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Government of Assam

Honouring the legacy of BODOFA UPENDRA NATH BRAHMA



Shri Narendra Modi
Prime Minister



Shri Amit Shah
Home Minister & Minister
of Cooperation

Upendra Nath Brahma was a visionary leader, revered as Bodofa – the father of the Bodo people. As the proponent of Bodo identity, he inspired a generation with his tireless advocacy for well-being of the community. His legacy extends beyond his lifetime, with his birthday celebrated as **Chhatra Divas** in Assam, underscoring his profound impact as a student leader.



Born: 31-03-1956

Death: 01-05-1990

Unveiling of Statue and Naming of Road & Rotary in New Delhi

As a tribute to
Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma

by

Shri Amit Shah

Home Minister and Minister of Cooperation
Government of India

In august presence of

Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma
Chief Minister, Assam

Smt Rekha Gupta
Chief Minister, Delhi

Shri Pramod Boro
Chief Executive Member, BTR

Shri Dipen Boro
President, ABSU



Statue



Height: **9 feet**



Road

The road will start from Lala Lajpat Rai Marg and take a U turn crossing **Bodoland House** at Kailash Colony Road, further connecting Lala Lajpat Rai Marg

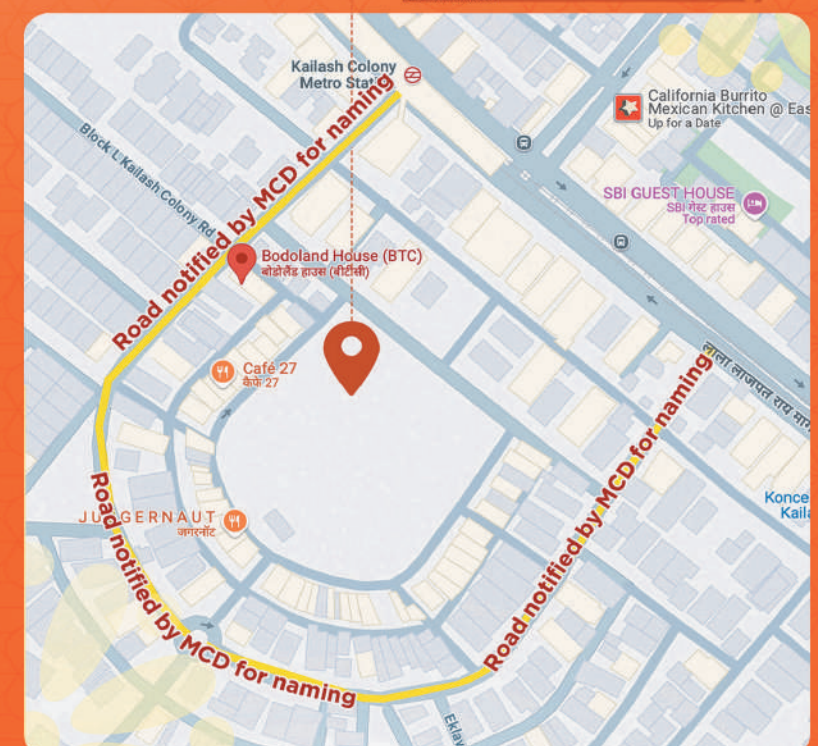


Length: **835 metres**



Width: **50 feet**

Venue



DIPR/D/HLT/8/1-May-25



1 May 2025



4 PM



Kailash Colony, New Delhi - 48

Markets settle flat as geopolitical tensions, selling in Baja twins fuel volatility

MUMBAI, April 30: Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty stayed range-bound for the second consecutive session and ended flat on Wednesday in a highly volatile trade amid escalated geopolitical tensions and selling in Bajaj twins.

Sustained foreign fund inflows, however, restricted the markets decline.

The 30-share BSE benchmark gauge declined 46.14 points or 0.06 per cent to settle at 80,242.24. During the day, it hit a high of 80,525.61 and a low of 79,879.15, gyrating 646.46 points.

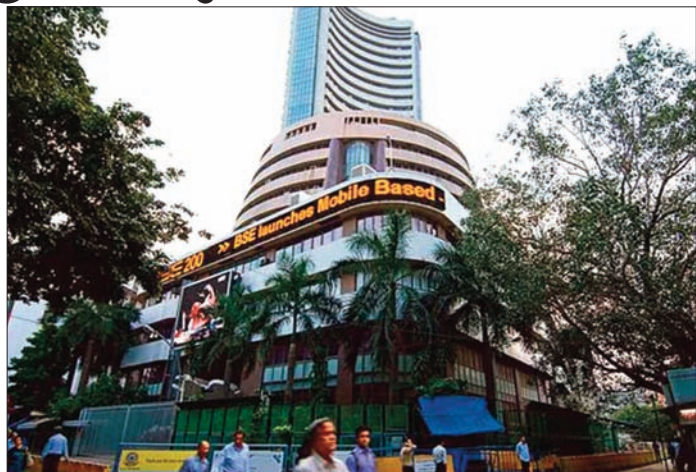
The NSE Nifty ended marginally lower by 1.75 points or 0.01 per cent at 24,334.20.

"Nifty extended its consolidation for the second consecutive session, closing flat ahead of key US economic data (Q1 GDP) today. Market sentiment remains cautious due to the ongoing India-Pakistan geopolitical concerns," said Siddhartha Khemka, Head - Research, Wealth Management, Motilal Oswal Financial Services Ltd.

From the Sensex firms, Bajaj Finserv dropped over 5 per cent, while Bajaj Finance tanked almost 5 per cent each.

Bajaj Finserv Ltd (BFL) on Tuesday reported a 14 per cent increase in consolidated net profit to ₹ 2,417 crore in the fourth quarter ended March 2025.

Meanwhile, NBFC firm Bajaj



Finance on Tuesday reported a 16 per cent rise in standalone net profit to ₹ 3,940 crore in the March 2025 quarter.

Tata Motors, State Bank of India, UltraTech Cement, Tata Consultancy Services, Tata Steel and Asian Paints were among the other laggards from the 30-share pack. Maruti, Bharti Airtel, Power Grid, Hindustan Unilever and HDFC Bank were among the gainers.

The BSE smallcap gauge tanked 1.74 per cent and midcap index declined by 0.72 per cent.

"Benchmark indices closed largely flat for the second straight session on Wednesday in a range-bound market. However, broader mid and smallcap indices closed sharply lower for the day. Markets

traded in a narrow range, digesting earnings announcements. There are no clear or strong signals from the macro side to push the markets decisively in either direction. While trade deal optimism persisted, the border situation remained tense," Satish Chandra Aluri, Analyst, Lemonn Markets Desk, said.

Among sectoral indices, industrials dropped 1.20 per cent, services (1.10 per cent), commodities (0.93 per cent), power (0.89 per cent), utilities (0.88 per cent) and financial services (0.72 per cent).

Telecommunication, auto, realty and tech were the gainers.

In Asian markets, South Korea's Kospi index and Shanghai SSE Composite settled lower while

Tokyo's Nikkei 225 and Hong Kong's Hang Seng ended higher.

Markets in Europe were quoting higher. US markets ended in the positive territory on Tuesday.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth ₹ 2,385.61 crore on Tuesday, according to exchange data.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 0.92 per cent to USD 63.66 a barrel.

The BSE benchmark climbed 70.01 points or 0.09 per cent to settle at 80,288.38 on Tuesday. The Nifty ended marginally up by 7.45 points or 0.03 per cent to 24,335.95. Both the indices gained more than 1 per cent in the preceding session on Monday.

"The broad market performed well this month, driven by reduced tariff risks, a potential US-India trade deal, and strong FII inflows. However, momentum is being capped by rising tensions between India and Pakistan and muted Q4 results. This negative bias is expected to persist in the near term, but the long-term outlook remains positive due to the minimal financial impact from the conflict. Consequently, any market consolidation is likely to be used as an investment opportunity," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Limited, said.

Equity markets will remain closed on Thursday for 'Maharashtra Day'. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 3...

APHLC leader Deori Terang

the accusations. "The opposition does nothing but hold press conferences to spread lies. They can't even organize proper meetings anymore. Instead, they call a few social media users and post their claims online," he said.

"They've accused me of giving away 1,000 acres of land to Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma — that is a lie and pure misinformation. They allege I misappropriated Forest Department funds, siphoned off crores under the guise of setting up a nursery, and claim the ED visited my house. All these are baseless," Ronghang asserted.

The BJP in Karbi Anglong has intensified its drive to induct new members, especially from the APHLC. The APHLC, led by retired civil servant J I Kathar, has been a vocal critic of the BJP and wielded considerable influence among the Christian community in Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong. Local MAC and member of parliament Amarsing Tisso, along with Rolland Killing, president of the BJP's East Karbi Anglong District Committee, were also present at the public meeting.

Tyre makers, Rubber Board to improve

Rajiv Budhbraja said. "We faced several challenges in implementing the project. The major challenge was the COVID-19 pandemic immediately after we announced the initiative. It was beyond anyone's control. That postponed everything," he added. Non-availability of planting material in the Northeast and transporting the same from Kerala consumed a huge amount of time, and it eventually slowed the project, Budhbraja said.

"The Rubber Board was the key agency in identifying the beneficiaries. This also took some time. Presently, the major challenge we are facing is the uncertain weather conditions in this region. Excessive rain is hampering the progress and delaying the project further," he added.

Tripathi said once the INROAD would be over and the region will start producing around three lakh tonnes of natural rubber, and the Northeast is estimated to contribute 40-45 per cent of the country's overall production, up from around 15 per cent at present. (PTI)

West KA tops in science in

the HS exams. Your sincerity and hardwork have paid off and I wish you the best for your future endeavours," he posted on X. "To all those who could not clear it this time, remember you can always RESTART & achieve your goals," Sarma added. (PTI)

Polling to be held in

Kamrup, Kamrup(Metro), Hojai Nagaon, Morigaon and Darrang. Seven districts of the state are under the Sixth Schedule of the constitution where autonomous council polls are held. A total electorate of 1,80,36,682, comprising 90,71,264 male, 89,65,010 female and 408 others, will exercise their franchise in 25,007 polling stations. The total seats include 21,920 Gram Panchayat (GP) members with 10,883 seats reserved for women, 2,192 GP presidents, including 1,097 reserved for women, 2,192 GP vice presidents with 1,108 for women, 181 Anchalik Parishad (AP) members with 1,124 reserved for women, 181 AP president with 98 for women, 181 AP vice president with 96 for women and 397 Zilla Parishad members with 199 seats reserved for women. (PTI)

Cabinet approves Shillong-Silchar

between Guwahati, Shillong and Silchar, traversing through Ri Bhoi, East Khasi Hills, West Jaintia Hills, East Jaintia Hills in Meghalaya and Cachar district in Assam and reduce congestion on existing NH-06 and enhance transport infrastructure development in line with the PM Gati Shakti National Master Plan.

The statement said that upon completion, the Shillong - Silchar Corridor will play a pivotal role in regional economic growth, improving connectivity between Guwahati, Shillong, Silchar, Imphal, Aizawl and Agartala.

The project aligns with the government's vision of Atmanirbhar Bharat, enhancing infrastructure while generating employment and fostering socio-economic development in Meghalaya, Assam, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura, it added. (PTI)

Indian soldiers defeat Pakistan

remained an integral and inseparable part of India. The conflict ended with India successfully defending strategic territories and establishing the Line of Control (LoC)," Sarma said. Regarding the Indo-Pak War of 1965, he said that Pakistan launched the deceitful "Operation Gibraltar," infiltrating Kashmir and subsequently escalating into full-scale war.

Indian forces courageously repelled the invasion and carried out daring counter-attacks deep inside Pakistani territory, capturing key areas including the strategic Haji Pir Pass. The enemy's dreams of victory crumbled before India's determined military might, and the conflict ended in tactical victory and moral ascendancy for India," the chief minister said.

The Indo-Pak War of 1971 (Bangladesh Liberation War) showcased the "extraordinary courage, strategy, and humanitarian spirit" of the Indian Armed Forces, he said.

"Responding to the Pakistani army's genocide and the influx of millions of refugees from East Pakistan, Indian forces launched one of the most rapid and decisive military operations in modern history. Within just 13 days, our armed forces secured an overwhelming victory, resulting in the surrender of 93,000 Pakistani soldiers and the liberation of Bangladesh. The subsequent Simla Agreement (1972) reaffirmed India's diplomatic and strategic supremacy," Sarma said.

Referring to the 1999 Kargil War, Sarma alleged Pakistan had deceitfully occupied strategic peaks in Kargil, 'seeking advantage through stealth'. But the Indian army's response was "swift, brave, and determined", he said.

"Battling harsh mountainous terrain and freezing temperatures, our soldiers reclaimed every inch of territory with remarkable valour, forcing Pakistan into a humiliating retreat. This clear victory underscored once again India's unwavering commitment to territorial integrity," he added.

The Assam chief minister has been making posts against Pakistan on social media since the Pahalgam terror attack on April 22, which claimed the lives of 26 people, mostly tourists. (PTI)

21 MLAs urge PM Modi,

The letters stated, "The people of Manipur welcomed the President's rule...with lots of hope and expectations. It's going to be almost three months since the President's rule was imposed, but no visible actions to bring peace and normalcy are seen so far."

"There is strong apprehension among the people that the violence may reoccur in the state. Many civil organisations have come out openly against the imposition of the President's rule. They have been demanding installation of a popular government in the state," it said.

The legislators claimed in the April 10 letter that these organisations have started "holding public rallies, street corner meetings, instigating the general public, blaming the ruling MLAs for not staking claim to form a popular government and fixing responsibility for the imposition of PR (President's rule) in Manipur". The letters were received separately by the Prime Minister's Office and the Ministry of Home Affairs on April 29 and made public on Wednesday, one of the legislators said.

The MLAs also said, "We feel that the installation of a popular government is the only means to bring peace and normalcy in Manipur." They requested the PM and the home minister to "take necessary steps to install a popular government at the earliest in the interests of the people of Manipur. We assure you that we will work with full dedication and devotion to bring peace and normalcy after installation of a popular government".

However, Manipur Pradesh Congress Committee president Keisham Meghachandra Singh criticised the 21 MLAs for writing the letter to the Centre, bypassing the governor. He alleged that these legislators bypassed the Constitutional route in their "attempt to form a government in the state", currently under the President's Rule.

Meghachandra accused the MLAs of political insincerity and questioned their seriousness about ensuring democratic governance in the state.

In a post on X, Meghachandra said, "These legislators, who should have gone to Raj Bhavan in Imphal to stake claim a formation of a new government, had chosen to write not to the Manipur Governor. Instead, they chose to write to the Prime Minister and the Union Home Minister. The state is placed under President's Rule. Their actions show that they are not serious about meeting the Governor to stake claim to the new government in Manipur."

He emphasised that the political will of the people of Manipur must "not be reduced to a matter of convenience for ruling parties".

"The mandate of the people of Manipur can't be played for their political convenience. The people of Manipur want a change. The people of Manipur want a new alternative", the Congress leader said, adding, "We must honour the new alternative and the change that the people of Manipur will bring for our better future." (PTI)

Every Assam citizen will stand

Mankachar. Our people were living with a sense of insecurity earlier," he said. Stating that Assembly elections are due early next year, Sarma exhorted people to remain united and continue supporting the BJP.

"Our people have to be together. We have to be strong politically. If we commit the slightest mistake, we will return to the days of Congress," he said, alleging that guns and blasts were daily affairs under the previous regimes.

"Now, Assamese and tribal people are sharing the same platform. There is no dispute between Assamese-speaking and Bengali-speaking people, or between Bengali-speaking and Hindi-speaking people. We have come to know who is our real enemy and have to be united against them," he said, hitting out at the Congress.

He claimed that though people from the minority communities vote for the Congress at times, this time they will not support the opposition party. "People from the minority community should understand that there have been no communal riots under the BJP government," he claimed.

The chief minister also spoke on the welfare schemes being implemented by the government, including providing free foodgrains, cashless medical treatment, free higher education and incentives for youth and women. "We have to strengthen our state further and for that, we seek your continued support for the BJP," Sarma added. (PTI)

Amit Shah to unveil statue

signifies growing national recognition of Bodofa's leadership and vision. "This event is a landmark moment, honouring Bodofa's contributions beyond regional boundaries and elevating his legacy to the national stage," said Boro.

The people of the Bodoland Territorial Region are eagerly awaiting this historic occasion. Tomorrow, May 1, 2025, Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma's legacy will be immortalised in our nation's capital through the unveiling of his statue and the naming of a major road in Kailash Colony as Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma Marg. This day will forever be remembered as a proud and historic moment for the people of Bodoland and Assam,"

India's gold demand falls 15 pc in Jan-Mar to 118.1 tonnes on high prices: WGC

NEW DELHI, April 30: India's gold demand witnessed a 15 per cent on-year decline to 118.1 tonnes in the January-March quarter of this year, even as value grew by 22 per cent to ₹ 94,030 crore due to surging prices, the World Gold Council (WGC) said on Wednesday.

According to the WGC forecast, India's gold demand for 2025 is expected to be between 700-800 tonnes. Gold prices have risen 25 per cent since the beginning of 2025, approaching the key psychological threshold of ₹ 1,00,000 per 10 grams, affecting consumer buying patterns. "The elevated prices have impacted affordability. Yet, the enduring cultural significance of gold, especially ahead of Akshaya Tritiya and the upcoming wedding season, continues to support buying sentiment," WGC India CEO Sachin Jain said in its quarterly report.

According to experts, the gold market is humming with excitement on the auspicious occasion of Akshaya Tritiya, which holds immense cultural significance in India, traditionally marking a surge in gold purchases.

Record prices have pushed consumers towards smaller, lightweight pieces, with some postponing purchases hoping for price dips. Despite this, wedding-related demand remained relatively stable given its essential nature.

Experts believe, while the current price levels might prompt some to exercise caution, the inherent cultural significance of gold during Akshaya Tritiya, coupled with its enduring status as a reliable asset, suggests continued positive momentum in buying, they added.

Investment demand, however, remained resilient with a 7 per cent rise to 46.7 tonnes, from 43.6 tonnes in the corresponding period. (PTI)

Meta launches AI app, Zuckerberg chats with Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella at developer conference

CALIFORNIA, (US) April 30: Working to differentiate itself in the crowded field of artificial intelligence, Meta Platforms has launched a standalone AI app — with a social media component — to compete with OpenAI's ChatGPT.

The Meta AI app, built with the company's Llama 4 AI system. It includes a "discover" feed that lets users see how others are interacting with AI. It also has a voice mode for interacting with the AI.

"It's smart for Meta to differentiate its ChatGPT competitor by drawing from the company's social media roots. The app's Discover feed is like a version of the OG Facebook Feed but only focused on AI use cases," said Forrester research director Mike Prox.

By letting users link their Facebook and Instagram accounts, the Meta AI app "gets a leg up on instantly personalising its user experience with social media context."



Meta has taken a different approach to AI than many of its rivals, releasing it for free as an open-source product. The company says more than a billion people use its AI products each month.

At the Menlo Park, California-based tech giant's inaugural conference, LlamaCon, on Tuesday Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg chat-

ted with Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella in a technical discussion around the speed of AI development and how the technology is shifting both their companies — where AI is already writing code — as well as the world.

Acknowledging there is a lot of "hype" around AI, Zuckerberg said "if this is going to lead to massive



(interest) and agricultural income up to ₹ 5,000 a year.

Sugam can be filed by individuals, Hindu Undivided Families (HUFs) and firms (other than Limited Liability Partnerships (LLPs)) having total annual income up to ₹ 50 lakh and income from business and profession.

ITR-2 is filed by individuals and HUFs not having income from profits and gains in business or profession.

Sandeep Jhunjhunwala, Tax Partner at Nangia Andersen LLP said so far salaried individuals having income under the head capital gains were required to file form ITR-2 even where the capital gains were exempt by virtue of the threshold limit prescribed under Section 112A, resulting in elaborate disclosure requirements including information about accrual or receipt of capital gain, details of securities etc.

This inconvenience is reduced with the new form ITR-1 for AY 2025-26 incorporating a small section for reporting the income in the nature of LTCG on which tax is not payable by virtue of the exemption limit provided in Section 112A.

"However, in cases, where the taxpayer earns LTCG under Section 112A in excess of ₹ 125,000 or where the taxpayer earns any other LTCG other than that taxable under Section 112A or earns short term capital gains or has carried forward or brought forward capital losses or derived income from any combination of the above, the salaried individual would have to resort to Form ITR-2 for filing return of income," Jhunjhunwala said.

A similar change has been made to form ITR-4 which applies to taxpayers resorting to presumptive taxation for their business income. The new ITR-4 form for AY 2025-26 subsumes reporting of LTCG subject to tax under Section 112A of the IT Act within the limit of ₹ 1.25 lakh.

AKM Global Partner-Tax Sandeep Sehgal said, "this change streamlines the tax filing process, making it more accessible and less burdensome for small investors and salaried individuals, thereby encouraging timely and accurate compliance". (PTI)

increases in productivity, that needs to be reflected in major increases in GDP."

"This is going to take some multiple years, many years, to play out," Zuckerberg said. "I'm curious how you think, what's your current outlook on what we should be looking for to understand the progress that this is making?"

Nadella brought up the advent of electricity, saying that "AI has the promise, but you now have to sort of really have it deliver the real change in productivity — and that requires software and also management change, right? Because in some sense, people have to work with it differently."

He said it took 50 years before people figured out to change how factories operated with electricity.

Zuckerberg replied "well we're all investing as if it's not going to take 50 years, so I hope it doesn't take 50 years." (AP)

Assam HS results out: Pass percentage down ● Girls outshine boys

West KA tops in science in 100% pass percentage

GUWAHATI, April 30: Girls outshone boys in the Assam state board conducted class 12 examinations, even as the overall pass percentage in all streams dipped compared to last year.

The results were declared on Wednesday. The Assam State School Education Board (ASSEB), formed last year following the merger of two previous entities that conducted the class 10 and 12 board exams, had conducted the test in February-March.

The Arts stream, which had the maximum number of candidates, recorded a pass percentage of 81.03, a decrease from 88.36 per cent last year.

In Science, 84.88 per cent students cleared the exam, compared



to 89.88 per cent in 2024. The percentage of successful candidates in Commerce stream was 82.18, down

from 87.66 per cent the previous year. The pass percentage of girls was 82.95 in Arts, 85.54 in Science

and 82.40 per cent in Commerce.

