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BJP gains ground as hill leaders rally for progress and autonomy ● Wave of support swells as ex-rivals join BJP

Mass joining boosts BJP in West Karbi Anglong: CEM

HT Correspondent

HAMREN, April 12: At a BJP 'Mass Joining' programme held in Taseng, West Karbi Anglong, Chief Executive Member (CEM) of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), Tuliram Ronghang, expressed confidence in the party's growing popularity, attributing it to the developmental work carried out by the government.

Addressing the gathering, Ronghang said, "People are joining the BJP after witnessing the good work done by the Centre under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi." He welcomed Chandra Sing Phangcho, Finance Secretary of the Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC) district committee, and Robinson Phangcho of the All Party Hills Leaders Conference (APHLC) into the party, adding, "We can now work together for the betterment of the region."

The CEM also praised Diphu's first-time BJP MP, Amar Sing Tisso, for raising the issue of implementing Article 244(A) in Parliament.

This article provides for the creation of an autonomous state within Assam — a long-standing demand in the hill districts of Dima Hasao, Karbi Anglong, and West Karbi Anglong.

Ronghang recalled that the BJP has been committed to the cause even before coming to power.

Historically, the ASDC was a dominant regional party in the hill districts, including the then unified Karbi Anglong and NC Hills (now Dima Hasao), while the APHLC, under its president J.I. Kathar, a retired civil servant, remains a vocal critic of the BJP in these regions.

Speaking to the media after the event, Ronghang claimed that opposition workers and supporters from 20 polling stations — around 2,000 people — had joined the BJP. "In the next election, the BJP will secure a thumping majority in Amri," he asserted.

Amri is a newly created Legislative Assembly constituency in West Karbi Anglong and will go to the polls for the first time in the next state election.

Also present at the event were Deputy Chairman of Hill Area Small Scale Industries Limited, Arun Terang; KAAC Deputy Chairman Avijit Kro; MP Amar Sing Tisso; Members of Autonomous Council Head Sing Rongphar and Pawan Kumar; and KAAC Executive Member Rina Terangpi.

Assam Police 'worked extensively' to prevent violence during Waqf protests: Himanta

GUWAHATI, April 12: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday claimed that the state police had "strong intelligence inputs" about possible disturbances during protests against the Waqf (Amendment) Act in the state but the law enforcers "worked extensively" to prevent any violent incident.

He said that intelligence inputs suggested that the state could witness trouble during the protests on Friday.

"We had strong intelligence inputs that Assam could witness some disturbances due to protests by the minority community yesterday," Sarma, who also holds the home department, said at a press conference here.

He said the inputs were received five days before.

"Assam Police approached leaders of the minority community and masjid committees. They worked extensively for five days. And yesterday was a day of immense satisfaction," he said, adding that the state witnessed protests in three places with the participation of around 150 people in each rally.

Sarma also expressed his gratitude to the minority community and its leaders.

He said maintaining law and order is the primary duty of the police, and it will continue doing so.

"If there is anything to say (about the Act), there are proper platforms. The matter is already before the Supreme Court. They can argue for or against it there," he added.

Sarma, in a post on X on Friday, had also complimented the police for maintaining law and order.

"Despite having nearly 40 per cent Muslim population, Assam has remained peaceful today except for isolated protests in three places involving not more than 150 participants each against the Waqf Amendment Act," he had said.

"My compliments to @AssamPolice for their extensive groundwork that helped maintain calm and order. People across Assam -- irrespective of caste, creed, or community and religion, are united in spirit and eagerly preparing to welcome our beloved Bohag Bihu with joy and harmony," the chief minister added. (PTI)

SDPO Assault Row: DGP orders inquiry

GUWAHATI, April 12: Assam DGP Harmeet Singh on Saturday ordered an inquiry into the alleged assault of a student leader by a police officer at Jonai in Dhemaji district, an official said.

Advisor of Jonai Regional unit of All Assam Students' Union (AASU) Chandra Kanta Baruah was allegedly dragged from outside a temple, where he and a friend was attending a devotional programme, and taken to an undisclosed location where he was severely beaten up allegedly by sub-divisional police officer (SDPO) Surjya Kanta Morang on Friday night.

Baruah received injuries in several parts of his body and was taken to the police station in an unconscious state. He was later taken to a hospital *(CONTD. ON PAGE-2)*

ASS to felicitate 10,000 senior citizens on Assamese New Year

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, April 12: In a unique and large-scale tribute to the elderly, the Asam Sahitya Sabha (ASS) is set to felicitate 10,000 senior citizens aged 65 and above on April 15, the first day of the Assamese calendar (Pahila Bohag), which also marks the Assamese New Year. The initiative, part of the Sabha's ongoing 'Nijor Din' programme, will extend across Assam, other parts of India, and even abroad.

The Asam Sahitya Sabha, the state's premier literary and cultural organisation, has been at the forefront of preserving and promoting Assamese language, literature, and heritage.

Through 'Nijor Din', the Sabha aims to express gratitude to those who have made lasting contributions to society, particularly in the fields of culture, education, language, and community service.

A member of the Sabha's central office in Jorhat informed that preparations are in full swing, with extensive coordination taking place among office-bearers and members not just across the state, but in other regions and countries with significant Assamese communities. *(CONTD. ON PAGE-2)*

YouTuber Jaspreet Singh appears before Assam Police

GUWAHATI, April 12: YouTuber Jaspreet Singh on Saturday appeared before the Assam Police in connection with a case filed against him and four others for allegedly promoting obscenity on a publicly accessible online show, an officer said.

Singh appeared before the investigating officer (IO) of Guwahati Police's Crime Branch in the afternoon for questioning in connection with the case registered on February 10.

"He was examined and his statement was recorded by the IO," the officer said.

On April 5, another YouTuber, Samay Raina, had appeared before the Guwahati Police's Crime Branch in connection with the case. Now, only Apoorva Makhija was yet to appear before the police.

The police had sent summons to Singh and Makhija again after they sent emails stating they were out of the country, the officer said.

Guwahati Police had registered the case against Raina and YouTuber and social media influencer Ranveer Allahabadia, Ashish Chanchlani, Jaspreet Singh, Apoorva Makhija and others for promoting obscenity and engaging in sexually explicit and vulgar discussion on a publicly accessible online show, causing serious harm to public decency and morality.

The crime branch had registered a case under sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), read with sections of the IT Act, Cinematograph Act 1952 and ?Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986. Allahbadia had also *(CONTD. ON PAGE-2)*

A new government would be formed in Manipur soon: BJP MLA

IMPHAL, April 12: A Manipur BJP MLA on Saturday claimed that there has been a lot of improvement in the law and order in the state and hoped that a new government would be formed soon.

BJP MLA T Robindro said peace talks between Meitei and Kuki civil groups have also started.

"There has been a lot of improvement (law and order). We have strong faith that the Centre will constitute a new government at the earliest. Peace talks between Meitei and Kuki groups have started. We believe that talks between Meitei and Kuki legislators will happen *(CONTD. ON PAGE-2)*

National Herald case

ED issues notices to take possession of assets in Cong-linked AJL

NEW DELHI, April 12: The Enforcement Directorate Saturday said it has served notices to take possession of immovable assets worth ₹ 661 crore that it had attached as part of a money laundering probe linked to Congress-controlled National Herald newspaper and the Associated Journals Limited (AJL).

The federal probe agency said in a statement that it has served the relevant documents to the respective registrar of properties where the assets are located.

Simultaneously, the notices have been affixed at "conspicuous part of these properties" located at Herald House at ITO (5A, Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg) in Delhi, in the Bandra(E) area (Plot No 2, Survey No 341) of Mumbai and the AJL building located at Bisheshwar Nath Road (Property No.1) in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, on Friday.

The notices primarily seek vacation of the premises to be taken over by the ED.

"A notice... has also been served to Jindal South West Projects Limited which occupies the 7th, 8th, and 9th floors at Herald House, Bandra (E), Mumbai, to transfer the rent/lease amount every month in favour of the director, Directorate of Enforcement," it said.

The action has been taken under Section (8) and Rule 5(1) of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) that talks about the procedure of taking possession of assets attached by the ED and then confirmed by the adjudicating authority (of the PMLA).

These immovable assets worth ₹ 661 crore, apart from shares of AJL worth ₹ 90.2 crore, were attached by the ED in November 2023 to "secure the proceeds of crime and to prevent the accused form dissipating the same." The Adjudicating Authority confirmed this order in April last year. According to the ED, the total "proceeds of crime" in the case was ₹ 988 crore.

The Congress had earlier termed the investigation "petty vendetta tactics" and dubbed the ED a "coalition partner" of the BJP.

The ED investigation began in 2021 after the Metropolitan Magistrate at Patiala House Courts in Delhi took cognisance of a private complaint *(CONTD. ON PAGE-2)*

India, Italy resolve to take forward IMEEC initiative

NEW DELHI, April 12: India and Italy have decided to expand cooperation in areas of trade, defence, clean energy and high technology while vowing to work jointly in implementing the ambitious India-Middle-East-Europe-Economic Corridor (IMEEC).

Ways to deepen India-Italy cooperation under the framework of Joint Strategic Action Plan (JSAP) 2025-29 figured prominently during talks between External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and Italian Deputy Prime Minister Antonio Tajani last evening.

Tajani, also the minister of foreign affairs and international cooperation, is on a two-day visit to India from Friday.

In the delegation level talks, Jaishankar and Tajani reviewed the growing bilateral cooperation under the ambit of JSAP which included the areas of trade and investment, defence and security, space, science and technology, clean energy transition and people-to-people ties, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said on Saturday. It said the two ministers noted the vast potential of India-Italy cooperation in areas of artificial intelligence, cyber, telecom, digital technologies, renewable energy, biofuels, education and mobility of youth and professionals, among others.

The JSAP was announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Italian PM Giorgia Meloni following their last November meeting at Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Jaishankar and Tajani reiterated their commitment to elevating the bilateral strategic partnership and ensuring concrete outcomes from the JSAP, the MEA said in a statement.

It added that the visit and engagements of Deputy PM Tajani were instrumental is taking forward the strategic partnership and diversifying bilateral cooperation across domains as per the JSAP.

The two ministers also exchanged views on global and regional developments of mutual interest with Jaishankar welcoming Italy's continued focus on the Indo-Pacific.

Jaishankar and Tajani renewed their commitment to take forward the strategic initiative IMEEC, according to the MEA. In this context, the external affairs minister welcomed Italy's appointment of a special envoy for IMEEC. Billed as a pathbreaking initiative, the IMEEC *(CONTD. ON PAGE-2)*

NFR unveils 306.9 KWp solar power plant in Guwahati

Advancing Green Energy and Sustainable Infrastructure

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, April 12: In a significant move toward environmental sustainability and the promotion of renewable energy, Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) has inaugurated a 306.9 KWp Solar Power Plant at the Uzan Bazar Water Treatment Plant in Guwahati.

The plant was officially launched on April 10, 2025, in a ceremony led by Chetan Kumar Shrivastava, General Manager of NFR, and attended by Samir Lohani, Divisional Railway Manager of Lumding Division, and Sandeep Kumar, Principal Chief Electrical Engineer of NFR.

According to an official statement, the state-of-the-art solar installation, developed under the Environment and Housekeeping Management (EnHM) fund, is designed to generate an average of

928 units of electricity daily, contributing to estimated annual savings of approximately ₹ 30 lakh.

The plant comprises 558 mono crystalline solar module plates, each with a capacity of 550 Wp, and is supported by eight Luminous make inverters with a combined inverter capacity of 315 KVA. The total cost of the project, completed on March 7, 2025, amounted to ₹ 2.48 crore.

Designed to power critical operations at the Uzan Bazar Water Treatment Plant, the solar system is integrated *(CONTD. ON PAGE-2)*

Great potential for growth in bilateral trade between India, Italy: Prez

India's rapid economic growth and the roadmap for 'Viksit Bharat' by 2047

NEW DELHI, April 12: President Droupadi Murmu, on Saturday said there is great potential for growth in bilateral trade between India and Italy as she invited Italian companies to expand their operations in this country.

Murmu made the remarks while welcoming the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Italy Antonio Tajani, who had called on her along with a delegation at the Rashtrapati Bhavan.

Both India and Italy are rooted in ancient civilisational heritage, with a proud history of contributing to the world through "our philosophy, literature, and arts", the President said.

She asserted that India and Italy have been interconnected over the centuries through trade and the exchange of people and ideas. There is a great potential for growth in bilateral trade and investment between the two countries, Murmu

said. "India's rapid economic growth and the roadmap for 'Viksit Bharat' by 2047 present numerous opportunities for industrial partnerships and collaboration," the President said.

She invited Italian companies and PSUs to expand their operations in India, especially for manufacturing and co-production.

Murmu also urged Italian green technology companies to explore possibilities of cooperation and partnership with the Indian industry. The President said the Joint Strategic Action Plan announced during the meeting of Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni and Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Rio in November 2024 is a blueprint for the next five years.

"This Action Plan will be a guiding framework to accelerate our joint efforts," Murmu added.

The President was happy to note that Italian universities and research centres are exploring possibilities of collaboration with Indian partners, according to a statement issued by her office.

She said that the new education policy has facilitated foreign universities to open campuses in India. "Italian universities can be invited to open campuses in India," Murmu said. *(CONTD. ON PAGE-2)*

Hiring outlook remains positive; 45% firms plan to recruit in FY26: Report

MUMBAI, April 12: The hiring outlook for this financial year remained positive as 45 per cent of employers interviewed said they plan to hire for new permanent positions, a report said on Saturday.

A significant 45 per cent of employers plan to hire for new permanent positions, while 13 per cent plan to replace manpower in their existing positions, workforce solutions and HR services provider Genius Consultants said in a report - Hiring, Compensation & Attrition Management Outlook Survey for 2025-26.

The report is based on insights from 1,520 CXOs and senior-level dignitaries of organisations across various industries for the upcoming financial year.

The report further revealed that the growth of the importance of temporary hiring is widely visible, as 26 per cent of the employers focus on temporary, contractual, or project-based roles.

However, 16 per cent of organisations indicated no hiring plans for FY26, highlighting a cautious approach.

When asked about the primary focus of hiring, the report found that 37 per cent of employers said they aim to recruit mid-level professionals, while 26 per cent said they are shifting towards gig workers, contract-based roles, and advisory positions. This confirms the trend shift in industries towards flexible staffing.

Meanwhile, entry-level hiring accounts for 19 per cent, and senior leadership recruitment stands at 18 per cent, said the report.

Projected workforce growth reflects a balanced strategy with 53 per cent of organisations foreseeing moderate hiring growth between 5-10 per cent, while 33 per cent planning a substantial hiring increase exceeding 10-15 per cent, it added.

Among industries, the retail, e-commerce and Q-commerce sector (21%) is expected to experience the highest manpower recruitment, due to which, recruitment requirements in Logistics and Warehousing are also expected to grow, as confirmed by 9 per cent of the respondents.

Around 15 per cent of employers expect higher recruitment in automobiles and EV, as 11 per cent predict the rise of recruitment needs in the renewables, energy and engineering projects.

IT Services, telecom and technology (13 per cent), manufacturing, engineering and production (11 per cent), infra, transport and real estate (10 per cent), and BSFI (9 per cent) sectors are also set to experience a growth in talent needs.

Meanwhile, sectors such as FMCG and FMCD, Healthcare, Hospitality, Media and Entertainment, and Education report minimal hiring activity in this fiscal, it said. "While organizations are navigating economic uncertainties, the demand for skilled talent remains strong. With mid-senior professionals in high demand, businesses must focus on retention strategies to mitigate attrition risks. These insights will help corporates adapt their talent management approach effectively for 2025-26," Genius Consultants Chairman and Managing Director R P Yadav added. (PTI)

realme launches Narzo 80 Pro and Narzo 80x 5G smartphones

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, April 12: Smartphone brand realme has officially launched two new 5G-enabled models in India—realme Narzo 80 Pro 5G and realme Narzo 80x 5G—aimed at delivering high performance and durability at accessible price points.

According to an official statement, the new Narzo 80 series smartphones offer segment-first features, cutting-edge chipsets, and advanced display and camera technologies.

The Narzo 80 Pro 5G, priced from ₹17,999, is designed as a gaming-centric device powered by the MediaTek Dimensity 7400 5G chipset built on 4nm architecture. It claims an Antutu score of over 780,000 and supports 90FPS gameplay in BGMI.

The phone features a 6.7-inch 4500nits HyperGlow Display—reportedly the brightest in its segment—with a 120Hz refresh rate and advanced touch sampling for responsive gaming.

Other key highlights include a 6000mAh battery with 80W Ultra Charging support, a 50MP Sony IMX882 OIS camera with low-light and action shot enhancements, and an IP66/68/69-rated body for dust and water resistance.

The model also features Military-Grade Shock Resistance and Stereo Dual Speakers with Hi-Res Audio certification. It is available in Speed Silver and Racing Green colour options.

Meanwhile, the Narzo 80x 5G, starting at ₹ 11,999, becomes the world's first smartphone equipped with the MediaTek Dimensity 6400 5G chipset, built on a 6nm process. With an Antutu score of 420,000+, the device targets users seeking all-around performance.

It sports a 6.5-inch 120Hz Eye Comfort Display with ten layers of eye protection and offers features like Rainwater Smart Touch and Sub-Zero Charge, enabling charging even at -10°C.

The Narzo 80x is equipped with a 6000mAh battery and 45W SuperVOOC charging, delivering 50% charge in 38 minutes.

It also includes a 50MP AI rear camera, IP69 rating for durability, and premium design elements like vegan leather finishes in Deep Ocean and Sunlit Gold.

Commenting on the launch, a realme spokesperson said, "The Narzo 80 series represents our most powerful offering yet for young consumers who demand uncompromising performance."

The launch also strengthens realme's growing 5G portfolio on Amazon.in, where both models will be available with promotional coupon offers and no-cost EMI options.

Tanmay Shah, Category Leader – Smartphones & Accessories, Amazon India, added, "We are confident that both these devices will cater to the needs of customers seeking high-performance smartphones at competitive price points."

The launch of the Narzo 80 series reflects realme's continued focus on bringing premium features to mid-range devices while pushing boundaries in performance, design, and durability.

UPI faces third outage in less than a fortnight, transactions impacted

NEW DELHI, April 12: UPI users across the country experienced transaction failures on Saturday as the popular payment system was down due to a technical glitch.

This is the third time in less than a fortnight that UPI witnessed outages impacting transactions. In the recent past, UPI outage was reported on March 26 and April 2.

According to the outage tracking platform Downdetector, a platform that monitors service disruptions based on user reports, complaints about UPI failures were being received after 11:30 am.

The Unified Payments Interface (UPI) is an instant payment system developed and managed by the NPCI, an RBI-regulated entity.

NPCI acknowledged that users are facing partial transaction decline and it is working to resolve the issue.

"NPCI is currently facing intermittent technical issues, leading to partial UPI transaction declines. We are working to resolve the issue and will keep you updated. We regret the inconvenience caused," NPCI said in a post on X.

UPI is built over the IMPS infrastructure and allows you to instantly transfer money between two bank accounts.

The payment interface provides a transfer facility without any user charge. Users can transfer any amount of money at any time without incurring additional fees from NPCI.

It is also widely used for small payments at local shops, as there is no minimum transaction limit. Additionally, UPI offers a convenient AutoPay feature, which allows users to set up recurring payments for bills and subscriptions, making transactions seamless and hassle-free. It is to be noted that transactions through UPI touched a record high of ₹ 24.77 lakh crore in March, recording a growth of 12.7 per cent over the preceding month.

The UPI transaction value was ₹ 21.96 lakh crore in February. (PTI)

Assam's Purabi Dairy to add new processing units: Officials

GUWAHATI, April 12: The West Assam Milk Producers' Co-operative Union Ltd (WAMUL), which operates the popular brand Purabi Dairy, is set for a major expansion with the addition of four large milk processing units, along with a number of smaller ones, over the next few years, its top officials said on Saturday.

It currently has a state-of-the-art processing unit in Guwahati, the largest such facility in the North East, and a smaller one in Dhemaji.

"Currently, we have a large plant here with milk processing capacity of 1.5 lakh litres per day (LLPD). We have recently taken over a small unit in Dhemaji," WAMUL managing director Sameer Kumar Parida said.

"We are increasing the number of processing units so that we can expand the reach of our products as well," he added.

The third unit, a defunct facility which WAMUL has taken over in Silchar, will be operational by September or October, taking our total units to three," he said.

Parida said four large processing units in Jorhat, Dibrugarh, Dhemaji and Silchar are planned, which will be operational within next two to three years.

Satya Brata Bose, managing director of North East Dairy and Foods Ltd (NEDFL), said the commissioning of the new units will enable Purabi Dairy to market its products to other states also.

The NEDFL is a joint venture between National Dairy Development Board (NDDB) and government of Assam, which works with WAMUL.

"Currently, Purabi products are available in peripheral areas of neighbouring states like Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh. With the new units coming up, we will be able to send our products to a wider market," Bose added.

Parida said WAMUL reported a growth of 25 per cent in 2024-25, with turnover crossing Rs 320 crore, and it has set a target of surpassing Rs 450 crore in 2025-26.

The recent agreement between NDDB and WAMUL to expand the milk processing capacity of the Guwahati plant from 1.5 LLPD to 3 LLPD will boost its expansion and presence, he added.

He further said WAMUL has achieved a significant milestone with its state-of-the-art milk processing plant here receiving the ISO 22000: 2018 certification, while its cattle-feed plant at Changsari has been awarded the ISO 9001 certification.

ISO 22000:2018 is an international standard for food safety management systems (FSMS), ensuring organisations in the food chain can consistently provide safe products and services by identifying, assessing and controlling food safety hazards.

ISO 9001 is an international standard for quality management systems (QMS) published by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO).

Parida added that the cooperative has also expanded its product portfolio by introducing new items, like ice creams, with more newer offerings to be made to customers over time. (PTI)

Philips launches festive steamer campaign with Assamese film icons

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, April 12: As Assam prepares to celebrate Rongali Bihu with traditional fervour and festive fashion, Philips has launched its 'Steam It Up' campaign to help people keep their outfits crisp, fresh, and ready for every occasion.

According to an official statement from the company, the campaign features celebrated Assamese actors Aimee Baruah, Nishita Goswami, and Barsharani Bishaya as regional ambassadors, showcasing the convenience and effectiveness of the Philips STH5000 Handheld Steamer.

Rongali Bihu marks the Assamese New Year and is known for its colourful celebrations, traditional dances, and elegant attire like the Mekhela Chador.

The Philips STH5000 is designed to make dressing up easier during the festive rush, offering quick touch-ups and a wrinkle-free finish for even the most delicate fabrics.

