's explosive batting style with precision. That surface, an uncharacteristic one for Wankhede, had turn and grip for spin as well as pace off the ball for seamers which took the fight out of SRH batters.

But such an approach against the spin-heavy CSK would not be the right way and has the potential to backfire. Noor Ahmad has thrived in CSK colours with 12 wickets in seven matches which includes his three wickets against MI earlier this season, while the five-time winners also have two seasoned exponents in Ravichandran Ashwin (5 wickets) and Ravindra Jadeja (4).

MI, however, would still have the upper hand given their current form despite having lost to CSK in their season-opener in Chepauk.

Rohit Sharma hasn't notched up a big score yet but his brisk start against SRH gave MI the impetus they needed. Tilak Varma has been on a roll and so has been Suryakumar Yadav, with Ryan Rickelton's contribution at the top and Will Jacks' all-round show giving MI the fuel for their win.

MI would be pleased with how their bowling department is finding its rhythm with Trent Boult causing a lot of trouble with his perfect execution of the yorkers in recent outings, and Jasprit Bumrah also finding his lengths in the contest against SRH. Pandya has floated well through his roles as a bowler and batter but he will continue to rely on Naman Dhir for some aggressive batting in death overs.

Karn Sharma suffered a finger webbing split while fielding against SRH and given the lack of turnaround time between matches, he is an injury concern. On their part, there are no signs yet that CSK have been able to end their troublesome run of four consecutive losses with a five-wicket win over Lucknow Super Giants. But MS Dhoni's return to the Wankhede — the venue for many battles between these teams — should spur the visiting side. Dhoni was the difference between MI and CSK the last time these two teams clashed here in 2024, with his four-ball 20 with three sixes off Pandya.

Dhoni's return as full-time skipper for the remainder of the season and CSK finding "manoeuvrability" with their bowling line-up was one positive sign for the old warhorse, who faces the task of reviving their disappointing campaign, contribute with the bat in death overs, and manage his knee injury amid all this. CSK have added former MI player Dewald Brevis but it remains to be seen if the South African batter, as well as young Mumbai recruit in Ayush Mhatre, would slide into the playing XI immediately given their limited knowledge of conditions and pitch here.

**Teams : Mumbai Indians:** Hardik Pandya (c), Rohit Sharma, Suryakumar Yadav, Robin Minz, Ryan Rickelton (wk), Shrijith Krishnan (wk), Bevon Jacobs, Tilak Varma, Naman Dhir, Will Jacks, Mitchell Santner, Raj Angad Bawa, Vignesh Puthur, Corbin Bosch, Trent Boult, Karn Sharma, Deepak Chahar, Ashwani Kumar, Reece Topley, V/S Pennemetsa, Arjun Tendulkar, Mujeeb Ur Rahman, Jasprit Bumrah.

**Chennai Super Kings:** MS Dhoni (c&wk), Dewald Brevis, Devon Conway, Rahul Tripathi, Shaik Rasheed, Vansh Bedi, Andre Siddharth, Ayush Mhatre, Rachin Ravindra, Ravichandran Ashwin, Vijay Shankar, Sam Curran, Anshul Kamboj, Deepak Hooda, Jamie Overton, Kamlesh Nagarkoti, Ramakrishna Ghosh, Ravindra Jadeja, Shivam Dube, Khaleel Ahmed, Noor Ahmad, Mukesh Choudhary, Nathan Ellis, Shreyas Gopal, Math-eesha Pathirana.

Match starts at 7:30pm IST. (PTI)

## PBKS GOING GUNS UNDER IYER'S LEADERSHIP

# RCB eye better batting effort in return clash against PBKS

**MULLANPUR (PUNJAB), April 19:** Royal Challengers Bengaluru have very little time to pick up the pieces after a debilitating loss as they eye a much-improved display from their batting unit in a return Indian Premier League match against in-form Punjab Kings here on Sunday.