For boys, the pass percentage was 78.4, 84.39 and 82.08 in Arts, Science and Commerce, respectively. West Karbi Anglong and South Salmara registered the highest pass percentage in Science and Commerce streams, respectively, with 100 per cent of the candidates clearing the exam.

In Arts, Baksa district topped the list with 94.21 per cent candidates clearing the exam. The vocational courses recorded a pass percentage of 68.55. Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma congratulated the successful students and urged those who could not clear it to work harder. "Congratulations to all the students who have successfully cleared (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Polling to be held in 14 dists tomorrow

Campaigning for first phase of panchayat poll ends

GUWAHATI, April 30: Campaigning for the first phase of panchayat polls in Assam, scheduled for May 2, in 14 districts of the state ended on Wednesday.

Polling in the first phase will be held in the districts of Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Charaideo, Sivasagar, Majuli, Jorhat, Golaghat, Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, Sonitpur, Biswanath, Cachar, Hailakandi and Sribhum.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma led the campaign trail for the ruling NDA along with Union minister Sarbananda Sonowal and BJP state president Dilip Saikia.

Congress Deputy leader in Lok Sabha, Gaurav Gogoi, Congress MPs Pradyut Bordoloi and Rakibul Hussain along with party's state unit president Bhupen Borah campaigned for the party candidates.

Panchayat elections will be held in two phases on May 2 and 7 in 27 districts for the first time after the delimitation of the constituencies in the state.

Polling will be held on both days from 7:30 am to 4:30 pm and repoll, if any, for the first phase will be held on May 4 and for the second phase on May 9.

The counting of votes for both phases will be held simultaneously on May 11.



A total of 348 Zila Parishad and Anchalik Parishad candidates have already been elected uncontested with the ruling NDA establishing a lead with 325 seats, according to the Assam State Election Commission.

The NDA has already secured 37 Zila Parishad (35 BJP and 2 AGP) and 288 Anchalik Panchayat (259 BJP and 29 AGP) seats unopposed. Independents have won 15 Anchalik Parishad seats, the Congress nine and the AIUDF one seat uncontested.

In the second phase, polling will be held at Dhubri, South Salmara, Mankachar, Goalpara, Bongaigaon, Barpeta, Bajali, Nalbari, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Cabinet approves Shillong-Silchar highway project at an estimated cost of ₹ 22,864 cr

NEW DELHI, April 30: The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved the development of a 166.80 km greenfield high-speed corridor from Mawlyngkhung in Meghalaya to Panchgram in Assam on hybrid annuity mode at a total cost of ₹ 22,864 crore.

According to an official statement, the project length of 166.80 km (NH-6) lies in Meghalaya (144.80 km) and Assam (22 km).

"The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has approved the proposal for the development, maintenance and management of four-lane greenfield access-controlled 166.80 km of National Highway No 06 from Mawlyngkhung (near Shillong) in Meghalaya to Panchgram (near Silchar) in Assam on hybrid annuity mode...at a total capital cost of ₹

22,864 crore," it added.

The proposed greenfield high-speed corridor will improve the service level for the traffic moving between Guwahati to Silchar, it noted.

"The development of this corridor will improve the connectivity to Tripura, Mizoram, Manipur and the Barak Valley region of Assam from mainland and Guwahati with substantially reduced travel

distance and travel time," it said, adding that this will, in turn, contribute to the enhancement of logistics efficiency of the nation.

The corridor will improve connectivity between Assam and Meghalaya and spur economic development, including the development of industries in Meghalaya, as it passes through the cement and coal production areas of Meghalaya.

As per the statement, this corridor will cater to the national and international tourists coming from well-connected Guwahati Airport, Shillong Airport, and Silchar Airport (via existing NH-06), connecting Guwahati to Silchar. This would connect scenic places of tourist attraction in the Northeast and promote tourism. This critical infrastructure project will improve inter-city connectivity (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Indian soldiers defeat Pakistan each time it dares to challenge country's unity, strength: Himanta

GUWAHATI, April 30: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday said that each time Pakistan dared to 'challenge India's unity and integrity', Indian soldiers courageously rose to the occasion and defeated the enemy to uphold the country's pride.

His comment comes at a time when Pakistani troops engaged in unprovoked firing along the Line of Control (LoC) and the International Border (IB) in multiple sectors across four districts of Jammu and Kashmir, prompting Indian forces to "respond effectively".

This marked the sixth consecutive night of ceasefire violations by Pakistan along the LoC, amidst heightened tensions between New Delhi and Islamabad following a recent terror attack in Pahalgalam on

April 22. "India-Pakistan Wars: A Legacy of Indian Valor and Triumph—since independence, India's brave armed forces have repeatedly stood tall, defending our nation's sovereignty against Pakistani aggression," the chief minister posted on 'X'.

"Each time Pakistan dared to challenge India's unity and integrity, our soldiers courageously rose to the occasion, decisively defeating the enemy and upholding India's pride," he said.

Sarma went on to highlight the four wars fought between the two countries—the Indo-Pak War of 1947-49, the 1965 war, the 1971 war leading to the creation of Bangladesh and the Kargil War of 1999. "Every Indo-Pak conflict underscores one enduring truth:

whenever India faced aggression, our soldiers stood fearless, undefeated, and unwavering in their resolve," he asserted.

The CM also said that this legacy of courage and sacrifice continues to inspire every Indian citizen. "Our armed forces remain vigilant, committed to protecting India's sovereignty and dignity under all circumstances. Jai Hind!", Sarma said.

Referring to the Indo-Pak War of 1947-1949 (First Kashmir War), he said that when Pakistan 'treacherously invaded Jammu & Kashmir soon after independence, India responded swiftly and heroically'.

"Our soldiers executed the historic airlift operation to Srinagar, safeguarding the valley and ensuring Kashmir (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

21 MLAs urge PM Modi, HM Shah to form 'popular govt' in Manipur to bring peace

IMPHAL, April 30: Twenty-one Manipur MLAs have written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah separately, urging them to form a "popular government" in the northeastern state, which is now under the President's rule, to ensure peace and normalcy.

The Centre had on February 13 imposed the President's rule in Manipur, where more than 250 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in ethnic violence between Meiteis and Kuki-Zo groups since May 2023.

The imposition of the President's rule came after chief minister N Biren Singh resigned. The state assembly, which has a



tenure till 2027, has been put under suspended animation.

The letters, containing the same appeal, were signed by 13

BJP MLAs, 3 NPP legislators, 3 Naga Peoples' Front MLAs and two independent members of the assembly. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Every Assam citizen will stand behind armed forces in event of war with Pakistan: CM

GUWAHATI, April 30: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday asserted that every citizen of the state would stand firmly behind the country's armed forces in the event of a war with Pakistan following the Pahalgalam terror attack.

He said the next couple of months would be critical for the country, and the people of this northeastern state would offer help in every way possible.

"We all know how Pakistani terrorists killed innocent people at Pahalgalam last week. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has said the terrorists will be pursued to the ends of the world, and our armed forces will serve them justice," Sarma said, addressing a panchayat election rally in Goalpara.

"We don't know whether there will be a war between Bharat and Pakistan, but if

there is one, each person of Assam will stand with our armed forces and with Prime Minister Modi," he affirmed.

Sarma maintained that the next one or two months will be a 'testing time' for the country and said, "We have to put the 'Vijay tilak' (sign of victory) on Bharat Mata's forehead. During elections, we may support one party or the other, but when it comes to war, we are all Indians first. We have to pray and help in every way possible." The CM further said peace and harmony among all communities have been ensured under the BJP-led state government.

"After the BJP government came to power, our indigenous people started feeling secured. They are happier. All communities are living peacefully in places like Dhubri, Goalpara, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Amit Shah to unveil statue of Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma in New Delhi

HT Correspondent KOKRAJHAR, April 30: The Kailash Colony in New Delhi is set to witness the inauguration of Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma Marg and the unveiling of a statue of Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma, the former president of the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU), on Thursday, May 1.

The inauguration coincides with the 35th death anniversary of Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma and is being organised with grand public participation. The event marks a significant recognition of the Bodo community's contributions at the national level. Notably, this will be the second roadway in New Delhi named after a prominent Assamese figure, following one named after Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi.

Preparations and arrangements for the event were completed by Tuesday evening. Union home minister and minister of Cooperation, Amit Shah, will inaugurate the newly named street and unveil the statue in honour of Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma in the heart of the national capital.

According to an official notification issued by the Office of the Superintending Engineer-I, South Zone, MCD, the road stretch from Lala Lajpat Rai Marg near Kailash Colony Metro Station (A-18, Kailash Colony) to Lala Lajpat Rai Marg near A-5/A-6, Kailash Colony, will now be known as Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma Marg.

Shah will grace the occasion as the chief guest. Chief Minister Himanta

Biswa Sarma and Delhi chief minister Rekha Gupta will attend as special guests. Pramod Boro, chief executive member (CEM) of the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR), and Raja Iqbal Singh, Mayor of Delhi, will join as Guests of Honour.

The government of the Bodoland Territorial Region, in collaboration with the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU), is organising the anniversary event with a day-long programme to celebrate Bodofa's life, legacy, and contributions.

CEM Pramod Boro stated that the tribute honours Bodofa's lifelong commitment to the upliftment of marginalised communities, the promotion of democratic values, and the advocacy of community rights. He added that the commemoration (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

APHLC leader Deori Terang joins BJP in Karbi Anglong



HT Bureau

DIPHU, April 30: In a further blow to the regional party All Party Hills Leaders Conference (APHLC), prominent leader Deori Terang joined the BJP during a mass induction event held at Disobai playground in the Member of Autonomous Council (MAC) constituency of Karbi Anglong.

Reacting to the development, Chief Executive Member (CEM) Tuliram Ronghang said the BJP's growing popularity has prompted

members of opposition parties — including the Congress, APHLC, and the Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC) — to switch sides.

"Even the entire Mahila Congress unit of West Karbi Anglong has joined the BJP," he added.

Responding to allegations from the opposition over corruption, an alleged ED raid, illegal coal mining, and the construction of a lavish house in Diphu, Ronghang dismissed (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Tyre makers, Rubber Board to improve skills, infra for farmers

'We faced several challenges in implementing the project'

GUWAHATI, April 30: A joint initiative of tyre manufacturers and the Rubber Board of India has been rolled out across the Northeast region and West Bengal to improve the quality of rubber farmers' produce by imparting training and building infrastructure over the next five years, officials said on Wednesday.

The programme is a part of the ongoing ₹ 1,100-crore project Indian Natural Rubber Operations for Assisted Development (INROAD) and is named 'iSPEED', which will entail an additional amount of ₹ 145 crore, they said.

INROAD entails the development of two lakh ha of rubber plantation in the Northeastern states and West Bengal, financially supported by Apollo Tyres, CEAT, JK Tyre and MRF, and it is being implemented by the Rubber Board of India in association with the Automotive Tyre Manufacturers' Association (ATMA).

"The project, iSPEED, is a five-year commitment to directly benefit over two lakh smallholder rubber farmers and nursery owners across the Northeast and West Bengal by imparting structured skill training, deploying modern infrastructure and improving quality standards at source," ATMA chairman Arun Mammen said.

The industry body is investing in the knowledge and capabilities of the rubber growers, empowering smallholders with scientific know-how, sustainable practices and shared infrastructure, he added.

Rubber cultivation in the Northeast has grown significantly under the INROAD project with over 1.36 lakh new growers taking up plantation in the past four years, an official said.

However, limited access to scientific tapping techniques, lack of quality processing infrastructure and disease management continue to impact the yields, he said.



To address these gaps, iSPEED will support the deployment of 3,000 smokehouses for high-quality sheet production, 3,000 sheet rolling machines, model nurseries and demonstration units across key field stations, processing and grading centres for post-harvest management and a network of lead farmers to support community-based knowledge transfer.

The ATMA chairman had on Monday and Tuesday launched the initiative formally by inaugurating a few smokehouses in Tripura and Assam, tailor-made for the region and created using local materials.

The Rubber Board will be the primary implementation partner for iSPEED, supported by regional institutions like Tripura University and other domain experts.

Commenting on the development, INROAD chairman Pravin Tripathi said: "With INROAD laying the foundation, iSPEED will bring the momentum. We are building rural infrastructure and skilling models that will outlast the project cycle and create sustainable value for growers."

Since the majority of beneficiaries of the project are small landholders with holdings of less than one acre, INROAD is encouraging group approach for creating infrastructure so that the entire community is empowered, he added.

Over 1.25 lakh hectares of rubber plantation have been completed in Northeast and West Bengal as part of the INROAD project by four leading tyre manufacturers of the country.

The INROAD project, which was scheduled to be completed in five years, got delayed and will be over in six years, ATMA director general (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

QUOTE OF THE DAY

People change and forget to tell each other
—Lillian Hellman

Closing energy transition gap

Asia and Pacific region's energy mix is central to achieving global net-zero targets, but it has a 20 per cent higher emission intensity than the global average. The rising energy demand, reliance on coal power generation, energy import dependence, and depth of energy-intensive manufacturing, and hard-to-abate sectors such as aluminium, cement, shipping, and trucking even make the region's energy transition more challenging. "Energy Transition Readiness Assessment (ETRA) for Developing Asia and the Pacific" by Asian Development Bank says that in such a situation most developing countries require significant efforts to close the energy transition gaps. ETRA has made this significant observation in the backdrop of the region's being the home to 52 per cent of world's population, 35 per cent of GDP, 41 per cent of global energy consumption, and 46 per cent of the world's greenhouse gas emissions. Most developing Asian countries face challenges in balancing economic growth, energy security, sustainability, and socioeconomic equity. Developing Asia's energy transition hinges on a resilient energy system relying on two key pillars – reduced dependence on fossil fuels, and enhanced energy security. Its energy sector accounts for three-quarters of the region's greenhouse gas emissions. Coal power generation accounted for 48% of the total energy supply and 57% of the electricity generation in the region in 2022. Nevertheless, phasing out coal power generation by a 2050–2060 timeline is challenging for two reasons. First, coal-fired power plants (CFPPs) in the region are relatively young. The residual life of coal producing plants in 2022 shows 6.9 years in Uzbekistan, 26.2 years in India, and the highest 37.8 years in Bangladesh. Eleven countries have residual life of their coal plants between India's and Bangladesh.

Second, many countries rely heavily on coal power generation as coal power continues to be a cheaper resource. The early retirement of CFPPs is possible but would require appropriate carbon pricing, frameworks for transition finance, and substantial amounts of concessional funding while ensuring a just transition for those adversely impacted by coal phase out. While more needs to be done, developing Asia is making clear progress toward a massive renewable energy capacity build-out. Of the 26 assessed countries, in 2022, the share of new renewable energy capacity exceeded 75% in nine countries, including the PRC, India, and Kazakhstan. Balancing economic development and sustainability is key to developing Asia's energy transition aspiration. However, the region scores below the world and advanced economy medians for the energy economy linkages dimension, implying widespread challenges in separating economic growth from energy consumption and emissions. Many countries need to address inefficient energy production and consumption, high emissions per economic output, and slow adoption of energy-efficient technologies critical for a sustainable transition.

Energy trade in the low-carbon technology products from developing Asia has increased, with the PRC setting benchmarks for the rest of the region. However, the decarbonization of energy-intensive manufacturing must be prioritized by improving energy efficiency, directly and/or indirectly electrifying activities with renewable power, and shifting toward inherently less energy-consuming economic activity, ETRA says. The quality of energy infrastructure still lags considerably compared to advanced economies due to overloaded power transmission and distribution lines.

Kashmir's shattered calm: The aftermath of the Pahalgam massacre



On the evening of April 22, 2025, a brutal massacre unfolded amidst the serene meadows of Baisaran in Pahalgam, claiming the lives of 25 unsuspecting tourists and a local pony operator. Barely had the news broken when a palpable wave of grief and anger swept through Kashmir. In Srinagar's Maisuma Bazaar – historically associated with intense political protests – a young shopkeeper, Riaz Bhatt, mobilised a spontaneous crowd, calling for a candlelight march at the iconic Lal Chowk. In a valley that has witnessed decades of bloodshed, this massacre felt different. It wasn't just another tragic headline; it was a visceral blow to the collective soul of Kashmir.

"Kashmir could not have remained silent this time," said Riaz. His sentiments reflected a rare, genuine, and unified outcry. The massacre at Baisaran wasn't merely another statistic in Kashmir's long chronicle of violence; it was a profound violation that shook the Valley to its core. Streets that had once echoed with separatist slogans now bore witness to silent candlelight vigils, voluntary shutdowns, and heartfelt prayers. From Srinagar to Kupwara and Budgam, Kashmiris – ordinary citizens, political leaders, traders – stood united in mourning.

Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, a key figure in the Hurriyat Conference, aptly captured the mood: "The brutality of the act targeting innocent civilians was so shocking, so inhuman, that it touched every heart." Sheikh Ashiq of the Awami Ittehad Party echoed this emotion, noting how even households that had weathered decades of turmoil now wept collectively, mourning the loss as if it were their own.

The emotional outpouring was notably distinct from the politically-charged protests of the past. This time, the people's grief was spontaneous and personal, untethered from politics or ideology. The massacre rekindled painful memories from past tragedies. In the Sikh village of Chittisinghpura, just 50 km away from Pahalgam, Nanak Singh, a survivor of the horrific 2000 killings where 35 Sikhs were gunned down, found himself trapped in a haunting déjà vu. "We couldn't eat, couldn't sleep. It was as if we were witnessing again what had happened that fateful night," he lamented, his voice breaking under the weight of memory.

Joginder Singh, another resident of Chittisinghpura, bitterly noted how little respect the perpetrators of such atrocities had for human life. As with Chittisinghpura, so now with Baisaran: the victims were innocents, caught in the crosshairs of an ideology that respected neither innocence nor humanity.

Beyond the immediate grief and mourning, the massacre has cast a long and dark shadow over Kashmir's fledgling tourism resurgence. The Valley had been experiencing an unprecedented boom. In 2024 alone, a record 2.36 crore tourists,

including foreign visitors and pilgrims to Amarnath and Vaishno Devi, flocked to the Union Territory. The Centre's aggressive tourism promotion drive post the abrogation of Article 370 had started yielding tangible results: bustling markets, full hotels, and thriving local businesses.

However, within hours of the attack, Kashmir's flourishing tourist season came to a screeching halt. Images and videos of the carnage went viral, painting a picture of terror that no public relations campaign could easily erase. "Today, it is the time of social media. Everything spreads fast. What we saw was just barbarism," said Mush-taq Pahalgami, head of the Pahalgam Hotel and Guest House Owners Association.

Where once Pahalgam teemed with tourists, today it wears a desolate look. Pony ride operators like Ishfaq, who until days ago were too busy to sit down for a meal, now loiter aimlessly, their livelihoods shattered overnight. Dal Lake in Srinagar, usually brimming with colourful shikaras ferrying excited visitors, is now eerily silent. Boatman Aijaz Ahmed be-

moaned, "For the last two days, I haven't got a single customer. Everything seems to be finished."

Even the famed Tulip Gardens, a major seasonal attraction, stand deserted. Gulmarg, Sonmarg, and other picturesque locales that once buzzed with activity are now ghost towns. A few tourists, like Rashmi Sonwalkar from Pune, who decided to stay on, are haunted by apprehension. "We dropped Pahalgam from our itinerary. Fear is difficult to overcome," she admitted.

Tourism stakeholders are struggling to cope. Rauf Trambo, president of the Travel Agents Association of Kashmir, admitted that the tourist season for April and May has been effectively lost. Yet he remains cautiously optimistic for a recovery by June – provided, of course, that the confidence of tourists can be restored.

In a bid to counter the negative narrative and rekindle hope, the Kashmir Chamber of Commerce and Industry is finalising an outreach campaign. "Our teams will meet families of the victims across the country and convey that Kashmir mourns with them," said Faiz Ahmed Bakshi, the body's secretary general. "We will also urge tourists to return – it's their land as much as it's ours."

But the road to recovery will not be easy. Many in Kashmir are deeply concerned about how the mainstream media's portrayal of the incident might further alienate Kashmiris across the country. "This has never happened before. The whole of Kashmir has condemned the attack. Yet, some media houses are fuelling fear. They should help bridge divides, not widen them," lamented Srinagar-based tour operator Farooq Ahmad Kathoo.

The safety of Kashmiris outside the state is also a growing concern. "If we want our children, studying and working in other parts of the

country, to be safe, we must resist narratives that portray Kashmiris negatively," said Trambo, highlighting how the fallout of the tragedy extends far beyond tourism.

Adding to the confusion and public anger is the lack of clarity regarding potential security lapses. Reports suggest that Baisaran was opened for tourists on April 20 without adequate security arrangements or prior intimation to the forces. This has raised troubling questions about administrative oversight, especially in an area that has seen intermittent militant activity in the past.

The massacre and its aftermath have brought Kashmir to yet another crossroads. For a region so often caught between violence and hope, between despair and resilience, this latest tragedy is a harsh reminder of its fragile stability. Just as Kashmir had begun to shed its image as a conflict zone and rebrand itself as a tourist paradise, the Pahalgam massacre yanked it back into an all-too-familiar cycle of fear and uncertainty.

Yet, amid the grief and loss, there is also resilience. The spontaneous protests, the widespread shutdowns, the heartfelt condemnation across religious and political divides – all are testament to a people who refuse to be defined by violence. Kashmir's spirit, though battered, remains unbroken.

It is now up to the leadership – in Delhi, in Srinagar, and across civil society – to ensure that the Valley's aspirations for peace, prosperity, and normalcy are not extinguished by the actions of a few. The tragedy of Pahalgam must not be allowed to define Kashmir's future. Instead, it must serve as a rallying cry for a renewed commitment to humanity, unity, and lasting peace. (The writer can be reached at dipakurmigpltd@gmail.com)

A brief on Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region and their initiatives

(... continued from last edition)

By: Diganta Barooah

Achievements under Schemes of MDoNER : Sanctioned Projects for NE States

In the year 2024 till 15th December a total number of 86 Projects worth ₹ 1970.54 crore have been sanctioned and ₹ 1590.81 crore have been released under various Schemes of MDoNER viz. North East Special Infrastructure Development Scheme-Other Than Roads Infrastructure (NESIDS-OTRI), North East Special Infrastructure Development Scheme – Roads (NESIDS-Roads), Prime Minister's Development Initiative for North East Region (PM-DevINE), Schemes of NEC and Special Development Packages.