"As someone who wears traditional Assamese outfits regularly, I know how important it is to keep them looking pristine," said Nishita Goswami. "With the Philips handheld steamer, it's so easy to make any outfit look fresh in just a few seconds—perfect for busy Bihu mornings."

Aimee Baruah echoed the sentiment, adding, "Bihu is a time to celebrate our heritage and look our best.

"I love that the steamer is gentle on my silks and still removes every crease. It's become an essential in my festive prep."

Sharing her experience, Barsharani Bishaya said, "I'm always on the go during Bihu season with events and functions. The handheld steamer helps me stay ready without the fuss of ironing. It's quick, light, and perfect for every kind of fabric I wear."

The STH5000 heats up in 30 seconds, delivers 24g/min of continuous steam, and is safe for delicate materials like silk and cotton.

As part of the campaign, Goswami visited leading local retailers Electrocity and Maitree to demonstrate the steamer's features.

Pooja Baid, chief marketing officer of Versuni India, noted, "Bihu is a celebration of culture, joy, and style. Whether you're dressing in handwoven traditional attire or contemporary festive fashion, Philips ensures your outfit is always flawless."

The Philips STH5000 Handheld Steamer is now available across major retail stores and online platforms, with exclusive Bihu offers for customers in the Northeast.

Committed to responsible development of Palitana Palace in Guj, to serve only veg food, says IHCL

MUMBAI, April 12: Indian Hotels Company Limited (IHCL) on Saturday said it will follow its approach of responsible development while restoring the Palitana Palace in Gujarat.

IHCL, in a statement, also said that since the signing of this property, it planned to cater to only vegetarian food and non-alcoholic beverages, keeping in mind the beliefs and sensibilities of the local (Jain) community.

The statement came in the wake of a section of the Jain community expressing apprehensions that this property will encourage other hospitality companies in the holy city, and that every company might not be as "committed" as the Taj group to respect the sanctity of the site.

"For over a century, IHCL has remained steadfast in its commitment to responsible development. In line with this approach, restoration of Palitana Palace as a hotel will be undertaken with respect for

the beliefs and sensibilities of the local community and has been planned from the outset to offer only vegetarian Jain cuisine and non-alcoholic beverages," an IHCL spokesperson told PTI.

Located 50 km southwest of the Bhavnagar district of Gujarat, Palitana is a major pilgrimage centre for Jains, particularly for its over 850 intricately carved temples on the Shatrunjaya hills, which are considered one of the holiest places in Jainism.

Earlier, Shree Mumbai Jain Sangh Sangathan, a union of all the Jain sub-communities, had written a letter to the state chief minister as well as home minister, besides the Gujarat Pavitra Yatradham Vikas Board, expressing concerns over the presence of the hotel.

The Sangathan had expressed apprehensions that this property will encourage other hospitality companies into the holy city, and that every company might not be as "committed" as the Taj group to respect the sanctity of the site.

The Sangathan has also urged the state government to declare Palitana a vegetarian, non-alcoholic zone in line with other religious places like Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh and Katra in Jammu (Vaishno Devi shrine). "We have been assured of a meeting with the Gujarat chief minister next week in this regard," the Sangathan executive committee member Kamlesh Shah told PTI.

On March 25, IHCL had announced its partnership with Thakore Saheb Mandhatasinhji Jadeja of Rajkot, representing Trident Developers and the Jadeja Royal Family of Rajkot, to restore the 65-key Palitana Palace under the Taj brand. (PTI)

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NFR unveils 306.9 KWp solar

with a comprehensive electrical network extending to barges and jetties, ensuring seamless energy distribution and operational efficiency. With a payback period of just eight years and an expected operational lifespan of 25 years, this solar installation underscores NFR's commitment to energy efficiency, adoption of green technologies, and reduction of its carbon footprint. The initiative not only highlights NFR's leadership in sustainable infrastructure but also sets a benchmark for future renewable energy projects within the Indian Railways network. The project, the statement added, forms an integral part of Indian Railways' broader vision to embed renewable energy into its core infrastructure and minimize reliance on conventional power sources.

By deploying clean energy solutions at key facilities, Indian Railways continues to support national efforts aimed at curbing carbon emissions and advancing environmental responsibility. (With inputs from PTI)

SDPO Assault Row: DGP

at Jonai where the doctors referred him to the Assam Medical College Hospital in Dibrugarh. Baruah's condition was stated to be critical, according to doctors attending on him. Following the incident, members of several students' organisations, including AASU, staged a protest outside the police station demanding action against the SDPO. The DGP has ordered an 'immediate inquiry' by Inspector General of Police (Operations) Jitmol Doley. (PTI)

A new government would be

in the near future to assist in bringing peace. I have faith that a new government will be formed soon, " Robindra told reporters on the sidelines of the programme in Kakching district. "There is no inability to choose a leader or division among us (BJP legislators). We all are united. We will not allow division of Manipur and all will stand united for the state" the legislator from Thanga constituency said. Over 260 people have lost their lives since ethnic violence broke out between the Imphal valley-based Meitei and neighbouring hills-based Kuki communities in May 2023. The clashes began after a 'Tribal Solidarity March' organised in the hill districts to protest against an order of the Manipur High Court on the Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe status.

President's rule in Manipur was imposed on February 13 after the then chief minister N Biren Singh resigned on February 9. The state assembly, which has a tenure till 2027, has been put under suspended animation. (PTI)

YouTuber Jaspreet Singh

appeared before the Guwahati Police on March 7 and was questioned for over four hours. The police said that he had cooperated and assured of extending his cooperation in future, including coming to Guwahati, in connection with the case. The Supreme Court had granted him protection from arrest but had termed his remarks "vulgar". Another accused in the case, Ashish Chanchlani, was the first to appear before the police on February 27 and was granted anticipatory bail by the Gauhati High Court on February 7. Besides the five YouTubers, the owner of the place where the shooting of the controversial show took place has also been named in the FIR, he added. (PTI)

India, Italy resolve to take

envisages a vast road, railroad and shipping networks among Saudi Arabia, India, the United States and Europe with an aim to ensure integration among Asia, Middle East and West. The IMEEC initiative was firmed up on the sidelines of the G20 Summit in Delhi. An agreement was signed by India, Saudi Arabia, the European Union, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the US and some other G20 partners for the corridor. Tajani also met with Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal.

Jaishankar, Goyal and Tajani also co-chaired the inaugural India-Italy Business, Science and Tech Forum which seeks to facilitate tech collaborations, innovation, academic and R&D partnerships, co-production and joint business ventures. The forum saw the participation of more than 100 Italian companies and counterpart Indian firms from four key sectors: Industry 4.0 and new technologies; infrastructure, transport and logistics; clean energy transition; and aerospace and defence. Several business-to-business meetings were held with the objective of forging economic and commercial partnerships.

An Education, Science and Tech, Innovation Forum was also organised in which Heads of universities and research centres from both countries participated to explore research and innovation, and higher education collaborations. India's Ministry of Science and Technology and Italy's Ministry of University and Research also signed an MoU for cooperation in the field of scientific research. (PTI)

ED issues notices to take

filed by BJP leader Subramanian Swamy on June 26, 2014. The complaint, the ED said, highlighted a "criminal conspiracy" by several prominent political figures, including the first family of the Congress party led by Sonia Gandhi, her MP son Rahul Gandhi, apart from late Congress leaders Motilal Vora and Oscar Fernandes and also Suman Dubey, Sam Pitroda and a private company Young Indian for alleged involvement in a money laundering scheme related to the fraudulent takeover of properties valued over ₹ 2,000 crore belonging to the AJL. "The legal proceedings against the accused have faced challenges but have been upheld by both the Delhi High Court and the Supreme Court of India, allowing the investigation to proceed," the ED said.

AJL is the publisher of the National Herald news platform (newspaper and web portal) and it is owned by Young Indian Private Limited. Congress leaders Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi are majority shareholders of Young Indian with 38 per cent shares held by each one of them. They were questioned for hours by the ED in this case a few years back.

The ED claimed its investigation has "conclusively" found that Young Indian, a private company "beneficially owned" by Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi, "acquired" AJL properties worth ₹ 2,000 crore for a mere ₹ 50 lakh, significantly undervaluing its worth. "Young Indian and AJL properties were used for generation of further proceeds of crime in the form of bogus donations to the tune of ₹ 18 crore, bogus advance rent to the tune of Rs 38 crore and bogus advertisements of ₹ 29 crore," the ED has alleged. (PTI)

Great potential for growth

The President said that the two countries are collaborating closely in emerging technologies, innovation and defence besides working together on multilateral platforms such as the G-20 in the present era.

The two leaders agreed that India-Italy strategic partnership would reach new heights in the times to come, she was quoted as having said in the statement. (PTI)

ASS to felicitate 10,000 senior

"This is not just a ceremonial event. It's a heartfelt expression of reverence and recognition for our elders, many of whom have worked quietly but tirelessly to uphold the Assamese identity," the official said. Each felicitation will be carried out by a dedicated five-member team, all dressed in traditional Assamese attire, symbolising the rich cultural roots of the event.

During the visit to the homes of the honourees, the teams will offer 'paan-tamul' (betel leaves and arecanut), a hand-woven 'gamosa' made by local weavers, a packet of books, and a greeting card on behalf of the Sabha. The gesture is also symbolic—rooted in age-old Assamese customs of respect and hospitality.

Before the felicitation, the delegation will organise a brief 15-minute gathering involving the senior citizen's family members and neighbours. The idea is to foster a sense of community while encouraging those in attendance to become life members of the Sabha, as per the recent resolution passed by the executive committee for the 2025–27 term. "This is an opportunity to connect with people at the grassroots, to build lasting relationships, and to make them active participants in our literary and cultural mission," the Sabha representative added.

The teams conducting the events have been requested to document the ceremonies by taking photographs, which will be shared on social media platforms and through various media outlets.

These images, along with details of the felicitation, are also to be sent to the Sabha's publicity convenor, Shankusiddha Nath (Phone: 9864120357), who is coordinating public outreach for the initiative. With this ambitious and heartfelt initiative, the Asam Sahitya Sabha continues to reaffirm its commitment not only to the cultural enrichment of Assam but also to recognising the invaluable human resources who have nurtured its heritage over the decades.

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Dhubri's Bidyapara Girls High School records 100% fail rate in HSLC 2025

HT Correspondent

DHUBRI, April 12: In a stunning and deeply concerning outcome, all 72 students who appeared for the 2025 High School Leaving Certificate (HSLC) examination from Bidyapara Girls High School have failed, according to Mohammad Ikbal Zulfikar Khandakar, the academic in-charge Head Master of the institution.

Situated in the heart of Dhubri town, the school has now come under scrutiny from education officials, parents, and local residents who are questioning how such a result could occur in its entirety. The complete failure rate has sparked a wave of outrage and disappointment, raising serious concerns about the quality of education, teaching infrastructure, and academic support being provided at the institution.

"This is a moment of deep shock and reflection. We must immediately assess what went wrong and work on a recovery plan," said academic in-charge Head Master Khandakar.

He also emphasized the need for urgent intervention from the education department to improve teaching standards and accountability.

Meanwhile, Shilair Kachari High School, located in the Gauripur block under Matiabag cluster of Dhubri district, has recorded a concerning performance in the latest academic results with 109 out of 157 students not clearing the High School Leaving Certificate Examination 2025, it reflects deeper issues that might be affecting educational outcomes in the region, reflecting a pass percentage of 30.57%.

Speaking with Maheswar Ray I/c Head Master of Shilair Kachari High School revealed that, among the successful candidates, 2 students achieved first division, 23 secured second division, and another 23 passed with third division marks. While the number of first division holders remains low, the relatively balanced distribution across second and third divisions reflects moderate academic performance.

Such a result not only affects the morale of students but also highlights systemic issues that need to be addressed promptly.

Authorities are expected to visit the school in the coming days to investigate the matter and propose corrective measures. While the overall state pass percentage stood at 63.98%, Dhubri lagged behind with only 54.89% of its students clearing the examination.

Rigorous scrutiny underway for Zilla Parishad candidates in Cachar

Proceedings unfolded in the vigilant presence of key officials deputed for the Panchayat Election 2025

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, April 12: The scrutiny of nominations for the post of Zilla Parishad Member in the forthcoming Panchayat Election 2025 commenced at the Old Conference Hall of the District Commissioner's Office, Cachar on Saturday. The entire exercise is being meticulously overseen by Addl District Commissioner, Cachar, Antara Sen, who is spearheading the scrutiny process with utmost diligence and commitment.

The scrutiny proceedings unfolded in the vigilant presence of key officials deputed for the Panchayat Election 2025. Among them were Election Observers Indrani Laskar and Hanif Noorani, whose presence reinforced the importance of maintaining neutrality and adherence to election protocols. Their role is pivotal in monitoring the scrutiny process to ensure compliance with all norms laid down by the State Election Commission.

Also present was Addl District Commissioner Kimchin Lhangum, who is extending crucial administrative support and coordination to facilitate a smooth and uninterrupted scrutiny session. Together, the officials demonstrated a unified approach towards upholding the sanctity of the democratic process.

The proceedings mark a vital phase in the election timeline, as the scrutiny of nominations determines the final list of candidates who will enter the electoral fray. The atmosphere at the Old Conference Hall was marked by a sense of order, transparency, and discipline, setting the tone for a free and fair Panchayat election in the Cachar district.

Bankers meet for micro food processing enterprise in Hojai

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, April 12: A bankers meet was organised by Hojai Unnayan Mancha (HUM), a local NGO under sponsorship of Assam Industrial Development Corporation (AIDC) and District Industries and Commerce Centre (DICC),Hojai about the scheme of Prime Minister Formalisation of Micro Food Processing Enterprise(PMFME) on Friday last here.

The LDM and all bank branch managers were present in the meeting. Sujay Kr Dutta, secretary of HUM welcomed all the bankers and raised the issues of the beneficiaries of PMFME and appeal them to help for setting up of own micro entreprenurship.

The district resource person (DRP) Aniruddha Sahu highlighted the details about sanctioned data. The LDM Mausham Bora suggested all to select beneficiaries for those who have activity with market linkage and bank transaction and have capacity to deposit 5 percent margin money.

The secretary of HUM wished all for Rongali Bihu and given importance on selection of genuine beneficiaries and also ensured of providing training from Food Craft Institute with proper branding and packaging of the processed food product, stated in a press note here.

Baokhungri Festival begins atop Baokhungri Hill in Kokrajhar

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, April 12: The 12th edition of the Baokhungri Festival has been kicked off on Saturday with vibrant traditional festive activities at the Baokhungri Hill along the Harinaguri in Kokrajhar district that withessesd a huge gathering.

The mega event was organised by the Tourism Department of government of Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC).

The three-day festival is a celebration of Bodo culture, spirituality, and age-old traditions which has been celebrating every year on the eve of the newyear i.e. last day of the Choitra month to welcome the Baisak month or Rongjali Bwisagu/Rongali Bihu.

This festival is held in sync with the auspicious Sankranti, the festival marks a significant spiritual journey as thousands of devotees are expected to trek up the Baukhungri Hill on April 14 to seek blessings from Lord Bwrai Bathou, praying for good health and the fulfillment of their wishes.

The festival was inaugurated by Dharma Narayan Das, Executive Member of the Bodoland Territorial Council, who opened the main entrance, setting the tone for a cultural extravaganza.

The event features a line-up of traditional Bodo sports like Khomlainai (Bodo wrestling), Ghila Gelenai, Dongfang Bukhunai, and Daobo Athing, alongside cycling races and indigenous games that highlighted the community's vibrant athletic heritage.

Visitors to the festival are treated to a range of traditional Bodo delicacies available at numerous food stalls, while cultural performances from multiple ethnic groups added color and unity to the celebrations, showcasing Bodoland's cultural diversity.

The opening day saw participation of several prominent leaders and dignitaries including BTC executive members, Dabaisa Boro, Ranjit Basumatary, Dhanajay Basumatary, Member of Parliament Rwngwra Narzary, and MLA Lawrence Islary.

More than just a cultural event, the Baokhungri Festival is a vital platform for preserving indigenous traditions, fostering community unity, and promoting tourism across the Bodoland Territorial Region.

The sacred trek on Sankranti remains the spiritual heart of the festival, drawing pilgrims from across Assam and beyond.

The members of the organising committee of the festival and local citizens are seen busy while discharging their duties to meet a smooth successful of the festival in a grand manner.

"I'm thrilled to join the 12th Baokhungri Festival 2025. Let's celebrate nature, culture, and unity together. Trek the iconic Baokhungri Hills, soak in our rich traditions, and revel in community spirit. See you at the summit," said BTC executive member Ranjit Basumatary.

Congress MLA Abdus Sobahan Ali Sarkar accuses Dhubri District President of 'Cash for Ticket' scam

HT Correspondent

DHUBRI, April 12: A major controversy has erupted in Assam's Dhubri district ahead of the 2025 Panchayat elections, as Congress MLA from Golakganj, Abdus Sobahan Ali Sarkar, has lodged a written complaint against Abedur Zaman, the District President of the Dhubri District Congress Committee.

The MLA has accused Zaman of involvement in a "cash for ticket" scam, alleging that party nominations are being sold in exchange for bribes.

In a letter addressed to Debabrata Saikia, the CLP Leader in the Assam Legislative Assembly, Sarkar expressed deep concern over the alleged unethical practices being followed under Zaman's leadership.

The complaint claims that despite the Congress Party's guidelines mandating candidate selection through Block Congress Committees (BCC), Zaman unilaterally issued tickets to individuals who allegedly paid him money, ignoring the BCC-recommended lists.

The complaint specifically mentions a meeting held on April 9, 2025, at the District Congress Committee office where party leaders, including former minister Wazed Ali Choudhury and other PAC members, were present. Sarkar alleges that Zaman disregarded the candidates proposed by the BCC and instead issued tickets to his own choices for personal gain. One such controversial case highlighted is the ticket issuance to Isha Hoque Ali, allegedly a former BJP worker over a unanimously recommended Congress candidate, Bazlur Rahman, in the Raidak ZPC area.

The letter further accuses Zaman of frequently being under the influence of intoxicants, displaying unruly behavior, using abusive language against senior leaders, and surrounding himself with "hooligans."

It also claims that he is running a "parallel administration" within the district, sidelining the MLA and other senior office bearers.

Calling Zaman's actions a violation of party discipline and a threat to its internal democratic values, the Golakganj MLA has urged the Congress high command to investigate the allegations and take disciplinary action.

The allegations, if proven true, could deal a serious blow to the Congress party's credibility in Dhubri, a region where it has traditionally had a strong support base. Party insiders are now awaiting a response from the state leadership on how it plans to address the issue.

'We Ring The Bell Campaign 2025'

HT Bureau

DIPHU, April 12: Jan Vikas Samiti in collaboration with Jirsong Asong, NGO organized a programme 'We Ring the Bell Campaign 2025' from March 15 to March 30. The campaign was carried out at Rongmongve and Dolamara L.P. Schools, nearby Anganwadi centers, and also included activities at the village level.

The primary objective of the programme was to raise awareness about the rights of children with disabilities and to spread the message that every child, regardless of their abilities, deserves access to quality and inclusive education. A total of 1,726 participants, including students, teachers, parents, and community members have actively taken part in the campaign. Interactive sessions, awareness rallies, and community engagement activities were conducted to emphasize the importance of welcoming children with disabilities into schools and ensuring their full inclusion in mainstream education.

All teachers, Anganwadi workers, and Jirsong Asong staff from the Inclusive Development of Children and Youngsters with Disabilities Project, along with parents, actively participated in the campaign and rallies. Their involvement was instrumental in motivating and encouraging the enrollment and regular attendance of children with disabilities in schools.

This initiative helped foster a more inclusive and supportive environment in the community and inspired local institutions to become more accessible and responsive to the needs of children with disabilities.

ICAI, Guwahati celebrates Bihu with children of Akshar Forum

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, April 12: The Guwahati Branch of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) successfully organised a meaningful day of learning and festivity at the Akshar Forum, Pamohi, Guwahati under the leadership of CA Raginee Goyal.

Akshar Forum is a free 100-student model school established in 2016 in Assam which takes used plastic as fees from underprivileged children and teaches them along with teaching of livelihood and vocational skills.

It is also a testing facility for innovative teaching methods, in line with India's National Education Policy of 2020 (NEP 2020).

This heartwarming event aimed to bring smiles and joy to the children through distribution of toys and stationery and a delectable bihu feast with vibrant music and dance for community bonding.

CA Raginee Goyal, CA Jay Prakash Gupta and CA Piyush Birmiwal from Managing Committee of Guwahati Branch and CA Neha Choudhary leading a group of CA students danced and enjoyed with the children, and enjoyed Bihu goodies with the kids.

CA Neha Choudhary led a group CA Students of Guwahati EICASA for an Educational Tour where they had the opportunity to explore and witness the unique educational model of Akshar Forum, known for its sustainable and inclusive learning initiatives.

The visit included interactive sessions with the students and staff of the forum, offering valuable insights into community-centric education.

The event exemplified ICAI's commitment to community engagement, cultural preservation, and nurturing socially responsible professionals.

The vibrant blend of learning and celebration left a lasting impression on both the children and the CA students who participated.

Sitala puja concludes

HT Bureau

DIPHU, April 12: Sitalabari Executive Committee celebrated Shree Shree Sitala puja with a five day religious affair started on April 8 and concluded on Saturday at Sitlabari in Diphu market. From Saturday morning a large number of devotees thronged to the mandir to participate in the religious festivity to seek blessings from goddess Sitala. As the devotees offered puja to goddess Sitala, the priest and temple assistance distributed maha prasad from the offerings of goddess Sitala.

The Sitalabari Executive Committee secretary, Rajib Chakraborty stated that for the last 66 years the Sitala puja has been celebrated under the patronage of Sitalabari Executive Committee. During the five day religious festivity activities like puja archana, evening kirtan with all communities such as Lokhimon Sangh, Gorkha kirtan, Assamese naam kirtan and Bengali kirtan were taken up. In the evening cultural programmees were being held, Chakraborty informed.

On the concluding day today thousands of devotees have come to participate in the puja to seek blessings from goddess Sitala. Maha prasads of goddess Sitala were distributed among the devotees, he informed.

Oil India Limited ranked among top 3 dream companies to work for in India

Adoption of digital solutions, dedication to employee welfare and knowledge empowerment were key factors

HT Correspondent

DIBRUGARH, April 12: Oil India Limited (OIL) has been ranked the third best company to work for among over 500 public and private sector organizations in India at the prestigious 'Dream Companies to Work For' awards.

The recognition was conferred during the 33rd World HRD Congress, held from February 17 to 19, 2025, at Taj Lands' End, Mumbai.

The award was received by representatives from OIL's HR Relations Department and the Indian Oil Workers Union (IOWU). The recognition highlights OIL's commitment to creating a people-centric, innovative, and growth-oriented workplace.