With the exception of Tim David, the RCB batters had a night to forget as they slipped to 95 for nine against PBKS in Bengaluru on Friday, losing the match by five wickets.

In a rain-curtailed 14-over-a-side match, the RCB batters cut a sorry figure with the likes of Phil Salt, Virat Kohli, skipper Rajat Patidar, and Liam Livingstone failing miserably in front of their home crowd.

Patidar acknowledged the batters' failure at the Chinnaswamy Stadium.

"Initially it was sticking and two paced, but we could have done far better as a batting unit. Partnerships are important, we have lost wickets in quick intervals and that's a big lesson for us," Patidar had said after the loss against Punjab Kings.

Come Sunday, and RCB, who are placed fourth in the points table, would bank on Salt and Kohli to provide an explosive start and the onus would be on Patidar, Livingstone, Jitesh Sharma, Krunal Pandya and David to lend stability in the middle-order.

On the bowling front, Josh Hazlewood and Bhuvneshwar Kumar will be spearheading the attack but they will need a lot more support from people like Yash Dayal, Krunal and Suyash Sharma.



Despite their third loss at home, Hazlewood sought to look at the positives.

"Quite unreal schedule in the last few days, well, we're playing again tomorrow. Yeah it's something different and I think the way we went about it (defending the total) on the field was a positive,

to take wickets and put them under a little pressure and we can take that momentum to the next game," he said.

PBKS, on the other hand, are going great guns under Shreyas Iyer's leadership and are currently placed second in the standings with five wins in seven games behind table toppers Delhi Capitals.

What has stood out for PBKS this season is their bowling department.

Arshdeep Singh, Xavier

Bartlett and Marco Jansen have been brilliant on the pace front, while leg-spinner Yuzvendra Chahal has reignited himself, taking crucial wickets in the middle overs.

Chahal's attacking bowling has reaped rich dividends for PBKS, something which the team's skipper Iyer acknowledged.

"Personally I had a chat with Chahal. I told him you are a match winner and you need to get us wickets as much as possible. You don't need to be safe in your ap-

proach and he has got the capability of bouncing back. That's what we appreciate of him as a leggie," Iyer said.

As far as their batting is concerned, young Priyansh Arya, who had already hit a ton, and Prabhsimran Singh are expected to give a good start to PBKS innings.

In Iyer, Josh Inglis, Nehal Wadhara, Shashank Singh and Marcus Stoinis, PBKS boast of strong middle-order.

**Teams:**  
**Royal Challengers Bengaluru:** Rajat Patidar (c), Virat Kohli, Yash Dayal, Josh Hazlewood, Phil Salt, Jitesh Sharma (wk), Liam Livingstone, Rasikh Salam, Suyash Sharma, Krunal Pandya, Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Swapnil Singh, Tim David, Romario Shepherd, Nuwan Thushara, Manoj Bhandage, Jacob Bethel, Devdutt Padikkal, Swastik Chhikara, Lungi Ngidi, Abhinandan Singh, Mohit Rathee.

**Punjab Kings:** Shreyas Iyer (c), Priyansh Arya, Prabhsimran Singh (wk), Nehal Wadhara, Shashank Singh, Glenn Maxwell, Marcus Stoinis, Marco Jansen, Yuzvendra Chahal, Arshdeep Singh, Yash Thakur, Suryansh Shedge, Praveen Dubey, Vijaykumar Vysakh, Harpreet Brar, Azmatullah Omarzai, Josh Inglis, Xavier Bartlett, Vishnu Vinod, Aaron Hardie, Kuldeep Sen, Harmoor Singh, Musheer Khan, Pyla Avinash.

Match starts at 3.30 pm. (PTI)

## There's good depth in Indian hockey, has the ability to adapt to new tactics: Fulton

**NEW DELHI, April 19:** Impressed with talent on show at the National Championship, Indian men's hockey team chief coach Craig Fulton on Saturday said the country has great depth but the players' ability to adapt to new tactics quickly will be key, going forward.