Poorvottar Vikas Setu portal:

This portal has been developed to digitize the process for submission of concept notes and DPRs to MDoNER for expeditious processing of proposals. This has also ensured proper tracking of all proposals received from State Governments.

PM Gati Shakti Portal:

MDoNER has created its own instance of the PM Gati Shakti portal which contains the geotagged details of all the ongoing and completed projects. Post sanction processes of all the ongoing projects are monitored through this portal.

Expenditure under 10% Gross Budgetary Support for NE Region

As per the extant policy of the Government, all non-exempted Central Ministries/Departments (currently 54) are mandated to spend at least 10% of their Gross Budgetary Support (GBS) of Central Sector and Centrally Sponsored Schemes for North Eastern Region (NER). Regular quarterly review meetings at the level of Hon'ble Minister / Secretary, MDoNER are being held to ensure that all Ministries spend the mandatory 10% of their GBS in the North Eastern Region. Meeting with the Ministries/Departments which are not able to spend as per their target are being held separately in order to expedite the implementation of the projects and also the expenditures.

Focus on NER- Fortnightly Visit of Union Ministers to NE States :

In order to accelerate the pace of development in North Eastern Region and to maximize the efficacy of the projects/schemes being implemented by the Government in the region, it was decided that each North Eastern State will be visited by a Union Minister in every 15 days. MDoNER anchors and coordinates these visits by nominating Union Ministers for visiting NE States by rotation every month, since 2015. From January, 2015 to 31st November 2024, Union Ministers visited NER for more than 723 times. These visits are coordinated and monitored through "Poorvottar Sampark Setu" portal, which provides valuable insights and graphical information about State-wise/ District-wise visits of Union Ministers in NER. Action taken on the recommendation of Union Ministers during these visits is reviewed by

MoS, MDoNER from time to time.

Setting up of various Task Forces: Agarwood Task Force:

Agar is one of the world's most valuable trees, native to North East Region (NER) used for medicine and fragrance purposes. The agarwood sector in the NER holds significant promise for economic growth and international trade. Recognizing its potential, an Inter-Ministerial Task Force (IMTF) was constituted by Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (MDoNER) to streamline and enhance the agarwood industry in the region towards sustainable development and global competitiveness.

Tourism Task Force:

To develop one world-class tourism site per NE state to attract global visitors; establish GI status for 200 unique products in NER and foster cultural identity and brand recognition, Inter-ministerial Tourism Task Force has been set. Tourism sites for development in each state have been identified and shared with the respective States. The State shall be taking a final decision on the way forward.

Purvottara Vikas Chintan Shivir:

On 13th September, 2024, "Purvottara Vikas Chintan Shivir" was held under the Chairmanship of Secretary, MDoNER. Representatives of 54 Union Ministries/Departments, NITI Aayog, Border Road Organization, Deputy Commissioners of 14 Aspirational Districts of NER, Planning Secretaries of eight NE States, Senior Officers of MDoNER and its organizations participated in the dialogue and offered valuable inputs for streamlining timely project implementation.

Investment Promotion in Northeast Region :

The Ministry is organizing investment promotion activities to showcase the region's investment and trade potential. The focus sectors identified for the purpose are agriculture & allied sectors, handicrafts & handlooms, tourism & hospitality, IT&ITeS, sports & entertainment, education & skill development and healthcare. As a precursor to North-East Investor's Summit (NEIS), which the Ministry, plans to organize in March-April, 2025), a total of 4 Road Shows have been organized during 2024 in Kolkata, Mumbai, Hyderabad and Bengaluru to showcase investment and trade potential of North Eastern Region. 115 MoUs worth ₹ 38,856 Crores have been signed between the States and Investors so far covering all the 6 Road-shows so far. With an intent to strengthen the Investment Promotion Agency (IPA) and to assist the NE State Government to meet the objectives of attracting, facilitating and increasing investments in their states, MDoNER has signed an Memorandum of Understanding with Invest India.

North Eastern Council Plenary :

72nd Plenary of North Eastern Council was held at State Convention Centre, Shillong on 21st December, 2024. It was Chaired by Union Home Minister and Chairman of NEC, Amit Shah in the presence of the then Union Minister, DoNER and Vice-Chairman, NEC, Jyotiraditya Scindia and the MoS, DoNER

and Member, NEC, Sukanta Mazumdar, Governors of NE States and Chief Ministers of NE States. The Plenary was also attended by Secretary, MDoNER, Secretary, NEC and Other Senior Officers of Government of India and State Governments of NER. Various issues pertaining to NEC and NER were discussed during the Plenary. The Home Minister emphasized on the development of Infrastructure, use of technology etc.

Achievements of North Eastern Handicrafts & Handlooms Development Corporation Limited (NEHDC):

NEHDC identified & mobilised 623 numbers of artisans and weavers of all the eight NE states and showcased the rich crafts of the NER and provided marketing platform to them in the recently completed AT-MANIRBHAR BHARAT UTSAV, VIVIDHTA KA AMRIT MAHOTSAV 2024, SURAJKUND MELA 2024. To highlight the significance of Eri silk culture, as a part of the 78th Independence Day celebrations, 2024, NEHDC has inaugurated the Eri Silk Rearing and Production Experience Centre (ESRPEC) at the Garchuk office campus. The main aim of this centre is to promote Eri culture and to demonstrate the various stages of the Eri silk lifecycle. Additionally, the centre will feature educational exhibits, videos, and interactive displays to emphasize the history, cultural significance, and technical aspects of Eri silk. NEHDC has also obtained the prestigious OEKO-TEX® STANDARD 100 certification for its Eri Silk from Germany on the nation's 78th Independence Day. Established a Center of Excellency in collaboration with Apparel Made-Ups & Home Furnishing Sector Skill Council at Garchuk, Guwahati for conducting job-oriented and industry related curriculum for under graduate, post graduate and continuing education, to promote Training of Trainers and assessors and skilling industry professional on Apparel & Home Furnishings sectors. Launched YARN ON WHEELS (Har Ghar Dhaga) initiative along with yarn through NEHDC mobile app which have significantly impacted the local weaving community for more affordable yarn directly at their doorstep by supplying 1,907.53 kg of yarns of Cotton, Eri, Tussar and Acrylic of ₹ 28.40 lakhs. Established in-house Smart Handloom and Innovation Centre under the brand name 'Nature's Weave', which has produced 4977 units of sarees, stoles, dupattas, mufflers, bedsheets, curtains cushion covers and 1240 metres of other yardage fabrics made from Cotton, Eri, Mulberry, Muga silks etc. with overall sale of ₹ 91.03 lakhs. Established an NABL accredited Textile Testing Laboratory, at Garchuk, Guwahati and as on date 12,971 numbers of test reports are provided to private and government agencies regarding testing fiber, yarns and fabric. The Laboratory is able to carry out various testing like fiber content, fiber fitness, fabric thickness, thread count, yarn count, Lea Strength Test etc. (The author is the Assistant Development Officer, Transformation and Development Department, Government of Assam. He can be reached at digantaraju@gmail.com)

UPSC topper or caste topper? Talent missing, caste and background hot market

By: Dr. Satyawan Saurabh

Every year when the results of the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) are announced, a large section of the country gets excited – somewhere hopes are shattered, somewhere dreams are fulfilled. But for the last few years, a new and dangerous trend has also been – instead of discussing the talent and hard work of the successful candidates, their caste, religion and economic background are being examined under a microscope. And then, on the basis of that, the story of their struggle is fabricated, and and and glorification or controversy is created on social media.

On one hand, successful candidates want to celebrate their hard work, while on the other, society turns them into a 'trophy' – either in the name of caste pride in the name of the emotional market.

When talent becomes secondary and identity becomes primary

Have we become so shallow that success now has to be viewed through the prism of caste? A student who worked day and night for years, who persisted despite failures, who sacrificed personal pleasures and did penance – his story will now be measured not by his talent but by his caste identity?

Social media platforms and news channels now first ask, "Which caste is this topper from?" Then comes the question: "What does a father do?"

Then, if a farmer, labourer or lower-class background is added from anywhere, then the success story is made more saleable by adding the 'spice of struggle' to it.

New trend of 'farmer's son' branding

It is a strange irony that now even those studying in AC rooms in posh areas of big cities have started calling themselves "sons of farmers". Even if the ancestors in the family have done farming or have a small piece of land, he is declared to be the son of a farmer family.

The reality is that the farmers who are still burdened with bank loans and whose children are still studying in dilapidated schools are not able to become a part of this 'farmer family' branding.

This new "sell the struggle" model is actually social-emotional engineering of a mass middle-class or upper-class segment.

The new motto of success: Service or self-branding?

While civil service once meant a life dedicated to the betterment of society, its meaning now seems to be changing. Now, after becoming a topper, it has become a trend to immediately open a YouTube channel, conduct 'Ask Me Anything' sessions on Instagram, appear in advertisements of coaching brands, write books and give motivational speeches.

There is nothing wrong in young people celebrating their success or inspiring others. But questions arise when the spirit of service is left behind and self-branding becomes the primary agenda.

New arena for caste politics: UPSC

The format of UPSC is now becoming a medium for political gain. Different political ideologies, media houses and caste organisations are competing to claim UPSC toppers as their own.

Somewhere propaganda is being done in the name of "Dalit pride"; somewhere slogans of "upper caste pride" are being coined. Some call it "OBC miracle", while others call it "flight of farmer's daughter".

In fact, in all this, a simple truth gets lost – hard work is hard work; it sees no caste, no religion, and

While civil service once meant a life dedicated to the betterment of society, its meaning now seems to be changing. Now, after becoming a topper, it has become a trend to immediately open a YouTube channel, conduct 'Ask Me Anything' sessions on Instagram, appear in advertisements of coaching brands, write books and give motivational speeches

no lineage.

UPSC: The only exam that tests values

UPSC is a rare achievement of Indian democracy – where a person's knowledge, understanding, thinking, reasoning and decision-making ability are tested, irrespective of caste, religion or class. This exam proves time and again that talent can emerge even from the farthest corners of the country.

But when society itself begins to break this achievement down into caste lines, it is a blow to the soul of democracy.

The difference between real struggle and pretence

The real struggle is the one that remains unsaid. The one who comes from a rural background but doesn't try to sell himself. The one who doesn't post his photoshoots and 'story' on social media. The one who thinks of his success as personal satisfaction, not a commercial brand.

On the other hand, the one who turns struggle into a product is the one who goes viral today. He is the one who appears in the advertisements of big coaching companies. He is the one who becomes a social media star.

Ultimately the question remains the same – why and for whom?

Is the aim of becoming a UPSC topper still the same – to reach the last person in the society, distribute justice, and bring honesty to administration?

Or has it now become an alternative 'celebrity career'?

This reflection is necessary; otherwise, one day the civil service will also turn into a glamour industry – where branding will prevail, not value; where selfies will prevail, not service.

Conclusion: Avoid categorising success

The country needs such youth who link success to their duty and not to their selfishness. Those who go beyond caste, religion or class and present themselves as just citizens.

Those who understand that a bigger test than the UPSC exam is going to come ahead – when, sitting on an administrative post, one will have to provide unbiased service without any discrimination and without any publicity.

Only then will the democracy of this country remain strong, and only then will real talent be respected – without any barriers of caste, religion, or background.

AHSEC Higher Secondary results declared

Sivasagar, West Karbi Anglong, lead Assam's HS Exam triumph

HT Bureau

DIPHU/GUWAHATI, April 30: The Assam State School Education Board (ASSEB), Division-II (formerly AHSEC), declared the results of the Higher Secondary Final Examination 2025, revealing significant performances across districts, particularly in Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong.

In the Arts stream, Karbi Anglong recorded a pass percentage of 64%, while West Karbi Anglong posted a stronger result with 81.20%.

Other top-performing districts in the Arts stream include Baksa (94.21%), Darrang (93.82%), and Sivasagar (90.78%).

In Science, West Karbi Anglong achieved a notable milestone, securing a 100% pass rate—leading the state. Sivasagar followed with 97.13%, and Baksa with 95%.

Karbi Anglong registered a 65% pass rate in the Science stream.

The Commerce stream also saw West Karbi Anglong excelling with a 97.14% pass rate, while Karbi Anglong secured 80.57%.

South Salmara stood out with a perfect 100% pass percentage, followed by Baksa (98.20%) and Chirang (98.15%).

Congratulating the success, Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) Executive Member for Education, Richard Tokbi, lauded the efforts on social media, stating, "West Karbi Anglong secured impressive 100% pass percentage in Science stream in Assam HS Result 2025. Kudos to all the Teachers and Students for this magnificent achievement. Congratulations."

In a specific highlight from Hamren, the Hamren Girls Higher Secondary School achieved a 100% pass rate in the Science stream for the first time.

All eight students who appeared passed—four in the first division with letter marks and four in the second division.

The students securing first division are Pretty Teronpi, Romelin Hansepi, Ropjeli Hansepi, and Roptharlin Teranpi.

The second division achievers are Birtichai Intipi, Amarit Singh Timung, Larta Bepi, and Marina Tissopi.

The results underscore West Karbi Anglong's rising academic performance and commitment to excellence in education.

Our Sivasagar Correspondent adds: Sivasagar district has once again emerged as one of the top performers in the Higher Secondary (HS) Examinations 2024-25, with impressive results across all streams, as declared by the Assam Higher Secondary Education Council on Wednesday.

The district secured the first position in the Commerce stream with a pass percentage of 97.42%, second in Science with 97.60%, and fourth in the Arts stream with 95.91%.

The Vocational stream also saw a high success rate with 95% of students passing.

In the Commerce stream, out of 392 students, 164 secured first division, 135 second, and 52 third division.

In the Arts stream, 5,783 candidates appeared, with 2,039 achieving first division, 2,137 second, and 1,578 third division.



In Science, 1,023 students secured first division, 417 second, and 56 third division.

From Government HS School, 74 students appeared in the Arts stream, of which 65 secured first division, 8 second, and 1 third division.

In Science, 23 of 69 students got first division, 41 second, and 5 third.

In Commerce, 7 students earned first division and 34 secured second division.

One Vocational stream student secured first division.

At Puleswari Girls' HS School, 48 students secured first division, 49 second, and 11 third division, with an overall pass percentage of 95%.

Notably, Ananya Gogoi of the school scored 99 marks in the Beauty and Wellness subject, the highest in the subject.

New Look Academy reported a 100% pass percentage, with 24 out of 26 candidates securing first division and the remaining 2 second division.

At Desangmukh BR Ambedkar Senior Secondary School, all candidates passed of which, 37 secured first division while 27 got second division.

From Thanuram Gogoi HS School, 26 students achieved first division, 86 second, and 8 third division.

Sivasagar's continued academic excellence reinforces its reputation as one of the leading districts in Assam for Higher Secondary education.

Our Demow Correspondent adds: Students from various institutions in Demow and Nitaipukhuri delivered commendable performances in the Higher Secondary Final Examination

2025, the results of which were declared on Wednesday. At Demow Senior Secondary School, Trijyotshna Saikia topped the Arts stream with 94.4 percent, while Kaustav Mahili led the Science stream with 84 percent.

A total of 25 students from the school secured star marks with letter grades in different subjects.

In Demow Junior Commerce College, results in the Commerce stream included 1 first division, 6 second divisions, and 7 third divisions. In the Arts stream, the college recorded 1 first division, 9 second divisions, and 3 third divisions.

Demow College saw 14 students secure first division in the Arts stream, with 47 in second division and 139 in third division.

In the Science stream at Demow Higher Secondary School, 2 students earned star marks, 21 secured first division, 18 second division, and 10 third division.

At Nitaipukhuri Higher Secondary School, 3 students secured second division and 2 received third division in the Science stream.

In HCDG College, Nitaipukhuri, the Arts stream saw 2 students achieving star marks, 9 students with first division, 38 with second division, and 70 with third division.

Several students also earned letter marks in various subjects.

Well-wishers have extended congratulations to the students for their strong academic results.

Our Margherita Correspondent adds: Margherita witnessed jubilant scenes on Wednesday following the an-

nouncement of the Higher Secondary examination results, with two local schools—Margherita Public Higher Secondary School and Axom Senior Secondary School—achieving a 100% pass rate once again.

Margherita Public Higher Secondary School continued its remarkable track record by maintaining a 100% pass rate for the ninth consecutive year.

This year, a total of 172 students appeared for the examinations—40 from the Science stream and 132 from the Arts stream.

Of these, 34 Science students secured First Division and 6 passed with Second Division.

In the Arts stream, 63 students achieved First Division, 65 secured Second Division, and 4 passed in the Third Division.

The consistent performance of the government school brought immense pride and happiness to its students, faculty, and staff. Similarly, a festive atmosphere prevailed at Axom Senior Secondary School, located at Agbandha siding in Margherita, as the school once again recorded a 100% pass rate.

All 56 students from the Arts and Commerce streams successfully cleared the exams.

The outstanding results led to exuberant celebrations on campus, with students and staff bursting crackers, dancing, and expressing their joy.

Principal Pinku Kalita shared that the continued success of the school in maintaining a perfect pass rate year after year has been a source of motivation and pride for the entire school community.

Himanta welcomes Union Cabinet decision to include caste enumeration in census

GUWAHATI, April 30: Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday welcomed the Union Cabinet's decision to include caste enumeration in the next census.

"We welcome #Census 2025, which will further strengthen the agenda of social justice and is a tribute to Dr Ram Manohar Lohia, Jan Nayak Karpoori Thakur and several other greats", the chief minister posted on X.

"The Modi government has always stood for the representation and rights of our backward communities", he said.

The Union government on Wednesday announced that caste enumeration will be included in the next census exercise in a "transparent" manner and slammed the opposition parties for using caste survey as a "political tool".

The Congress and other opposition parties have been vociferously demanding a nationwide caste census, making it a major election issue, and some states like Bihar, Telangana and Karnataka have conducted such surveys.

The government decision comes ahead of assembly



elections in Bihar, where several parties including some BJP allies have been coming out in support of the caste census.

Announcing the decision taken by the Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs, Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said the census comes under the purview of the Centre, but some states have done caste enumeration in the name of surveys "non-transparently" which has created doubts in the society. (PTI)

DC Goalpara inaugurates SEAS Biotech's new admin building

HT Correspondent

GOALPARA, April 30: SEAS Biotech Pvt. Ltd., a prominent player in sustainable ethanol production, inaugurated its new Administrative Building at the Goalpara Ethanol Factory, situated in the Industrial Growth Centre at Matia in Goalpara, on Wednesday.

The inauguration ceremony was attended by Deputy Commissioner of Goalpara, Khanindra Choudhury, IAS, who graced the event as the chief guest.

Also present were officials from the forest department, local administration, industries, and educational institutions.

DC Khanindra Choudhury officially inaugurated the new facility and launched a tree plantation drive, reinforcing SEAS Biotech's commitment to sustainability and community involvement.



The administrative expansion marks a significant development following the successful commissioning of SEAS Biotech's main plant, which produces 140 Kilo Litres Per Day (KLDP) of fuel-grade ethanol.

The plant has created employment for over 200 direct and 100 indirect personnel, contributing to

the industrial growth of the region.

Samarth Haralka, Director of SEAS Biotech Pvt. Ltd., stated, "The creation of this Administrative Building is another step towards building a world-class work environment for our team. It reflects our belief that strong infrastructure and a supportive workspace are essential for inno-

vation and growth."

He also expressed gratitude to the Government of Assam and Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma for fostering a conducive environment for industrial development.

SEAS Biotech's ethanol facility is noted for its carbon-negative operations and is the first in India to install a 100% bamboo-fueled RG Boiler from Lambion-Thermax.

The plant also focuses on local grain sourcing, supporting farmers and bolstering the regional economy.

"The wave of green energy is here, and we are proud to be at the forefront of it," added Haralka.

With a vision of "Redefining Green Mobility," SEAS Biotech Pvt. Ltd. continues to drive sustainable industrial growth through innovation in renewable energy.

Four held with heroin in police crackdown

HT Correspondent

DIBRUGARH, April 30: Dibrugarh police arrested four alleged drug peddlers and seized 34.59 grams of suspected heroin during two separate operations conducted in Kalibari and Railway Colony areas on Tuesday night.

The arrested individuals have been identified as Purnima Biswas (53), Abhijit Biswas (25), Sujata Rai alias Saheli (30), and Inja Hussain alias Niku (28).

All four have been booked under provisions of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, 1985.

Acting on a tip-off, police launched a co-ordinated crackdown in the two locations and successfully apprehended the accused.

From the residence of Purnima Biswas, police recovered 71 small bottles containing suspected heroin, along with six mobile handsets.

A police official stated, "We have launched a massive crackdown against the drug trade, and so far, many drug peddlers have been arrested with contraband items."

The operations are part of ongoing efforts by Dibrugarh police to curb narcotics-related activities in the district.

RPF arrests four for HSD Oil theft from Power Car at Guwahati Railway Station



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, April 30: The Railway Protection Force (RPF) of Guwahati apprehended four individuals on April 29, in connection with the theft of High-Speed Diesel (HSD) oil from a Generator Brake Van, commonly known as a power car, attached to Train No. 12067 UP at Guwahati Railway Station.

According to an official statement, the action followed a memo received from the Senior Section Engineer of AC/TL/GHY, reporting the theft of HSD oil from the train's power car.

Responding swiftly, RPF officers and staff carried out a coordinated raid and search operation.

Their prompt response led to the suc-

cessful arrest of four accused individuals and the recovery of 10 litres of stolen diesel oil.

In relation to the incident, a formal case was registered as Case No. 07/25 dated 29.04.2025 under Section 3(a) of the Railway Property (Unlawful Possession) Act, along with Sections 154 and 164 of the Railways Act.

Following their arrest, the accused were produced before the Special Railway Magistrate (SRM), Guwahati.

Based on a request made by the Enquiry Officer of RPF/Guwahati, all four were remanded to judicial custody and have been sent to Central Jail, Lokhra, Guwahati.

This incident is part of a broader crackdown on criminal activities by the RPF.

In March alone, the force arrested 19 individuals for theft-related offences, and its momentum continued through April, with 22 more arrests made up to the current date.

The RPF reiterated its commitment to safeguarding railway property and maintaining the safety and security of rail operations across the zone.

NCHAC celebrates 74th Foundation Day

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, April 30: The North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council (NCHAC) marked its 74th Foundation Day with a vibrant celebration at the Council Secretariat Compound in Haflong, featuring a range of activities including infrastructure inaugurations, book launches, cultural performances, and community recognitions.