In addition to the top-three ranking, OIL secured four more distinguished honors at the event: Leading HR Practices for Quality Work Life for its "WE Assessment" initiative, Best Knowledge Management Sharing Initiatives for the "HR Clinic & Gyan Manthan" program, Innovating HR through Leveraging Digital Solutions for Transparency and Efficiency under the HR Tech Awards, Organization with Best Employee Relations Practices under the Global HR Excellence Awards.

These awards are a testament of the Company's excellence in quality work life, knowledge sharing, digital HR innovation, and employee relations.

The World HRD Congress is a prestigious global platforms celebrating excellence and innovation in human resource development, bringing together HR professionals, business leaders, and change-makers from over 130 countries, the event recognizes organizations that are setting benchmarks in people management and workplace culture.

This year's World HRD Congress focused on the theme "AI (IQ.EQ.SQ.) – New HR Paradigms," spotlighting the role of technology in shaping future workplaces. OIL's proactive adoption of digital solutions and its dedication to employee welfare and knowledge empowerment were some of the key factors in its recognition.

These accolades reaffirm OIL's position as a leading employer, driven by a strong commitment to its people and a progressive approach to human resource development.

Hemari Kro felicitated

HT Bureau

DIPHU, April 12: The Sitalabari Executive Committee on the occasion of Sitala puja celebration, which is a five day religious affair held at Sitalabari, Diphu market, felicitated Hemari Kro, Head Assistant & Superintendent in-charge Higher Education Inspector of Schools, Karbi Anglong district.

He has been felicitated for achieving the Honorary Doctorate (Honoris Causa) from the Advisory Selection Board of the Bharat Virtual Open Education University affiliated and collaborated with Central Christian University for his effort in education and social welfare services and for receiving the 'Samaj Sewak Perona Award, 2025'conferred by the Uttar Purvanchal Perona Samanay Unnayan Charitable Trust, in a function held at Pensioner's Bhawan, Chandmari, Guwahati on Friday (March 21).

The Committee president Tuhin Bhattacharya and secretary Rajib Chakraborty and other members were present.

The secretary Chakraborty said it has been a great honour that a person from Karbi Anglong had received an Honorary Doctorate at the same time the 'Samaj Sewak Perona Award' from the prestigious institution Uttar Purvanchal Perona Samanay Unnayan Charitable Trust.

"Kro an employee working as Head Assistant & Superintendent incharge Higher Education in the office of the Inspector of Schools, Karbi Anglong district Circle, Diphu, he is simple, trustworthy and is very much sincere to his duty. The Sitalabari Executive Committee is fortunate enough to felicitate such a person like Kro, who has made a mark for himself," Chakraborty noted.

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Editor's pick

Yunus's gambit with China

By: Bhopinder Singh

Yunus faces mounting accusations of aligning with extremist forces, alienating traditional allies like India, and stoking regional tensions for political survival. Has the icon of empowerment become the architect of instability?

On 10th December 2006, accepting the Nobel Prize, Bangladeshi economist and businessman, Muhammad Yunus, said, "A human being is born into this world fully equipped not only to take care of him or herself, but also to contribute to enlarging the wellbeing of the world as a whole.

Some get the chance to explore their potential to some degree, but many others never get any opportunity, during their lifetime, to unwrap the wonderful gift they were born with." Less than twenty years later, Muhammad Yunus was to get that providential opportunity to walk the talk on a far larger canvas for his country and its citizens as the 'Chief Adviser of Bangladesh', following the bloody ouster of Sheikh Hasina.Immediately, he faced many choices that would test the honesty of his words given at the same Nobel Prize acceptance speech like, "Terrorism must be condemned in the strongest language. We must stand solidly against it and find all the means to end it."

Sadly, as things soon unfolded, he sided with those who spoke in the language of religious extremism, supremacism and non-secularity — consequently, the Bangladeshi minorities were brazenly targeted, and the once relatively secular nation looked increasingly like its once-conjoined entity on the western side — i.e., Pakistan. Yunus had knowingly sided with the forces that had vandalised, demonised and weaponised the politics of bigotry.Tellingly, Yunus chose to 'normalise' relations with Pakistan (putting the genocidal history at the hands of Pakistanis on the back burner) with ease of visa restrictions, resumption of direct flights/maritime links etc., whilst retaining an accusatory tone with Delhi, knowing the dynamics of the hyphenated Indo–Pak equation in the region.

The dismantling of the spirit that premised '1971' was seemingly not restricted to just diminishing the legacy of Mujibur Rehman and his clan — but going as far as sleeping with the persecutor (Pakistan) on the rebound. A stark gap between his initial call for 'new youth leadership' (supposedly beyond vendetta politics) as opposed to overstaying himself, has exposed his ambitious and willy politics.

The youth leadership that got Yunus to power is slowly but surely getting disillusioned with unheeded calls for early elections. The 84-year-old Yunus, who had earlier toyed with the idea of starting a political party himself, seems to be disconcertingly comfortable with the idea of retaining power. His go-slow approach to honouring his word and retractions have made the student leaders and the shadowy Bangladeshi military — that had played a role in Yunus's political ascendancy in the first place — become increasingly twitchy.

Even socio-economically, if unemployment was the primary driver of societal dissonance, the situation on that front is getting neglected (more like deliberately distracted) and worsening by the day. Student leaders cannot afford to give Yunus the long rope — and they are already toying with the idea of starting their political party to further their agenda, beyond reposing faith in Yunus indefinitely.

This dark and brewing backdrop requires Yunus to sully the narrative with some 'manufactured distractions/emotions' that could offer a reprieve. What better option than to provoke India — to force reactions from Delhi to legitimise his manipulative politics and relevance? Besides stoking the Sheikh Hasina bogey, pinging India also panders to subliminal religious sentiments and additionally perpetuates India's 'big brother' storyline. Herein, knowing the regional undercurrents and sensitivities, Yunus has cunningly drawn China into the admixture. Yunus's Machiavellian allusion to the 22 km strip of land in North Bengal called the Siliguri Corridor or Chicken's Neck (without naming the same) whilst on Chinese soil, was designed to rile India.

His loaded assertion to the Chinese that Northeast India is "landlocked" and therefore "no way to reach out to the seas", along with the suggestions of "extension of Chinese economy" with seeming guarantees of Bangladesh as the "only guardian of the ocean for all this region", was hardly naïve. It perfectly complemented the expansionist instincts of the Chinese — and Delhi was outraged by the deliberate baiting done by Yunus.

While Delhi did well to not fall for the trap and feed Yunus with reciprocal indignities that he could have twisted towards his own political and domestic distractions, at least the future course of Yunus's politics stands fully exposed.

While all this diplomatic posturing and grandstanding does not take away from the building pressures by the student leaders, Bangladeshi military, or the distraught citizenry with the sliding economy — such distractions are from the playbook of undemocratic leaders who readily sacrifice the nation's long-term, for the sake of their own political short-term.

Beyond Sheikh Hasina's Awami League, other national parties like the Bangladeshi National Party (BNP) or even the extremist Jamaat are getting nervous with the inordinate delay in the call for elections. Just how long will Muhammad Yunus be able to distract and manipulate emotions towards sustaining power will be tested in days to come — though Bangladeshi history is rife with coup d'etats and crippling protests that could oust Muhammad Yunus too.

In its 54 years of independence (since 1971), Bangladesh has faced 29 military coups — and the recent 'emergency meetings' called by the Bangladeshi Army Chief, General Wakar uz Zaman, do not make for reassuring optics as far as Yunus is concerned. Is the China gambit Yunus's desperate attempt, in an otherwise failing reality? ***(Courtesy: The Pioneer)***

Columbian President Gustavo Petro's Left coalition facing tough opposition in 2026 polls

By: Pablo Castaño

Not even the reality show La Casa de los Famosos, a spin-off of Big Brother, managed to surpass the audience of the first televised Council of Ministers in Colombia last February. Millions of Colombians watched live as some ministers criticized President Gustavo Petro, another lavished him with praise in a tone resembling a declaration of love, and other cabinet members exchanged reproaches.

This unusual exercise in government transparency, which Petro has repeated several times, has been one of the Colombian president's latest ideas to revive his popularity, which is down to 32 percent just one year away from the 2026 parliamentary and presidential elections. The resignation in March of finance minister Diego Guevara after he pushed for budget cuts shows that Petro is already focused on the 2026 elections, though he himself cannot seek reelection as the constitution bars it.

The first left-wing government in Colombia's recent history enters its fourth and final year with the same sense of instability that has accompanied it from the start, a result of its lack of a parliamentary majority and the relentless pressure from economic, media, and judicial elites. Some of the reforms promised in 2022 have been approved, while others remain stalled in a Congress controlled by the traditional parties, and the goal of "total peace" with domestic armed groups remains a dream. The outcome of the 2026 elections will depend on the final balance of the government's reformist agenda, Petro's ability to mobilize his supporters, and the conservative opposition's capacity to unite behind candidates.

The former M-19 guerrilla turned president is well aware that the streets are the battleground where he can outmanoeuvre conservative forces. That is why he responded to the Senate's rejection of his labour reform, which sought to reduce working hours and improve overtime pay, by calling for a popular referendum on the measure.

For the referendum to succeed, it needs 13.5 million votes, a very difficult figure to achieve given Petro was elected with 11.2 million votes. However, polls show majority support for holding the vote, suggesting the appeal of Petro's anti-elitist rhetoric against opposition lawmakers. Even if the referendum does not take place, the Pacto Histórico, Petro's broad-left coalition, has found in the referendum a rallying cry to mobilize its base and political momentum for the Left at a time when the government's perceived decay was becoming unsustainable.

The labour reform is not the only proposal that has run up against a Congress dominated by the old parties. The health reform, which was finally approved by the House of Representatives on March 6, also faced countless obstacles. If the Senate confirms its support, one of the Pacto Histórico's main legislative projects will become reality - an initiative aimed at reducing the role of private insurers in the health care system and improving prevention and access to services.

Petro has been forced to include representatives from center-right parties in his government to secure their support, as he did to pass his first tax reform. Throughout his term, Petro has combined popular mobilizations in support of his reforms with negotiations with the traditional parties, whose members have often proved willing to abandon their resistance in exchange for positions of power.

The Pacto Histórico government has also succeeded in passing its education reform, which establishes free university access for students from the most disadvantaged social strata and pension reform. The latter is the most important for reducing the enormous social inequalities inherited from decades of neoliberal governments. (Despite its robust economy, Colombia is arguably the most unequal country in Latin America, which is the most unequal region in the world.)

Petro's reform has strengthened the public pension system by creating a "solidarity pillar" that guarantees dignified pensions even for those who have not reached the contribution threshold and takes into account the time women dedicate to childcare. Only one in four elderly Colombians received a pension in 2022, according to a report by the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana. The reform is expected to alleviate this situation, reducing poverty among those over sixty.

In addition, Petro has made Colombia an international example of socio-ecological transition policies. He has promoted social agreements with farmers and indigenous communities to protect the Amazon, boosted renewable energy by amending regulations to increase benefits for local communities, and kept his promise to block new hydrocarbon exploration — an unprecedented measure accelerating the path to a post–fossil fuel future. Though it is still too early to assess the impact of these policies, the Colombian government's determined ecological push contrasts with the weak action of its counterparts in the Global North.

One of the main pending reforms is improving land distribution in Colombia, the most unequal in Latin America: 80 percent of the land belongs to 1 percent of the population. Nearly a third of Colombians are farmers, meaning millions survive on tiny plots. An analysis by the National University of Colombia revealed that each cow in extensive livestock farming has more grazing land than a farming family has to cultivate. The internal armed conflict that has plagued the country since the 1960s has worsened the problem, as large landowners have often used paramilitary groups to expel farmers from their land.

The Pacto Histórico government sought to reverse this situation by distributing land to farming families and formalizing small and medium rural properties. These goals were already outlined in the peace agreement signed in 2016 between the Colombian state and the now disbanded Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) guerrilla group, but the conservative government of Iván Duque (2018–2022) did not implement the agreement.

Petro's administration, which has ruled out forced expropriations, has designated just over one hundred thousand hectares, far from the three million targeted by the Peace Agreement. The Agrarian Jurisdiction Law, which would speed up land redistribution, is still pending approval and has faced strong opposition from the Right in Congress. "The far right will always seek to maintain the unjust land ownership in Colombia," Petro wrote on Twitter/X in 2024. "They know that violence and drug trafficking have emerged from it and have fueled the political project of backwardness on which they are built."

The other major unfinished task of the Petro government is "total peace," its most ambitious goal. The 2016 peace agreement ended the war between the state and the FARC, but dissident former FARC fighters, paramilitary and criminal groups, and the National Liberation Army (ELN) guerrilla group still control vast areas of Colombian territory. The largest group is the Clan del Golfo, a nine-thousand-fighter force led by former paramilitary commanders and drug traffickers. After the failure of previous governments' militarist strategies, Petro initiated dialogue processes with several of these illegal groups. Cease-fires achieved in various parts of Colombia reduced violence, a report from the Special Jurisdiction for Peace confirmed.

However, the failure of peace talks with the ELN that appeared promising and the outbreak of violence between armed groups in the Catatumbo region in early 2025, which left dozens dead and thousands displaced, buried the "total peace" aim for the short term. Though it has not abandoned dialogue with armed groups, the government has increased military pressure and focused on negotiations with armed groups at the local scale to de-escalate the conflict and protect civilians.

While trying to pass pending key reforms, the Pacto Histórico is already looking ahead to 2026. Legislative elections will be held in March, and presidential elections in May and June. The Pacto Histórico has not yet selected a candidate, though it has confirmed that the coalition will become a single party, reducing the risk of divisions on the Left. The same cannot be said for the center and the Right, which are locked in a fierce battle to lead the opposition.

The most talked-about name to succeed Petro is Gustavo Bolívar, current director of social prosperity and failed mayoral candidate for Bogotá in the last elections, also known as the author of novels adapted into highly successful TV shows, such as Sin Tetas No Hay Paraíso. Another option is María José Pizarro, a senator and the daughter of Carlos Pizarro, an M-19 comrade of Petro who was assassinated in 1990.

The Right is convinced that Petro's time is up but disagrees on who should succeed him. Outsider Vicky Dávila, former director of Semana magazine and a fierce critic of Petro, stands out in the race, positioning herself as Colombia's version of Donald Trump or Javier Milei. She will have to compete with potential candidates from the Democratic Center, the ultraconservative party of former president Álvaro Uribe, who is currently on trial for alleged ties to paramilitary groups. Among them are Senators Miguel Uribe, María Fernanda Cabal, and Paloma Valencia, all with hard-right stances. Bogotá mayor Juan Manuel Galán (center-right) and former centrist presidential candidates Sergio Fajardo and Germán Vargas could also join the race.

With no confirmed candidates yet, a March poll showed a highly fragmented vote, with Bolívar (11.8 percent), Fajardo (9.5 percent), and Dávila (8.3 percent) leading. However, the good news for the Left ends there, as voters identifying with right-wing and centrist ideologies total over 57 percent, while fewer than 19 percent identify as left-wing. Alliances between centrist and right-wing candidates will be key.

The only certainty for the Pacto Histórico is that the pre-campaign, which has already begun, will play out on two parallel fronts: Congress, where the government will push its major pending reforms at any cost, and the streets, where Petro will try to mobilize his supporters in defense of his labour reform, a symbol of the political change he has led since 2022. ***(IPA Service)***

Panchayat polls: Assam's choice

By: Satyabrat Borah

The upcoming panchayat elections in Assam are set to take place soon, bringing excitement and activity to many parts of the state. These elections are important because they allow people to choose leaders for their local villages and communities. Panchayats are groups that help manage things like schools, roads, and water in rural areas. They make sure the needs of the people are met at the grassroots level. This year, the elections will happen in two phases, giving everyone a chance to vote for the leaders they trust.

The Assam State Election Commission has planned the elections carefully. They announced that voting will occur on May 2 and May 7, 2025, in 27 out of the state's 34 districts. The first phase will cover 14 districts, including places like Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, and Cachar. The second phase will include 13 districts, such as Dhubri, Goalpara, and Kamrup. Seven districts won't have these elections because they follow a different system called the Sixth Schedule, which has its own way of choosing leaders. The results of the elections will be shared on May 11, 2025, so people won't have to wait long to know who won.

More than 1.8 crore people are expected to vote in these elections. This number includes about 90.71 lakh men, 89.65 lakh women, and 408 others. The Election Commission has set up 25,007 polling stations across the state to make voting easy. Each station will have enough workers to help voters, and security will be in place to keep everything peaceful. The commission is also updating the voter list to include new people who are eligible to vote, as long as they were 18 years old by January 1, 2025. Voters can use their voter ID cards or other documents like Aadhaar or ration cards to prove who they are.

The panchayat system in Assam has three levels: gaon panchayat, anchalik panchayat, and zilla parishad. At the gaon panchayat level, people will elect 21,920 members. There are also 2,192 gaon panchayat presidents and vice-presidents, and half of these roles are reserved for women. At the anchalik panchayat level, 2,192 members will be chosen, along with 181 presidents and vice-presidents. For the zilla parishad, 397 members will be elected. These numbers show how many leaders will work together to make decisions for their communities.

One special thing about this election is that gaon panchayat candidates can't use political party symbols. This means they will run as individuals, not as members of parties like BJP or Congress. The Election Commission wants these elections to focus on local issues, not big political groups. However, candidates for anchalik panchayat and zilla parishad can show their party connections. This mix allows voters to think about both the person and the party when making their choice. The process for candidates to join the election is clear. Candidates could withdraw their names by April 17 if they changed their minds. There are rules for who can run. For example, candidates for gaon panchayat must have passed their Class 10 exams, while those for higher levels need to have passed Class 12. Also, candidates can't have more than two living children, but this rule doesn't apply to children born before March 19, 2018.

The Election Commission is using ballot papers for voting instead of electronic machines. They said there aren't enough machines for such a big election, so paper ballots will be used at all polling stations. This method is familiar to many voters, and officials will make sure the counting is done fairly. About 1.2 lakh workers will help run the elections, from setting up stations to counting votes. The commission has also set limits on how much money candidates can spend. For gaon panchayat members, the limit is 25,000 rupees. For anchalik panchayat members, it's 2.5 lakh rupees, and for zilla parishad candidates, it's 10 lakh rupees. These rules help keep the elections fair.

To make sure everyone can vote, the government has declared May 2 and May 7 as public holidays in the areas where polling will happen. This means schools, offices, banks, and even tea gardens will close for the day. The idea is to give people time to go to the polling stations without worrying about work. In some places, like Golaghat, there are 1,164 polling stations for 7.88 lakh voters. In Bokakhat, 1.39 lakh voters will use 204 polling stations. These numbers show how much effort is going into making the elections smooth.

Political parties are getting ready for the elections too. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its partner, the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), have decided to work together. They've formed teams to plan their campaigns and share their ideas with voters. Other parties, like the Congress, are also preparing. They see these elections as a chance to connect with people in villages and show their strength before the bigger state elections in 2026. Even smaller groups are joining in, talking to voters about what they can do for their communities.

The elections are a big deal because they show how democracy works at the local level. People in Assam's villages will choose leaders who understand their daily lives. These leaders will help fix things like broken roads, improve schools, and make sure clean water is available. The panchayats also manage programs that give jobs or support to families who need help. By voting, people can pick someone they believe will listen to them and make their village better.

The government has made some changes to prepare for the elections. They passed a new law called the Assam Panchayat (Amendment) Bill, 2025, which includes rules for managing local markets. They also reorganized some areas in 2023 to make sure each panchayat represents the right number of people. These changes aim to make the system fairer and more organized. The last panchayat elections were in 2018, and the term of those leaders ended in February 2024. That's why everyone is eager for this new election to choose fresh leaders.

Voters are excited too. Many are talking about what they want from their panchayats. Some want better schools for their children, while others hope for more jobs or cleaner villages. The elections give them a chance to have their say. In rural areas, where most of Assam's people live, these votes matter a lot. The leaders elected will work closely with the state government to bring development to their areas.

To keep things peaceful, the Election Commission has rules called the Model Code of Conduct. These rules tell candidates how to campaign fairly, like not misusing government resources or causing trouble. The commission is also making sure voters know about the election dates and how to vote. They've asked everyone to cooperate so the elections can be free and fair.

The panchayat elections are a time for communities to come together. Neighbors will talk about who they want as their leaders, and families will go to polling stations to cast their votes. It's a moment when every person's voice counts, no matter how small their village is. After the votes are counted on May 11, new leaders will start working to make life better for their people. These elections are a reminder that change starts at home, in the places where people live every day.

As the election days get closer, Assam is buzzing with energy. Candidates are meeting voters, sharing their plans, and listening to what people need. The government is doing its part to make sure everything is ready, from voter lists to polling stations. For the people of Assam, this is a chance to shape their future by choosing leaders who care about their villages. The panchayat elections may be local, but they have a big impact on the lives of millions.

Global move for end to conventional wars to prevent nuclear threat is needed

By: Dr Arun Mitra

Humanitarian crisis is at its peak as an aftermath of the wars in Middle East and between Russian & Ukraine. Despite the ceasefire between Israel and Hamas there is no respite from the bombings on hapless citizens of Gaza. If we go by the larger estimates over 100,000 have already been killed, majority of them being women and children. This has in fact turned out to be a blatant aggression by the Zionist regime of Israel to annihilate the Palestinians. The recent killing of Para-medical workers proves the point. U S administration is fully supporting Israel with latest high-powered bombs and is at the back of Israel in all circumstances. It authorized the release of 2,000-pound bombs to Israel in January 2025, a munition that had previously been held back.

Similarly, the end to human sufferings as a result of Russia Ukraine war does not seem to be a reality in the near future. That the talks between US and the Russian governments to end the war will yield a result soon is uncertain. The European Union has taken strong exception on these talks. Many members of the EU countries have declared military support to the Ukraine government. According to figures released by Kyiv, U.N. statistics, and open-source data published by BBC Russia, the total death toll of Ukrainian and Russian soldiers, as well as Ukrainian civilians stands at 158,341 as of March 31, 2025. NATO stands strongly with Ukraine which irks Russia. The hope for end to this war is grim.

If these wars continue the possibility of use of Nuclear weapons cannot be ruled out. The Israeli Heritage Minister Amichai Eliyahu had threatened the use of nuclear weapons. US Senators Lindsey Graham and Tim Walberg have also come up with similar statements. These statements confirm Israel's mind set to annihilate the Palestinians. US President Donald Trump's aggressive statements against Iran are also serious threat in that direction.