He emphasised that the next 18 months will be crucial for creating a squad with sufficient bench strength.

Fulton, who closely monitored the recently-concluded Nationals, highlighted the competitiveness of the matches when the top teams clashed.

"When we put strength on strength, the games were very, very close. There's good depth -- particularly in goalkeeping and across the board -- which was great to see. It was also encouraging to spot players who haven't featured in the league before," Fulton was quoted as saying in a Hockey India release.

Asked about positional gaps, Fulton acknowledged the need for improvement in scoring field goals and handling various tactical scenarios.

"We want players who can move the ball effectively against both man-to-man and zonal defenses, press intelligently, and outlet under pressure.

Versatility isn't the main focus -- it's more about athleticism, game awareness, and the ability to quickly adapt to new tactics," Fulton remarked.

Commenting on regional performances, the coach observed that while winners Punjab stood out with a strong representation of international players, the top four teams overall demonstrated good balance and quality.

"Some regions were definitely stronger than others. Punjab, for instance, stood out with the highest number of international players, which gave them an edge. At the same time, there was a healthy balance of talent across the top four teams. Beyond

that, however, the depth and overall quality did dip a bit."

With a new core group being formed for the Asia Cup cycle, Fulton emphasised that the primary focus is not on age but on finding the right players for specific roles.

"It's not about bringing in more youth -- it's about identifying the right players for the right positions," he said.

"A training camp with 54 probables is scheduled soon, from which a core group of 40 players will be selected. We've been speaking about creating depth for a while now. The next 18 months are crucial in building a squad with sufficient bench strength," Fulton explained.

The coach also shed light on his scouting criteria.

"We looked at individuals, of course, but also how they operated within their team's tactical framework. The biggest attribute we assessed was defense -- both one-on-one and group defense." (PTI)

## He is one of the best bowlers in IPL: Iyer on Chahal

**BENGALURU, April 19:** Punjab Kings captain Shreyas Iyer has called Yuzvendra Chahal "one of the best bowlers" in the Indian Premier League and said he has asked the seasoned leg-spinner to always look for wickets instead of worrying over leaking runs during a "personal chat."

After a subdued start to the this edition of the T20 tournament, the Punjab Kings spinner has found his rhythm and took the wickets of Rajat Patidar and Jitesh Sharma in PKBS' five-wicket win over Royal Challengers Bengaluru here on Friday. "Personally I had a chat with Chahal. I told him you are a match winner and you need to get us wickets as much as possible. You don't need to be safe in your approach and he has got the capability of bouncing back. That's what we appreciate of him as a leggie," Iyer said.

"He is one of the best bowlers in the IPL, probably the best bowler in the IPL so far. You to back that all the time," he said after the win over RCB.

Punjab Kings produced an inch-perfect bowling effort to restrict RCB to 95 for nine in a rain-curtailed 14 overs-a-side match at the Chinnaswamy Stadium. (PTI)

## Josh Hazlewood: Master of 6m length finds new distance to hit a purple patch

**BENGALURU, April 19:** Josh Hazlewood smiled wistfully as he ran past a dumbstruck Punjab Kings skipper Shreyas Iyer after dismissing him with a climbing delivery in the channel just outside the off-stump. The moment had two layers of significance to it.

It was the third time Hazlewood had the number of Shreyas in four IPL innings, conceding just eight runs.

So, it was a personal victory for the Royal Challengers Bengaluru pacer. But more than stamping the authority over a familiar rival, it signalled the Australian's ability to learn from past mistakes.

His previous two spells at the Chinnaswamy Stadium were ordinary — 1/43 against Gujarat Titans and 0/40 against Delhi Capitals where Jos Butler and KL Rahul took him to cleaners despite the track here offering more assistance to the bowlers.

For a master metronome like Hazlewood, those punishments would have hurt his pride immensely.

But he changed the script on his third visit to the venue — 3/14 off three overs but it was a travesty that such an excellent effort ended up in a losing cause.