According to an official statement, several important infrastructure projects were inaugurated as part of the celebrations.

These included a newly constructed Customary Law Court, an extended Council Secretariat Building with a modern Server Room for the Revenue Department, the newly set up Election Department, and the Sonaram Thaosan Media Centre located at Sengya Haphai, Dibrari.

In addition, a borewell and a 300,000-litre water tank with iron filtration capabilities were inaugurated to improve water supply for the Council premises and staff quarters.

The event also saw the launch of several key publications, including the 'NCHAC Souvenir', the 'Customary Law Book', 'Dara Disani Laishi' by Sanjib Parbosa, and 'Echoes of Identity: The Cultural Memory and Transformation of the Dimasas' by Vandana Thousen.

In recognition of educational achievements, NCHAC felicitated the top five government schools and high-performing matriculation students.

Additionally, selected 'Gaonburas' (village headmen) were honoured with cheques in appreciation of their dedicated service to the community.

To encourage sports and youth development, sports equipment was distributed to the constituencies of Semkhor, Daotuahaja, and Dolong.

The celebrations were attended by Debolal Gorlosa, Chief Executive Member (CEM) of NCHAC, Chairman Mohet Hojai, executive members, council officials, senior government officers, and distinguished citizens from the region.

Assam Agitation leader Tilak Chandra Mazumdar passes away at 85

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, April 30: Tilak Chandra Mazumdar, a veteran leader of the Assam Movement and a distinguished scholar of Sankari literature, passed away at the age of 85 on Tuesday night at a private hospital in Guwahati.

He is survived by his wife, noted writer Upama Mazumdar, a son, four daughters, and a large circle of relatives and admirers.

Born on August 12, 1940, in the Majumdar family of Ramdia Sri Sri Dhakurapara Satra in Kamrup district, Mazumdar emerged as a respected figure in Assam's academic and cultural landscape.

He began his education at a local school in Ramdia, completed his secondary education at Hajo High School, and went on to graduate with Honours in Assamese from Cotton College in 1962.

He later earned a postgraduate degree from Gauhati University in 1965.

Mazumdar began his teaching career at North Guwahati College in 1965 before joining Nowgong Girls' College, where he served for 35 years until his retirement in 2001.

He also held the post of founder principal at Sri Shankardev Junior College in

Nagaon. A renowned scholar of Sankari literature, Mazumdar authored several significant works including 'Satra Darpan', 'Abibhakta Nagaon Jilar Satra Samuhar Samaj-Sanskritik Adhyayan', and 'Satraar Gurikatha'.

He also edited important literary compilations such as 'Prachin Asomiya Sahityar Pranjal Dhara' and 'Srimanta Shankardev: Sahitya Sanskritir Jilkan'.

His passing has deeply saddened the people of Nagaon and the broader academic community.

The Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), Assam Sahitya Sabha, and various other organisations expressed condolences, describing Mazumdar as a stalwart of Assam's intellectual and cultural heritage.

Mazumdar's mortal remains were brought to the AGP office in Nagaon on Wednesday, where party leaders and members paid their last respects.

His body was later taken to Nowgong Girls' College, where faculty and students gathered to honour his memory.

The final rites were performed at the Amolapatty Public Crematorium in the presence of a large gathering.

Sikhi Kakati wins Desh Ratna Award for contribution to Satriya Dance and acting



HT Correspondent

MORIGAON, April 30: Ten-year-old Shikhi Kakati from Morigaon district of Assam has been conferred with the prestigious Desh Ratna Award-2025 in recognition of her outstanding contribution to Indian culture through Satriya dance and acting since the age of five.

The award ceremony, organised at

Mandi House, Kamani Auditorium in Delhi on Tuesday evening, was a joint initiative of the Ministry of Rural Development, Ministry of Defence, and Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, in collaboration with the Bharti Yuva Welfare Association (Bharat) under the Government of NCT of Delhi.

The event was graced by Union

Tourism and Culture Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, Union Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal, Uttar Pradesh Labour and Employment Minister Raghu Raj Singh, former UP Education Minister Shatish Chandra Drivedi, and noted Bollywood actors Mushtaq Khan and Rahul R Butcher.

Apart from the Desh Ratna Award, Shikhi Kakati has also received several other honours including Rashtra Seva Samman, Bharatiya Ratna Samman, Rashtriya Pratibha Samman, Bharatiya Sutrikari Samman, National Excellence Achievers Award, Swami Vivekananda Pride Achievers Award, Rashtriya Seva Samman, and Ratna-2025 (National Gem of Service).

Shikhi is the daughter of writers and poets Montu Kumar Nath and Junmoni Kakati.

She is currently a Class V student at Mahendra Kandali Academy, Morigaon. She trains in Satriya dance and acting under the guidance of Prasanna Kumar Medhi, Tapas Bardoloi, and Utpala Hokai at Shankari Sangeet Vidyalaya, affiliated with Srimanta Sankardev Sangha.

Memo No. F/AT/Tender/202526/615

NOTICE INVITING TENDER

April 11, 2025.

Sealed Tenders are invited affixing a non-refundable Court Fee Stamp of Rs. 8.25 (Rupees Eight and paise Twenty Five) only are invited from the registered Contractors along with self-attested copy of up to date Contractor's Registration, GST Registration, Income Tax Return (last 3 years), Annual Turnover (last 3 years), Bank Solvency along with the Tender which will be received by the undersigned through speed post/courier/registered post/ tender box till 02.05.2025 up to 2 PM (I.S.T.) and will be opened on 02.05.2025 at 3:00 P.M. (I.S.T.) in the O/o the Field Director, Manas Tiger Reserve, Barpeta Road as details below:

Particulars	Location	Estimated Amount	EMD
Landscape Management under Manas Tiger Reserve.	Rupohi under Bhuyanpara Range.	Rs. 18,33,388.00	Rs. 36,668/- for General & Rs. 18,334/- for SC/ST/OBC.

In the event of any unusual occurrence due to strike, bandh, holiday etc. the same will be received and opened on the next working day at the same place and same time. Details estimate may be seen in the office of the Field Director, Manas Tiger Reserve w.e.f. 11.04.2025 to 30.04.2025.

Detail N.I.T. may be seen in all working days during office hours in the office of the undersigned.

IPR(BTC)/C/2025-26/226

Sd/- Field Director,
Manas Tiger Reserve

Tariff talks with India going great, think will have deal: Trump

NEW YORK/WASHINGTON, April 30: US President Donald Trump said negotiations with India over a bilateral trade deal are “coming along great” and he thinks Washington will “have a deal” with New Delhi.

Trump made the remarks on Tuesday while speaking to reporters before departing the White House for a rally in Michigan marking the first 100 days of his second administration.

“India is coming along great. I think we’ll have a deal with India,” said the president. “The Prime Minister (Narendra Modi) as you know was here three weeks ago, and they want to make a deal. We’ll see what happens,” he added. Prime Minister Modi visited the White House in late February.

Earlier in the day, Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent told reporters in the White House that the US is “very close” to a trade deal with India. He said that America’s Asian trading partners and allies “have been the most forthcoming in terms of doing the deals”. At a press briefing, he spoke about Vice President JD Vance’s India visit last week. “I think that he and (Prime Minister Narendra) Modi made some very good progress. So I could see some announcements on India.”

Bessent added that he can also see the contours of a deal with South Korea coming together and substantial talks with Japan. Responding to a question on the timeline for a trade deal, he said, “I think that we are very close on India and ... India, in a funny way, is easier to negotiate with (than) many other countries because they have very high tariffs and lots of tariffs.

“So it’s much easier to confront the direct tariffs when we go through these unfair trade deals that have been put in over decades, that the non-tariff trade barriers can be much more insidious and also harder to detect. “So a country like India, which has posted and ready tariffs, it’s much easier to negotiate with them,” he said, adding that negotiations with New Delhi are “moving well”. After Vance’s India visit, a statement from his office welcomed significant progress in the negotiations for a US-India Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA). It also formally announced the finalisation of the Terms of Reference for the negotiations, laying down a roadmap for further discussions about the shared economic priorities.

According to the statement, the BTA presents an opportunity to negotiate a new and modern trade agreement focused on promoting job creation and citizen well-being in both countries to enhance bilateral trade and supply-chain integration in a balanced and mutually beneficial manner.



Guided by their respective visions of ‘Amrit Kaal for India’ and ‘Golden Age for America,’ the trade agreement is expected to create new opportunities for growth for workers, farmers, and entrepreneurs in both countries, the statement said.

Deliberations between Indian and US officials on the proposed bilateral trade agreement began in Washington last week with an aim to iron out issues and give an impetus to the negotiations.

India’s chief negotiator, Additional Secretary in the Department of Commerce Rajesh Agrawal, is leading the team for the first in-person talks between the two countries. On April 15, Commerce Secretary Sunil Barthwal stated that India would try to close the negotiations as quickly as possible with the US.

In a joint statement issued after their bilateral meeting in Washington in February this year, President Trump and PM Modi announced plans to negotiate the first tranche of a mutually beneficial, multi-sector BTA by the fall of 2025.

The leaders had committed to designate senior representatives to advance these negotiations and to ensure that the trade relationship fully reflects the aspirations of the COMPACT (Catalysing Opportunities for Military Partnership, Accelerated Commerce and Technology). In the past, Trump has called India a “tariff king” and a “big abuser”.

During a joint press conference with Modi in the White House on February 13, Trump had said that India has “been very strong on tariffs”, and “I don’t blame them, necessarily, but it’s a different way of doing business. (PTI)

Pahalgam attack: US urges de-escalation

Rubio to speak with India, Pak foreign ministers

NEW YORK/WASHINGTON, April 30: Amid rising tensions between India and Pakistan, the US has called on both countries “not to escalate” the conflict. Secretary of State Marco Rubio will speak to their foreign ministers “as early as today or tomorrow”.

US State Department spokesperson Tammy Bruce at a press briefing on Tuesday said that Washington is reaching out to both India and Pakistan “regarding the Kashmir situation” and telling “them not to escalate the situation.”

Secretary of State Marco Rubio “expects to speak with the foreign ministers of Pakistan and India as early as today or tomorrow. He is encouraging other national leaders and foreign ministers to reach out to the countries on this issue,” Bruce said.

“So it is – again, as I’ve noted, every day action is being taken, in this case the Secretary speaking directly to his counterparts in India and Pakistan, and we’ll – we expect certainly the impact he’s usually had with the individuals he’s spoken with and certainly with President Trump’s leadership, India and Pakistan having those conversations. It’s very important for them,” Bruce said.

Responding to a question on Pakistan’s Defence Minister Khawaja Asif’s comments that Pakistan has “been doing this dirty work in United States”, Bruce added “the only thing I’m really prepared to discuss here is the fact that the Secretary of State is going to be speaking with the foreign ministers of both countries.”

“What I can tell you – obviously, we’re also monitoring the developments across the board in that region, and we – as you know,



at multiple levels, I have to say – are in touch with the governments of India and Pakistan, not just at the foreign minister level, certainly, but at multiple levels. We, of course, are encouraging all parties to work together for a responsible solution. The world is watching this. But I have no additional details in that regard.”

On April 22, terrorists opened fire in Kashmir’s Pahalgam, killing 26 people, in the deadliest attack in the Valley since the Pulwama strike in 2019. The Resistance Front (TRF), a proxy of the banned Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), claimed responsibility for the attack.

Meanwhile, in New Delhi, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday told the top defence brass that the armed forces have “complete operational freedom” to decide on the mode, targets and timing of India’s response to the Pahalgam terror attack, according to government sources.

During the high-level meeting, which was attended by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, National

Security Advisor Ajit Doval and the chiefs of three services, Modi affirmed that it is the national resolve to deal a crushing blow to terrorism, they said.

Modi expressed complete faith and confidence in the professional abilities of the armed forces.

On April 26, US President Donald Trump said that there have always been tensions between India and Pakistan, and the two countries will figure it out between themselves “one way or the other”.

He made these remarks after he was asked about tensions between India and Pakistan in the wake of the Pahalgam terror attack. “I am very close to India and I’m very close to Pakistan, as you know. And they’ve had that fight for 1,000 years in Kashmir. Kashmir has been going on for 1,000 years, probably longer than that. And it was a bad one yesterday, though; that was a bad one. Over 30 people,” Trump said during a press gaggle with reporters aboard Air Force One on the way to Rome.

Also, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres on Tuesday spoke

separately by telephone with External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, reiterating his strong condemnation of the terrorist attack in Pahalgam.

In a post on X, Jaishankar said, “Received a call from @UN SG @antonioguterres. Appreciate his unequivocal condemnation of the terrorist attack in Pahalgam. Agreed on the importance of accountability. India is resolved that the perpetrators, planners and backers of this attack are brought to justice.”

In the telephone calls, Guterres noted the importance of pursuing justice and accountability for these attacks through lawful means, as the spokesman for Secretary-General Stéphane Dujarric said.

Guterres also expressed his deep concern at the rising tensions between India and Pakistan and underscored the need to avoid a confrontation that could result in tragic consequences.

The UN chief offered his Good Offices to support any de-escalation efforts, Dujarric added.

President of the 79th session of the UN General Assembly Philemon Yang is also “deeply concerned” by the escalation of violence between India and Pakistan. Spokesperson for the Office of the President of the General Assembly Sharon Birch said at a press briefing.

Yang extended his sincere condolences to the families of the victims of the attacks in Jammu and Kashmir, and “stresses that the targeting of civilians is unacceptable and cannot be justified under any circumstances. He calls on both parties to exercise maximum restraint and to resolve this dispute through diplomatic means.” (PTI)

3 Indian-origin people found dead after shooting at US home

NEW YORK, April 30: Three Indian-origin people were found dead after a shooting at a home in the US state of Washington, according to local media reports.

The incident took place on April 24 in Newcastle city.

The dead were identified as Harshavardhana Kikkeri, 44, Shwetha Panyam, 41, and Dhruva Kikkeri, 14. The Seattle Times newspaper reported on Tuesday.

While the deaths of Shwetha and Dhruva were ruled as homicide by the police, Harshavardhana died by suicide, the report quoted the King County medical examiner’s office as saying.

Neighbours told the KOMO News that a young family lived in the home where the shooting took place.

On the night of the shooting, authorities were called to the townhouse on 129th Street after receiving a 911 call. The KING 5 television station said its crew saw a child being escorted from the home and comforted by investigators.

Unconfirmed reports said Harshavardhana, alongside Shwetha, was the owner of an India-based AI tech company Holoworld.

According to the company’s website, it was founded in 2018 by the two, with Harshavardhana serving as the CEO and CTO, and Shwetha as president.

King County sheriff’s spokesperson Brandyn Hull said she could not comment on whether the case was believed to be a murder-suicide.

“We understand many questions remain about the events that took place in Newcastle on April 24,” Hull was quoted as saying by Renton Reporter newspaper. (PTI)

Kremlin says deal to end war with Ukraine can’t be achieved quickly

KYIV, April 30: Clinching a deal to end the Russia-Ukraine war “is far too complex to be done quickly,” a senior Kremlin official said Wednesday, as the US labours to bring momentum to peace efforts and expresses frustration over the slow progress.

Meanwhile, a nighttime Russian drone attack on Ukraine’s second-largest city of Kharkiv wounded at least 45 civilians, officials said. The United Nations reported that the number of Ukrainian civilian casualties in the more than three-year war has surged in recent weeks amid Washington’s attempts to broker a peace agreement.

Russian President Vladimir Putin backs calls for a ceasefire before peace negotiations, “but before it’s done, it’s necessary to answer a few questions and sort out a few nuances,” Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said. Putin also is ready for direct talks with Ukraine without preconditions to seek a peace deal, he added. “We realise that Washington wants to achieve quick progress, but we hope for understanding that the Ukrainian crisis settlement is far too complex to be

done quickly,” Peskov said. “There are many details and an array of small nuances that need to be solved before a settlement.”

US President Donald Trump has previously expressed frustration over the slow pace of progress in negotiations aimed at stopping the war, which he said he could end in the first 24 hours of his new administration in January. Western European leaders have accused Putin of stalling while his forces seek to grab more Ukrainian land. Russia has captured nearly a fifth of Ukraine’s territory since Moscow’s forces launched a full-scale invasion on Feb 24, 2022.

Trump has chided Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy for steps that he said were “prolonging” the “killing field,” and the US leader has rebuked Putin for complicating negotiations with “very bad timing” in launching deadly strikes that battered the Ukrainian capital, Kyiv.

Trump has long dismissed the war as a waste of American taxpayer money and of lives lost in the conflict. Senior US officials have warned that the administration could abandon the peace ef-

forts, if it sees no solution. That could spell an end to crucial military help for Ukraine and heavier economic sanctions on Russia. The US State Department on Tuesday tried again to push both sides to move more quickly.

“We are now at a time where concrete proposals need to be delivered by the two parties on how to end this conflict,” department spokeswoman Tammy Bruce quoted US Secretary of State Marco Rubio as telling her. “How we proceed from here is a decision that belongs now to the president,” she told reporters, relating a conversation that she had with Rubio. “If there is not progress, we will step back as mediators in this process.” Russia has effectively rejected a US proposal for an immediate and full 30-day ceasefire, making it conditional on a halt to Ukraine’s mobilisation effort and Western arms supplies to Kyiv.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov claimed Wednesday that Ukraine had accepted an unconditional truce only because it was being pushed back on the battlefield, where the bigger Russian forces have the upper hand. (AP)

UK-US conduct joint airstrikes on Houthi military target in Yemen

LONDON, April 30: The UK’s Royal Air Force (RAF) participated in a joint operation with US forces against a Houthi military target in Yemen, Britain’s Ministry of Defence (MoD) said in a statement on Wednesday. The MoD said the strikes on Tuesday were in line with the UK’s long-standing policy since the Houthi rebels initiated attacks in the Red Sea in November 2023, killing innocent sailors. “On 29 April 2025, UK forces participated in a joint operation with US forces against a Houthi military target in Yemen,”

reads the MoD statement. “This action was in line with long-standing policy of the UK government, following the Houthis initiating their campaign of attacks in November 2023, threatening freedom of navigation in the Red Sea, striking international ships, and killing innocent merchant mariners. “Careful intelligence analysis identified a cluster of buildings, used by the Houthis to manufacture drones of the type used to attack ships in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, located some 15 miles south of Sanaa,” the statement notes. (PTI)

About 4,700 North Korean soldiers killed or wounded fighting for Russia, S Korea says

SEOUL, April 30: An estimated 4,700 North Korean soldiers have been killed or wounded while fighting alongside Russia against Ukrainian forces, South Korea’s spy agency told lawmakers Wednesday.

The assessment came two days after North Korea confirmed for the first time that it had sent combat troops to help Russia recapture parts of the Kursk region, which it lost control of

to a surprise Ukrainian incursion last year. In a closed-door parliamentary committee briefing, South Korea’s National Intelligence Service said North Korea had suffered 4,700 casualties, including 600 deaths, on the Russia-Ukraine battlefronts, according to Lee Seong Kweon, one of the lawmakers who attended the meeting.

Lee told reporters the NIS said that 2,000 injured North Korean soldiers

were repatriated to North Korea by air or train between January and March. He cited the NIS as saying the dead North Korean soldiers were cremated in Russia before their remains were sent back home. In January, the NIS said about 300 North Korean soldiers had died and another 2,700 had been injured, and the South Korean military increased the estimated casualties to 4,000 last month. (AP)

Vietnam celebrates 50 years end war’s end with focus on peace, unity

HO CHI MINH CITY (Vietnam), April 30: Vietnam on Wednesday celebrated the 50th anniversary of the end of the war with the United States and the formation of its modern nation with a military parade and a focus on a peaceful future.

The fall of Saigon on April 30, 1975 marked the end of a Vietnam divided into the communist North and US-allied South, and the country’s top official told crowds the past decades had led to ever-increasing unity.

“All the Vietnamese are the descendants of Vietnam. They have the rights to live and work, to have freedom to pursue happiness and love in this country,” said To Lam, the Vietnam Communist Party’s general secretary.

“In a spirit of closing the past, respecting differences, aiming for the future, the whole party, the people and the army vow to make Vietnam become a country of peace, unity, prosperity and development,” he added.

Thousands camped overnight on the streets of the former South Vietnamese capital, which was renamed Ho Chi Minh City after it fell to North Vietnamese and Viet Cong troops, to get the best vantage point for the parade.

Many lingered on the streets later in the afternoon and ate picnics while waiting for drone and fireworks shows scheduled for the evening.

“Now it’s time for peace,” said spectator Nguyen Thi Hue, a city resident. “Peace is the dream that everyone in the world wants.”

One float carried the Lac bird, Vietnam’s emblem, another a portrait of Ho Chi Minh.

Chinese, Laotian and Cambodian troops marched behind Vietnamese army formations, including some wearing uniforms similar to what was worn by northern Vietnamese troops during the war.

Helicopters carrying the national flag and jets flew over the parade near Independence Palace, where

a North Vietnamese tank smashed through the gates on the final day of the war.

Sitting next to Vietnam’s leader were Cambodia’s former leader Hun Sen and Laotian Communist Party General Secretary Thongloun Sisoulith.

To Lam said beyond a victory over the US and South Vietnam, the fall of Saigon was a “glorious landmark” that ended a 30-year fight for independence that began with the fight to oust French colonial troops. He said Vietnam owes its position in the world today to support from the Soviet Union, China and solidarity from Laos and Cambodia, as well as “progressive” people all over the world including the US.

Vietnam’s changing global approach

The emphasis on reconciliation and not, like previous years, on military victory reflected how Vietnam was approaching the changing tides of the global economy and geopolitics today, said



Nguyen Khac Giang, an analyst at Singapore’s ISEAS–Yusuf Ishak Institute.

He added that the Vietnam War remains central to how the Communist Party framed its legitimacy, not just as a military triumph but also as a symbol of national unity. But To Lam’s comments underlined that the reconciliation remains unfinished.

“The war still defines Vietnam’s

unity, and its unresolved divides,” Giang said.

For Pham Ngoc Son, a veteran who fought for the communists, today there is “only space for peace and friendship” between the US and Vietnam.

“The war is over a long time ago,” said the 69-year-old who, during the war, served as an army truck driver bringing troops and supplies from the north to the

south along the Ho Chi Minh trail — the secret supply route used by North Vietnam.

Passage of time has led to improved relations with US

This year also marks the 30-year anniversary of diplomatic ties between Vietnam and the US.