In a commentary written for International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), Heba Taha, an Associate Senior Lecturer in the Department of Political Science and the Center for Advanced Middle Eastern Studies at Lund University has warned 'that throughout the past year, the violence in Gaza has been described using nuclear analogies, with reports indicating, for example, that the destructive power of Israeli explosives dropped on Gaza is equivalent to, or surpasses, those of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombs. These metaphors try to link Gaza to these nuclear targets. These reports also perhaps implicitly push back against the distinction between conventional and non-conventional weapons, since Gaza stands as a display of the immense damage and unimaginable violence that conventional weapons can cause'.

President Putin has increasingly used the threat of the nuclear arsenal during the ongoing war and Russia has placed its weapons on heightened alert.

At one time in the ongoing war there appeared a grave threat to the nuclear power plants. This threat is in abeyance for the time being but not abolished.

In 2025, rising geopolitical tensions, coupled with "dangerous nuclear rhetoric and threats," are causing concern, with the UN Secretary-General calling for action to support the legally binding atomic weapon ban treaty.

The conventional wars provide precondition where more deadly weapons are developed. The nuclear threat has been seen to increase under these circumstances. It is therefore imperative that the conventional wars must be stopped if we have to abolish the nuclear weapons. It is unfortunate that the global community is either mute spectator or ineffective in the present situation. The UN too has failed to make the parties agree to end the wars.

The trade war initiated by Donald Trump can any time add to the gravity of the situation. Global South which is already deprived region has landed into further precarious situation.

It is imperative that the Global South should take strong initiative to end these wars. As a leader of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), India had powerful voice to promote peace. It is unlikely that present leadership will take any such initiative because they have plans to become arms exporter. Moreover Indian government has not taken a firm stand against the Zionist's genocidal actions.

Under these circumstances it is the duty of the civil society to demand in a much louder voice for end to the conventional wars and save the situation from escalating to nuclear exchange which would be catastrophic. ***(IPA Service)***

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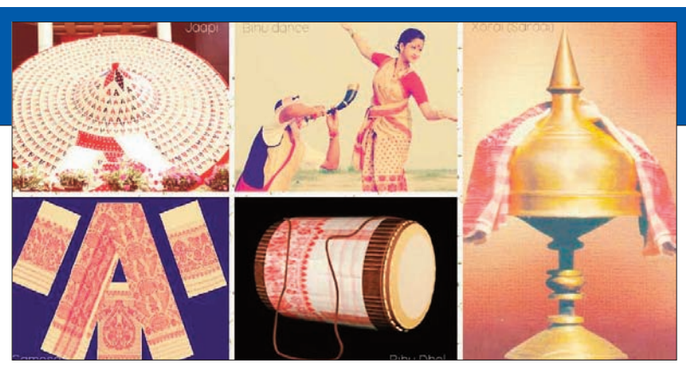
Ahom dynasty's influence on Assamese culture



By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

The Ahom Dynasty, which ruled Assam for nearly 600 years from 1228 to 1826, was one of the most influential political powers in the region, leaving an indelible mark on its culture, social structure, language, religion, administration, and architecture. The Ahoms were originally a Tai group who migrated from present-day Yunnan province in China under the leadership of Sukapha, their founder. Over the centuries, they assimilated into the local culture, blending their customs with indigenous traditions to create a distinct Assamese identity. This long reign not only ensured political stability but also gave Assam a unique cultural legacy that continues to thrive even today.

One of the most significant contributions of the Ahom rulers was the development of the Assamese language and literature. The Ahoms initially had their own script, but as they gradually merged with the local population, they adopted Assamese as the court language. They commissioned several literary works, particularly the Buranjis, historical chronicles that provide detailed accounts of the Ahom rule, society, military strategies, and diplomatic affairs. These Buranjis, written both in Ahom and Assamese, have been invaluable sources of historical knowledge and have helped shape Assamese historiography. Additionally, the Ahom kings encouraged scholars and poets, leading to the flourishing of Assamese literature during their rule. The use of Sanskrit was also encouraged, reflecting a cultural synthesis that enriched literary traditions.

The architectural marvels left behind by the Ahoms bear testimony to their grandeur and sophistication. The Rang Ghar, often considered the oldest surviving amphitheater in Asia, is a symbol of their architectural brilliance. Used as a royal sports pavilion, it reflects a unique blend of indigenous and Mughal architectural styles. Another remarkable structure is the Talatal Ghar, a seven-story palace with secret tunnels and escape routes, showcasing advanced military engineering. The Kareng Ghar in Gargaon, the capital of the Ahoms, is another fine example of their construction techniques. These structures, made of indigenous materials like bricks, mortar made from rice husk, and a special type of cement, have withstood the test of time, offering a glimpse into the engineering skills of the Ahoms. Numerous temples, tanks, and roads were also built under their patronage, facilitating the economic and religious life of the people.

Religious assimilation was another crucial aspect of the Ahom rule. Though the Ahoms originally followed their traditional Tai animist beliefs, they gradually embraced Hinduism, particularly under the later rulers. This transition was facilitated by Brahmins who were invited to the Ahom court and played an essential role in shaping religious policies. Despite their conversion, the Ahoms retained many of their ancestral customs, leading to the development of a syncretic religious culture. Me-Dam-Me-Phi, a festival dedicated to ancestor worship, is still celebrated in Assam as a legacy of Ahom religious traditions. The Ahoms also contributed to the establishment of temples and satras (Vaishnavite monasteries), further enriching the religious landscape of Assam.

Socially, the Ahom Dynasty introduced a structured administrative system that had a lasting impact on Assamese society. They developed the Paik system, a unique method of labor distribution that assigned every able-bodied man to a category of work based on state requirements. This system not only ensured a stable workforce but also played a crucial role in maintaining a standing army. The Ahom administration was highly organized, with various officials managing different aspects of governance. The kingdom was divided into provinces called "mouzas," each governed by officers who collected revenue and maintained law and order. This efficient system allowed the Ahoms to sustain their rule for centuries, and even after their decline, remnants of their administrative structure persisted in Assamese governance.

The military prowess of the Ahoms was unparalleled, as they successfully resisted multiple invasions, particularly from the Mughals. The Battle of Saraighat in 1671, led by the legendary commander Lachit Borphukan, remains one of the most celebrated victories in Assamese history. Despite being outnumbered, the Ahom forces employed strategic warfare, including naval combat on the Brahmaputra River, to decisively defeat the Mughals. This resilience in defending their homeland fostered a sense of pride and identity among the Assamese people. Even today, Lachit Borphukan is revered as a symbol of bravery and patriotism, and his legacy is commemorated through various events and institutions.

The Ahom Dynasty also had a profound impact on Assamese festivals, music, dance, and cuisine. Many cultural practices that originated during their rule continue to be an integral part of Assamese society. The Bihu festival, although predating Ahom rule, gained further significance during their reign as it became a festival of agricultural prosperity celebrated across the kingdom. Traditional dance forms such as Sattriya, which evolved under the influence of Vaishnavite culture, flourished during this period. The Ahoms introduced unique culinary traditions, including the use of fermented food items, bamboo shoots, and exotic meats, which remain popular in Assamese cuisine today.

Another remarkable feature of Ahom rule was their policy of inclusivity and assimilation. They never imposed their language or customs on the indigenous people; instead, they encouraged cultural exchanges that led to a rich blend of traditions. This inclusivity helped in uniting various ethnic groups under one administration while allowing them to retain their unique identities. Over time, the Ahoms themselves became indistinguishable from the broader Assamese society, their legacy deeply embedded in every aspect of Assamese culture.

Despite their eventual decline following the Burmese invasions and the subsequent British annexation of Assam in 1826, the impact of the Ahom Dynasty remains undeniable. Their contributions to language, literature, administration, architecture, religion, and social structure have left an enduring legacy that continues to shape Assam's cultural identity. Today, the Ahoms are remembered not just as rulers but as architects of Assamese civilization, whose influence transcends centuries. Their rule exemplifies a rare blend of military strength, administrative acumen, and cultural patronage, making them one of the most celebrated dynasties in Indian history.

In contemporary Assam, efforts are being made to preserve and promote the heritage of the Ahoms. Various historical sites have been restored, and festivals celebrating Ahom traditions are being revived to ensure that their legacy is passed on to future generations. The recognition of Ahom history in school curricula, documentaries, and research initiatives further highlights their contributions to the region. The pride associated with Ahom ancestry continues to inspire cultural movements, strengthening Assamese identity in an era of rapid globalization.

The Ahom Dynasty's influence on Assamese culture is profound and multifaceted, extending far beyond political dominion. Their legacy lives on in the language, traditions, religious practices, administrative systems, and even in the collective consciousness of the Assamese people. This six-century-long rule was not just a chapter in history but the foundation upon which modern Assamese society was built. The resilience, innovation, and adaptability of the Ahoms remain a source of inspiration, ensuring that their contributions are cherished for generations to come.

(The writer is an Editor in Chief of the Assamese E-magazine SAMPROTIK. He can be reached at himangshur1989@gmail.com or 9954812261, 9864000260)

Reality: A journey through philosophy, science, and perception

By: Dipak Kurmi

The question of what constitutes reality has perplexed humanity for millennia. The quest to determine the true nature of existence spans across philosophical traditions, scientific inquiry, and existential contemplation. From ancient Indian philosophies like Vedanta and Samkhya to modern Western thought and scientific revelations, reality remains an elusive and intricate concept. While some argue that reality is an illusion shaped by perception, others assert that it is a dynamic interplay of consciousness and material existence. This article explores the varied dimensions of reality through different philosophical and scientific lenses, shedding light on the enigma that surrounds our understanding of existence.

Vedanta Philosophy: Maya and the Illusion of Reality

Vedanta, one of the most profound schools of Indian philosophy, posits that the world as we perceive it is an illusion, a manifestation of Maya. Maya is the cosmic power that veils the ultimate reality, deceiving individuals into believing in the permanence of the transient world. The great philosopher Adi Shankaracharya illustrated this concept through the metaphor of a rope mistaken for a snake in dim light. The rope signifies Brahman, the unchanging and eternal reality, while the snake represents the deceptive illusions caused by Maya.

Vedanta asserts that human suffering arises from misplaced attachments to this illusory world. Under Maya's influence, individuals prioritize material pursuits, status, and temporary pleasures, mistaking them for ultimate goals. However, the only path to liberation from this illusion is through knowledge and self-realization. By understanding the ephemeral nature of worldly existence and recognizing Brahman as the true reality, one can transcend Maya's deception and attain enlightenment.

Samkhya Philosophy: Purusha and Prakriti

In contrast to Vedanta, Samkhya philosophy does not dismiss the reality of the world but rather presents a dualistic framework to comprehend it. According to Samkhya, two fundamental entities shape existence: Purusha and Prakriti. Purusha is the eternal, conscious self, while Prakriti is the dynamic cosmic energy responsible for the material world's manifestation.

Unlike Vedanta, which views the world as an illusion, Samkhya acknowledges the diversity and complexity of reality but emphasizes that it is not the ultimate truth. Prakriti operates through three fundamental qualities—sattva (purity), rajas (activity), and tamas (inertia)—which dictate the material world's functioning. However, true liberation lies in disentangling Purusha from Prakriti, recognizing the eternal self as distinct from the ever-changing material realm.

Yoga Philosophy: Transcending Reality through Discipline

Yoga philosophy, deeply rooted in Samkhya, presents a path to transcending material entanglements and attaining self-realization. It teaches that human suffering arises from the misidentification of Purusha (the eternal self) with Prakriti (the transient material world). This misidentification results in attachment, grief, and cyclical suffering.

The solution, as prescribed by Yoga, is rigorous self-discipline. Through meditation, ethical living, and spiritual practices, individuals can disentangle Purusha from Prakriti, gaining insight into their true nature. By stilling the fluctuations of the mind and perceiving reality beyond material existence, Yoga practitioners aim to transcend suffering and achieve ultimate liberation.

> Vedanta asserts that human suffering arises from misplaced attachments to this illusory world. Under Maya's influence, individuals prioritize material pursuits, status, and temporary pleasures, mistaking them for ultimate goals

The Movie Analogy: Understanding Reality Through Perception

A practical way to grasp these philosophical concepts is through the analogy of watching a 3D movie with special glasses. The viewer sees vibrant, lifelike images that seem to burst from the screen. However, these images are not entirely real; they are created by the glasses, a filter shaping perception. Similarly, in Vedanta, Maya acts as the lens distorting our understanding of reality, while in Samkhya and Yoga, Prakriti functions as the medium shaping our experience of existence.

Behind the cinematic illusions lies the actual screen, just as behind Maya's deception or Prakriti's manifestations exists the true, eternal reality. However, until one removes the perceptual filters, they remain trapped in a distorted understanding of existence.

Western Philosophical Perspectives on Reality

Western philosophy also grapples with the nature of reality, presenting diverse viewpoints. Enlightenment thinker René Descartes asserted that reality could be understood through reason and mathematical principles. His famous dictum, "Cogito, ergo sum" ("I think, therefore I am"), emphasized consciousness as the foundation of reality.

However, Immanuel Kant challenged the notion of objective reality, proposing that human perception is inherently subjective. According to Kant, we never perceive reality as it is; instead, our minds structure experiences through innate categories, shaping our understanding.

In the 19th and 20th centuries, existentialists like Jean-Paul Sartre and phenomenologists like Edmund Husserl explored consciousness's role in shaping reality. They argued that reality is intimately tied to human experience and perception, suggesting that existence is not fixed but rather fluid and subjective.

Postmodernist philosophers such as Jean-François Lyotard and Jacques Derrida further deconstructed the idea of a single, objective reality. They posited that reality is fragmented, constructed through diverse discourses, and shaped by cultural and linguistic influences. According to postmodernism, what we consider "real" is often a product of power structures and historical narratives rather than an absolute truth.

The Intersection of Science and Philosophy

Modern science provides additional insights into the nature of reality, often aligning with philosophical perspectives. Albert Einstein's theory of relativity demonstrated that reality is not absolute but rather dependent on the observer's frame of reference. His findings suggested that space and time are not fixed entities but interwoven dimensions influenced by gravitational forces.

Quantum mechanics further challenges classical notions of reality. The famous double-slit experiment reveals that particles can exist in multiple states simultaneously until observed, implying that observation plays a fundamental role in shaping reality. This aligns with philosophical ideas that perception is not merely a passive act but an active force in constructing existence.

Reality: A Personal Creation

Given the vast and often conflicting perspectives on reality, is there a definitive answer to what reality truly is? Perhaps not. Instead of seeking an ultimate, universal truth, individuals may find meaning by shaping their own reality. By engaging deeply with life, setting purposeful goals, and immersing in meaningful work, people can create a reality that resonates with their existence.

While ancient philosophies teach the importance of self-awareness, modern science highlights the fluidity of reality, and postmodern thought underscores its constructed nature, one fundamental truth emerges: reality is a deeply personal experience. It is not a fixed, objective entity but a dynamic interplay of perception, consciousness, and the external world.

Ultimately, the question of reality may not have a singular answer, but the journey of exploring it enriches human understanding. Whether through self-realization, disciplined practice, intellectual inquiry, or scientific exploration, the search for reality remains one of the most profound and transformative endeavors of human existence. ***(The writer can be reached at dipakkurmiglpltd@gmail.com)***

Haiku for young minds: A gateway to poetry and imagination

By Mowsam Hazarika

Poetry has long been a gateway to emotion, observation, and the beauty of the world. Among its many forms, haiku stands out for its elegance in brevity. Originating in Japan, haiku is a three-line poem with a 5-7-5 syllabic structure that captures fleeting moments in nature and human experience. Dr. Aparna Buzarbarua's book, Sisur Babe Jnan Bijnanar "Haiku", serves as a delightful introduction to this form for young readers. Published by Purbayon Publication, the book is written in Assamese and has been thoughtfully translated into English, Hindi, and Bengali, ensuring that it reaches a diverse audience.

One of the most remarkable aspects of this book is its multilingual approach. By offering translations in four major languages—Assamese, English, Hindi, and Bengali—Dr. Buzarbarua makes haiku accessible to children from different linguistic backgrounds. This not only promotes inclusivity but also serves as a learning tool, allowing young readers to compare translations and expand their linguistic skills. Early exposure to poetry can significantly enhance creativity, language development, and emotional intelligence. Haiku, in particular, is an excellent starting point for children, as its concise yet vivid nature encourages imagination without feeling overwhelming.

The haiku in this book explore relatable themes such as the sky, food, rain, sea, and sun—elements children encounter in their daily lives. By focusing on these universal subjects, the book fosters a deeper connection between young readers and their surroundings. A haiku about the sky might capture the vastness of space or the beauty of a sunset, while one about food may evoke the warmth of home-cooked meals. Similarly, haiku centered on rain, the sea, and the sun offer an invitation to appreciate the natural world's wonders. Each poem acts as a small window into a moment of beauty, encouraging mindfulness and attentiveness—one of haiku's most magical aspects.

Unlike longer poetic forms, haiku thrives on simplicity and precision. By distilling emotions and ideas into a few carefully chosen words, it becomes an ideal form of expression for young minds. Dr. Buzarbarua's haiku are accessible, engaging, and thought-provoking, making poetry feel inviting rather than intimidating. The brevity of haiku also encourages children to try writing their own, fostering creativity and self-expression.

Additionally, haiku's frequent use of seasonal and natural imagery makes it a great tool for environmental awareness. Poems about changing seasons, the rhythm of rainfall, or the movement of waves help children develop a deeper appreciation for nature's cycles. If the book includes illustrations, they would further enhance the reading experience by visually bringing the haiku's themes to life. Even without illustrations, the imagery within the poems naturally sparks vivid mental pictures, making the experience immersive and enjoyable.

Dr. Buzarbarua's contribution to children's literature through this book is significant. In Assam and beyond, Sisur Babe Jnan Bijnanar "Haiku" can serve as an educational resource in schools, libraries, and homes. Parents and teachers can use it as a tool to introduce poetry in a fun and engaging manner. It can inspire creative writing exercises, poetry discussions, and even multilingual literacy. By making Assamese literature more accessible through translation, the book also helps preserve and promote regional literary traditions while embracing a global perspective.

More than just a collection of poems, Sisur Babe Jnan Bijnanar "Haiku" is an invitation to observe, reflect, and create. Its multilingual format, engaging themes, and simple yet profound verses make it a must-read for children, parents, and educators alike. Dr. Buzarbarua has masterfully blended knowledge and creativity, crafting a book that not only introduces young readers to poetry but also encourages them to see the world with fresh eyes. Whether read aloud, explored individually, or used as a creative learning tool, this book is a wonderful addition to any child's library.

For anyone looking to spark a child's love for poetry, Sisur Babe Jnan Bijnanar "Haiku" is a perfect choice—one that will inspire curiosity, wonder, and a lifelong appreciation for words. ***(The writer is a Poet, Science Journalist, Sustainability Advocate, Former Director, Assam Seed & Organic Certification Agency, Ex-Joint Director of Agriculture, Assam. He can be reached at 9435103685)***

Poem

Sad To Revisit You...

By: Bipul Chandra Kalita

Sad to revisit your wealthy dreamland,
You´ve learnt the art of hypocrisy
At the cost of your healthy conscience,
Consciously
Cautiously
To cheat your original foresight;
Personality matters not at all,
Circumstances prove it
As money steers your thought-process.

We know we will leave everything behind -
Laughter
Teary eyes
Buildings and ornaments - everything;

I want you to know me
I want you to know who you are
So as to sow seeds of love and kindness
So as to reap wisely grown sources of joy
When we get our unavoidable summons from above...
Who knows where we are destined to go?

Your red lips´ glow needs to be wise,
My faith in you needs to justify
Our mutual understanding:
My social dependence on you,
Your spiritual bondings on it´s entry and exit points
And, everything that my good will brings for your comfort.

I stand by socially approved practicable principles
To resist your bully over my solemn silence
To assist those whose effort to correct you is active,
Snatching hemlock from your lips´ smile
And destroying the same to rescue you forever.

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Envoys from Iran and US arrive in Oman for first round of talks over Tehran's nuclear programme

MUSCAT, April 12: Envoys from Iran and the United States arrived Saturday in Oman ahead of the first talks over Tehran's rapidly advancing nuclear programme since President Donald Trump returned to the White House.

No overall agreement is immediately likely, but the stakes of the negotiations couldn't be higher for these two nations closing in on half a century of enmity. Trump repeatedly has threatened to unleash airstrikes targeting Iran's nuclear programme if a deal isn't reached. Iranian officials increasingly warn that they could pursue a nuclear weapon with their stockpile of uranium enriched to near weapons-grade levels.

Flight-tracking data analysed by The Associated Press showed a private jet from Pulkovo Airport in St. Petersburg, Russia, arrived in Oman on Saturday morning. US Mideast envoy Steve Witkoff had just met Russian President Vladimir Putin on Friday there. Meanwhile, Iran's Foreign Ministry released footage of Tehran's top diplomat, Abbas Araghchi, meeting with Omani Foreign Minister Badr al-Busaidi. Iran's state-run IRNA news agency reported that Araghchi provided Iran's "stance and key points for the talks to be conveyed to the US side."

IRNA's report suggested the meeting would be held later Saturday.

"If there is sufficient will on both sides, we will decide on a timetable. But it is still too early to talk about that," Araghchi said, in an audio clip published by IRNA. "What is clear now is that the negotiations are indirect, and in our view only on the nuclear issue, and will be conducted with the necessary will to reach an agreement that is on an equal footing and leads to securing the national interests of the Iranian people."

Trump and Witkoff both have described the talks as being "direct."

"I think our position begins with dismantlement of your programme. That is our position today," Witkoff told The Wall Street Journal before his trip. "That doesn't mean, by the way, that at the margin we're not going to find other ways to find compromise between the two countries."

He added: "Where our red line will be, there can't be weaponisation of your nuclear capability,"

While the US side can offer sanctions relief for Iran's beleaguered economy, it remains unclear just how much Iran will be willing to concede. Under the 2015 nuclear deal, Iran could only maintain a small stockpile of uranium enriched to 3.67%.

Today, Tehran's stockpile could allow it to build multiple nuclear weapons if it so chooses and it has some material enriched up to 60%, a short, technical step away from weapons-grade levels.

Judging from negotiations since Trump unilaterally withdrew America from the deal in 2018, Iran will likely ask to keep enriching uranium up to at least 20%.

One thing it won't do is give up its programme entirely. That makes the proposal of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of a so-called Libyan solution — "you go in, blow up the facilities, dismantle all the equipment, under American supervision, American execution" — unworkable.

Iranians including Ayatollah Ali Khamenei have held up what ultimately happened to the late Libyan dictator Moammar Gadhafi, who was killed with his own gun by rebels in the country's 2011 Arab Spring uprising, as a warning about what can happen when you trust the United States. *(AP)*

Polls open in Gabon's first presidential election since 2023 military coup

LIBREVILLE (GABON), April 12: Voters in the oil-rich Gabon headed to polling stations on Saturday in a presidential election that the country's military rulers hoped would legitimise their grip on power.