However, the spell was an underliner of Hazlewood's efficiency across the formats and it's based on relentless rather than magic. If you have a keen eye, then shades of Australian legend Glenn McGrath is unmistakable.

Like the 'Pigeon', Hazlewood too is a master of the 6-metre length and it's not surprising that he has close to 60 dot balls in this edition of the IPL alone.

It's an incredible stat as the 34-year-old bowls at least 12 balls in the Power Plays, and his dot ball percentage dur-



ing that phase is approximately 73 per cent.

"I find if you really hit the wicket hard on that six to eight metres, it's quite tough to bat. I think it's just about trying to read the play, read the batter," Hazlewood said in the post-match press conference.

"I think sometimes you get that sense that they're either going to come at you or sit deep and you can just make subtle changes of that length and can make a big impact," the Aussie detailed his modus operandi.

Along with his ability to adapt, the high release point makes Hazlewood a tricky customer to deal with on any kind of surface, as it allows him to find that disconcerting extra bounce.

Shreyas will vouch for that. The ball pitched slightly behind the good length but it bounced above the batter's midriff, robbing him of space to execute the cut/slash past the point fielder.

All the PBKS skipper could manage was a tame edge for Jitesh Sharma behind the stumps and now Hazlewood shares the Purple Cap with Chennai Super Kings' spinner Noor Ahmad with 12 wickets.

"Yeah, it's just, I think, trying to sense the batter and what mindset he's had and just those subtle changes when required. Yeah, potentially, I think it just could have been that balance of how hard to go," he noted.

Hazlewood has also benefited from the presence of the vastly experienced

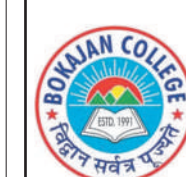
Bhuvneshwar Kumar at the other end, and the two have been the acoustic hearts of RCB new ball attack.

They operate rather similarly too — troubling batters with hard-to-notice changes in line and length.

Hazlewood accepted that. "I think to bowl with someone like Bhuv, who's been around for so long, so skilful at the start and at the end, it's great to learn from as well.

"But I think just the variety, we're all a little bit different, complement each other really well. So yeah, it's exciting," he said.

Perhaps, Hazlewood will be rewarded more suitably when RCB face Rajasthan Royals here on April 24. (PTI)



বোকাঝান মহাবিদ্যালয়

BOKAJAN COLLEGE

Affiliated to ASSAM UNIVERSITY, SILCHAR  
WARD NO. 6, BOKAJAN TOWN, PO- SUKHANJAN,  
DIST.- KARBI ANGLONG, ASSAM, PIN-782480  
<https://bokajancollege.co.in>

Ref. No: BKJ/BC/

Date : 15-04-2025

### NOTICE

It is hereby informed to all the concerned that in order to process the admission of the students into H.S.1<sup>st</sup> Year (Arts & Commerce) for the Session of 2025-26 through "DARPAN" admission portal, the college has developed an online facilitation centre. Students desirous to take admission in the college are requested to visit the college during office hours on or before 23-04-2025.

### Admission Fee (including Tuition Fee & Others)

- For BPL/Meritorious Students - Rs. 1490/-  
(Above 60% in HSLC Exam)
- For Others - Rs. 3500/-

### Documents Required

- 2 (Two) Copies Passport Size Photo
- HSLC Marksheets
- Aadhaar Card

(The Fee is for the whole Academic Session 2025-26)

- Free Text Book will be provided to all the students through GOA/KAAC.
- Scholarship to all SC/ST/OBC/Tea Tribe/Minority/Meritorious Students who fulfill the conditions laid by GOA/GOI.

LAST DATE OF ADMISSION: 23-04-2025

- For Assistance Contact the Mobile Nos. 7002630544, 6003359489, 7002511259 & 8761058976
- For more information visit <https://bokajancollege.co.in>

Sd/-  
Principal  
BOKAJAN COLLEGE