In 2023, Vietnam upgraded its relations with the US to that of a comprehensive strategic partner, the highest diplomatic status it gives to any country and the same level of relations as China and Russia. There are new signs of strain in the relationship with Washington, however, with President Donald Trump’s imposition of heavy tariffs and the cancellation of much foreign aid, which has affected war remediation efforts in Vietnam.

Vietnamese officials say the relationship with the US is anchored in American efforts to address war legacies such as Agent Orange contamination and unexploded ordnance in the countryside that still threaten lives.

The future of those projects is

now at risk because of the Trump administration’s broad cuts to USAID.

Moreover, the export-dependent country is vulnerable in a global economy made fragile amid Trump’s tariff plans.

Vietnam was slammed with reciprocal tariffs of 46 per cent, one of the highest. This puts a “big question mark” on what the US wants to achieve in Asia, said Huong Le-Thu of the International Crisis Group think tank.

Previously, close ties with Washington have helped Vietnam balance its relations with its much larger and more powerful neighbour China, she said. Vietnam is one of the countries, along with the Philippines, that has been involved in direct confrontations with China over conflicting maritime claims in the South China Sea.

Focus on economic and not strategic competition may mean that Vietnam and other countries in Southeast Asia become less important for the US. (AP)

Itanagar Capital Police return 75 lost mobile phones during 10th edition of SAMVAD

HT Bureau

ITANAGAR, April 30: In a continued effort to build stronger police-community relations and enhance public service delivery, the Itanagar Capital Police returned 75 recovered lost mobile phones to their rightful owners during the 10th edition of "SAMVAD", held at Chimpu on April 30, 2025.

The event took place under the "Police Ajin" initiative, a citizen-centric programme designed to promote proactive engagement between the public and the police force, an official statement stated.

The occasion was graced by the presence of local MLA Tech Kaso, along with Superintendent of Police, Itanagar Capital Region, Rohit Rajbir Singh, IPS, Sub-Divisional Police Officer (SDPO) Kengo Dirchi, Deputy Superintendent of Police (Headquarters) Chamrak Arun, and other senior officers of the Capital Police.

In his address, MLA Tech Kaso commended the Itanagar Capital Police for their dedicated and people-friendly approach to policing.

He especially lauded their efforts in tracing and returning lost mobile phones to their owners, highlighting the

department's consistent commitment to transparency and public welfare.

The recovery and return of the mobile phones were the result of coordinated work by a dedicated police team led by Inspector N Nishant, Officer-in-Charge of Chimpu Police Station.

The team included Head Constables Jerry Romin and Rili Tabri; Constables Dejum Ete, Tai Lirak, Tasser Tasso, and Rabin Singh; Lady Constable Inya Gadi; and Constable Jeni Wangpan from the SP Office.

Their systematic and committed efforts played a pivotal role in tracing and retrieving the lost phones from across the Capital Region.

Superintendent of Police Rohit Rajbir Singh, IPS, congratulated the police team for their relentless dedication and effective handling of public grievances.

He noted that the successful return of mobile phones not only demonstrates efficient policing but also strengthens public confidence in the law enforcement system.

The event also saw several members of the public sharing their personal experiences and expressing gratitude for the Capital Police's initiative in recov-

ering and returning their mobile phones.

Their testimonies reflected the growing trust between the community and the police, reinforced through such citizen-focused programmes.

The "SAMVAD" platform has been instrumental in fostering communication, accountability, and cooperation between the police and the general public.

It serves as a critical mechanism through which the police can address community concerns and enhance public engagement.

According to official information, the Itanagar Capital Police recovered more than 300 lost mobile phones in 2024 alone. In the current year, 2025, they have already traced and recovered over 150 phones.

The return of 75 mobile handsets during Wednesday's event underscores the department's ongoing commitment to service-oriented policing and public outreach.

The Itanagar Capital Police reiterated their pledge to maintain a responsive, citizen-friendly, and accountable policing model, continuing their mission to build and sustain a secure and supportive community environment.



Arunachal Pradesh Congress Holds 'Samvidhan Bachao' Rally in Itanagar



HT Bureau

ITANAGAR, April 30: In a public demonstration against what it termed a growing threat to democratic values and constitutional integrity, the Arunachal Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) organised a protest march in Itanagar on Wednesday as part of its ongoing 'Samvidhan Bachao Abhiyan' (Save the Constitution Campaign).

According to an official statement, the rally was aimed at raising awareness about what the Congress party alleges to be a "sustained attack on the Constitution of India, democratic institutions, and the principles of social and economic justice by the Modi Government."

The protest march began at Rajiv Gandhi Bhawan and proceeded to the Tennis Court located within the premises of I G Park in the state capital.

The demonstration drew the participation of Congress workers, leaders, and supporters who held placards carrying messages such as "Save Constitution, Save India" and "Protect Democracy."

Addressing the gathering at the culmination point of the rally, APCC leaders strongly criticised the central government.

They accused it of systematically un-

dermining constitutional bodies and using investigative agencies to target opposition leaders through what they described as fabricated legal cases.

The leaders also condemned what they termed the suppression of dissent, the erosion of parliamentary norms, and the curtailment of freedom of expression.

Further, they alleged that the actions of the central government had contributed to the weakening of India's federal structure, thereby endangering the balance of power between the Centre and the states.

The 'Samvidhan Bachao Abhiyan' forms part of a broader, nationwide campaign spearheaded by the Indian National Congress.

The campaign seeks to draw public attention to what the party perceives as serious threats to the democratic framework of the country, and calls for collective efforts to safeguard constitutional values and institutions.

The Arunachal Pradesh leg of the campaign, marked by the rally in Itanagar, was a continuation of this larger political movement intended to mobilise public opinion and reinforce the importance of upholding democratic principles.

Legal Metrology Department conducts routine inspection, ten booked

HT Bureau

ITANAGAR, April 30: The Department of Legal Metrology & Consumer Affairs (LM&CA), Government of Arunachal Pradesh, conducted a routine inspection at the Naharlagun Market area on Wednesday, as part of its continuing efforts to curb unfair trade practices and protect consumer interests.

The inspection was carried out in the jurisdiction of Papum Pare and the Itanagar Capital Region (ICR).

The inspection team was led by Debia Tana, District Consumer Protection Officer (DCPO)-cum-Assistant Controller, Legal Metrology & Consumer Affairs, along with Inspectors Tao Tasar and Tarh Sonu.

The team was accompanied by police personnel from the Naharlagun Police Station to ensure smooth execution of the inspection process.

According to an official statement, the inspection was aimed at verifying price regulation, accuracy of weights and measures used by traders, and compliance with statutory provisions under the Legal Metrology Act, 2009, the Legal Metrology (Packaged Commodities) Rules, 2011, and the Arunachal Pradesh



Legal Metrology (Enforcement) Rules, 2011.

During the inspection, officials scrutinised various aspects of the goods sold in the market, particularly focusing on packaging and labelling standards.

The goal was to ensure that all pack-

aged commodities adhere to legal norms and that weighing instruments used by vendors are duly verified and calibrated.

As part of the enforcement action, a total of eight traders were booked under the Legal Metrology Act, 2009 for using unverified weights and measures.

Additionally, two traders were booked under the Legal Metrology (Packaged Commodities) Rules, 2011 for selling non-standard packaged goods at their trading premises.

The department reiterated that this initiative is in line with the state government's broader objective of ensuring transparency in commercial transactions and protecting the interests of the common consumer.

Maintaining accuracy in trade measurements and pricing is essential to promote fair practices and build consumer trust, the department stated.

Debia Tana, DCPO-cum-Assistant Controller, urged all traders to comply with the provisions of the Legal Metrology Act and the relevant packaged commodities rules to avoid penalties and legal consequences. He also appealed to consumers to stay vigilant and informed about their rights and duties under the Consumer Protection Act, 2019, as amended from time to time.

The department emphasised that such inspections will continue as part of ongoing efforts to promote ethical trade practices and safeguard the rights of consumers across the region.

Governor extends May Day greetings

HT Bureau

ITANAGAR, April 30: On the eve of International Labour Day, observed globally as 'May Day', the Governor of Arunachal Pradesh, Lt. General K T Parnaik, PVSM, UYSM, YSM (Retd.), extended his warm greetings to the people of the state, with special acknowledgement to manual workers.

In an official message, the Governor paid tribute to the workforce, recognizing them as the true architects of the state's infrastructure, economy, and overall national progress.

In his message, the Governor highlighted the historical significance of

'May Day', describing it as a day that commemorates the long-standing struggle for fair labour practices.

He noted that the occasion serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of upholding workers' rights, ensuring fair wages, promoting safe working conditions, and eliminating forced labour.

More importantly, he emphasised that it is a day to honour the dignity of labour in all its forms.

Reflecting on the evolving nature of the economy, Governor Parnaik underlined the importance of empowering the workforce to face emerging challenges.

"In today's dynamic and evolving economy, it is imperative that we empower our workforce to meet new challenges with skill, confidence, and resilience," he stated.

He further stressed that while it is essential for the workforce to be empowered, it is equally important for workers themselves to strive for excellence, productivity, and quality in their contributions to the nation.

Reaffirming his commitment to the welfare of the labour force, the Governor called for collective efforts to ensure just wages, safety, and security for every worker.

He urged that these commitments be

upheld not only in principle but also in practical action.

Governor Parnaik concluded his message with a call to action aligned with the national vision.

"Let us move forward with the spirit of 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas, aur Sabka Prayas', as envisioned by our Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, to build a stronger, inclusive, and prosperous India—Viksit Bharat," he appealed.

The Governor's message serves as a reminder of the essential role of workers in nation-building and the need for sustained efforts to safeguard their rights and well-being.

Governor Parnaik Advocates AI-Driven Governance for a Viksit Arunachal



HT Bureau

ITANAGAR, April 30: In a significant move towards integrating technology into public administration, the Governor of Arunachal Pradesh, Lt. General K T Parnaik, PVSM, UYSM, YSM (Retd.), took part in a detailed PowerPoint presentation on the application of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools at the Raj Bhavan in Itanagar on Wednesday.

According to an official statement, the Governor underlined the importance of automation as a crucial component of good governance.

He emphasized that the adoption of AI

tools has the potential to greatly improve efficiency in government operations, particularly in areas such as record-keeping, data analysis, and real-time planning.

Reaffirming the vision of the Prime Minister Narendra Modi for a Viksit Bharat (Developed India), Governor Parnaik stressed that Arunachal Pradesh could align with this national goal by laying a strong foundation built on technological advancement.

He pointed out that a similar transformation is achievable for the state, with the ultimate aim of creating a "Viksit Arunachal" through the strategic integration of AI in governance.

The Governor elaborated on the advantages of AI, noting that its strength lies in the speed and precision with which it produces outcomes.

He further acknowledged the competent performance of individual government departments but identified inter-departmental coordination as an area that continues to face challenges.

He stated that technology can play a vital role in analyzing existing systems, planning effectively, and addressing these coordination gaps through structured and tech-enabled governance.

Governor Parnaik identified several spe-

cific sectors where AI tools could have an immediate and measurable impact.

These included anti-drug initiatives, real-time monitoring of infrastructure development projects—particularly those related to road construction—and overall enhancement of administrative oversight.

Drawing from his firsthand experiences during official tours across various districts, the Governor urged ministers and senior bureaucrats to focus on bottom-up automation strategies, beginning at the district level. He emphasized the importance of localized implementation of automation to create a foundation for broader transformation.

"As an enabler, I will continue my mission to promote automation," he affirmed.

The presentation, which served as the platform for this important dialogue on AI adoption in governance, was delivered by Abhinav Varma Kalidindi, founder and CEO of IKONZ, Hyderabad.

The event was attended by several key officials, including State Ministers Gabriel D Wangsu, Dasanglu Pul, Balo Raja, and Kento Jini.

Senior bureaucrats such as Commissioners and Secretaries from the Departments of Education, Information Technology, Tourism, and Planning were also present during the session.

The discussion marks a progressive step in the state's journey toward digital transformation, reflecting a growing recognition of the role emerging technologies can play in public service delivery and state administration.

Nirjuli Police arrest drug peddler after brief chase

HT Bureau

ITANAGAR, April 30: In a significant development under the ongoing anti-drug initiative Operation Dawn 2.0, Nirjuli Police apprehended a suspected drug peddler in possession of heroin following a brief chase.

The arrest was made during a naka checking operation conducted on April 28 at Dikrong Colony, based on specific input, an official statement stated.

The operation was led by Inspector T M Nekam, Officer-in-Charge of Nirjuli Police Station.

The team comprised Constables Sonam Nanggye, Hano Pai, Tamin Rai, Lady Constable T Ngulom, and Constable B Newar.

The operation was carried out under the overall supervision of Superintendent of Police, Naharlagun, Mihin Gambo, IPS, and Sub-Divisional Police Officer, Naharlagun, Rishi Longdo.

During the naka checking, a scooter rider attempted to flee the scene.

The police team immediately gave chase and successfully intercepted the individual at Midpu.

The rider was later identified as Tame Peter, 23, a resident of D-

Sector, Nirjuli.

Upon conducting a body search of the suspect, the police recovered 21 vials containing suspected heroin, with a total weight of approximately 27.51 grams.

Following the recovery, Nirjuli Police registered a case under the



Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act.

Specifically, Nirjuli PS Case No. 42/25 was filed under Section 21(b) of the Act.

The accused, Tame Peter, has been formally arrested, and further investigation into the matter is currently underway.

Superintendent of Police, Naharlagun, Mihin Gambo, IPS, commended the Nirjuli Police team for their swift and effective action in apprehending the accused and recovering the contraband.

Stresses need for collective resolve Congress recalls Modi's 'grandstanding', BJP ad in wake of 26/11

NEW DELHI, April 30: The Congress on Wednesday recalled Narendra Modi's "grandstanding" at his 2008 Mumbai address as the Gujarat CM, just two days after the 2008 Mumbai attacks began, and the BJP's "awful" advertisement targeting the UPA government, but asserted "let us now be cohesive at this most sensitive time".

In the wake of the April 22 Pahalgam terror attack, Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jai Ram Ramesh said this is a time to demonstrate a collective resolve to teach Pakistan a lesson it will never forget.

"On the night of April 22 itself, the Indian National Congress had asked for an all-party meeting. The meeting was held two days later but was not attended by the prime minister. The Congress Working Committee (CWC) resolution of April 24 is absolutely clear," he said on X. The senior leader noted the Congress and other opposition parties have also called for a special session of Parliament to discuss the attack and showcase a collective resolve.

"But what did the BJP do on November 28, 2008 -- just two days after the deadly terror attacks



began in Mumbai? In a brazenly unprecedented move, the then Gujarat CM went to Mumbai and, in an act of grandstanding, addressed the media," Ramesh said.

The BJP also issued an "awful" advertisement that very day in the newspapers, he said. "This is history. Let us now be cohesive at this most sensitive time. The country is waiting."

Ramesh also shared the 2008 advertisement of the BJP which read -- "Brutal terror strikes at will. Weak government -- unwilling and incapable".

His remarks came a day after a pictorial social media post by the Congress appealing to portray PM Modi as a leader missing in action during a crisis was slammed by the

BJP on Tuesday. The ruling party saw it as a "sar tan se juda" imagery and an attempt to weaken India.

Following the backlash, the Congress later deleted the post.

The Congress has also asked its leaders to toe the party line on the Pahalgam terror attack or face disciplinary action.

In a letter to all state unit chiefs, CLP leaders, party general secretaries and in-charges, MPs, MLAs/MLCs and heads of various departments and frontal organisations, Congress general secretary K C Venugopal asked them to exercise utmost discipline and consistency in public communication and not speak out of place on the Pahalgam incident.

The CWC has termed the Pahalgam attack, masterminded by Pakistan, as a direct assault on the values of this republic. It also called for a comprehensive examination of intelligence failures and security lapses.

Both Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi had expressed support to the government on whatever action it takes on the matter. (PTI)

Take right steps to protect country by understanding nation's feelings: Kharge to PM

BENGALURU, April 30: Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Wednesday urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to take the right steps towards protecting the country at the earliest in the wake of the Pahalgam terror attack, by understanding the feelings of the country and utilising the authority given to him by political parties to conduct any operation in the current situation.

Reiterating his demand to convene a special session of Parliament to discuss the terror attack and demonstrate a collective resolve, the AICC chief, in the wake of controversy over the party's 'Gayab' social media post targeting the PM, said no attempt should be made to cause any damage to the dignity or image of anyone.

"All parties have to be together. A session should be called, and the prime minister should be there. What steps the PM has taken or is planning to. He need not reveal them because keeping such things secret operations have to be conducted. But, regarding the current situation and what is in his mind, he has to at least call a meeting of floor leaders during the session and speak to them," Kharge said to a question on demand for a special parliament session.

Speaking to reporters here, he said, "We have already given complete authority to them (central government) and have told them to ensure that no problem is caused to the people and soldiers of India, and also we don't face any setback. We have given them the full support to keep Pakistan under control."

"We expect the PM to under-



stand the opinion of the people and the feeling that is there in the country, and utilise the authority given to him by all parties to conduct any operation in the current situation, and do his job. He should take the right step towards protecting the country at the earliest," he added.

Kharge and Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi have already written to Modi, asking him to convene a special session of Parliament.

Asked whether Congress had to face embarrassment because of its 'Gayab' (missing) social media post targeting the prime minister, Kharge said, "I have not seen it, what can I say."

"But, any person, whoever it is, whether prime minister or any person or leader, no attempt should be made to cause any damage to their dignity or image. Whoever does it, whether they (BJP) do it or our people (Congress), it is not right," he said. (PTI)

Courts can modify arbitral awards, SC holds

NEW DELHI, April 30: In a significant verdict, the Supreme Court on Wednesday held courts could modify arbitral awards under the 1996 law on arbitration and conciliation.

In a 4:1 majority ruling, Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna aside from Justices B R Gavai, Sanjay Kumar and Augustine George Masih held under certain circumstances, the arbitral awards could be modified by using provisions of the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996.

The verdict will impact domestic and international arbitral awards in commercial disputes. Pronouncing the judgement, the CJI, however, ordered courts to exercise "caution" in modifying arbitral awards.

"The special powers of the Supreme Court under Article 142 of the Constitution can be applied to modify awards. But this power must be exercised with great caution within the limits of the Constitution," he said.

The CJI added, "The question of law is answered to say that the court has limited power to modify arbitral awards under Sections 34 and 37 of the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996."

Justice K V Viswanathan, the lone dissenting judge, held courts couldn't alter arbitral awards. (PTI)

Rig Vedic scholar Satya Chandrashekarendra anointed as junior pontiff of Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam



KANCHEEPURAM (TAMIL NADU), April 30: Rig Vedic scholar from neighbouring Andhra Pradesh Sri Satya Chandrashekarendra

Saraswathi Shankaracharya was anointed as the junior pontiff of the ancient Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam at a grand religious ceremony here on Wednesday. The 25-year-old acharya, known as Ganesha Sharma Dravid before his initiation into sanyasa as per the tradition at the Kanchi matam, was identified by the matam as successor to the present Seer Sri Vijayendra Saraswathi Shankaracharya. The historic event took place on the auspicious Akshaya Thritiya attended by the seers from across the country.

During the Sanyasa Sweekara Mahotsavam, the senior pontiff Sri Vijayendra Saraswathi blessed the Sanyasa name of Satya Chandrashekarendra. Saraswathi Shankaracharya to Duddu Satya Venkata Surya Subramanya Gane-

sha Sharma Dravid, marking the latter's ascension as "71st Shankaracharya of the Peetam" according to Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam.

The rituals connected with the ascension commenced on Tuesday at the Pancha Ganga Teertham, Sri Kanchi Kamakshi Ambal Devasthanam. Special pujas at Sri Kamakshi Ambal Sanmudhi and Jagadguru Adi Shankaracharya Sanmudhi at Sri Kamakshi temple, marked the occasion.

Special pujas were held at Sri Shankaracharya and Sri Sureshwaracharya Sanmudhi, too, followed by the junior pontiff's visit to Brindavan of Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswati and Sri Jayendra Saraswati Shankaracharya.

Prasadam from various temples across Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Maharashtra and other states were offered to the 71st acharya by the temple representatives.

"The event coincided with the 2534th Jayanti Mahotsavam (May 2, 2025) of Jagadguru Adi Shankaracharya who established Sri Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam in 482 BCE. Since then, the Peetam has the distinction of an unbroken line of 70 acharyas (spiritual leaders)," according to Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam. (PTI)

14 dead in Kolkata hotel blaze; PM announces ex gratia, CM orders probe

KOLKATA, April 30: A massive fire that tore through a budget hotel in the congested Mechuaipatti area of Burrabazar in central Kolkata on Tuesday night claimed at least 14 lives and left 13 injured, triggering a political blame game and calls for accountability.

The fire broke out around 7:30 PM in the six-storey Rituraj Hotel and quickly engulfed the building, trapping several of the 88 guests staying in 42 rooms at the time, officials said.

"Most of those who died were trapped inside and could not escape the thick smoke," a senior officer of the Fire and Emergency Services Department said.

The majority of the victims died due to suffocation, while a few reportedly jumped off upper floors in panic. The deceased included 11 men, a woman and two children.

All 14 bodies have been identified, Mayor Firhad Hakim said after visiting the injured on Wednesday. He said arrangements were being made to hand over the bodies to the victims' families.

Police Commissioner Manoj Verma and State Fire and Emergency Services Minister Sujit Bose initially confirmed 15 fatalities, but later revised the toll to 14 after cross-verification with hospitals and rescue agencies.

"The initial reports mentioned 15 casualties. There was some confusion. But after verification, the number has been corrected to 14. That is the confirmed figure we have at the moment," Verma told reporters. However, Hakim maintained that 15 had died.

"All the deceased have been identified and police are in touch with the families," he said.



Ten fire tenders were deployed, and after nearly 10 hours of intense firefighting, the blaze was brought under control in the early hours of Wednesday, officials said.

Eyewitnesses described chilling scenes of horror — flames leaping from windows, guests screaming for help, and some people jumping off from windows to escape the blaze.

Firefighters used ladders and ropes to rescue dozens of trapped guests as thick black smoke billowed from the building.

The cause of the fire is under investigation, but new inputs indicate gross negligence and flouting of fire safety norms by the hotel.

"The hotel allegedly violated multiple safety regulations. The only staircase was blocked, and ventilation points were sealed due to an under-construction, illegal dance bar on the same floor, which severely hampered evacuation efforts," a senior fire department official said. Bose confirmed that the hotel had defunct fire alarms and sprinklers.