It's the first election since a 2023 military coup ended a political dynasty that lasted over 50 years. Analysts have predicted an overwhelming victory for the interim president who led the coup.

Some 9,20,000 voters, including over 28,000 overseas, are registered to participate across more than 3,000 polling stations. A third of the country's 2.3 million people live in poverty despite its vast oil wealth.

The interim president, General Brice Clotaire Oligui Nguema, 50, toppled President Ali Bongo Ondimba nearly two years ago. He hopes to consolidate his grip on power for a seven-year term in office.

Bongo was placed under house arrest after the coup but freed a week later due to health concerns. His wife and son were detained and charged with corruption and embezzlement of public funds. Bongo himself was not charged.

Following the coup, Oligui Nguema promised to "return power to civilians" through "credible elections". He has touted himself as a leader who wants to unify the Gabonese and give them hope, running his presidential campaign under the slogan: "We Build Together."

In January, the parliament adopted a new contentious electoral code allowing military personnel to run in elections.

The country's new constitution, adopted in a referendum in November, has also set the presidential term at seven years, renewable once, instead of the unlimited fiver-year term. It also states family members can't succeed a president and has abolished the position of prime minister.

A challenger with an anti-colonial approach

A total of eight candidates are running for president. However, Oligui Nguema's main challenger is Bongo's former prime minister Alain Claude Bilie-By-Nze, who has promised to reorganise public finances, create jobs for young people and "end the umbilical cord" with former colonial ruler France.

In a recent interview with The Associated Press, Bilie-By-Nze said he did not expect the election to be fair or transparent. "Everything has been done to lock down the vote," he said.

In a region where France is losing longstanding allies in many of its former colonies, Gabon stands out as one of only a few where that partnership has not been threatened. It still has more than 300 French troops present, one of only two African countries still hosting them.

Oligui Nguema has not signalled an end to the French military presence, but Bilie-By-Nze has said "no subject is off limits" in renegotiating the ties between the two countries.

Voters cast their ballots

Dozens of voters, from various age groups, lined up at ballot stations early Saturday in the capital city, Libreville, as voting progressed peacefully.

Jonas Obiang told the AP while waiting to cast his ballot in the working-class district of Damas that he would vote for Bilie-By-Nze because he viewed the 2023 coup as a continuation of the malpractice of the previous regime.

His views were echoed by Antoine Nkili, a 27-year-old unemployed man with a Master's degree in law. *(AP)*

Argentina says it will lift country's strict currency controls with help from IMF

BUENOS AIRES, April 12: The libertarian government of President Javier Milei has announced that it would lift most of the country's strict capital and currency controls on Monday, a high-stakes gamble made possible by a new loan from the International Monetary Fund.

In a nationally televised address on Friday, Economy Minister Luis Caputo said the IMF's executive board had decided to approve the $20 billion bailout package announced earlier this week, which offers a lifeline to Argentina's dangerously depleting foreign currency reserves.

Caputo said the central bank would receive $12 billion from the IMF on Tuesday — a bigger-than-expected upfront sum that gives Argentina's foreign currency reserves breathing room to make the major change.

The new policy also involves cutting the Argentine peso free from its peg to the dollar and letting it trade within a so-called currency band that ranges from 1,000 to 1,400 pesos per dollar.

"The agreement will allow us, starting Monday, to lift the exchange rate controls that so severely limit the normal functioning of the economy," Caputo said from the government headquarters in Buenos Aires. "Investments that are currently pending will begin to come into Argentina to take us to this new stage."

The capital controls, known here as "el cepo," or "the trap," are a tangle of regulations that help to stabilize the peso at an official rate and prevent capital flight from Argentina.

Imposed by a previous administration in 2019, the restrictions curb individuals' and companies' access to dollars, discouraging the foreign investment that Milei needs to achieve his goal of transforming heavily regulated Argentina into a free economy. The restrictions have given rise to a vast black market where Argentines go to sell their depreciating pesos for dollars.

The announcement came as the IMF's executive board was preparing to approve the new $20 billion loan agreement with Argentina, the 23rd rescue package in the nation's long and tumultuous history. After the first $12 billion disbursement from the IMF hits Argentina's central bank Tuesday, another $1 billion will arrive in June. International organizations will contribute another $6 billion as part of the deal.

Before Milei took office in December 2023, the previous left-wing Peronist administration ran up massive budget deficits, leading to sky-high inflation and a chronically weakening peso. By scrapping subsidies and price controls and ending reckless money-printing, Milei has delivered Argentina's first fiscal surplus in years and largely stabilized its macroeconomic picture, thrilling markets. *(AP)*

Apple has few incentives to start making iPhones in US, despite Trump's trade war with China

SAN FRANCISCO, April 12: President Donald Trump's administration has been predicting its barrage of tariffs targeting China will push Apple into manufacturing the iPhone in the United States for the first time.

But that's an unlikely scenario even with US tariffs now standing at 145% on products made in China — the country where Apple has manufactured most of its iPhones since the first model hit the market 18 years ago.

The disincentives for Apple shifting its production domestically include a complex supply chain that it began building in China during the 1990s. It would take several years and cost billions of dollars to build new plants in the US, and then confront Apple with economic forces that could triple the price of an iPhone, threatening to torpedo sales of its marquee product.

"The concept of making iPhones in the US is a non-starter," asserted Wedbush Securities analyst Dan Ives, reflecting a widely held view in the investment community that tracks Apple's every move. He estimated that the current $1,000 price tag for an iPhone made in China, or India, would soar to more than $3,000 if production shifted to the US And he believes that moving production domestically likely couldn't be done until, at the earliest, 2028. "Price points would move so dramatically, it's hard to comprehend."

Apple didn't respond to a request for comment Wednesday. The Cupertino, California, company has yet to publicly discuss its response to Trump's tariffs on China, but the topic may come up on May 1 when Apple CEO Tim Cook is scheduled to field questions from analysts during a quarterly conference call to discuss the company's financial results and strategy.

And there is no doubt the China tariffs will be a hot-button issue given Apple's stock price has dropped by 15% and lowered the company's market value by $500 billion since Trump began increasing them on April 2.

If the tariffs hold, Apple is widely expected to eventually raise the prices on iPhones and other popular products because the Silicon Valley's supply chain is so heavily concentrated in China, India and other overseas markets caught in the crossfire of the escalating trade war.

The big question is how long Apple might be willing to hold the line on its current prices before the tariffs' toll on the company's profit margins become too much to bear and consumers are asked to shoulder some of the burden.

One of the main reasons that Apple has wiggle room to hold the line on its current iPhone pricing while the China tariffs remain in place is because the company continues to reap huge profit margins from the revenue generated by the subscriptions and other services tied to its product, said Forrester Research analyst Dipanjan Chatterjee. That division, which collected $96 billion in revenue during Apple's last fiscal year, remains untouched by Trump's tariffs.

"Apple can absorb some of the tariff-induced cost increases without significant financial impact, at least in the short term," Chatterjee said.

Apple tried to appease Trump in February by announcing plans to spend $500 billion and hire 20,000 people in the US through 2028, but none of it was tied to making an iPhone domestically. Instead, Apple pledged to fund a Houston data centre for computer servers powering artificial intelligence — a technology the company is expanding into as part of an industry-wide craze.

When asked this week about whether Trump believes Apple intends to build iPhones in the US, White House Press Secretary Karoline Levitt pointed to Apple's investment promise as evidence that the company thinks it could be done. "If Apple didn't think the United States could do it, they probably wouldn't have put up that big chunk of change," Leavitt said.

US Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick also predicted tariffs would force a manufacturing shift during an April 6 appearance on a CBS news program. "The army of millions and millions of human beings screwing in little screws to make iPhones, that kind of thing is going to come to America," Lutnick said. *(AP)*

Trump proclaims himself 'in good shape', but results of his physical aren't immediately released

WASHINGTON, April 12: US President Donald Trump had an annual physical on Friday and concluded, "I did well," praising his own heart, soul and cognitive ability while noting medical reports from White House doctors may not be ready until the weekend.

The 78-year-old, who in January became the oldest in US history to be sworn in as president, spent nearly five hours at Walter Reed National Military Medical Centre undergoing what he called "every test you can imagine".

"I was there for a long time," Trump said. "I think I did very well."

Despite long questioning predecessor Joe Biden's physical and mental capacity, Trump has routinely kept basic facts about his own health shrouded in secrecy — shying away from traditional presidential transparency on medical issues. He said he believes the doctor's report on his latest physical would be ready on Sunday — though, if history is any indication, that may offer little more than flattery with scarce detail.

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said while Trump was still being examined that a "readout from the White House physician" on his health that would be released "as soon as we possibly can" and suggested it'd be comprehensive.

Trump went straight from the examination to Air Force One to fly to Florida for the weekend. Speaking to reporters midflight, he said doctors offered him "a little bit" of advice on lifestyle changes that could improve his health, though he didn't elaborate on what that was. *(AP)*

Mideast mediator Oman at centre of key first Iran-US meeting over Tehran's nuclear programme

MUSCAT, April 12: Once again, some of the highest stakes in Middle East geopolitics will be discussed in this quiet coastal city without skyscrapers.

Here in Muscat, the capital of Oman nestled against the sheer stone heights of the Hajar Mountains, Iran and the United States will meet for talks over Tehran's rapidly advancing nuclear programme for the first time since President Donald Trump began his second term.

No agreement is immediately likely, but the stakes of the negotiations couldn't be higher for these two nations closing in on half a century of enmity.

Trump repeatedly has threatened to unleash airstrikes targeting Iran's nuclear programme if a deal isn't reached. Iranian officials increasingly warn that they could pursue a nuclear weapon with their stockpile of uranium enriched to near weapons-grade levels.

And at the centre is Oman, one of the world's last sultanates on the eastern edge of the Arabian Peninsula. Its unique history, people and proximity to Iran have made it indispensable for the

West as it has held discussion after discussion for Iran. But these latest talks — suddenly announced by Trump in the Oval Office just days earlier — have put Oman firmly into a spotlight it otherwise seeks to avoid.

"The Omanis have a lot of experience when it comes to playing this back-channel role," said Giorgio Cafiero, the CEO and founder of the Washington-based risk analysis firm Gulf State Analytics. "I think that right now in this day and age of Trump 2.0, the stakes are really high and it's important for us to understand the value of Oman being a diplomatic bridge."

Oman, home to 5.2 million people across an arid country just larger than Italy, stands out among the Gulf Arab states. Its oil and gas wealth is marginal by comparison, and its citizens outnumber its population of foreign workers.

Omanis can be found working normal jobs from taxi cabs to offices. And its people are Ibadi Muslims, a more liberal offshoot of Islam predating the Sunni-Shiite split.

They occupy a strategic location along the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow mouth of the Persian Gulf through which a fifth of all oil passes.

And Oman is a former empire whose seafaring rule once stretched all the way down to the island of Zanzibar off Africa. That history extends into how it deals with the wider world, said Marc J O'Reilly, a history professor at Heidelberg University in Ohio. It is a path O'Reilly referred to as "Omanibalancing" over 25 years ago — and one that still works today for the sultanate after the 2020 death of its longtime ruler Sultan Qaboos bin Said and the installation of Sultan Haitham bin Tariq. *(AP)*

US tariffs could shrink global trade by 3%: UN economist

UNITED NATIONS, April 12: Global trade could shrink by three per cent and exports could see a shift from markets such as the US and China to India, Canada and Brazil due to tariffs imposed by the US, a top UN economist has said.

US President Donald Trump unveiled a massive tariff plan last week. The White House later announced a 90-day pause on "reciprocal tariffs" for most countries except China, which in turn decided to impose 125 per cent tariffs on US imports.

"Global trade could shrink by 3 per cent, with significant long-term shifts in trade patterns and economic integration," International Trade Centre Executive Director Pamela Coke-Hamilton said in Geneva on Friday.

"For example, exports from Mexico—which have been highly impacted—are shifting from markets such as the US, China, Europe and even other Latin American countries, with modest gains instead in Canada and Brazil, and to a lesser extent, India," she said.

Similarly, Vietnamese exports are redirecting away from the US, Mexico and China, while increasing substantially towards Middle East and North Africa (MENA) markets, the EU, Korea and others, she said.

Citing the example of apparel, Coke-Hamilton said that textiles is a top industry in terms of economic activity and employment for developing countries.

In this context, she said that Bangladesh, the world's second-largest apparel exporter, would face a reciprocal tariff of 37 per cent, should it come into effect, which could lead to a loss of USD 3.3 billion in annual exports to the US by 2029.

She added that a key part of the solution for developing countries to navigate any global shocks—be it a pandemic, climate disaster or sudden changes in policies—lies in prioritising three areas -diversification, value addition and regional integration.

"So there are opportunities for developing countries not just to

navigate times of uncertainty, but to proactively prepare for the long haul," she said.

Coke-Hamilton said that initial estimates, developed with the French economics research institute CEPII, calculated before the announcement of the 90-day pause and the additional tariff hikes on China, indicate that by 2040, the effect of the so-called "reciprocal" tariffs and initial countermeasures could reduce global GDP by 0.7 per cent.

Countries like Mexico, China and Thailand—but also countries in Southern Africa—are among the most affected, alongside the United States itself.

On China's decision to impose 125 per cent tariffs on US imports, Asia Society Policy Institute (ASPI) Vice President and Managing Director, Washington DC Wendy Cutler said that with China's announcement of further tariff hikes against US imports, it's clear that hopes that China would blink first in this trade war are misplaced.

"China is in for the long haul. Beijing has also admitted that it has reached the endpoint in retaliating with tariffs, perhaps signalling that it has lots of other tools in its arsenal that could be activated further should the US respond today with additional measures," she said.

She added that the steep tariffs now in place—145 per cent for Chinese imports to the US and 125 per cent for US imports to China—virtually halt all goods trade between the two largest economies in the world.

"How long these tariffs remain in place is an open question, but at some point, both Washington and Beijing will recognise the need to re-engage and manage this deteriorating situation," she said.

ASPI's Vice President of International Security and Diplomacy Daniel Russel said that Chinese President Xi Jinping isn't backing down, but he's not blowing things up either.

He's "betting that Trump's tariff tantrum will collapse under the weight of the US market response," Russel said.

He added that Beijing is shifting away from symmetrical retaliatory tariffs, signalling that it's done playing Trump's escalation game and instead is playing for the long-term strategic advantage.

"By declaring it will 'ignore' future US tariff hikes, Beijing is not trying to win the trade war—it's trying to outlast it and to outmanoeuvre Trump. Beijing's goals are to buffer its economy, expand diplomatic clout, and keep pressure on US allies to hedge. Xi's Southeast Asia tour is part of a strategy to shore up China's economic ties in the region while Washington lashes out and alienates its partners," Russel said. *(PTI)*

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Kuki groups warn Meiteis against climbing 'sacred' Thangjing Hill

Attempts to cross the buffer zone shall be considered a direct challenge to the Kuki-Zo community

IMPHAL, April 12: Kuki-Zo civil society organisations have "warned" the Meitei community against climbing the Thangjing Hill in Manipur's Churachandpur district, stating that any attempts "will be opposed tooth and nail".

The Thangjing Hill is considered a sacred site for Meiteis who visit it in April.

In a statement, six Kuki-Zo groups said any attempt to climb the hills would be viewed as a "direct challenge".

"There is speculation that the Meitei community intends to cross the buffer zone for Chinga Kaba at Thangting Hill in the month of April. No political settlement has been reached between the Government of India and the Kuki-Zo community, and without such an

agreement, the Meitei community has no jurisdiction to enter Kuki-Zo land," it said.

"Whoever attempts to cross the buffer zone shall be considered a direct challenge to the Kuki-Zo community, and any untoward incidents that occur during such attempts shall be solely the responsibility of those who undertake them," it added.

The groups, among which were Kuki Inpi Churachandpur and Kuki Students Organisation Churachandpur, appealed for maintaining the status quo and preventing further escalation. "Any intention to cross the buffer zone will be opposed tooth and nail by the Kuki-Zo community," the statement said. The buffer zone, which is heavily guarded by security forces, separates the Meitei-controlled Imphal Valley and the Kuki-dominated hill districts.

More than 250 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in the ethnic violence between the two sides since May 2023. (PTI)

Minor girl allegedly raped and murdered in Manipur's Churachandpur

IMPHAL/ CHURACHANDPUR, April 12: A 'mentally challenged' minor girl was allegedly raped and murdered in Manipur's Churachandpur district, officials said on Saturday.

The girl's body was found in a forest in Thanlon sub-division of the district on Friday, they said.

"The girl had gone to collect firewood at a forest in Leijangphai area on Friday. As she did not return, her father became concerned and went to the forest," officials said..

Her body was found on Friday afternoon with the clothes torn and injury marks on the body, officials added.

Police have arrested a suspect in the case and investigation is underway.

This is the third incident in Churachandpur district involving sexual assault of minor girls in less than a month.

Earlier this month, a 10-year-old girl was sexually assaulted by an underaged boy in Churachandpur district. Last month, a 9-year-old girl was found dead in the vicinity of a relief camp for internally displaced people in Churachandpur district.

The girl's body was found with an injury mark on her neck and bloodstains around the body. Her parents and civil society organisations including Zomi Mothers' Association had alleged the girl was murdered after she was sexually assaulted. (PTI)

Aizawl to host International Half Marathon on April 26

AIZAWL, April 12: Mizoram's capital Aizawl will host for the first time an International Half Marathon on April 26, a minister said.

Mizoram Sports minister Lalnghinglova Hmar on Friday said that the coming event will be organised jointly by Mizoram government and Innovations India to promote health, fitness and tourism besides an anti-drug campaign among youths. He said that the objective of the international event is empowerment of sportspersons and development of Mizoram and Northeast India in line with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of developing Northeast.

Accredited by the Athletics Federation of India (AFI), the proposed half marathon event received the support of several key institutions and agencies, including Sports Authority of India (SAI), NF Railway, Mizoram Athletic Association, and various government departments, public sector units and corporates, he said.

More than a thousand runners from across India as well as abroad are expected to participate in the event and international runners from Kenya and Vietnam have already confirmed their participation, the minister said.

Runners from a number of cities across the country, including Delhi, Gurugram, Noida, Indore, Ayodhya, Varanasi, Alwar, Haridwar, Shillong, Dimapur, Lakhimpur, Mirzapur, and Itanagar have registered to participate in the international event, Hmar said.

Runners from Railways and Services are also expected to participate, he said.

According to Hmar, the marathon event will have four categories - 21.1 km (half marathon), 10 km (open race) particularly for women, 5 km (fun race) and 5 km race for juniors.

The Aizawl International Half Marathon (AIHM) would be an annual sports event that would go a long way in nurturing and empowering the youths and sportspersons of the region enabling them to perform at various National and International platforms and bring glory for the country, Hmar said.

It will act as one of the biggest platforms towards development and would surely create a euphoria about Mizoram across the globe, he said. The winners will be given prizes worth ₹ 10 lakh, Hmar added. (PTI)

Six militants arrested in Manipur

IMPHAL, April 12: Six militants were arrested from different parts of Manipur in separate operations, police said on Saturday.

The arrests were made on Friday from Bishnupur, Imphal East, Imphal West and Kangpokpi districts, they said.

A cadre of the Kanglei Yaowl Kanna Lup (KYKL/SOREPA) was arrested from Leimaram Mamang Leikai in Bishnupur. Leichombam Pakpi Devi (37), the arrested militant, was allegedly involved in extortion and recruiting youth in the proscribed group, police said.

An active member of the banned Kangleipak Communist Party (KCP-Noyon) was arrested from the Checkon crossing in Imphal East district. Huidrom Sunder Singh (39) was involved in the transportation of arms and ammunition and extorting shops located in the Mantripukhri area, police said.

A militant of KCP(PWG) was arrested from Urup Awang Leikai in Imphal East, while another member of the outfit was nabbed from Lei Ingkhol Maning Leikai in Imphal West. Both of them were involved in extorting small businesses. An active cadre of KYKL was nabbed from Lamlong Bazaar in Imphal East. He was identified as Moirangthem Suranjoy Meitei (31), police said. A cadre of the proscribed PREPAK (Pro), identified as Angom Surjit Singh, was apprehended from Phayeng Sabal Leikai in Imphal West.

In another operation, security forces apprehended a man while he was extorting money from the driver of a truck on NH-2 in Kangpokpi district. He was identified as Hensonpiek Vaiphei (23), who had been staying at a relief camp in Churachandpur.

Over the last few weeks, a large number of militants of different banned outfits have been arrested in both Meitei-controlled Imphal Valley and the Kuki-dominated hill districts on charges of extorting the locals, mainly small businesses, taking advantage of the prevailing hostilities between the two communities.

The arrests come as the Centre is making efforts to bring back peace, which has been elusive since ethnic violence broke out in the state in May 2023. In February, President's Rule was imposed in the state after BJP leader N Biren Singh resigned as the chief minister. (PTI)

Tripura to expand rubber cultivation across 20,485 hectares: CM

HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, April 12: Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha announced that to boost the economy of the state, rubber cultivation will be expanded to 20,485 hectares of land, and 10 new rubber processing centers will be established.

"The Bharatiya Janata Party-led government is a people-oriented government. This government is continuously working for the welfare of the people. Rubber cultivation will be increased in 20,485 hectares of land in the state, and 10 new rubber processing centers will be set up," said Saha.

Saha made the announcement while inaugurating several development projects in Khowai district on Friday.

Saha said at the event, "I went to Dharmanagar the day before yesterday and inaugurated about 46 projects. In this way, such programs are being held almost every day. Today, I inaugurated three schools and a motor stand here. People from different places are constantly asking about my schedule. This proves that we are continuing development works across the state under the guidance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Since our government came to power, we have been trying to develop every department. Not just school buildings, but also the learning environment of schools are being improved. Efforts are also being made to ensure that students receive quality education. The state government is continuously working to address the shortage of teachers. Now, qualified teachers are being recruited through the Teachers' Recruitment Board, Tripura." While discussing the program, the Chief Minister stated that over 16,000 government jobs have been provided in the last seven years since this government came to power.

NEHU VC calls for peace, proposes 'Reconciliation Committee'

SHILLONG, April 12: Vice Chancellor of the North Eastern Hill University (NEHU), Prof Prabha Shankar Shukla on Saturday appealed to all stakeholders of the university for peace, order and academic progress even as he assured to constitute a "Truth and Reconciliation Committee" to objectively review the grievances and recommend a roadmap for institutional healing.

In a statement, Prof Shukla said, "Let this press release serve as both a testimony and a sincere appeal to all stakeholders of NEHU: To the students: Your concerns are important. Your voice matters. However, protests must remain peaceful, constructive, and democratic. Do not let external influences hijack your agency or misguide your cause. To the teachers and staff: Let us rise above factionalism and reaffirm our academic mission. Let us not allow partisan politics to cloud our professional judgment. The future of our students must be our top priority."

He also urged the student unions and community leaders: "Engage in meaningful dialogue. Avoid rhetoric and threats. You hold immense influence and responsibility. Use it wisely."

"To the judiciary and law enforcement agencies: We seek your support in ensuring the rule of law is upheld within the university premises. Every unlawful act, no matter how politically framed, must be dealt with according to the Constitution," Prof Shukla said adding, "To the Government of India and the Ministry of Education: I extend my full cooperation and openness to reform, inquiry, and institutional improvement. NEHU stands for transparency and accountability."

Calling for institutional renewal, the VC said, "It is time to intro-

spect. The events of the past few months reflect a crisis of institutional trust. They also reveal the urgent need to depoliticize academic spaces and reaffirm the values of scholarly inquiry, freedom of thought, and justice."

Stating that he is committed to initiating long-term institutional reforms, Prof Shukla said, "These include: Strengthening grievance redressal mechanisms; Ensuring fair and transparent appointment processes; Enhancing security and digital infrastructure; Implementing academic audits and peer reviews; Fostering intercultural dialogue and inclusive practices; Creating neutral platforms for student-teacher engagement."

"I propose the formation of a 'Truth and Reconciliation Committee' comprising retired jurists, educationists, and community elders to objectively review the grievances and recommend a roadmap for institutional healing," he said while assuring to call for a Special Session of the Academic Council and Executive Council, to be held jointly with student representatives, to initiate a new era of shared governance and collaborative policy-making.

"I chose to serve NEHU not for recognition or reward, but to contribute meaningfully to higher education in Northeast India. My career has been defined by teaching, mentoring, and institution-building. These recent events, while personally distressing, have strengthened my belief in the power of truth, the resilience of the academic community, and the transformative potential of education. I remain undeterred in my duties and dedicated to the students and faculty of NEHU. My office remains open for dialogue, consultation, and resolution. Let us rebuild NEHU not with slogans or vendetta, but with sincerity, service, and scholarship," Prof Shukla stated further.

Reminding that the North-Eastern Hill University belongs to the people of Northeast India, the VC said it was founded to empower marginalized communities, nurture critical thinking, and foster national integration adding the present crisis, though painful, must become an opportunity for transformation.

"Let us reclaim the spirit of NEHU—not with hostility or fear, but with dialogue, discipline, and determination. I appeal to every student, teacher, staff member, parent, and citizen of Meghalaya: let us unite in the interest of peace, progress, and academic excellence. I thank all those who continue to believe in the values of truth, equity, and scholarship. With your support, NEHU will rise again," he concluded. (NNN)

Tripura likely to host first IPL Match in 2026 as stadium nears completion

HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, April 12: Tripura is poised to make its mark on the national cricketing map, with the under-construction international stadium at Narsinghgarh in Agartala likely to host its first-ever IPL match in 2026. President of the Tripura Cricket Association (TCA), Tapan Lodh, confirmed that construction work on the stadium is progressing steadily and is expected to be completed by next year.

"We're optimistic about hosting an IPL match soon after the stadium's completion. While the initial pace of construction was slow, things have picked up significantly. Once all BCCI norms and requirements are fulfilled, we are confident the venue will be ready to host a major game," Lodh said. The Narsinghgarh stadium, once completed, will become the second-largest cricket venue in the Northeast after Guwahati, with a seating capacity of 25,000.

Construction began in 2017 but faced delays due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Now back on track, the stadium will serve as the home ground for both the Tripura state team and potentially the Indian national team, opening doors for international fixtures and strengthening the region's presence in Indian cricket.

In the meantime, TCA Secretary Subrata Dey announced that the BCCI is bringing back the TATA IPL Fan Parks for the 2025 season. Cricket fans in Tripura can enjoy the action live on giant screens at Swami Vivekananda Maidan on April 12 and 13.

International Conclave cum Buyer-Seller Meet in Tawang

Enhancing agri-exports of GI tagged Khaw Tai Rice, Mandarin Orange, Kiwi, Apple, Persimmon, Yak Cheese envisioned

HT Bureau

ITAGANAR, April 12: The Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA) in collaboration with the Government of Arunachal Pradesh, hosted an International Conclave cum Buyer-Seller Meet (IBSM) at Kalawangpo Convention Hall in Tawang, Arunachal Pradesh on Sunday to promote agricultural and processed food products exports from Arunachal Pradesh and the broader North-Eastern Region (NER) of India.

The International Conclave cum Buyer Seller Meet (BSM) was graced by the Chief Guest and Chief Minister, Pema Khandu; Minister of Agriculture Gabriel Denwang Wangsu; Chief Secretary (CS) Manish Gupta; Former Union Secretary Siraj Hussain; Chairman of APEDA Abhishek Dev, MLA of Tawang, Namgey Tsering; MLA of Lumla Tsering Lhamu; Commissioner and Secretary, Department of Agriculture Bidol Tayeng, amongst several officers of the Central and State Government of India.

In his keynote address Khandu committed to developing the agricultural & allied sectors, enhancing farmer's livelihoods, empowering Self-Help Groups and encouraging women led development. He envisions enhancing agri-exports of GI tagged Khaw Tai Rice (known as Khamti Rice), Mandarin Orange, Kiwi, Apple, Persimmon, Yak Cheese (Churpi), amongst others to South East Asian and ASEAN Countries. He encouraged domestic and international buyers to be a boon for the state and invest in the state's untapped potential.

Wangsu emphasized on the need to generate awareness and build capacity of the farmers of the state in order to ensure fair price for their agriculture prod-

ucts in domestic and international markets. He appreciated the farmers of the region for their unwavering commitment in producing the state's finest Kiwi, Mandarin Oranges, Apples, walnuts and Value-Added Products like wines, amongst others. Gupta highlighted that Arunachal Pradesh was a "powerhouse of Organic" and the Government of Arunachal Pradesh's commitment to exporting agri-produce like Kiwi, Apple, Mandarin Orange, Persimmon, Large Cardamom, Yak Cheese (also known as Churpi), Arecanut and Walnuts. Chairman of APEDA Abhishek Dev, IAS encouraged the identification of Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs)/ Farmer Producer Companies (FPCs) from Arunachal Pradesh for participation in key national and international Trade Fairs for market access, promotion and outreach. He assured that APEDA and the Government of Arunachal Pradesh are committed to working together closely for the identification and development of focused agriculture products from Arunachal Pradesh for exports to international markets, infrastructure development, training and capacity building of farmers, Farmer Producer Organisation (FPO), Farmer Producer Companies (FPCs), Women's Self Help Groups (SHGs), Start-ups and Exporters from the region as well as branding and international promotions of agriculture produce and Value Added Products from the state so people can benefit from such socio-economic developments. The International Conclave cum Buyer-Seller Meet enabled direct interactions between 11 international Buyers from 3 countries including UAE, Nepal and Bhutan with 17 Indian exporters from 7 states and Union Territories (UTs) including Assam, Maharashtra, Delhi, Hyderabad, Karnataka, Gujarat and West Bengal. The exporters from across the country also interacted with over 50 FPOs and 200 farmers from Arunachal Pradesh who participated in the event to understand the agri produce quality, availability and production quantities.

To showcase their diverse agri basket, products and services, over 10 stalls were exhibited by the Government of Arunachal Pradesh, APEDA, Indian Institute of Packaging (IIP), the National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India Ltd. (NAFED), Spices Board of India, National Cooperative Organics Limited (NCOL), Amul, North Eastern Regional Agricultural Marketing Corporation Limited (NERAMAC) and Marine Products Export Development Authority (MPEDA). Some of the finest agri produce from Arunachal Pradesh were showcased including GI tagged Khaw Tai Rice (known as Khamti Rice), Kiwi, Apple, Mandarin Orange, Persimmon, Large Cardamom, Yak Cheese (also known as Churpi), Arecanut, Walnut, Floriculture, Millets and Value-Added Products like Fruit Wines, amongst others.

APEDA facilitated meaningful trade discussions amongst Policymakers, Buyers, Exporters, Exhibitors, industry leaders and experts from key sectors such as Organic produce, Millets, Honey, Fresh Fruits and Vegetables, Processed Food, Spices and Tea aimed at unlocking the potential of Arunachal Pradesh's agri-business and processed food export sectors. It further invoked a dialogue amongst several stakeholders from the Central and State governments to strengthen Arunachal Pradesh's value chain ecosystem, address key concerns such as quality standards, packaging, logistics and transportation challenges to meet stringent demands of the international market. It explored ways to improve market access and promote sustainable growth in the agricultural sector of the state. This International Conclave and BSM at Tawang marks a critical step in the state's journey to open new avenues for agricultural products in the global marketplace, promote sustainable growth and strengthen the export ecosystem in India's North Eastern Region (NER).

অসম লোকসেৱা আয়োগ
ASSAM PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION
Jawaharnagar, Khanapara, Guwahati-781022.

No.96PSC/E-9/2023-24

NOTIFICATION

It is for information to all concerned that the **Departmental (Promotion) Examination** for the post of **Audit Officer (Local Fund) Assam under Finance (Estt. – B) Department, Govt. of Assam (Advt. No. 20/2024)** will be held on **17th, 18th, 19th and 21st June, 2025, at the Office of the APSC, Khanapara, Guwahati-22** as per Programme given below.

Date	Forenoon (09:00 AM to 12:00 P.M.)	Afternoon (01:30 PM to 04:30 P.M.)
17th June, 2025	Essay or Précis and Drafting (Paper-I) (2.30 Hours, 9.00AM to 11.30 AM)	Elementary Book Keeping (Paper-II)
18th June, 2025	General Accounts, (i) Without Books (Paper-III)	General Accounts, (ii) With Books (Paper-IV)
19th June, 2025	Rules and Regulations for the Audit and Inspection of Accounts under the Department. (i) Without Books (Paper-V)	Rules and Regulations for the Audit and Inspection of Accounts under the Department. (ii) With Books (Paper-VI)
21st June, 2025	Assam Panchayat Act, 1972 and the Rules framed there under together with subsequent amendment made there to, Assam Municipal Act and the Rules framed there under together with subsidiary Rules. (i) Without Books (Paper-VII)	Assam Panchayat Act, 1972 and the Rules framed there under together with subsequent amendment made there to, Assam Municipal Act and the Rules framed there under together with subsidiary Rules. (ii) With Books (Paper-VIII)

The list of candidates along with Roll Nos. and e-Admission Certificates will be uploaded on **3rd June, 2025** and **4th June, 2025** respectively in the Commission's website **www.apsc.nic.in.** No e-Admission Certificates shall be sent separately by post. The candidates may e-mail their queries to the e-mail id: **apsc-asm@nic.in** from **4th June, 2025** to **13th June, 2025** till **5.00 P.M.**

Sd/-
Secretary,
Assam Public Service Commission
Jawaharnagar, Khanapara, Guwahati-22

DIPR /D/ HLT/5/13-Apr-25

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'I appeal to the people of Maharashtra to not keep Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj restricted to the statewon't go prospectively and deal with that'

Aurangzeb who labelled himself Alamgir was defeated and buried in Maharashtra: Shah

RAIGAD, April 12: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Saturday praised the valour of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, emphasising that Aurangzeb who called himself Alamgir and fought against Marathas in Maharashtra throughout his life died as a defeated man and was buried in its soil.

Shah paid tributes to Shivaji Maharaj at Raigad Fort on his 345th death anniversary.

He said Shivaji Maharaj's ideals of "swadharm and swarajya" continue to inspire India's ambition to become a superpower by the 100th year of Independence.

"I appeal to the people of Maharashtra to not keep Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj restricted to the state. His tremendous willpower, determination, and courage inspire the country as he strategically united all sections of the society," Shah said while addressing a gathering.

Shah said Shivaji Maharaj defeated "Mughal shahi" (rule of Mughals).

"The ruler who called himself Alamgir fought Marathas till he was alive and died a defeated man in Maharashtra. His (Aurangzeb's) samadhi (tomb) is located on its soil," Shah said.

Notably, Maharashtra had witnessed a huge political row over

the demand by right-wing organisations to remove the tomb of the 17th Century Mughal emperor in Khultabad, Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar district.

"The legendary Maratha warrior king's ideals inspire India during its journey to celebrate its centenary of independence and become a superpower. The Narendra Modi government works on the ideals of Shivaji Maharaj,' Shah said.

The home minister described Raigad Fort, which served as the capital of the Maratha kingdom and houses Shivaji Maharaj's samadhi, as a source of inspiration for future generations rather than a tourist spot.

He credited Shivaji Maharaj's mother, Jijabai, for sowing the seeds of protecting "swadharm" and founding "swarajya."

As India moves toward its centenary of independence in 2047 and aspires to become a superpower, Shah said Shivaji Maharaj stands tall as an inspiration.

His "rajmudra" (royal sign) is used as the ensign of the Indian Navy, symbolising his enduring influence on the nation.

Shah stressted the importance of continuing the fight for "swadharm" and upholding Shivaji Maharaj's teachings on good governance and justice.

Shah was accompanied by Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, his deputies Eknath Shinde and Ajit Pawar, and BJP MP Udayanraje Bhosale and state Minister Shivendrasinh Bhosale, both descendants of the Maratha warrior king.

Fadnavis reiterated his government's commitment to constructing Shivaji Maharaj's memorial in the Arabian Sea, noting that a petition regarding the project has been referred back to the Bombay High Court. "We will present the case skillfully," he said.

Fadnavis also accepted Udayanraje Bhosle's demand for a national memorial of Shivaji Maharaj in Delhi and pledged to discuss the matter with Amit Shah.

Bhosle highlighted Shivaji Maharaj's teachings on social justice and communal harmony.

He demanded a law making insults to Shivaji Maharaj a cognisable and non-bailable offence with a 10-year jail term and proposed the establishment of a censor board to ensure historical accuracy in cinematic portrayals.

"Despite dedicating his life to others, he is still being insulted. I demand that a law be enacted, making insult of Shivaji Maharaj a cognisable and non-bailable offence with no bail for 10 years.

"There should be a censor board to check the cinematic liberty and factual errors on government-certified history," he said.

Bhosle remarked that the upcoming memorial of Shivaji Maharaj in the Arabian Sea may have been delayed because of environment and ecological issues, but it can be constructed on 48-acre land at Raj Bhavan.

Bhosle suggested that the delayed Arabian Sea memorial could be constructed on 48 acres of land at Raj Bhavan.

Earlier, Shah and other dignitaries offered floral tributes to Jijabai at Pachad near Raigad Fort.

Shah will have lunch with NCP MP from Raigad Sunil Tatkare at the latter's residence in Sutarwadi.

Tatkare told reporters there would be no political discussion during the luncheon. The luncheon meeting comes against the backdrop of differences among the Mahayuti allies over the guardian minister post for Raigad district.

Fadnavis had appointed cabinet minister Aditi Tatkare as the guardian minister but had to stay the decision after opposition from the Shiv Sena, which wants Bharat Gogawale in the post.

Tatkare said the issue of the guardian minister was not on the agenda for the lunch meeting. (PTI)

AIADMK-BJP alliance doomed to fail, says TN CM Stalin

CHENNAI, April 12: Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin on Saturday said "hunger for power" is the reason for the alliance between the AIADMK and BJP and the tie-up is against ideals such as protection of state rights and it is doomed to fail.

Stalin, reacting to the announcement of an alliance between the state's main opposition party and the national party that helms the Centre, said that the AIADMK claims to oppose NEET, the imposition of Hindi, the three-language policy and the Waqf Act and also say that Tamil Nadu's representation should not be reduced during delimitation.

"Are all these part of the Common Minimum Programme?", he asked. Union Home Minister Amit Shah, however, did not speak about any of these. Nor did he allow the AIADMK leadership to speak. Instead, Stalin said Shah used the press conference only to criticize his party, the DMK, the DMK government and him.

The chief minister said: "The AIADMK-BJP alliance is doomed to fail. It was the people of Tamil Nadu who handed repeated defeats to this coalition. Now, Shah has reconstituted the same failed alliance." Stalin said Shah failed to state on what ideological foundation the alliance was formed. Instead, he merely assured that a Common Minimum Programme would be worked out.

Further, he said: "The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam is a movement that stands to protect state rights, linguistic rights, and Tamil culture. In contrast, the BJP-AIADMK alliance has been formed with a hunger for power and stands against all these ideals. People have not forgotten that Edappadi Palaniswami, in his thirst for power, mortgaged Tamil Nadu's dignity and rights with Delhi and brought ruin to the state."

The Dravidian party chief said when Shah spoke about corruption while confirming an alliance with AIADMK, the people of Tamil Nadu "would certainly have laughed."

Former Chief Minister J Jayalalithaa had to step down twice due to corruption charges and she was sentenced to four years imprisonment in the disproportionate assets case by a special court in Bengaluru after years of legal proceedings. If the BJP forms an alliance with her party, can it still speak credibly about corruption,? Stalin demanded to know. It should not be forgotten that the AIADMK functionaries and their relatives were subjected to "two raids" by central investigating agencies.

"To escape the consequences, they ran towards the BJP leadership. The alliance was confirmed based on this compromise. The people of Tamil Nadu are not naive — they know that corruption is the very basis of the AIADMK-BJP alliance. Those who pledged AIADMK out of fear of two raids are now eager to mortgage the entire Tamil Nadu," the DMK president alleged. The alliance between the AIADMK and BJP is a failure alliance and the tie-up is a "corruption", by itself. Stalin alleged that the BJP leadership has a calculated plan to eradicate Tamil through Hindi imposition, to block Tamil people's progress through various conspiracies, and to undermine Tamil Nadu's rights through constituency delimitation.

The AIADMK, "an old bonded slave camp," which has long surrendered itself, is being coerced by threats by the BJP to implement these conspiracies.

Stalin said: "Whether the BJP comes alone or with partners, the people of Tamil Nadu are ready to deliver a fitting lesson. To the traitorous alliance that kneels in Delhi without self-respect and tries to pawn Tamil Nadu, the people will give the right response."

When repeatedly questioned by journalists about NEET, the Union Home Minister was unable to provide a proper response, the chief minister claimed adding if Shah believed NEET was right, he should have defended that position clearly. (PTI)

US tariffs will have minimal impact on Indian economy: BJP

NEW DELHI, April 12: Though the world is on edge because of the tariffs imposed by US President Donald Trump, Indian economy remains self-reliant and will likely suffer minimal impact, the BJP said on Saturday.

Addressing a press conference at the party headquarters, BJP spokesperson Syed Zafar Islam said that the Mudra Yojana has greatly benefited the MSME sector.

"There is global nervousness around Trump's tariffs. However, the Indian economy is self-reliant, and the impact on it will be extremely minimal. It will absorb this shock and use it as an opportunity to move forward.

"If you look at high-frequency data, it clearly shows the strength of the Indian economy — whether it's strong capital expenditure or sustained growth momentum," Islam said.

The spokesperson said ever since the BJP came to power in 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been working on an economic transformation.

"One of his first steps was launching the Jan Dhan Yojana to connect people with the banking system. Today, over 53 crore people are linked to this scheme, and around 70 per cent of them are women.

"Following that, he introduced the Mudra Yojana, which has now become a global model for supporting small businesses and entrepreneurship," he said. Islam said that before 2014, the sector contributed around 15 per cent to the economy.

"Today, that has risen to 20 per cent. Notably, 50 per cent of Mudra loan accounts are held by SC, ST, and OBC entrepreneurs, empowering those who were long kept on the margins," he said.

Islam also attacked the DMK-led government in Tamil Nadu over allegedly derogatory remarks made by its Forest Minister K Ponmudi. (PTI)

Amid violent protests, Mamata says Waqf Amendment Act will not be implemented in Bengal

KOLKATA, April 12: The Waqf (Amendment) Act will not be implemented in West Bengal, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said on Saturday amid violent protests in the state, particularly in the Muslim-majority Murshidabad district.

So far, 118 people have been arrested in connection with the violence that broke out in the district on Friday, according to police.

"Remember, we did not make the law over which many are agitated. The law was made by the central government. So the answer you want should be sought from the central government," the CM said in a post on X. "We have made our position clear on this matter -- we do not support this law. This law will not be implemented in our state. So what is the riot about," she asked.

Her remarks came as fresh violence was reported from Dhulian in Murshidabad's Samserganj, where one person sustained a bullet injury.

Addressing a press conference in Kolkata, ADG (Law and Order) Jawed Shamim said the details of the incident are not available yet.

He said the local police may not have been involved in the incident of firing, and that "this could probably be from the BSF end".

"These are early reports that we need to

cross-check," he said.

The injured person was admitted to a hospital and is out of danger, he added. Shamim said that on Friday, four rounds were fired by the police to control the violence in the district.

"In that firing, two persons were injured and are under treatment," he said, maintaining that young men were falling prey to "lies".

Several vehicles, including police vans, were set on fire, stones were hurled at security forces, and roads were blocked as violence rocked Malda, Murshidabad, South 24 Parganas and Hooghly districts during protests over the new legislation on Friday. Director General of Police (DGP) Rajeev Kumar said strong action would be taken against those indulging in violence, and the men in uniform will do everything in their power to protect the lives and properties of innocent citizens.

"The unfortunate incident that happened this (Saturday) morning may have been triggered by unsubstantiated rumours being spread from various quarters. I urge the people not to pay heed to such provocations, which are clearly the handiwork of miscreants," he said.

"This is a fight between good and evil. Rumour mongering has to be stopped. We will request people not to take the law and order into their own hands. We assure them that the police will take the strongest measure against the culprits and protect the lives and properties of the common people," he said.

The chief minister urged people to maintain calm and not fall prey to provocation.

"My sincere appeal to people of all religions, please remain calm, remain restrained. Do not engage in any irreligious behaviour in the name of religion. Every human life is precious; do not incite riots for the sake of politics." (PTI)

Nadda inaugurates training camp in Puri, asks BJP MLAs, MPs to connect with people

PURI (Odisha), April 12: BJP president and Union Health minister J P Nadda on Saturday asked party MLAs and MPs to learn the technique of getting connected with people and to associate with the developmental works.

Nadda said this after formally inaugurating a three-day training programme for party MLAs and MPs here.

Odisha Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi, Union ministers Jual Oram, Dharmendra Pradhan and Ashwini Vaishnaw, Odisha BJP president Manmohan Samal and most of the party MPs and MLAs attended the programme.

In his 90-minute address to the party's lawmakers, Nada apprised them of their responsibilities and duties to serve the BJP as well as the people.

"The party president focused on 14 points and asked the participants to get connected with the people of different sections like elders, dalits, women and others by visiting villages and becoming part of their lives," Bhubaneswar MP Aparajita Sarangi told reporters.

As the training programme was purely for the MLAs and MPs, the media was not allowed inside the meeting other than taking pictures and videos of the inaugural ceremony.