"This is a clear case of negligence. The hotel

had no active fire safety systems in place," the minister said.

Director General of Fire Services Ranvir Kumar said the hotel's fire safety clearance had expired in 2022.

"An FIR has been filed, and the hotel owners are absconding," he said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed deep grief over the tragedy and announced financial assistance for the families of the victims.

"Anguished by the loss of lives due to a fire mishap in Kolkata. Condolences to those who lost their loved ones. May the injured recover soon. An ex gratia of ₹ 2 lakh from PMNRF would be given to the next of kin of each deceased. The injured would be given ₹ 50,000," the PMO said in a post on X.

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee also expressed condolences and confirmed the death toll at 14.

"My heart goes out to the victims of the fire incident that took place at a private hotel (Rituraj) in Burrabazar area. I monitored the rescue and firefight operations throughout the night and mobilised maximal fire brigade services in the area. Fourteen died eventually in total because there were combustible materials stored inside. Investigation has been ordered," Banerjee posted on X.

The chief minister said the state government would provide ₹ 2 lakh to the families of the deceased and ₹ 50,000 to the injured.

Following the incident, Kolkata Police constituted a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to probe the cause of the fire. (PTI)

Champak the magazine and Champak the robotic dog: Delhi HC

Court issues notice to BCCI on publisher's plea

NEW DELHI, April 30: The Delhi High Court on Wednesday sought responses from the BCCI on a plea filed by the publishers of renowned children's comic book Champak alleging trademark infringement over the IPL naming its AI-powered robotic dog "Champak".

Justice Saurabh Banerjee observed the Champak brand name was existing since eternity and asked the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) and Indian Premier League (IPL) to file written statements in response to the plea within four weeks.

The court posted the hearing on July 9. The plaintiff's counsel also prayed that an interim protection be granted to him by directing the defendants not to use the mark.

The court, however, did not pass any interim order at this stage. Delhi Press Patra Prakashan Pvt Ltd moved the high court, saying it has been publishing Champak magazine since 1968.

The 18th session of the IPL is currently underway and will end on May 25, 2025. During one of the matches, BCCI and IPL introduced a AI-generated robotic dog and on April 20, calling it "Champak".

Advocate Amit Gupta, representing the publisher, said naming the robotic dog "Champak" amounted to

infringement of its registered trademark and also commercial exploitation as Champak was a well known mark.

He said "Champak" (robotic dog) as an entertainment feature during IPL matches, which are broadcast nationwide to over 20 crore viewers, resulted in irreparable harm to the plaintiff by diluting its well-established brand, tarnishing its goodwill, and unjustly enriching themselves.

"This constitutes dilution by way of tarnishment, causing injury to the distinctiveness and positive public perception painstakingly built by the plaintiff over decades," the plea said.

Senior advocate J Sai Deepak, who appeared for BCCI, opposed the plea saying Champak was the name of a flower and people associated the robotic dog with a character of a TV series and not the magazine.

The plea, also filed through advocates Mansi Kukreja, Kshitij Vaibhav and Muskan Nagpal, said the nickname of Virat Kohli, former captain of the Indian cricket team, is Cheeku and in one of the interviews, he himself disclosed that his nickname was given on the basis of the character which appears in Champak magazine. (PTI)

Rahul inspects ordnance factories, hospital projects on maiden visit to Amethi since LS polls

AMETHI (UP), April 30: Congress MP Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday visited Amethi for the first time since last year's parliamentary polls and began his day with an inspection of the ordnance factory in Munshiganj. Gandhi had laid the foundation stone for the factory during the UPA rule in 2007. The leader of opposition in the Lok Sabha also inspected the Indo-Asian Rifles Private Limited unit located on the same campus, which was inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on March 3, 2019. Both facilities have now begun manufacturing rifles.

Gandhi spent nearly an hour inside the factories, examining the rifles and interacting with officials to understand the production processes. Following this, he visited the Sanjay Gandhi Hospital, where he inaugurated a new heart unit built at a cost of approximately ₹3.5 crore.

Gandhi was briefed about the facility and its functioning by administrator Manoj Mattu. The Congress leader also flagged off a new ambulance service operated by the hospital.

During his visit, Gandhi also reviewed the progress of the Indira Gandhi College of Nursing, a project he is personally associated with and regards as a dream initiative. He interacted with students and faculty members, and took stock of the institution's activities.

Both the Sanjay Gandhi Hospital and the Indira Gandhi College of Nursing are managed by the Sanjay Gandhi Memorial Trust, New Delhi, of which Congress leader Sonia Gandhi is the chairperson and Rahul Gandhi a trustee.

Rahul Gandhi began his political career from Amethi and represented the seat in the Lok Sabha until 2019, when he lost to the BJP's Smriti Irani.

ACB files case against Sisodia, Jain for alleged corruption in classroom construction, AAP slams it as political move



ers, I feel there could soon be more cases against him (Sisodia) for occupying the minister's seat and forgetting to put a comma or a full stop in a document," AAP national media in-charge Anurag Dhanda said while taking a dig at the BJP.

"The BJP government does not work and instead files cases against AAP leaders on every matter," he alleged.

Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva demanded that the ACB investigate the role of the then chief minister of Delhi, Arvind Kejriwal, in the alleged scam.

"This is a decisive moment in the

fight against corruption of AAP and its previous government in Delhi," he said.

According to ACB officials, the project involved the construction of approximately 12,748 classrooms and school buildings across the national capital, which saw "significant financial irregularities, deviations and cost escalations".

The project was initially approved at a sanctioned cost with the condition that it would be completed by June 2016 and without scope for future escalation. However, not a single work was completed within the prescribed

timeline, the anti-graft body alleged in the statement.

Complaints regarding the alleged scam were received from BJP leaders Harish Khurana, Kapil Mishra and Neelkanth Bakshi.

It was alleged that the total expenditure incurred on the project amounted to ₹ 2,892 crore, pushing the per-classroom cost to ₹ 24.86 lakh, compared to the estimated ₹ 5 lakh per room under standard norms.

"Investigations revealed that the project was awarded to 34 contractors, most of whom are allegedly linked to AAP.

The construction involved Semi-Permanent Structures (SPS) with an expected lifespan of 30 years, yet costs matched those of Reinforced Cement Concrete (RCC) structures which typically last up to 75 years.

"Officials noted that the adoption of SPS construction did not result in any financial benefit," read the statement.

The ACB further claimed that the consultant and architect for the project were appointed without following due process.

"The Chief Technical Examiner (CTE) of the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) had raised serious violations of various clauses

in its report which highlighted gross violations of CPWD Works Manual 2014, GFR 2017, and CVC guidelines. However, the report was allegedly suppressed for nearly three years," it added.

According to the ACB, the CTE report observed that the actual cost of SPS classrooms was nearly equivalent to that of permanent structures due to the adoption of richer specifications.

The cost per square foot for SPS classrooms was pegged at ₹ 2,292, compared to ₹ 2,044-2,416 per square foot for pucca model schools. This negated any financial advantage expected from using SPS.

The initial tendered amount was ₹ 860.63 crore, which later saw an escalation of 17 per cent to 90 per cent amounting to ₹ 326.25 crore.

The anti-graft body said that of this, ₹ 205.45 crore was directly attributed to richer specifications, comprising nearly 24 per cent of the original tender value.

No fresh tenders were invited to reflect these changes, contrary to CVC guidelines. In five schools, work worth ₹ 42.5 crore was executed without proper tenders, using existing contracts, read the statement. (PTI)

ENPO has been demanding separation from the present Nagaland state since 2010

ENPO accepts Centre's proposal of 'Frontier Nagaland Territory'



KOIHMA, April 30: The Eastern Nagaland People's Organisation (ENPO) has announced that it is "compelled to temporarily narrow down" its long-standing demand for a separate statehood and accepted the Centre's offer for a certain level of autonomy in six eastern districts of the state.

ENPO media cell said the apex body of tribal organisations in six districts of eastern Nagaland has submitted its 'stance' to the Ministry of Home Affairs on the draft memorandum of settlement and the comments forwarded by the Nagaland government.

Alleging that the eastern Nagaland areas have been neglected in all sectors since Nagaland state was created in 1963, the ENPO has been demanding statehood since 2010.

The organisation has been demanding the formation of Frontier Nagaland Territory (FNT), comprising Kiphire, Longleng, Mon, Noklak, Shamator, and Tuensang districts.

The ENPO, while maintaining its demand for a "separate statehood", stated, "It is compelled to temporarily narrow down its stance, considering the inability of the GoI but with the condition that FNT

arrangement would be reviewed in 10 years, and that all other unresolved matters will be taken up through democratic political processes."

In a statement, ENPO also maintained that executive, legislative and financial autonomy under FNT must "not be infringed upon and must be implemented in both letter and spirit while all existing subjects under the state shall co-exist within the FNT as envisaged in the basic principle".

ENPO also made a stand on the shared autonomy category with key subjects such as - "establishment of a permanent high

court in Nagaland with a permanent bench in FNT, enhancement of state non-plan allocation from the Consolidated Fund of India".

To address fiscal deficits and enable progress, the Centre should empower the state government to pass enabling laws under Article 371A, it said.

The ENPO also demanded additional parliamentary seats in both the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha during the upcoming delimitation.

The organisation further proposed a conventional power-sharing mechanism that respects fundamental principles and allows members of both the frontier Nagaland legislative assembly and eastern Nagaland legislative unit to function under a decentralised planning and execution system.

It also emphasised the upgradation and modernisation of the village guard organisation, including enhancement of their salary and honorarium, as a vital part of the FNT arrangement.

While the MHA had made the proposal for FNTA, the state government, as the third party of the tripartite talks, accepted and submitted its response in November 2024, the ENPO said.

The ENPO has been demanding separation from the present Nagaland state since 2010, alleging deprivation on all fronts.

It also boycotted the 2024 Lok Sabha elections and did not participate in the urban local bodies' polls held last year. (PTI)

Guv reviews law and order situation in Manipur



IMPHAL, April 30: Manipur Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla on Wednesday reviewed the law and order situation in the state and strategised efforts to maintain peace, an official said.

The security review meeting was held at Raj Bhavan ahead of proposed programmes of several organisations belonging to Meitei and Kuki-Zo communities on May 3 to observe the second anniversary of the outbreak of the ethnic violence in the state.

The meeting, chaired by Bhalla, was attended by security advisor Kuldeep Singh, DGP Rajiv Singh, GOC 57 Mountain Division Maj. Gen. S S Kartikeya, SIB Joint Director Navdeep Singh Grewal and top officials from CRPF, BSF and the Manipur Police, a Raj Bhavan statement said.

Chief Secretary P K Singh along with IG AR (South) Maj. Gen. Ravroop Singh and IGAR (East) Maj. Gen. Suresh Kumar Bhambu also attended the meeting via video conference, it said.

"During the meeting, we have focused on reviewing the present security scenario in the state and strategising coordinated efforts to maintain peace and stability," an official said.

Zomi Students Federation (ZSF) and Kuki Students Organisation (KSO) said May 3, 2025, marks the completion of two years of the outbreak of the ethnic strife and urged all "to observe the day in silence by closing all educational institutions and all business establishments".

Imphal valley-based COCOMI, a Meitei organisation, had on Tuesday appealed to the people to halt all activities on May 3 and attend a public convention being organised on the day at Khuman Lampak stadium to discuss the future of the state.

Federation of Civil Society Organisations (FOCS) also announced that May 3 this year would be observed as a "solemn day of remembrance and solidarity under the theme - Bridging Divides for Shared Future".

More than 250 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in the ethnic violence between Meiteis and Kuki-Zo groups since May 2023.

The imposition of the President's rule came after Chief Minister N Biren Singh resigned. The state assembly, which has a tenure till 2027, has been put under suspended animation. (PTI)

Kuki-Zo student organisations urge people to observe shutdown on May 3 in parts of Manipur

IMPHAL/ CHURACHANDPUR, April 30: Two Kuki-Zomi student organisations have urged people to observe a shutdown of all educational institutions and business establishments in parts of Manipur on May 3 to mark the second anniversary of the beginning of ethnic violence in the state.

Zomi Students Federation (ZSF) and Kuki Students Organisation (KSO) said May 3, 2025, marks the completion of two years of the outbreak of the ethnic strife and urged all "to observe the day in silence by closing all educational institutions and all business establishments".

More than 250 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in the ethnic violence between Meiteis and Kuki-Zo groups since May 2023.

The imposition of the President's rule came after Chief Minister N Biren Singh resigned. The state assembly, which has a tenure till 2027, has been put under suspended animation.

The student bodies also called for "hoisting black flags at the respective residences of all".

These organisations also said a "mass prayer would be observed at Martyrs' cemetery and a public gathering at the wall of remembrance in Churachandpur district headquarters", and asked the public to attend the programme.

Earlier, the Indigenous Tribal Leaders Forum (ITLF) said May 3 would be observed as a "Separation Day".

In a statement, the ITLF said, "There will be a day of reflection and remembrance for the victims of the ethnic conflict that has deeply impacted the Kuki-Zo communities".

There will be a series of programmes, including prayers and exhortations for the victims and their families, a keynote address, organisational reports, and speeches by various tribal leaders, it said in a statement. (PTI)

Present eco-friendly model of development for Tripura, state forest minister urges Centre

AGARTALA, April 30: Tripura Forest Minister Animesh Debbarma on Wednesday urged the Union Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change to come up with an eco-friendly model of development for the state because of growing concerns over deforestation.

Speaking at a programme in West Tripura, Debbarma expressed concern over the increasing number of proposals seeking diversion of forest land for infrastructure projects, including highways and public institutions. The Minister claimed that every day he receives files seeking forest land clearance for schools, highways and other infrastructure.

"The development model for Tripura should not mirror that of larger states like Uttar Pradesh or Telangana," he said, questioning the need for multiple national highways in a relatively small state.

Referring indirectly to the four-lane expansion of the Assam-Agartala highway from Mungiakami to Ranibazar, he said, "We can travel to places like Ambassa and Dharmanagar and return via Kamalpur-Khowai. Do we really need so many highways?"

"Time has come to request the Centre to present an alternative eco-friendly development style. If national highways are constructed, there will be the possibility of encroachment by setting up shops or business centres", he said. (PTI)

Five involved in drug deals, extortion held

IMPHAL, April 30: Five people, including two cadres of banned outfits, were arrested in Manipur for allegedly being involved in extortion and drug deals, police said on Wednesday. Three members of the newly formed Chin Kuki Mizo Army (CKMA) were apprehended for allegedly facilitating drug deals along the India-Myanmar border in Churachandpur district, a senior officer said.

"They are residents of Churachandpur and had facilitated drug deals from Phaisat in Myanmar," he said.

The CKMA outfit is relatively new, compared to other Kuki organisations, and an investigation is underway to get more information about the group, the officer said.

Three firearms and ammunition, and three radio sets were recovered from their possession, he said.

One woman member of the proscribed Kangleipak Communist Party (PWG) was also arrested from Kwakshipai in Bishnupur district, another officer said.

She has been involved in extortion in Thoubal area, he said. (PTI)

Nagaland witnesses communication revolution

Wireless image transmission via radio signals

HT Correspondent
DIMAPUR, April 30: The Nagaland State Disaster Management Authority (NSDMA), in collaboration with OSCAR India, marked a technological breakthrough in disaster communication, successfully demonstrating wireless image transmission via radio signals without internet for the first time in Northeast India.

This pioneering achievement was conducted during the second phase training programme NSDMA from April 24-29, reinforcing their position as leaders in alternative communication technologies, an official release said on Wednesday.

While OSCAR INDIA has conducted similar successful experiments across India, this demonstration holds special significance as the first-ever implementation in Northeast India's challenging terrain.

The training programme equipped NSDMA's district project associates (DPAs) with crucial skills including, practical Morse code applications, hands-on antenna construction work-



shops where they built antennas for amateur radio operation by themselves, also a comprehensive mock fire rescue drill utilizing amateur radio communications.

The wireless planning & coordination (WPC) wing, department of telecommunications, lauded the effort of OSCAR INDIA by assigning the special call sign "AT2NE" - the first such designation for expedition in the field of amateur radio through-

out entire Kohima district. Nilkantha Chatterjee, convenor of OSCARINDIA, said, "This demonstration proves radio's vital role when modern networks fail. While we have conducted similar transmissions else here, bringing this capability to Northeast India's unique landscape is particularly rewarding."

He added that the 'AT2NE' call sign recognises "our commitment" to advancing communication resilience. During debriefing at the NSDMA Conference hall, Dr Johnny Ruangmei, joint chief executive officer, NSDMA, said: "Professionals in disaster management should be involved on a mission mode and not as a professional career alone."

He added that the NSDMA will work to harvest the communication capability of transfer image through voice frequency using HAM radio.

Tripura board announces Madhyamik, HS results

AGARTALA, April 30: The Tripura Board of Secondary Education (TBSE) on Wednesday announced the results of the Madhyamik (Class 10) and Class 12 exams with pass percentages of 86.53 and 79.29, respectively.

This was the first time TBSE declared the results in such a short time — around two months after the exams concluded.

Sharing the details at a press conference, TBSE president Dhanajoy Gonchoudhury said, "Out of 29,670 Madhyamik (class 10) examinees, 86.53 per cent passed the exam this year. There hasn't been a significant change compared to last year's performance."

He added that out of 1,019 Madhyamik-level schools across the state, 343 schools achieved a

100 per cent pass rate, reflecting strong academic outcomes in many institutions.

For the Higher Secondary level, 21,506 students appeared for the exams, and 79.29 per cent passed — a marginal increase from last year's 79.27 per cent.

"This is the first time the board has managed to announce both the Madhyamik and Higher Secondary results within such a short period," Gonchoudhury added.

Like last year, TBSE did not release the top-10 merit lists for either exam.

Explaining the reason, the board president said, "These are provisional results. We still need to conduct self-inspection, review and implement the Bachar Bachao Abhiyan (Save the Year Mission). Releasing a merit list now could

be unfair to some students who may make it into the top rankings after reviews."

He explained that if a merit list is declared early, students who appear on it could use it for admission into premier institutions across the country.

"If later changes occur due to the review process, it may alter the rankings. That's why we'll announce the top-10 list only after all procedures are complete," he said.

Chief Minister Manik Saha congratulated the students who cleared the exams.

"Congratulations to all the students who passed the examination conducted by Tripura Board of Secondary Education. I wish them a bright future", he wrote on Facebook. (PTI)

Nagaland student organisation intensifies protest over regularisation of ad-hoc professors

'United in demands but differ in methods'

KOIHMA, April 30: The Naga Students' Federation (NSF), the apex tribal students' organisation in Nagaland, intensified its protest for the second consecutive day on Wednesday here, against the regularisation of services of 147 ad-hoc professors and librarians and locked the main gate of the Directorate of Higher Education (DHE).

The NSF's agitation is against the April 21 government notification that regularised the services of 147 ad-hoc assistant professors and librarians under the DHE. It wants the appointments to be rolled back and the posts filled up through the Nagaland Public Service Commission (NPSC).

Speaking to the media, NSF president Medovi Rhi said the decision to lock the DHE gate was taken during an emergency presidential council meeting held on Tuesday night with its federating units, following the first day of the agitation.

"Until and unless the government revokes its decision to regularise the services of the ad-hoc staff and initiates recruitment through NPSC, the NSF will continue its protest and prevent the functioning of the DHE," Rhi said.

When asked whether the government approached them for a resolution, Rhi said they were informed of a Cabinet meeting scheduled for the

day and based on its outcome, the NSF would decide on the next course of action.

Officials of the district and administration and police deployed to thwart any escalating situation tried to convince the NSF activists to allow the DHE staff to enter the office for regular work.

The NSF representatives said, "Not possible till the government gives a positive response".

Meanwhile, a parallel peaceful protest led by the Combined Technical Aspirants of Nagaland (CTAN) and the Nagaland NET Qualified Forum (NNQF) resumed their agitation on Tuesday.

The agitation, which began on April 21, was suspended on April 25 after receiving a verbal assurance from the Higher Education Minister Temjen Imna Along to revoke the regularisation order and dissolution of the High Powered Committee (HPC). In addition to the demands shared with NSF, the CTAN and NNQF are also calling for the dissolution of the HPC, which was constituted by the government to investigate the matter.

Dissatisfied with the lack of concrete action, they resumed their protest.

CTAN convenor Meshenlo Kath emphasised their commitment to a peaceful agitation and affirmed that the protest would continue until all

three demands were met.

On Monday, the state Cabinet reduced the HPC's reporting period from eight weeks to four, reiterated its commitment to uncovering the facts, and urged the NSF, CTAN, and NNQF to withdraw their protests. Despite this, the agitating groups have remained firm in their stance.

District administration officials and security personnel have been deployed to prevent any escalation.

When asked why NSF, CTAN and NNQF are protesting separately, Rhi explained, "We are united in our demands but differ in our methods. NSF may escalate its protest beyond peaceful means, if needed, to put pressure on the government."

Kath said that both groups met Tuesday evening following a call by the Eastern Nagaland Students' Federation (ENSF) and initially agreed to move forward together peacefully. However, NSF's late-night information to lock the DHE was not endorsed by CTAN and NNQF, who chose to continue their agitation peacefully.