Noting that the BJP was the world's largest political party, Nadda told the party MLAs and MPs that of the 28 states and 7 union territories, the NDA has government in 19 places. The BJP alone has formed government in 13 states and UTs, the party president told the gathering and added that the respective MLAs and MPs should get connected to the people to win the confidence of the masses.

Nadda said in a span of three and half a month, as many as 13 and half crore people have voluntarily become members of the BJP. "The BJP is a cadre-based party having its own principles and ideology which should be carried out by the lawmakers," he said, adding that all the leaders should shun their ego, if any, and come forward to work for the party in tandem.

Nadda in his address also informed the lawmakers of the "Dos' and don't" for them.

Union Minister for Tribal Affairs Jual Oram said that the BJP is the lone party which conducts training programme for its workers and leaders from the booth level to the Prime Minister level. All the leaders irrespective of their positions get trained and reoriented to the party's principles and ideologies, Oram said.

The BJP president also suggested the MLAs and MPs to spend some time in public places like hospitals so that they could ascertain the public mood and their difficulties. (PTI)

Statehood is BJP's promise, no need for Omar Abdullah to seek it: J-K LoP

SRINAGAR, April 12: Jammu and Kashmir BJP on Saturday said there was no need for Chief Minister Omar Abdullah to seek restoration of the Union Territory's statehood as it was the saffron party's narrative, and that it would be restored at an appropriate time.

"It is unfortunate that the National Conference keeps on harping about statehood. Statehood is our narrative, it is the BJP's promise," said senior BJP leader and leader of opposition in the J-K assembly Sunil Sharma.

Talking to reporters here, he said Abdullah should rather focus on fulfilling the promises he made to the people. Raising religious and provocative slogans inside the assembly will not accelerate the process of statehood restoration, Sharma said, alleging that National Conference leaders were attempting to provoke religious sentiments in the assembly.

"The assembly is not Jamia Masjid. Slogans that should be raised in Jamia Masjid were raised in the assembly. The assembly is a place for debate and legislation," the BJP leader said.

"Do they want to make assembly a ring of jehad? Do they want to instigate legislative jehad? Such activities will not be accepted," he said, adding, "No citizen of Jammu and Kashmir, including the Muslims, will accept a statehood in which such slogans are raised in its assembly."

Sharma said the ruling party was "enacting a drama" inside the assembly to run away from discussions over people's issues. "It was for the first time in the history of the assembly that the government itself did not allow the House to run. The government was theirs, the Speaker was theirs, but they enacted a drama opposing the Waqf Amendment Bill and did not allow the House to run for three days because they did not want people's issues to be discussed," he said.

The leader of opposition said two assembly sessions were held in the last six months, but none of the promises in the National Conference's manifesto were reflected in either the assembly or in normal governance. "They gave free bus rides to women, but they increased the fares and fuel prices. The routine governance and the assembly sessions reflect the failure of the National Conference government. It reflects betrayal of the people," he added.

Sharma said the BJP-led Central government is committed to the holistic development of Jammu and Kashmir. "All centrally-sponsored schemes will continue to run without any hurdles," he said.

He however, said there will be no compromise on terrorism and separatism.

"We will not rest until we wipe out terrorism, separatism and stone-pelting." (PTI)

Cong must talk about status of INDIA bloc, says Shiv Sena (UBT)

MUMBAI, April 12: The Shiv Sena (UBT) on Saturday said the Congress must talk about the status of the INDIA bloc and should have addressed questions about the opposition alliance in the party's recent meeting in Ahmedabad.

In an editorial in party mouthpiece 'Saamana', the Sena (UBT) pointed out that the Congress only spoke about itself in the Ahmedabad meet, and INDIA or Bharat was nowhere in the discussion.

"Questions are being raised about where the INDIA bloc stands after the Lok Sabha election. The Congress needed to address this in its Ahmedabad session," the editorial said. "What happened to the alliance? Did it get buried in the ground or vanish into thin air? The responsibility to answer this question lies with the Congress president," it said.

The Congress held its session on April 8-9 in Gujarat, where it has been out of power for two decades. Senior Congress leaders, including Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi, addressed party workers. The Sena (UBT) also sought to know the Congress's stand for the Bihar, Gujarat and West Bengal state polls. "Or will the party again welcome defeat?" it asked.

In Bihar, the Rashtriya Janata Dal is a senior partner, while in Gujarat and West Bengal, INDIA partners, the Aam Aadmi Party and Trinamool Congress, will also be in the fray. "The Congress held its session in Gujarat but this did not yield any success in the state in the Lok Sabha polls, as the party won one seat in the western state after 2014," the Sena UBT said.

It said the Congress needs to make efforts in Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh. While the party met with success in Maharashtra in the Lok Sabha polls, it suffered a humiliating defeat in the state assembly polls. (PTI)

Historic, good for federalism, says Sibal on SC setting timeline for governors to act on bills

NEW DELHI, April 12: Rajya Sabha MP Kapil Sibal on Saturday hailed the Supreme Court for setting a timeline for governors to act on bills passed by state assemblies and said it is a "historic" verdict "good for federalism" as it defines the role of governors.

In a major victory to DMK-led Tamil Nadu government, the Supreme Court last Tuesday cleared 10 bills that were stalled and reserved by Governor R N Ravi for President's consideration.

The court also set a timeline for governors to act on bills passed by state assemblies.

Hailing the ruling at a press conference here on Saturday, Sibal said this ensures that the federal structure will move forward under principles of the Constitution.

The ruling also defines the governor's role, Sibal said.

"The Supreme Court has recently pronounced a historic judgement. It is in discussion because ever since the BJP government came to power (at the Centre), the governors have started acting arbitrarily. Whenever a bill is passed and the Governor's signature is required, the Governor would keep the bill at his end and delay it. They would not sign, hence the notification would not happen. People would suffer," the senior advocate said.

This used to happen in states where a party other than the ruling party at the Centre would be in power, and hence it was political, he said.

"We had been talking about this for years. I have been saying that it is against the federal structure. The leaders of the Centre tried to bring instability -- it was seen in West Bengal, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and many other places. Not only Governors, the Speakers would also act arbitrarily in Assembly. Now the Supreme Court has ordered against this practice," Sibal said.

"Now the Supreme Court has decided a three-month time frame to send the bill back. When the bill

is passed again, the Governor would be required to sign it within a month. The Attorney General opposed this saying a time frame cannot be mandated for Governors, but the Supreme Court denied it...

"The Governor would have the discretion to send the bill to the President, but the President would also have to follow the time frame," Sibal said, adding, "This is good for federalism."

In a first-of-its-kind direction, the top court on Tuesday fixed a timeline within which the Governor has to act on bills passed by the state legislature.

The apex court said there was no expressly specified time limit for the discharge of functions by Governor under Article 200 of the Constitution.

"Despite there being no prescribed time limits, Article 200 cannot be read in a manner which allows the Governor to not act on the bills presented to him for assent and thereby delay, and essentially roadblock law-making machinery in the state," it has said.

Fixing the timeline, the bench said in case of withholding assent on a bill and reserving it for the President with the aid and advice of the council of ministers, the maximum period would be one month.

In case the Governor decides to withhold assent without the aid and advice of the council of ministers, the bills must be returned to the assembly within three months, it added.

The top court said if the state assembly presents the bill after reconsideration, it has to be given assent by the Governor within a period of one month.

The bench cautioned that any failure to comply with the timeline would make the Governor's inaction subject to judicial review by the courts. (PTI)

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J-K LG, Army chief, Himachal CM pay tributes to JCO killed in gunfight with terrorists in Jammu

JAMMU/HAMIRPUR, April 12: Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha and Army Chief General Upendra Dwivedi on Saturday paid tributes to a junior commissioned officer who died in an encounter with terrorists near the Line of Control (LoC) in Jammu.

A wreath-laying ceremony for Subedar Kuldeep Chand was held at military garrison Tanda in Jammu's Akhnoor in the afternoon and his mortal remains were despatched to his family in Himachal Pradesh for last rites, officials said.

Chand is survived by his son, daughter, wife and elderly parents. His body would be cremated at his native village on Sunday.

They said senior Army, police and civil officers led by General Officer Commanding of 10th Infantry Division Major General Sameer Shrivastava and Senior Superintendent of Police, Jammu, Joginder Singh laid wreaths at the body and saluted the sacrifice of the junior commissioned officer (JCO).

Subedar Chand lost his life in a gunfight with terrorists attempting to infiltrate into India from the Pakistan side in the Keri-Bhattal area of the Akhnoor sector late on Friday night.

In a condolence message, Lt Governor Sinha said, "I salute the supreme sacrifice of our Army braveheart Sub Kuldeep Chand who laid down his life in the line of duty. His valour and sacrifice will never be forgotten. The entire nation stands firmly with the family of the martyr in this hour of grief."

Additional Directorate General of Public Information (ADGPI) of the Indian Army, in a post on X, said the Chief of Army Staff General Upendra Dwivedi and all ranks of the Indian Army salute the supreme sacrifice of the braveheart.

"The Indian Army offers deepest condolences and stands firm with the bereaved family in this hour of grief," it said.

Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Sukhwinder Singh Sukhu has expressed grief over the death of Kuldeep Chand and said, "The news of Kuldeep Kumar ji, a resident of Kohlvi village of my assembly constituency Naudan, being martyred is very sad.

"His unforgettable contribution to the service of the country will always be remembered with respect. I pray to God to give peace to the departed and give strength to the bereaved family," he added. *(PTI)*

Kishtwar: 2 more terrorists killed in ongoing operations; one was eliminated Friday

JAMMU, April 12: Two terrorists were killed in an ongoing operation in a snowbound area of Jammu and Kashmir's Kishtwar district, senior security officials said on Saturday, reaffirming their resolve to completely root out terrorism from the region.

The killings raised the number of terrorists neutralised in the ongoing operations in the Chhatru belt of the hilly district in the past two days to three. One terrorist was eliminated by the security forces on Friday morning.

Official sources said the slain terrorists were affiliated with Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) outfit and included a top commander, Saifullah, who was active in the Chenab valley region for the past one year. Assam Rifles' 5-Sector Commander Brigadier J B S Rathi and Doda-Kishtwar-Ramban Range Deputy Inspector General of Police Shridhar Patil said the operations, started on April 9, continues. The aim is to maintain peace and stability in the region, he said.

"A total of three terrorists was eliminated in the operations while the troops displayed great tactical acumen and swiftness, and ensured zero casualties on our side. Despite the weather and the night-time challenges, the troops displayed great professionalism and also gave the topmost priority to the security of the local population," Brigadier Rathi told reporters in Kishtwar.

He said the operations also brought to the fore the seemless coordination between India Army and police, especially its Special Operations Group (SOG).

"After the first contact on April 9, rapid

reinforcements were deployed in terms of special forces with the help of the Indian Air Force, and also to carry out realtime surveillance of the area the Unmanned Aerial Vehicles, drones and the night visions were employed basically to ensure that terrorists do not escape from the area," the army officer said.

He said the operation reaffirms the Army's commitment to maintain peace and stability in the south of Jammu, especially in the Pir Panjal Range.

"Certain security measures have been instituted in terms of the rapid force response capabilities, technological integration and inter agency seemless coordination to maintain peace and stability in the region. We are thankful to White Knight Corps and the General Officer Commanding of Delta Force for their guidance and support," he said.

The DIG said the operation is in its final stages after it was first launched on Wednesday following interception of the terrorists.

"Our operations will continue till all the terrorists present in the area are eliminated," Patil said, adding the most important thing during the operations was the special care taken for the safety of the local population and "I appreciate them for their support to security agencies".

He said the coordination and synergy witnessed during the operation will continue and "anyone coming here (from Pakistan) to indulge in terror activities will face the same fate".

In response to question on the killing of Saifullah, the DIG said, "We are not in a stage to confirm the identity of any dead terrorist. We will identify the bodies during our investigation and reveal it once it is established."

On the number of active terrorist groups in the Chenab valley region, he said the numbers are not important and "as I said our operations will continue till all of them are neutralized".

Brigaider Rathi also added that the number does not matter. "Whosoever comes with the aim of disturbing the peace and tranquility in the region will be eliminated."

Patil said a large quantity of war-like stores including M-4 Carbine rifles and AK series rifles were recovered from the dead terrorists.

Asked about the local support enjoyed by terrorists, he said it is part of investigation and will be shared once it comes forth.

Earlier, the Army's White Knight Corps took to X to inform about the killing of two more terrorists in the ongoing operations.

"In the ongoing operations at Chhatru, Kishtwar, despite bad and inclement weather, two more Pakistani terrorists have been eliminated. A large quantity of war like stores including one AK and one M4 rifle have been recovered," the Army's Jammu-based White Knight Corps said.

One ultra was killed Friday morning when security forces established a contact with terrorists during the operations which were launched on Wednesday.

The officials said a separate operation to track down terrorists has also been underway in Basantgarh and Ramnagar areas of Udhampur district since Wednesday.

While there has been an encounter between security forces and search parties in Ramnagar forests on Wednesday, a local villager reported presence of three terrorists after they visited him in Basantgarh forest on Wednesday night. *(PTI)*

Telangana's 'tree man' Ramaiah no more

HYDERABAD, April 12: Padma Shri awardee Daripalli Ramaiah, popularly known as green crusader 'Vanajeevi' Ramaiah, died in Khammam district of Telangana on Saturday. He was 87.

He suffered a heart attack at his house in Reddipalli village in Khammam district, family sources said. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy, his Andhra Pradesh counterpart N Chandrababu Naidu, and several other leaders condoled the demise of Ramaiah. Despite lacking formal education, Ramaiah, a potter by profession, came to be known as a 'Man of Trees' for his relentless mission of afforestation. Such was his dedication to the cause of expanding tree cover that he used to wear a board around his neck, with 'Vriksho Rakshati Rakshitah' (save trees then trees will save you) written on it, whenever he stepped out of his house.

Not only Ramaiah, his wife Janamma followed suit, sharing her husband's life mission. Undaunted by his poverty, Ramaiah carried the mission for over five decades and is estimated to have planted more than one crore saplings during his lifetime. He received the Padma Shri award in 2017 in recognition of his noble contribution to the cause of environment conservation. Paying homage to the departed soul, PM Modi said Ramaiah's life is devoted to planting and protecting lakhs of trees. "Daripalli Ramaiah Garu will be remembered as a champion of sustainability. He devoted his life to planting and protecting lakhs of trees. His tireless efforts reflected a deep love for nature and care for future generations. His work will keep motivating our youth in their quest to build a greener planet. My thoughts are with his family and admirers in this sad hour. Om Shanti," Modi said on X. *(PTI)*

Not informing about reason of arrest in violation of Art 22(1) will be ground for bail: HC

PRAYAGRAJ, April 12: Informing the reason for arrest is a mandatory requirement under Article 22(1) of the Constitution and its violation will be a ground to grant bail even if statutory restrictions on giving bail exist, the Allahabad High Court has ruled.

In the significant verdict, the High Court has set aside a December 25 remand order of a magistrate in Rampur, observing that the grounds of the arrest of the petitioner were not furnished to him.

The requirement of informing the grounds of arrest is a mandatory requirement of Article 22(1) of the Constitution, it said, adding that it is the duty of the magistrate to ascertain its compliance and that of other mandatory safeguards.

"When a violation of Article 22(1) is established, it is the duty of the court to forthwith order the release of the accused. That will be a ground to grant bail even if statutory restrictions on the grant of bail exist," a division bench comprising Justices Mahesh Chandra Tripathi and Prashant Kumar said.

The information of the grounds of arrest must be provided to the ar-

rested person in such a manner that sufficient knowledge of the basic facts constituting the grounds is imparted and communicated to the arrested person effectively in the language that he understands, the court said in its the order on a writ petition filed by Manjeet Singh.

An FIR was lodged against Singh on February 15, 2024, under IPC sections related to cheating, intimidation and breach of peace (420, 467, 468, 469, 406, 504, 506) and immediately after the arrest, the petitioner was produced before the remand magistrate on December 26, 2024 and sent to judicial custody through a "printed remand order". The court observed, "The petitioner was not furnished with the grounds of arrest as mandated under section 47 BNSS, and only an arrest memo lacking such details was provided."

"When an arrested person is produced before a Judicial Magistrate for remand, it is the duty of the Magistrate to ascertain whether compliance with Article 22(1) and other mandatory safeguards has been made.

"When a violation of Article 22(1) is established, it is the duty of the court to forthwith order the release of the accused. That will be a ground to grant bail even if statutory restrictions on the grant of bail exist," it said.

The counsel for the petition submitted that the core issue involved in the petition is not the merits of the allegations mentioned in the FIR but the illegality in the process of arrest and procedural lapses during the remand proceedings.

He argued that neither the reasons for the arrest nor the grounds were communicated in writing to the petitioner at the time of arrest, as is required under Article 22(1) of the Constitution of India.

Allowing the writ petition, the court in its order dated April 9, 2025, set aside the order dated December 26, 2024, passed by the remand magistrate and quashed the arrest of the petitioner. *(PTI)*

Tigress kills boy in MP's Bandhavgarh reserve

UMARIA (MP), April 12: A 12-year-old boy was killed in an attack by a tigress in Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve (BTR) of Madhya Pradesh's Umaria district on Saturday, an official said.

The incident took place when the boy went to the forest area along with his grandfather to collect Mahua flowers, he said.

"The tigress hiding in the shrubs attacked the boy in Dhamokhar range of the tiger reserve," Forest Range Officer Vijay Shankar Shrivastava said.

The tigress dragged the boy to some distance, but left the body in a stream and escaped after villagers raised an alarm, he said. *(PTI)*

डिजाईन, आपूर्ति, निर्माण, परीक्षण एवं कमिशनिंग कार्य

ई-निविदा सूचना संख्या. TRD/LMG/03 of 2025-26 तारीखः 10-04-2025। नीचे उल्लेखित कार्यों के लिए अधोहस्ताक्षरी -द्वारा ई-निविदा आमंत्रित किया गया हैं। **निविदा संख्या. EL-TRD-NFR-LMG-OHE-MOD32R। कार्य का नामः** पूर्वोत्तर सीमा रेलवे के लामडिंग मंडल के 4/7-8 किलोमीटर पर स्थित चापरमुख जंक्शन-हयबरगॉव खंड के रहा-फुलगुड़ी के बीच के स्थायी डाईवर्सन पर पीएससी श्लेब द्वारा सेतु संख्या. 7 का पुनः निर्माण के साथ संबंधित टीआरडी नवीकरण और 25 केवी, 50 एचजेड, सिंगल फेज रेलवे विद्युतीकरण का डिजाइन, आपूर्ति, निर्माण, परीक्षण कार्य। (0.00 आरकेएम/1 टीकेएम)। **निविदा राशिः** ₹91,46,987.58/-। **धरोहर राशिः** ₹1,82,900/-। **निविदा बंद होने की तारीख एवं समयः 05-05-2025** तारीख के **15.00** बजे में। उपरोक्त ई-निविदा के निविदा प्र-पत्र के साथ संपूर्ण विवरण **www.ireps.gov.in** वेबसाइट पर उपलब्ध रहेगा।

वरिष्ठ डीईई/ टीआरडी एंड जीएस/लामडिंग
पूर्वोत्तर सीमा रेलवे
मुस्कान के साथ ग्राहकों की सेवा में

RUNNING OF SUMMER SPECIAL TRAIN BETWEEN NEW TINSUKIA & SMVT BENGALURU

To clear extra rush during Summer season 2025, it has been decided to run **Train No. 05952/05951 New Tinsukia-SMVT Bengaluru-New Tinsukia summer special trains** TOD. The details are given below:

Train No. 05952 From New Tinsukia From 17-04-2025 to 26-06-2025 (Thursday) Trips= 11

Train No. 05951 From SMVT Bengaluru From 20-04-2025 to 29-06-2025 (Sunday) Trips= 11

DAYS	ARR.	DEP.	STATION	ARR.	DEP.	DAYS
	---	18.45	New Tinsukia	13.50	---	
Thursday	19.50	20.00	Dibrugarh	12.30	12.40	
	22.27	22.32	North Lakhimpur	10.10	10.15	Wednesday
	01.12	01.17	Rangapara North	07.10	07.15	
	03.25	03.50	Rangiya	04.35	05.00	
Friday	05.40	05.45	New Bongaigaon	02.43	02.48	
	11.05	11.15	New Jalpaiguri	20.45	20.55	
	16.05	16.15	Malda Town	17.05	17.15	Tuesday
Saturday	01.30	01.40	Kharagpur Jn.	09.10	09.20	
	13.30	13.40	Vizianagram Jn.	22.50	23.00	Monday
Sunday	09.00	---	SMVT Bengaluru	---	23.20	Sunday

Composition: Sleeper Class-(Twenty), GSLR- (Two) = 22 ICF coaches.

Others Commercial Stoppages: Dhemaji, Harmuti, Vishwanath Charali, Barpeta Road, Kokrajhar, New Cooch Behar, Aluabari Road, Kishanganj, New Farakka Jn., Rampur Hat, Bolpur Shantiniketan, Barddhaman, Dankuni, Andul, Bhadrakh, Cuttack, Bhubaneswar, Khurda Road Jn., Brahmapur, Palasa, Srikakulam Road, Kottavalasa, Pendurti, Simhachalam North, Duvvada, Vijayawada Jn., Gudur Jn., Perambur, Katpadi Jn., Jolarpettai.

General Manager (Operations)

NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
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President should decide on bills reserved for her consideration by Guv within 3 months: SC

NEW DELHI, April 12: For the first time, the Supreme Court has prescribed that the president should decide on the bills reserved for her consideration by the governor within a period of three months from the date on which such reference is received.

Four days after the top court cleared 10 bills, which were stalled and reserved by Tamil Nadu Governor R N Ravi for the president's consideration, and set a timeline for all governors to act on the bills passed by the state assemblies, the judgement running into 415 pages was uploaded on the apex court's website at 10.54 pm on Friday.

"We deem it appropriate to adopt the timeline prescribed by the Ministry of Home Affairs... and prescribe that the President is required to take a decision on the bills reserved for his consideration by the Governor within a period of three months from the date on which such reference is received.

"In case of any delay beyond this period, appropriate reasons would have to be recorded and conveyed to the concerned State. The States are also required to be collaborative and extend co-operation by furnishing answers to the queries which may be raised and consider the suggestions made by the Central government expeditiously," the top court said.

A bench of Justices JB Pardiwala and R Mahadevan on April 8 set aside the reservation of the 10 bills for the president's consideration in the second round holding it as illegal, erroneous in law.

Without mincing words, the court said "where the Governor reserves a Bill for the consideration of the President and the President in turn withholds assent thereto then, it shall be open to the State Government to assail such an action before this Court".

Article 200 of the Constitution empowers the governor to give assent to the bills presented to him, withhold the assent or to reserve it for the consideration of the president.