Despite differences in approach, both groups remain hopeful for a favourable outcome from the Cabinet meeting. (PTI)

HIRING OF VEHICLE
Tender Notice No. CON/J-I/ IMPHAL/2024-25/05 Dated: 27-03-2025. Open tender through e-Tendering system is invited from experienced and reputed contractor (s)/firm (s) for the following works.
Tender No. DYCE-C-4-IMP-HV-24-25-05A. Name of work: Hiring and operating of 7(Seven) Nos. 4WD light motor vehicles (Viz. Scorpio/ Bolero/Tata Sumo or similar) for the movement of Dy CE/Con-IV/ Imphal, XEN/AXEN, SSE/JE/Works, Security and 1 (One) Nos. Multi-Utility vehicle for SSE/JE/Works for inspection & Supervision activities for Noney yard, tunnels, minor bridges, etc. for 2 years in connection with Noney - Imphal New BG Railway Line Project. **Tender Value:** ₹2,03,88,952.38/-. **Earnest Money:** ₹ 2,52,000/-. **Tender Submission:** From 12-05-2025 to upto 15.00 hrs. of 26-05-2025 & opening at 15.30 hrs. of 26-05-2025 at Deputy Chief Engineer/Con-4/Imphal, N.F. Railway, Imphal, Manipur-795001 office. The complete information with tender documents of above e-tender will be available in website www.ireps.gov.in
Dy.CE/CON-4/Imphal
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E-AUCTION FOR PARKING CONTRACT AT TINSUKIA DIVISION		
E-Auction for parking contract at various stations over Tinsukia division. Rate Unit: Annual Licensing Fee. Trips/Days: 1096.		
Auction Catalogue No. TSK-Parking-35		
Seq No.	Lot No./Category	Description
AA/1	PARKING-TSK-SRTN-MX-36-25-1 (Parking - Mixed)	Parking Lot for Two Wheelers, Three Wheelers and Four Wheelers at location Sibsagar Town (Stand-II) in Tinsukia Division
AA/2	PARKING-TSK-BFD-MX-6-25-1 (Parking - Mixed)	Parking Lot for Two Wheelers, Three wheelers and Four Wheelers at Borhat in Tinsukia Division for a period of 3 (three) years.
AA/3	PARKING-TSK-MRHT-MX-3-25-1 (Parking - Mixed)	Parking Lot for Two Wheelers, Three wheeler and Four Wheelers at location at Moranhat Railway station in Tinsukia Division
AA/4	PARKING-TSK-DMGN-MX-30-25-1 (Parking - Mixed)	Parking Lot for Two Wheelers, Three Wheelers and Four Wheelers at location BOGIBEL GUIDE BUND for both North and South Bank in Tinsukia Division.
AA/5	PARKING-TSK-NCH-MX-9-25-1 (Parking - Mixed)	Parking Lot for Two Wheelers, Three Wheelers and Four Wheelers At Nakachari Rly Station in Tinsukia Division for the period of 03(three) years
AB/1	PARKING-TSK-JTTN-PCCV-29-23-1 (Parking - Passenger Carrying Commercial Vehicles)	Parking Lot for Goods carrying Commercial Vehicle at Jhorhat Town Goods Yard for a period of 03 (three) years
Auction Start Date & Time: 15.00 hrs. of 14-05-2025. Auction Close Date & Time: 16.20 hrs. of 14-05-2025. Prospective bidders are requested to visit E-Auction Leasing Module on IREPS website www.ireps.gov.in		
Divisional Commercial Manager (I/C), Tinsukia NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY Serving Customers With A Smile		

As an actor, baba was open to everything around him: Babil Khan on Irrfan

NEW DELHI, April 30: Babil Khan has fond memories of working as an intern in the camera department on Irrfan Khan's 2017 romantic drama "Qarib Qarib Singlle" and he remembers how his father enjoyed waking him up early in the morning for the shoot. Irrfan passed away on April 29 in 2020 after a fight with a rare form of cancer.

Babil, who has followed in his father's footsteps by getting into movies, considers Irrfan among the greatest actors ever and right alongside two of his favourite Hollywood icons Marlon Brando and Philip Seymour Hoffman.

He considers himself lucky that he got to closely observe his father's acting process and spontaneity first hand on the sets of the Tanuja Chandra-directed film, which also starred Parvathy Thiruvothu.

"I was the intern for the camera department. I was running around with a lens box... It was one of the greatest experiences

of my life. And he used to say that this is the best shooting he ever had. He used to say, 'Get up, let's go for the shooting.' It was for the first time I saw him like that. It was amazing, I can't explain, this lightness of being. He was enjoying himself," Babil told PTI in an interview.

Babil, who made his acting debut with "Qala" in 2022, recalled an incident when his father immediately incorporated his way of laughter for a particular joke in "Qarib Qarib Singlle".

"There was a joke, 'Do latte laana par apni nahi laana...'. But it was very difficult to execute. He came to me and said, 'Mujhe hasi nahin aa rahi.' I asked him what the joke was and he told me. I started laughing there and he was like, 'OK.' In that scene, he mimicked the way I had laughed at the joke. But that was the thing. As an actor, he was open to everything that was happening around," the 26-year-old said.

According to Babil, Irrfan

never had a set formula when it came to acting as he would constantly tweak his performance by observing people.

"He used to say, 'whatever nature is trying to give to me at that moment, I will try my best to execute it that way'... He even said in an interview, 'Main to sab se churata hoon.' He never went with the pride that I know what I'm doing'."

When his admirers would sing paeans about him and his acting prowess, Irrfan would always downplay it. "He was like, 'no, my work is ok' because he didn't think much about himself. Of course, he had some insecurities as a man. But I am fortunate that I got to witness that," he added. Babil said behind his father's greatness, there was a lot of contribution by his mother, producer Sutapa Sikdar.

"If she was doing her own thing.. if she didn't surrender to the combination of what nature was trying to create, I don't think

Irrfan would have ever been Irrfan. They combined to create Irrfan," he said.

Irrfan and filmmaker Shoojit Sircar worked together on 2015's "Piku" but the bond they shared has now transferred to the family. Babil recalled how Sircar came to his help when he faced social media trolling.

"He has really helped me a lot with everything. He's not just a director for me. He's my family... They were also best friends...

When he saw me a little disturbed, after all that trolling and everything, he reached out to me.

"So Shoojit da called me and said 'stop thinking about it. Now go and clean the room and send me a photo of it'... When I cleaned my room, I found a lot of unnecessary material, which I removed. Similarly, the unnecessary thoughts also started to go out of my mind. I got clarity," said the actor, who is collaborating for an upcoming untitled film. (PTI)

I LIKE CHARACTERS WHO GET LOST IN THE CROWD: NAWAZUDDIN SIDDIQUI



NEW DELHI, April 30: Like most actors, his aim is to disappear into his character. And unlike most movie stars, Nawazuddin Siddiqui would like to get lost in a crowd in real life too – the equivalent maybe of Harry Potter's invisibility cloak.

"It's very difficult for me to make myself presentable and stand out. But I feel very good that I am sitting in a corner and no one is looking at me... Rather, I'm observing others," Siddiqui told PTI in an interview.

"I feel the world is a 70mm film and I'm watching it," added the actor who became a star playing everyday people, be it in small roles such as in "Munnabhai MBBS" and "Peepli Live" or performances in acclaimed titles, including "The Lunchbox", "Bajrangi Bhaijaan" and "Maan-jhi".

Siddiqui's journey from Budhana in Muzaffarnagar in Uttar Pradesh to Delhi's National School of Drama and then to Mumbai from where he emerged as one of the Hindi film industry's most versatile stars after a long struggle is the stuff dreams are made of.

The aspiring actor went straight from watching C-grade films to world cinema.

Growing up in Budhana, he said there were no literary or cultural influences but there was a 'kachecha theatre' that would mostly show C-grade movies.

"I have grown up watching those movies and when I came to the city, I went to the National School of Drama and I was introduced to world cinema there so I missed a lot of Bollywood movies in between, which I saw later."

The 50-year-old said he still considers each character a fresh challenge, the latest being his portrayal of former customs officer Costao Fernandes in a new film on ZEE5.

In fact, if he had to have one of his characters as a travel companion, it would be that of a regular Mumbai tourist photographer from director Ritesh Batra's "Photograph".

"It's the kind of person who does not have a status and has nothing special about him. Even if he passes in front of you, you won't pay attention to him. I like such characters who get lost in the crowd," he said. Isn't it the antithesis of what actors want -- to stand out and be noticed?

"I don't want it. My aim is to not stand out even in real life. There are a lot of my friends, my seniors, like Manoj Bhui (Bajpayee), who often says that 'if you make Nawaz stand in the crowd, you won't even know where he is, he merges with the crowd'. So, I have that, and I like it," he said. (PTI)

Tamannaah joins Sidharth in folk thriller 'Vvan - Force of the Forrest'

NEW DELHI, April 30: Actor Tamannaah Bhatia will feature alongside Sidharth Malhotra in folk thriller movie "Vvan - Force of the Forrest", the makers announced on Wednesday. The project, which hails from Ektaa R Kapoor's Balaji Telefilms Ltd and The Viral Fever (TVF), will be directed by Arunabh Kumar and Deepak Mishra of web series. "Rooted in Indian mythology and mysticism, 'VVAN - Force of the Forrest' unfolds a tale straight from the pages of history and folklore. Delighted to welcome @tamannaahspeaks to this powerful narrative — a force in her own right, ready to command the screen like never before," Balaji Telefilms posted on its social media pages. The makers also announced that the movie will now release in theatres in 2026. "Vvan", which was earlier scheduled for release on Chhath Puja 2025, is the first project between Balaji Telefilms and TVF after they announced a creative partnership in 2023. (PTI)

NOT POSSIBLE TO ALLOW PAKISTANI ARTISTS WORK IN INDIA NOW: JAVED AKHTAR

NEW DELHI, April 30: "Should we allow Pakistani artists to work here?" That, lyricist Javed Akhtar said on Tuesday, is the question to be asked in the wake of the Pahalgam terror attack.

There is hardly "any warmth today" in India-Pakistan cultural ties, the veteran screenwriter-poet noted while saying that this is not the time to even think about whether Pakistani artists should be allowed to work in India.

"This could be thought about in better times and hopefully after some years some sense will prevail. And there'll be a better attitude towards India from the establishment of Pakistan. And then this can be considered. But at the moment, this question should not be asked. Not possible," Akhtar told PTI in an interview.

He added that Pakistani artists such as Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, Mehdi Hassan, Ghulam Ali and Noor Jehan were welcomed with open arms by Indian authorities in the past but this wasn't reciprocated by the Pakistani establishment. Akhtar's comments come after government sources said last week that "Abir Gulal", featuring Pakistani star Fawad Khan, will not be allowed to release in

theatres in India. The move comes amid growing calls for a ban on the movie, earlier slated for release on May 9, in the aftermath of terrorists gunning down 26 people in Kashmir's picturesque Pahalgam mountains on April 22.

Asked whether the ban is fair, Akhtar said there would be a better time for this discussion. "Particularly whatever has happened recently after that (it) should not even be a topic at the moment. There is hardly any friendly feeling or warmth because of what has happened in Pahalgam," he told PTI on the sidelines of the "IP and Music: Feel the beat of IP" event organised by FICCI.

"The question should be, should we allow Pakistani artists to work here?" Discussing the great reception Indians have always given great Pakistani artists, he also referred to Faiz Ahmed Faiz as a poet of the subcontinent.

"I won't say Pakistani poet. He was living in Pakistan because he was born there. But he was the poet of the subcontinent, a poet of peace and love. When he came to India, during Mr Atal Bihari Vajpayee's prime ministership, he was treated like a state head.

"The kind of respect he was given by the government and the way they looked after him and so on. But I'm afraid this has never been reciprocated. I have no complaints with the people of Pakistan...," he added. The 80-year-old veteran, who is also chairperson of the Indian Performing Right Society (IPRS), said melody queen Lata Mangeshkar was very popular in Pakistan in the 60s and 70s but didn't perform there even once.

"I won't complain to the people of Pakistan because they loved her (Mangeshkar). That's why she was so popular... They admired her but there was some blockage. And the blockage was in the system... In this kind of one-way traffic, there once comes a tiredness. This is absolutely equally valid. We don't get any response from you, but that will go on till when?" he asked. Akhtar also added that blocking Pakistani artists in India will only please the army and fundamentalists in Pakistan who want a tall wall between India and Pakistan. "The Pakistani should not be able to see what kind of freedom, what kind of privilege every citizen of India enjoys... They want the distance because that suits them. (PTI)

Sometimes people have to be told they can't take liberty: Javed Akhtar on responding to social media trolls

NEW DELHI, April 30: As someone who often schools faceless people on social media for their communal and hateful remarks, veteran screenwriter-poet Javed Akhtar says trolls should know they can also be subjected to the same treatment when the need arises.

Whether it's supporting Indian cricketer Mohd Shami during the recent 'roza' row, getting back at trolls who targeted him for praising Virat Kohli or condemning the Pahalgam terror attack in strong words, the lyricist is known for openly voicing his opinions on X.

Asked whether his family asks him to steer clear of social media trolls, Akhtar told PTI: "Yes, absolutely. Even my friends say 'let it be. Why do you want to get into it? You are above all these things'. Forgive me for my immodesty, I

mostly feel above these (trolls) but sometimes you have to come down and tell them that, 'No, you can't take this liberty, and if you will, I'll pay you back in the same coins.'"

The 80-year-old writer, who also serves as the chairperson of the Indian Performing Right Society (IPRS), was speaking on the sidelines of the "IP and Music: Feel the beat of IP" conference organised by FICCI on Tuesday here.

Akhtar, who took over the IPRS in 2017, said the copyright body needs government support so that artists receive their fair share of public performance royalty.

"If there are few lakh people who are not paying us public performance royalty, we can't have a few lakh cases in courts, it is not possible. It is only the govern-

ment which can put pressure by making some kind of a rule or a sub-rule to make it mandatory to pay."

"Whenever I have contacted any political party or ministry, they have been extremely sympathetic about the cause. They have respect for Indian artists, they have often gone out of the way to help us. I have no such problems. What we have to do now is to go again (to the authorities) and tell them what is wrong. You have made a fantastic law, but it is not working on the ground," he said.

"Sholay" and "Deewar", which he co-wrote with Salim Khan, are celebrating their 50th release anniversary. Asked what was the reason behind the enduring relevance of these films, the writer said it's impossible to predict how a movie is going to connect with

people while writing it.

"Kuch achhe kaam hote hain jo reh jaate hain public memory mein (there are a few good works that remain etched in public memory). And the films you're talking about they have somehow (have stayed in public memory)... Why, I don't know. If I knew, I would've done it again and again. They have become a part of the Indian psyche, culture, and common language."

"Dialogues of a 50-year-old film are being referenced in stand-up comedy, other films, and even in political speeches till today. How and why has it happened? I mean, what is charisma? There is no definition of charisma. It happens and then you try to reason it out, find some rationale or logic in it. But I think it is beyond it," he added. (PTI)



Swiatek and Sabalenka power into Madrid quarterfinals a day after blackout; Top seed Zverev loses

MADRID, April 30: Power was restored at the Caja Magica tennis complex and the Madrid Open resumed with a packed schedule that included second-ranked Iga Swiatek advancing to the quarterfinals after a "more relaxed" day because of the blackout.

Top-ranked Aryna Sabalenka made into the last eight by defeating Peyton Stearns in straight sets, while on the men's side, top-seeded Alexander Zverev was upset by 21st-ranked Francisco Cerundolo of Argentina.

Following the major blackout that prompted 22 matches to be postponed on Monday, Swiatek returned to the center court and defeated Diana Shnaider 6-0, 6-

7 (3), 6-4 to stay on track to defend her title in the Spanish capital.

"I liked yesterday. I think the whole world was just more relaxed, kind of, obviously the people who didn't lose because of this," she said. "I enjoyed the time off, and I tried to just recover, because we need to savor these free days, for sure."

Swiatek said she took away food from the tournament site and relaxed at the hotel until the power came back on.

"I just chilled and used that time to not think about what I should do," she said. "There was no signal, so basically no one used their phones. It was nice, I liked it."

Most parts of Madrid re-

gained power overnight, but the Caja Magica was still without electricity early Tuesday, causing a delay in the opening of the gates for fans.

The power came back quickly, though, and organizers did not have to alter the day's schedule of matches, although there was the possibility of the night session being delayed because of the high number of matches during the day.

Swiatek cruised in the first set but had to save 11 of 13 break points to seal a hard-fought victory against the 13th-seeded Shnaider.

Swiatek has not lost before the quarterfinals in seven tournaments this season but hasn't gone past the semifinals since



Roland Garros last year. She will next face Madison Keys, who defeated Donna Vekic 6-2, 6-3.

It will be Swiatek's first meeting with Keys since she lost despite having match point in the

semifinals of the Australian Open that was won by Keys.

"We played last year here, but I think it was a night session or something," Swiatek said. "I don't know, I think it was like colder or a little bit different, so

for sure we'll watch that match."

Sabalenka defeated 44th-ranked Stearns 6-2, 6-4 to advance to the Madrid quarterfinals for the fourth time in five years.

It was the WTA Tour-leading 28th win this season for the two-time Madrid champion. She was tied with Jessica Pegula with 27.

Sabalenka lost last year's final to Swiatek.

Cerundolo defeated the second-ranked Zverev 7-5, 6-3 to continue his quick rise in the rankings.

Cerundolo, who also defeated Zverev last year in Madrid, broke serve once in each set and saved the only break opportu-

nity he conceded at center court.

Zverev was coming off the title in Munich and will move on to defend his title in Rome.

"He played better than me today," Zverev said. "He definitely played better than me last year when we played here. But to be honest, I didn't play terrible, he just played better than me."

In the men's side, 31st-ranked Matteo Berrettini withdrew with an abdominal injury after losing the first set 7-6 (2) to sixth-ranked Jack Draper.

Sixth-seeded Alex de Minaur tied Carlos Alcaraz with a tour-leading 24th win this season by getting past Denis Shapovalov 6-3, 7-6 (3). (AP)

Women's hockey: India look to get combination right against Australia

PERTH, April 30: The Indian women's hockey team will field its "best combinations" and look to fix some defensive frailties in the three-match Test series against Australia starting here on Thursday with head coach Harendra Singh hoping to identify his core group for the FIH Pro League matches in June.

After opening the tour with back-to-back losses to the Australia A side, India will be eager to bounce back with a stronger performance.

"In the first two games, most of the players have had a chance to play and now we will try out the best combinations among players," chief coach Harendra Singh said in a press release issued by Hockey India.

"I am looking forward to this because this is how we identify the players who can compete in the forthcoming Pro League matches in Europe."

"Before going to the World Cup next year, the new girls should play a minimum of 35 matches. That is the goal we keep in mind while preparing for such tournaments," he added. India went down 3-5 in the opening match before narrowly losing 2-3 in the second against Australia A. Despite the results, the coach was upbeat about the team's effort.

"In both the matches, we have conceded some soft goals which were disheartening, but apart



from that, we have been very competitive. This is a test series so it is not about winning or losing, it is about the experience," the coach said.

He stressed on the importance of giving youngsters early exposure at the international level.

"There are some players who

have come out of the country to play for the very first time. I am giving the youngsters a chance to play so they are prepared to be the next generation," he added.

India's 26-member squad, led by Salima Tete with Navneet Kaur as vice captain, will now

face a bigger challenge against the senior team of Australia over the next three matches on Thursday, Saturday and Sunday.

The last time both sides met, India enjoyed a 1-0 victory during the FIH Hockey Pro League 2023-24 and will look to obtain a similar result.

Giving his assessment of the youngsters in the team, Harendra said, "Everyone is giving their heart and there is healthy competition within the team. The one girl who has caught my eye is Mahima Tete. She's mobile, quick and has great potential." (PTI)

Former national shooting coach Sunny Thomas dies

KOCHI, April 30: Former India shooting coach Sunny Thomas, under whose tutelage the sport achieved some historic highs including multiple Olympic medals, died on Wednesday after suffering a cardiac arrest.

He was 84 and breathed his last in Kottayam where he was based. Thomas is survived by his wife KJ Josamma, sons Manoj Sunny, Sanil Sunny and daughter Sonia Sunny. The former shooter, who guided the Indian marksmen from 1993 to 2012, was a first-hand witness to several momentous occasions in the sport's history. He

was bestowed with the Dronacharya award in 2001 and was part of the coaching staff during the 2004 Athens Olympics where Rajyavardhan Singh Rathore became the first Indian to win a Games medal in shooting with his silver in the men's double trap competition.

The National Rifle Association of India (NRAI) president Kalikesh Narayan Singh Deo condoned the death of Thomas.

"This is a void which Indian Shooting will find very difficult to fill. Professor Thomas was an institution in Shooting and India

would not have become the Shooting power that it is today, without his selfless contribution to our sport," said Deo.

"The entire Shooting community is in grief and on behalf of everyone at the NRAI, I send my heartfelt condolences to his loved ones," he added. The highest point in Thomas' career came in Beijing when Abhinav Bindra became the first Indian to claim an individual gold medal, bagging the yellow metal in the men's 10M air rifle event. Bindra always held Thomas in high regard as a coach, and it reflected in his touching

tribute to him, calling the octogenarian a "father figure."

"Deeply saddened to hear about the passing of Prof. Sunny Thomas. He was more than a coach, he was a mentor, guide, and father figure to generations of Indian shooters," Bindra wrote in his 'X' handle. "His belief in our potential and his relentless dedication to the sport laid the foundation for India's rise in international shooting. He played a big role in my early years, and I'll always be grateful for his support and guidance. Rest in peace, sir. Your impact is everlasting." (PTI)



Dembele's early goal gives PSG 1-0 win over Arsenal in 1st leg of Champions League semis

LONDON, April 30: Paris Saint-Germain is leaving England on a high again and within touching distance of a second Champions League final.

Ousmane Dembele's early goal gave PSG a 1-0 win over Arsenal on Tuesday in the first leg of their semifinal, and only a couple of late misses prevented the advantage from growing bigger.

"It was a great night," PSG midfielder Vitinha said. "We could have scored more but we are glad for 1-0 and we will do everything in our power to go to the final." Having already eliminated Premier League champion Liverpool and Aston Villa in the knockout stages, PSG outplayed Arsenal as well in a stadium where it lost 2-0 in the league phase in October.

This youthful PSG side has

come a long way since then, and once again showed that it's a better team without superstar Kylian Mbappe — whose Real Madrid lost 3-0 at the Emirates Stadium in the quarterfinals.

Despite that recent history, PSG showed no hesitation in taking the game to Arsenal from the start. And Dembele opened the scoring in the fourth minute after he was left all alone in the area and was picked out by Khvicha Kvaratskhelia for a first-time finish that snuck in via the far post.

The goal came after 26 consecutive passes in the buildup, which stats provider Opta said was the most for PSG in a Champions League game since at least 2003-04.

"We showed the kind of team we are," PSG coach Luis Enrique said. "We tried to play our

way and scored the goal early playing the way we play."

It was the hosts who looked affected by the moment — and the absence of suspended midfielder Thomas Partey — in their first Champions League semifinal since 2009.

They couldn't cope with PSG's pace in transition and the visitors' lead easily could have been bigger after a dominant first half. "They started quick with a goal and they dominated the first 15-20 minutes," Arsenal goalkeeper David Raya said. "It's only halftime, we take positives."

Kvaratskhelia caused Arsenal problems throughout and had a penalty appeal turned down in the 17th minute and a shot saved by David Raya in the 26th.

Raya made a better save in

the 31st to deny Desire Doue as PSG continually was the more threatening team.

At the other end, Gianluigi Donnarumma denied Arsenal an equalizer on the stroke of half-time with a one-handed save to keep out a shot from Gabriel Martinelli.

With former Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger looking on in the stands, the Gunners improved in the second half.

Mikel Merino thought he had equalized shortly after the break when he headed in a free kick from Declan Rice, but it was disallowed for offside after a lengthy VAR check.

Donnarumma, who played a key part in the wins over Liverpool and Aston Villa, then had to make another low one-handed finger-tip save to steer Leandro Trossard's shot wide

after a quick counter in the 56th, but that was as close as Arsenal came to an equalizer.

"That's the work of a goalkeeper, no? Save the team," Luis Enrique said. "They work every day for that."

PSG substitutes Bradley Barcola and Goncalo Ramos both had chances to double the lead late on when clear through on goal. But Barcola shot narrowly wide and Ramos rattled the crossbar to keep Arsenal close going into the second leg in Paris next week.

"We have to go to Paris and win the game. We are more than capable of doing it," Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta said. "If you want to be in the Champions League final, you have to do something special. And we are going to need to do something special in Paris." (AP)

'Titan' Donnarumma saves the day for PSG again in the Champions League

LONDON, April 30: Gianluigi Donnarumma was hailed as a "titan" by Paris Saint-Germain coach Luis Enrique after producing some brilliant saves against Arsenal to ensure his team took a lead into the second leg of their Champions League semifinal next week.

The Italy goalkeeper continued his impressive form in the knockout stage by pulling off two one-handed stops low down to his left, first to deny Gabriel Martinelli and then Leandro Trossard, and preserve PSG's clean sheet in a 1-0 win Tuesday.

Previously this campaign, Donnarumma was PSG's star in a last-16 win over Liverpool with two saves in a penalty shootout at Anfield, while a series of great saves in the second half of the second leg against Aston Villa allowed the French champion to squeeze through the quarterfinals.

Luis Enrique rarely veers away from his praise for the collective but the Spanish coach let that mantra slip a touch after the Arsenal game.

"I really want to underline the work of 14 or 15 players," he said. "...Obviously there were some players that shone a bit more than others and when you're playing away at set pieces, a team that's so good at set pieces, you need a titan in goal."

Actually, it was at a set piece that Donnarumma — occasionally weak under the high ball — made his one error of the night against Arsenal. He chose to come off his line in an attempt to get to the ball as Declan Rice swung in a free kick early in the second half, but then changed his mind and found himself stranded as Mikel Merino headed into an empty net.

Donnarumma was, however, bailed out by a video review that spotted Merino was offside.

Otherwise, the 26-year-old Italian — still bearing the scar on his right cheek from a nasty injury sustained against Monaco in the French league in December — was a reassuring presence, with his agility to tip aside Trossard's left-footed shot particularly outstanding.

"He made the saves like he did against Liverpool and Villa," Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta said, "and that's the difference in the Champions League."

Indeed, there's something about playing in England that seems to inspire Donnarumma.

The 1.96-meters goalkeeper might never top those penalty-shootout saves against England in the Euro 2020 final at Wembley Stadium that helped Italy win the European Championship for the first time four years ago. (AP)

Advances worth 8cr to TOPS athletes unaccounted for lack of bill submission

NEW DELHI, April 30: Advances adding up to Rs 8 crore given to athletes under the sports ministry's flagship Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS) remain "unsettled" as beneficiaries have failed to submit bills or recovery amounts" despite repeated reminders, an internal assessment by the Sports Authority of India (SAI) has revealed.

The breakdown of the amount and the names of those who have failed to settle their accounts were not revealed.

However, during a recent performance audit, "objections were raised" about the irregularity for which around 30 athletes (both in the core and developmental group) are under the scanner, according to an internal communication that PTI has accessed.

Reliable sources in SAI and Sports Ministry also revealed that the concerned TOPS athletes have not provided "adequate" explanation for the delay despite being reminded regularly.

It is learnt that "corrective measures" will be taken to make sure that the amount, which was spent in the recently-concluded Olympic cycle, is accounted for, starting with a fresh set of reminders.

At its 155th meeting here on Wednesday, the Ministry's Mission Olympic Cell (MOC) discussed the issue at length along with routine matters such as ratification of financial assistance sought by athletes.

"All members were unanimous in their view that there has to be some action against those who are not furnishing bills," an MOC source told PTI.

"There were various suggestions on how to deal with this situation. These included deductions from their cash awards, and deductions from the fresh proposals sent by repeat offenders. But no decision has been reached. In the next MOC, it will be picked up again," the source said.

As per the laid down procedure, athletes have to submit bills within 15 days of the completion of a training or competition for which advance has been disbursed.

"We understand that they are busy but some pending bills date back to two years ago. It is taxpayers' money and not a good example for other athletes. They must learn to handle finances," the source said.

"The view is that there has to be accountability. It is about complying to laid down procedure."

The sports ministry and SAI have been trying to revamp the TOPS structure and in February, the list of the elite core group was trimmed from 179 to 94, featuring only 42 able-bodied athletes. The developmental list, which is the second rung of the scheme, stood at 112 after a minor reshuffle.

It was a fairly routine pruning after the completion of an Olympic cycle but what attracted attention was the omission of some sports like swimming, squash, golf and tennis from the core list. Athletes picked for TOPS were also made eligible for increased allowance during training and competition trips abroad but they will also have to undergo "physical and psychological tests" every six months as part of a re-worked evaluation process. (PTI)

Revitalised Rajasthan Royals look to halt Mumbai Indian's charge

JAIPUR, April 30: Rajasthan Royals will turn up against Mumbai Indians with renewed vigour as they aim to halt the five-time champions' surging momentum in the Indian Premier League here on Thursday.

With 14-year-old Vaibhav Suryavanshi potentially playing the knock of the tournament on Monday, the Royals have found a ray of hope in what has been an IPL campaign of missed opportunities.

The hosts still have a mathematical chance of making the play-offs but deep down the management has accepted its fate.

A side strain to skipper Sanju Samson paved the way of Suryavanshi's debut and it only took him three innings to become the talking point of the cricketing world.

Samson last played on April 16 and there is no clarity over his comeback, leaving Suryavanshi and Yashasvi Jaiswal to open the innings again. Their 166-run stand against Gujarat Titans ensured they made short work of the 210-run target.

Having put bowlers of international repute to the sword, it would be interesting to see how



southpaw Suryavanshi fares against Jasprit Bumrah.

Lower down the order, there will be pressure on Shimron Hetmyer who has not been at his ballistic best this season where the pitches have been on the slower side.

What will probably make the difference in their ordinary run is their inability to close games from winning positions.

In the pace department, Jofra Archer has provided the breakthroughs but has conceded close to 10 runs per over. Sandeep Sharma too has proved to be a tad expensive. In fact, none of their frontline bowlers have an econ-

omy rate of less than 9.

For Hardik Pandya-led Mumbai Indians, the return of Bumrah has coincided with their ascent to the top of the table. The perennial slow starters have now collected five wins on the bounce and look unstoppable.

"This competition is very tough, can't get carried away. We need to play good cricket, always prepare for the next game and keep up with the momentum going forward," Pandya had said after the win over LSG.

One of the positives for MI in the previous game was the performance of debutant Corbin

Bosch who scored at a strike rate of 200 besides taking a wicket.

With likes of Suryakumar Yadav and Rohit Sharma back at their best, MI seem to be peaking at the right time, an ominous sign for the opposition teams.

Squads:

Rajasthan Royals: Yashasvi Jaiswal, Shimron Hetmyer, Shubham Dubey, Vaibhav Suryavanshi, Sanju Samson, Dhruv Jurel, Kunal Singh Rathore, Riyan Parag, Yuvraj Singh Chahal, Nitish Rana, Sandeep Sharma, Tushar Deshpande, Akash Madhwal, Kumar Kartikeya, Kwen Maphaka, Wanindu Hasaranga, Maheesh Theekshana, Fazalhaq Farooqi, Ashok Sharma, Jofra Archer.

Mumbai Indians: Suryakumar Yadav, Rohit Sharma, Tilak Varma, Bevon Jacobs, Ryan Rickelton, Robin Minz, Krishnan Shri-jith, Hardik Pandya, Naman Dhir, Raj Bawa, Vignesh Puthur, Will Jacks, Mitchell Santner, Jasprit Bumrah, Arjun Tendulkar, Ashwani Kumar, Reece Topley, Lizaad Williams, Karn Sharma, Trent Boult, Deepak Chahar, Satyanarayana Raju, Mujeeb Ur Rahman.

Match starts 7.30 PM IST. (PTI)

Superbet Rapid and Blitz: Praggnanandhaa bounces back to jump to second spot

WARSAW (POLAND), April 30: Indian Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa bounced back from a poor start to climb to second in the overall standings at the end of the first half of the blitz section in the Superbet Rapid & Blitz tournament, part of the Grand Chess Tour.

Praggnanandhaa's efforts held him in good stead for a second day running. The Indian had not done well on the first two days of rapid chess but has come back strongly especially showing his expertise in the blitz section.

With just five minutes given for each game and a three seconds increment after every move is made, Praggnanandhaa played his usual brand of complicated games and ended with three straight wins.

He had started with losses to Deac Bogdan-Daniel of Romania and Levon Aronian of United States but then recovered to beat Firouzja Alireza of France and Maxime Vachier-Lagrave.

In the last three rounds, Praggnanandhaa put it across former world champion Veselin Topalov of Bulgaria, Aravindh and David Gavrilescu of Romania to collect score 5.5 points out of allotted nine games.

On a day when Indian GM Aravindh Chithambaram ran a bit out of steam and could only garner 3.5 points from his nine games, Vladimir Fedoseev of Slovenia cruised to a brilliant 8/9 on the penultimate day and took his tally to a massive 19 points out of a possible 27.

Fedoseev's dominance started right from the beginning now enjoys a huge 3.5 points lead over second place Praggnanandhaa.



Unless there is a massive change in the fortunes of other players, the overall first place seems almost decided for which 4.5 points should be enough for Fedoseev in the remaining nine games slated on the final day. Aravindh started with 2.5 points from first four games and then could only get one point from the last five.

He will have to fight hard in the second half of blitz in order to finish what he started so well — tying for first place in the rapid section.

Standings after nine rounds rapid and blitz: 1. Vladimir Fedoseev (Slo) 19; 2. R Praggnanandhaa (Ind, 15.5); 3-5: Aravindh Chithambaram (Ind), Levon Aronian (Uta); Maxime Vachier-Lagrave (Fra) 14.5 each; 6. Firouzja Alireza (Fra) 14; 7-8: Duda Jan-Krzysztof (Pol), Deac Bogdan-Daniel (Rou) 13 each; 9. David Gavrilescu (Rou) 9; 10. Veselin Topalov (Bul) 8. (PTI)

He's talented but needs to stay disciplined: Madan Lal



NEW DELHI, April 30: Like most of the cricket world, World Cup-winning former India pacer Madan Lal is thoroughly impressed by 14-year-old Vaibhav Suryavanshi's breathtaking IPL performances but he also has a word of caution for the rising star — talent alone won't be enough going forward.

Lal said the prodigy from Bihar's Samastipur would also need to be disciplined and focussed to achieve greater success.

"He's very talented. But talent alone doesn't guarantee success. He needs to be focused, disciplined, and keep working hard. If his process is right, I believe he can achieve amazing heights," Lal told 'PTI Videos'.

Suryavanshi set the IPL ablaze with a record-breaking 35-ball century against table-toppers Gujarat Titans and praise has poured in from all corners for the young swashbuckler.

"I've never seen a kid like this. When I was captain of the Delhi team, Sachin (Tendulkar) played against us at a very young age and scored around 80 runs in the Ranji Trophy semifinal.

"Then came Virat Kohli, who is still playing. And now, everyone is talking about Suryavanshi. He has all the makings of a superstar," he said.

Lal described Suryavanshi's hitting abilities as a "God-given talent."

"...but it's up to you how you work on it. Your sincerity, discipline, upbringing — these matter a lot. Family support is important too. When your parents are disciplined and supportive, that gives you added motivation," he explained.

Lal felt Suryavanshi should play as much domestic cricket as possible going forward.

"Playing in different conditions against various opponents helps you grow," he reasoned. (PTI)

Cricket retained for 2026 Asian Games in Japan

NEW DELHI, April 30: The Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) has confirmed that cricket will be a part of the 2026 Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games to be held in Japan from September 19 to October 4.

The call to retain cricket was taken during the meeting between the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) and the organising committee (AINAGOC) earlier this week.

"The latest development in the compilation of the sports programme came at the 41st meeting of the AINAGOC Board of Directors at Nagoya City Hall on Monday, April 28, when cricket and Mixed Martial Arts were both formally approved," the OCA said.

Cricket matches will be played in the T20 format and hosted in Aichi prefecture, although the exact venues are yet to be finalised.

"The venue for cricket will be in Aichi prefecture but the exact location has not been decided. Interest will be high, not only because of cricket's popularity in South Asia in particular but also because the T20 (20 overs per side) format will be included in the Los Angeles Olympic Games in 2028," the OCA said.

"This will be cricket's first appearance in the Olympics since 1900 in Paris, where Great Britain beat France by 158 runs in the final of the two-team tournament.

Cricket will be among 41 sports featured at the Games, which are expected to see participation from 15,000 athletes and officials representing the OCA's 45 National Olympic Committees.



This will be the fourth time cricket features in the Asian Games, following its inclusion in Guangzhou (2010), Incheon (2014), and Hangzhou (2023). The Indian men's and women's teams are the defending champions.

Cricket will also feature in 2028 Los Angeles Olympics. It will be cricket's first appearance in the Olympics since 1900 in Paris, where Great Britain beat France by 158 runs in the final of the two-team tournament.

The OCA also confirmed that a "floating Athletes' Village" — a cruise ship docked in

Nagoya Port — will accommodate 4,600 athletes and officials.

It will house athletes from several disciplines including archery, basketball 3x3, canoe/kayak (sprint), cycling mountain bike, cycling BMX racing, football (men), gymnastics, handball, judo, kabaddi, kurash, mixed martial arts, rowing, rugby, sepaktakraw, sport climbing, squash, tennis, weightlifting, wrestling and wushu.

However, that cricketers will be accommodated in hotels, alongside athletes from badminton and football. (PTI)

Dhawan lauds 14-yr-old Suryavanshi for his IPL ton, terms it 'Phenomenal'

NEW DELHI, April 30: Former India opener Shikhar Dhawan on Wednesday lauded teenage sensation Vaibhav Suryavanshi for his fearless IPL hundred, saying the 14-year-old's confidence belies his age and his performance will inspire aspiring cricketers across the country.

Rajasthan Royal's Suryavanshi set the IPL ablaze by becoming the youngest player to score a century in the tournament. His 35-ball hundred against table-toppers Gujarat Titans was also the second-fastest in league history.

"It's a great performance indeed, the way he batted was just phenomenal. The big thing is not that he is just 14, the greater thing in that is his self-confidence at such a tender age," said Dhawan on the sidelines of the Intercontinental Legends Championship (ILC) launch.

The baby-faced big-hitter from Bihar's Samastipur hammered 11 towering sixes and seven fours, accumulating 94 of his 101 runs in boundaries.

His innings was the fastest by any RR batter, breaking Yusuf Pathan's 15-year-old record of a 37-ball hundred against Mumbai Indians.

"The way he dominated the bowlers that night who have a name in international cricket is a great achievement indeed...the country should be proud and it will inspire other youngsters in the country," Dhawan said.

Dhawan, the first player to hit back-to-back centuries in the IPL, was also impressed with other youngsters, including Ayush Mhatre, who have made a mark this season.

"It is great to see these players—someone is 14, another is 17—playing in the Indian Premier League. To see these boys achieve success at such a young age is great to see," said Dhawan.

The 39-year-old also condemned the recent terrorist attack in Kashmir's Pahalgam region, expressing heartfelt condolences to the victims' families and backing the government's response.

"I have no words for what happened in Pahalgam... I have full faith in our government that they'll be planning something to counter this. I have my full condolences with the families of the victims. It was heart-wrenching indeed," said Dhawan. (PTI)

Cricket Kenya to start its own T20 League in September

NAIROBI, April 30: Cricket Kenya is all set to start its own franchise-based league, CKT20, in September to revive the sport in which the country had done reasonably well in the past, including reaching the semi-final of the ODI World Cup in 2003. The first season of the league will be an intense 25-day showdown to be contested by six franchises that have been allowed to import at least five international players from across the globe.

A lucrative contractual agreement has been penned by the CK and the Dubai/India based company AOS Sport Tournament in which the latter is expected to invest USD 2 million over a period of five years.

"This is huge. It will be exciting. It will be thrilling. It will turn around Kenya's game for the better," former Kenya International Kennedy Obuya said.

"Only four of the foreign players in a team will be permitted to play at any given fixture, the rest of the fielded squad will be local," explained the former wicketkeeper-batter, who played 90 ODIs for his country and is also a CK Board Member. The league is set to get USD 300,000 funding in the opening season from the AOS.

The support will be increased by USD 50,000 annually, translating to USD 350,000 in 2026, USD 400,000 in 2027, USD 450,000 in 2028 and USD 500,000 in 2029, totalling to approximately 255 million Kenyan Shilling in the five years at the current rate.

"This strategic collaboration is poised to catapult Kenyan cricket to unprecedented heights. The CKT20 League promises to unlock vast potential for Kenyan cricketers, as well as talented players from the African associate member nations," the AOS Sport Tournament Chairman Chandra Prakash Panwar stated. (PTI)

India top Asian U-15 Boxing Championships

AMMAN (JORDAN), April: 30 Putting up a dominant show, India topped the U-15 category by claiming a rich haul of 25 medals, including 10 gold, by women pugilists at the U-15 and U-17 Asian Boxing Championships here.

The women boxers secured 10 golds and four bronze medals across the 15 weight appearances, winning every title bout they contested in the finals on Tuesday.

The U-15 bouts started with Komal (30-33 kg) narrowly edging Kazakhstan's Aiaru Onggarbek with a 3:2 split decision.

Khushi Ahlawat (35 kg) then beat her opponent 4:1, while Tamanna (37 kg) sealed her gold with a second-round RSC.

Svi (40 kg), Milky Meinam (43 kg), Princi (52 kg), Navya (58 kg), Sunaina (61 kg), Trushana Mohite (67 kg), and Vanshika (70+ kg) all won their respective bouts unanimously, capping a clean sweep in the finals for the girls' U-15 squad. (PTI)

Azhar Mahmood shows interest in becoming Pakistan head coach

LAHORE, April 30: Former Pakistan all-rounder Azhar Mahmood on Wednesday expressed his interest in becoming the next head coach of the national team, saying he will soon apply for the high-pressure post.

The PCB was forced to begin a fresh search to find a new head coach and Director of the National Cricket Academy after foreign coaches Gary Kirsten and Jason Gillespie resigned last year, less than eight months into their two-year contracts.

The PCB had named one of their selectors, Aaqib Javed as their interim head coach until the T20 series in New Zealand.

Azhar reckons that he has "gained a lot of experience while working as assistant and bowling coach of the Pakistan team in recent years". He has worked with Mickey Arthur, Kirsten and Gillespie.

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has set May 5 as the deadline for interested candidates to apply for the head coach position.

The PCB has not confirmed as yet whether it will appoint separate coaches for the red and white ball teams or one coach for both formats.

Pakistan's former test spinner Saqlain Mushtaq, who has also worked as interim head coach and bowling coach in the past with the national team, is said to be another strong candidate in the running for future assignments.

According to PCB sources, New Zealand's Mike Hesson is the front runner to take over as head coach if he agrees to take up the assignment.

Two years back, PCB had approached Hesson but he had turned down the offer due to his prior commitments in leagues.

Hesson is coaching the undefeated Islamabad United in the Pakistan Super League (PSL).

Pakistan's first commitment of its new international season will be a five-match T20 series at home against Bangladesh in late May and early June.

Pakistan has had several foreigners as team director, head coach, high performance coach and even bowling, fielding and batting coaches since 2023 but most of them left on not-so-very-amiable terms with the PCB.

The list includes Mickey Arthur, Grant Bradburn, Andrew Puttick, Morne Morkel, Tim Nielsen, Simon Helmet, Yasir Arafat, Kirsten and Gillespie.

The PCB has also experimented with local coaches including Saqlain Mushtaq, Muhammad Hafeez, Aaqib Javed not to forget the long list of local batting, bowling and fielding coaches. (PTI)



NEW DELHI, April 30: Former India off-spinner R Ashwin thought about retiring after his 100th Test but finally took the call midway into the tour of Australia to ensure the "whole circle" related to his spot in the playing eleven doesn't repeat itself.

Speaking on a newly-launched podcast by Chennai Super Kings, Ashwin told fellow CSK member Mike Hussey that he made up his mind on retirement after not starting the Australia series in Perth where Washington Sundar played ahead of the veteran off-spinner.

Ashwin did play the second Test at Adelaide before being left out of the eleven for the third Test at Gabba where he eventually brought the curtains down to a glorious career.

"To be very honest, I wanted to do it after my 100th Test (in Dharamsala,

March 2024). And then I thought, Ok, let me give it a go in the home season. Because, I mean, you're playing well, and you're getting wickets, you're making runs," Ashwin said.

"I thought I'd probably close off with the Chennai Test here (against Bangladesh). I ended up getting a six-wicket haul and a hundred. So it's very tough to quit when you're doing very well.

"So, I went on with the series, and we lost against New Zealand. So, one after the other, it was just building up. And then I thought, okay, let me go to Australia. Let me see how this goes. Because the last time I was in Australia, I had a great, great tour," said India's second highest wicket-taker in Tests with 537 scalps to his name.

Having said that, time away from home was beginning to affect him.

"I thought it does make sense to play a bit. I was having a lot of fun, but the whole hard yards that I had to put through to put myself in the park again, physically and mentally, one of the most important things that was pulling me down was the family time," he said.

The 38-year-old, who is back at CSK this season, eventually made the announcement at the Gabba.

"And when I didn't start in Perth, it was like, okay, this whole circle keeps going again. People add very little value to what you're going through emotionally," he said.

"They don't really consider that because your emotions are yours, and it doesn't matter to anybody else. So I had been contemplating that, and then I thought, okay, maybe it is time," added Ashwin. (PTI)