"The Bills, having been pending with the Governor for an unduly long period of time, and the Governor having acted with clear lack of bona fides in reserving the Bills for the consideration of the President, immediately after the pronouncement of the decision of this Court in State of Punjab (supra), are deemed to have

been assented to by the Governor on the date when they were presented to him after being reconsidered.

"There is no expressly specified time-limit for the discharge of the functions by the Governor under Article 200 of the Constitution. Despite there being no prescribed time-limit, Article 200 cannot be read in a manner which allows the Governor to not take action upon bills which are presented to him for assent and thereby delay and essentially roadblock the law-making machinery in the State," the bench said in its judgement.

Observing that the governor is required to abide by the aid and advice tendered by the Council of Ministers, the top court said it is not open for the governor to reserve a bill for the consideration of the President once it is presented to him in the second round, after having been returned to the House previously.

"There is no expressly specified time-limit for the discharge of the functions by the Governor under Article 200 of the Constitution. Despite there being no prescribed time-limit, Article 200 cannot be read in a manner which allows the Governor to not take action upon bills which are presented to him for assent and thereby delay and essentially roadblock the law-making machinery in the State," the bench said while directing the registry to send a copy each of this judgment to all the high courts and the principal secretaries to the governors of all states. The apex court set timelines and said failure to comply with it would make the inaction of the governors subject to judicial review by the courts.

"In case of either withholding of assent or reservation of the bill for the consideration of the President, upon the aid and advice of the State Council of Ministers, the Governor is expected to take such an action forthwith, subject to a maximum period of one-month," the court said.

"In case of withholding of assent contrary to the advice of the State Council of Ministers, the Governor must return the bill together with a message within a maximum period of three months.

"In case of reservation of bills for the consideration of the President contrary to the advice of the State Council of Ministers, the Governor shall make such reservation within a maximum period of three months," the bench said.

In case of presentation of a bill after reconsideration, the governor must grant assent forthwith, subject to a maximum period of one-month, the court said.

The bench said that the governor couldn't sit over bills and adopt the concept of "absolute veto" or "pocket veto".

"There is no 'pocket veto' or 'absolute veto' available to the President in discharge of his functions under Article 201. The use of the expression "shall declare" makes it mandatory for the President to make a choice between the two options available under the substantive part of Article 201, that is, to either grant assent or to withhold assent to a bill.

"The constitutional scheme does not, in any manner, provide that a constitutional authority can exercise its powers under the Constitution arbitrarily," the bench said.

The top court exercised its plenary power under Article 142 of the Constitution to make the bill re-presented to the Tamil Nadu governor, as deemed to have been passed.

The apex court had previously framed questions to answer in a dispute between Tamil Nadu government and the governor over the delay in assent to bills passed by the legislative assembly.

The delay in giving assent by the governor prompted the state government to move the top court in 2023, claiming 12 bills, including one from 2020, were pending with him.

On November 13, 2023, the governor declared he was withholding assent to 10 bills following which the legislative assembly convened a special session and re-enacted the very same bills on November 18, 2023.

Later, some of the bills were reserved for the president's consideration. *(PTI)*

2 students killed, 21 injured after college bus overturns in J&K's Kupwara

SRINAGAR, April 12: Two students died and 21 others were injured after a college bus they were travelling in met with an accident in Jammu and Kashmir's Kupwara district on Saturday, officials said. A bus of Government Degree College Sogam carrying 27 students for picnic lost control and turned turtle near Vodpora area of Handwara, they said.

The officials said that the injured were taken to a hospital in Handwara where one girl student was declared brought dead. Two of the injured were referred to a hospital here in a critical condition, out of which one succumbed to the injuries, the officials said. They added that 20 students were undergoing treatment at the Handwara hospital.

Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah expressed grief over the loss of lives.

"The loss of two young promising students from GDC Sogam, in the tragic accident near Handwara is a tragedy that weighs heavily on all of us. My deepest condolences to their families in this hour of grief. Prayers for the swift recovery of the injured," the CM's office said on X. *(PTI)*

GOVT OF ASSAM
OFFICE OF THE ADDITIONAL CHIEF ENGINEER
PWD (R&B), ASSAM, DIPHU

No. ACEH/CS/GAD/18/2024-25/03 **Date:10.04.2025.**

PRESS NOTICE (E-PROCUREMENT)

The Additional Chief Engineer, PWD (R&B), Hills, Assam, Diphu on behalf of Governor of Assam invites bids through Engineering, Procurement and Construction (EPC-I) Mode of contract for the work detailed in the table below, from contractors having experience in similar nature of work.

Details of the bids may be seen at e-procurement portal website **www.assamtenders.gov.in.** The bidder must be enrolled in the **www.assamtenders.gov.in.**

Sl.No.	Name of work	Approx. value of work (In Rs.)	Bid security	Cost of Bid Document	Period of Completion	Class of Bidder
1.	Construction of Guest House Cum Conference Hall, Hamren, West Karbi Anglong.	11,85,47,274.00	2%for General and 1%for Reserved catrgory (To be deposited through net banking or RTGS/NEFT .	20,000.00 (To be deposited through net banking or RTGS/NEFT .	24 (Twenty Four months)	Class-I (A)

N.B. The Press Notice will be a part of the Bidding Document.

Sd/-
(S.N. Jigdung)
Additional Chief Engineer,
PWD (R&B), Hills, Assam, Diphu.

Memo No. ACEH/CS/GAD/18/2024-25/03-(A) **Date:10.04.2025.**

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Was disheartened by delay in 'Phule' release, but some things are out of your control: Pratik Gandhi

MUMBAI, April 12: Actor Pratik Gandhi has expressed his disappointment over the postponement of "Phule" amid controversy, saying he had hoped the film would release on its original date, April 11, which coincided with the 197th birth anniversary of the social reformer. The Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) granted a 'U' certificate to the makers on April 7 and had asked them to make a series of amendments, including removing terms such as 'Mang', 'Mahar' and 'Peshwai', as well as the line '3,000 saal purani ghulami' to be modified as 'kai saal purani ghulami', which director Ananth Mahadevan said they complied with.

After the trailer of "Phule" was shared online on April 10, a section of the Brahmin community raised objections over the portrayal of its members in the film. It will now release on April 25. Gandhi, who plays the title role of Jyotirao Govindrao Phule in the movie, said they may have missed the April 11 release date but hopes things will only get better from here on.

"I was shooting somewhere when I came to know that it (the film) is pushed by two weeks. I was disheartened immediately. But then I spoke to them (makers) and I got to know the reasons... These are the reasons over which you don't have any control... "It was disheartening for one big reason because this April 11 was the 197th birth anniversary of Jyotirao Phule. Had the film released on April 11, it would have been a part of history. That date was important. But whatever happens happens for the best," the actor told PTI in an interview.

According to Gandhi, the makers were asked to make "certain amendments" in the final film.

"There are certain things that were asked to be softened a little and communicated differently. With respect to the film, without changing or harming the film, whatever was possible has been done is what I'm told.

"Also, there was a sudden (uproar by a) set of people who felt that it was against them or their ideology. April 25 suddenly felt like a better date for the distributors and producers," he added.

The actor, known for "Scam 1992: The Harshad Mehta Story", "Do Aur Do Pyaar" and "Madgaon Express", said he is looking forward to watching the final cut of "Phule".

Gandhi appealed to the Brahmin community to not judge the film on the basis of its trailer.

"I was surprised by the reaction, but I can also understand where they are coming from. I'm just requesting them to watch the film and then make their opinion because whatever they have seen is just a trailer. So what you have seen right now are lines that are out of context," he said. Mahadevan earlier told PTI the controversy around "Phule" was "unnecessary" as they had already complied with the CBFC over the suggested amendments. The director also said they pushed the release to clear the controversy as there was nothing objectionable in the movie. Also starring Patralekhaa in the role of Savitribai Phule, "Phule" is backed by Dancing Shiva Films and Kingsmen Productions. It will be released in theatres by Zee Studios. (PTI)

Sunny Deol-starrer 'Jaat' collects ₹ 20.1 cr at box office in two days

NEW DELHI, April 12: "Jaat", starring Sunny Deol, has earned ₹ 20.1 crore at the domestic box office (gross) in two days.

Directed by Gopichand Malineni, the film released in theatres on April 10. It collected ₹ 11.6 crore on its opening day.

Production banner Mythri Movie Makers shared the box office collection on its official X handle on Saturday.

"#JAAT collects 20.1 CRORES+ DOMESTIC GBOC in 2 days. A blockbuster weekend loading. Book your tickets for #JAAT now! #BaisakhiWithJaat Starring Action Superstar @iamsunnydeol Directed by @megopichand Produced by @MythriOfficial @peoplemediafcy & @ZeeStudios_. A @MusicThaman Mass Beat ," read the caption.

Thew film also stars Randeep Hooda, Vineet Kumar Singh and Siyami Kher. (PTI)

Tom Felton quips he'll sneak into new 'Harry Potter' series as an 'extra'

LOS ANGELES, April 12: British actor Tom Felton says he is open to surprising the younger version of his popular character Draco Malfoy in the upcoming "Harry Potter" TV series, maybe even appearing as an extra cast member in the background.

The show, which is expected to commence filming later this year, is described as a "more in-depth" adaptation of JK Rowling's books as compared to the eight-part film franchise.

"We're all very excited to see the wizarding world continue. I'm looking forward to knocking on young Draco's door and surprising him, or something like that. I'll definitely be sneaking into a background shot as an extra," Felton, who played the tormented villain Draco in all eight "Harry Potter" movies, told People magazine.

The film franchise starred Daniel Radcliffe, Emma Watson, and Rupert Grint as the lead trio of Harry Potter, Hermione Granger, and Ron Weasley.Felton, 37, said he and his "Harry Potter" co-stars are still in contact with each other via WhatsApp. He, however, didn't reveal who all were part of the message group."We're all very tight still, very close. We're usually in four corners of the earth at the same time, so it's difficult to round us all up together. But Slytherins and Gryffindors are friendly," he teased. "Succession" duo Francesca Gardiner and Mark Mylod have signed up as writer and director, respectively, on the upcoming "Harry Potter" series. (PTI)

Kathak legend Kumudini Lakhia passes away

AHMEDABAD, April 12: Eminent Kathak exponent and choreographer Kumudini Lakhia passed away at her residence in Ahmedabad on Saturday (April 12, 2025) at the age of 95 due to an age-related ailment.

Lakhia was conferred with the Padma Vibhushan, India's second-highest civilian award, on the Republic Day this year in recognition of her lifelong dedication to Kathak.

"Kumudiniben passed away at her home in Ahmedabad at around 11 am. She was 95 and suffering from some age-related ailment for the last three months," said Parul Thakore, administrator of Kadamb Centre for Dance and Music that Lakhia founded here in 1964.

Born on May 17, 1930, in Ahmedabad, Lakhia went on to become a celebrated Indian Kathak dancer and choreographer. At Kadamb Centre, she developed technique, vocabulary and repertoire of Kathak dance.

She also worked as a choreographer in Hindi film "Umrao Jaan" (1981), among others.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi paid tributes to her and said her passion towards Kathak and Indian classical dances were reflected in her remarkable work over the years.

"Deeply saddened by the passing of Kumudini Lakhia ji, who made a mark as an outstanding cultural icon. Her passion towards Kathak and Indian classical dances was reflected in her remarkable work over the years," Mr. Modi said in on social media platform X.

"A true pioneer, she also nurtured generations of dancers. Her contributions will continue to be cherished. Condolences to her family, students and admirers. Om Shanti," he added.

Gujarat Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel also expressed grief over her demise, and described her "pride of Gujarat and India in the field of classical art".

"She trained many disciples in classical dance and exhibited the glory of Kathak dance in the country and the world. May God grant peace to her soul and give strength to her relatives and countless disciples and admirers to bear this grief. Om Shanti," he posted on X.

Lakhia won numerous prestigious awards such as Padma Shri, Padma Bhushan, Padma Vibhushan, Sangeet Natak Akademi, Kalidas Samman, and Gaurav Puraskar from the Gujarat government in recognition of her contribution to the world of Indian dance. (PTI)

Hindi film industry has chance of reviving itself with help from govt, says Vivek Agnihotri

MUMBAI, April 12: Innovation and creativity along with a "little pat on the shoulder" from the government can go a long way in helping the Hindi film industry revive itself, says filmmaker Vivek Agnihotri.

The director, known for "The Tashkent Files", "The Kashmir Files", and "The Vaccine War", recently wrote an open letter to Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal requesting urgent government support for the struggling Hindi cinema exhibition sector.

Agnihotri said the onus of the industry's problems doesn't rest on any one entity and that several issues need to be addressed before things start looking upward.

"This industry is crumbling. There are lots of issues—not about blaming anyone—but times have changed, technology has changed, and so has the way people consume cinema. There are some major problems and I don't think any one individual or association can solve them.

"So when Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal ji spoke at 'Startup Mahakumbh', I liked what he said that it's time that we focus on innovation, creativity and idea generation... With a little motivation, guidance and pat on the shoulder from the government, the industry has a chance of reviving itself... Innovation and creativity, these are the two most important things the film industry can definitely do with," the filmmaker said in an interview here.

According to Agnihotri, film industries in countries like France, Britain and South Korea are protected by their respective governments.

"What France has done in Europe, is that they realised that cinema is not just an art, but it can be a very powerful industry and soft power. So they protected it.

"Like Britain made the British Film Commission. All European countries have these commissions. The Korean government supports K entertainment, and the Chinese government supports their films. In Japan, society supports cinema in a very big way."

Among the issues plaguing the Hindi film industry, windowing and ticket pricing are right on the top, he added.

In cinema exhibition, windowing refers to the strategic timing and availability of a movie across different distribution channels to maximise revenue.

Most of the content in India today, the filmmaker said, is ultimately owned by two-three American streamers.

"I'm not criticising them. They are in the business but when the audience knows that any film, whether it's a Rs 1,000 crore film or Rs 10 crore film, will be available on OTT within four-eight weeks, why would they go and spend Rs 1,000 in the theatre?" Agnihotri said ticket pricing, which is comparatively low in the South, plays a key role in ensuring footfall in theatres.

"So many people (in the South) watch films because the pricing is controlled at Rs 100. Whenever there are these multiplexes celebrating Cinema Day, they keep the pricing around Rs 100. Then you see every single (screen) is house full, regardless of the film.

"It doesn't matter if there are three films releasing on that day, people go and watch all those films. Cinema in India should be the cheapest entertainment, but sadly it has become an elitist entertainment," he added.

There were many studios a few years ago, but today there are very few to name, said Agnihotri.

"Not just producers, you will see that the studios are also shutting their shops. There was a time when I knew at least 50 different independent producers who were producing at least two-three films a year.

"Now look at the tragedy that we are releasing old films nonstop. There are no new films to release. The reason is because the Indian producer has shut shop... I know lots of producers who are doing real estate. They had big studios and offices, they are converting them into residential office spaces." (PTI)

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KKR OPTED FOR EXTRA SPINNER AGAINST CSK DUE TO KNOWLEDGE OF CONDITIONS, SAYS DE KOCK

CHENNAI, April 12: Kolkata Knight Riders batter Quinton de Kock said having former Chennai Super Kings players Ajinkya Rahane and Moeen Ali in their ranks gave them key insights into the Chepauk conditions, which prompted the decision to field an extra spinner, a move that proved crucial in their eight-wicket win in the IPL contest.

KKR spinners Sunil Narine (3/13), Varun Chakravarthy (2/22), and Moeen Ali (1/20) shared five wickets between them, while pacer Harshit Rana chipped in with 2/16 to dismantle CSK's batting and restrict the hosts to their lowest-ever total of 103/9 in Chennai.

"When we bowled it seemed a lot slower, gripped a bit and our bowlers really enjoy that. We have got guys like Jinx (Rahane) and Mo (Moeen) who have been here before and they kind of knew that, so that's why we played an extra spinner," de Kock said after the match.

When asked about the nature of the pitch and if it changed in the second innings, de Kock said it only got better for batting as the game progressed.

"I do think (in) the second innings it got slightly better. It did come on a bit better, or at least that's what I felt, that's how it played, sort of slow and just got better and better during the innings went on," he said. De Kock lauded KKR for bringing together two mystery spinners in the shortest format and praised Narine for his all-round show. Narine smacked 18-ball 44 with five sixes and three fours in their modest chase.

"It's always (about) mixing it up. I think it's hard to line up certain spin bowlers like that because you never know what you're going to get," de Kock said. "On top of that, having that amount of skill, the areas they bowl, Sunil prides himself on the areas that he bowls and so does Varun. They're always working on their games, always trying to get better."

"Sunil, when he bats, he

brings the X factor. I think every bowler knows he's going to come hard. He practices really hard. He's always at practices. I don't think he's missed a practice, even optional practices. He really does work on it," he added.

De Kock also praised Rana for bowling his heart out on what appeared to be a slow wicket.

"He is our big fast bowler and we try to bowl him as a wicket-taker. It depends on the scenarios you face. With the new ball, (we need him to) strike up very early."

"Today we thought, 'okay, let's go with the spinner to start off and then he'll come in' and then that's his job is to come in and make sure always like break a wicket or when wicket is broken to come on and just try and keep getting wickets."

De Kock said KKR want Rana to operate with multiple plans.

"He doesn't have one set. We're not trying to give him one set plan," he said.

"We want to give him as many chances he can to pick up wickets for the team. Even though we've got the two spinners, but as a main fast bowler, we're going to get to certain wickets or stadiums where we're going to need our big fast bowler to stand up and really do what he did tonight," he added. (PTI)

De Bruyne sparks Man City comeback in 5-2 win over Palace in Premier League

MANCHESTER (ENGLAND), April 12: Kevin De Bruyne sparked Manchester City's remarkable fightback from two goals down in a 5-2 win over Crystal Palace in the Premier League on Saturday that re-ignited his team's Champions League qualification hopes.

The 33-year-old De Bruyne curled a free kick in off the post to begin the comeback in the 33rd minute.

He had a hand in goals by Omar Marmoush and Mateo Kovacic in the first half. James McAtee added a fourth - off a pass from goalkeeper Ederson, who later came off injured - before fellow academy product Nico O'Reilly wrapped up the win.

It was a display showing the enduring quality of De Bruyne, who announced last week he would be leaving City at the end of the season after 10 years at the club.

Injuries have affected the Belgium playmaker's impact in recent seasons but his class can still shine through, with his assist for Kovacic the 119th of his Premier League career.

"I would say basically I have been pain-free for the last six weeks and that's a massive difference," De Bruyne said. "It

was hard but now I feel free, and able to do a lot of training sessions. I don't know what's going to happen but I want to play on. We will see where I can end up."

Eberechi Eze and Chris Richards scored in the first 21 minutes for Palace to shock City into action.

The victory lifted City into fourth place above Chelsea and Newcastle, who have games in hand in the race to secure England's five Champions League spots. City moved two points behind third-place Nottingham Forest, which hosts Everton later Saturday.

Seventh-place Aston Villa, also in contention for Champions League qualification, visits already-relegated Southampton. Second-place Arsenal is at home to Brentford in between matches against Real Madrid in the Champions League quarter-finals. (AP)

Sports Minister Mandaviya backs AIFF's 2031 AFC Asian Cup bid

NEW DELHI, April 12: Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya on Saturday extended the government's full support to India's bid for the 2031 AFC Asian Cup, saying hosting major events will only boost the global stature of the country which is aiming to stage the 2036 Olympics.

The All India Football Federation (AIFF) has submitted the country's 'Expression of Interest (EoI)' to host the 2031 edition of the continent's most prestigious tournament before the deadline of March 31, it was announced on Friday.

"Hosting major sporting events has a profound and lasting impact on a nation's sports ecosystem and infrastructure. Sports can serve as a powerful testimony of India's rising global stature," Mandaviya said in an AIFF release.

"Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi is leading India's visionary bid to host the 2036 Olympics. There is also growing momentum behind India's aspiration to host the Commonwealth Games once again."

Extending the support of the government, Mandaviya said, "Given football's immense popularity across the country, it is only natural that we are pursuing the opportunity to host the AFC Asian Cup. "The government extends its strong support to the All India Football Federation's bid to bring Asia's biggest football event to India. Should we succeed, I am confident that football will get a big boost."

India will face tough competition from established football powerhouses such as Australia, South Korea and United Arab Emirates to get the right to host the tournament.

Indonesia and Kuwait have also submitted the EoI while there is a joint bid of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

Speaking from Kuala Lumpur, where he attended the 35th AFC Congress, AIFF President Kalyan Chaubey said, "The AIFF is happy to have the government's strong support in our bid to host the AFC Asian Cup 2031. The Asian Cup is the biggest football tournament in Asia and it is important for India as a nation to showcase what we have, not just to Asia but to the rest of the world.

The AFC will now work with the bidding countries on the delivery of the necessary bid documentation in accordance with the established timelines and processes. A bidding workshop is scheduled to be held later this month.

Thereafter, an overall evaluation of the bids will be undertaken by the AFC administration prior to the selection of the host for the 24-team competition by the AFC Congress in 2026.

India has never hosted the tournament, the continent's equivalent of World Cup. It had submitted bids to host the 2023 and 2027 editions when Praful Patel was the AIFF president.

The bid for the 2023 edition was withdrawn in 2018 and the same happened in case of the 2027 tournament also.

In December 2022, a few months after incumbent Kalyan Chaubey took charge as AIFF president, India withdrew its bid to stage the 2027 AFC Asian Cup, declaring that hosting big-ticket events is not among its "strategic priorities" at that juncture. (PTI)

FIFA chief Infantino praises impact of expanded tournaments in speech to Asian soccer group

KUALA LUMPUR, April 12: FIFA president Gianni Infantino praised the impact of expanded tournaments in the development of soccer around the world in a video message to the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) Congress on Saturday.

Speaking from the United States, host of this year's Club World Cup which will feature 32 teams in June and July instead of the previous seven, Infantino addressed the 46 member associations gathered in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

"Opportunities to face opponents from different continents don't come along too often and that is something that we have been trying to change at FIFA," said Infantino, who has pushed for bigger and new tournaments since taking his position in 2016 in a bid to generate more revenue for the organization's 211 member associations.

Asia will have four representatives at the Club World Cup: Al-Ain of the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia's Al-Hilal, Ulsan HD of South Korea and Japan's Urawa Reds.

"In total, players from more nations will represent their respective countries at this tournament than at all of the FIFA World Cups combined since 1930," added Infantino. "It is further proof in our desire to make football truly global."

While there has been some criticism of expanded tournaments in Europe because of the increased demands placed on players, AFC president Sheikh Salman bin Ibrahim Al Khalifa said Infantino had Asia's support.

"This is a competition that we have supported as a confederation and a competitive opportunity which our members, and their clubs, have wanted," the AFC president said.

The United States will also co-host the 2026 World Cup along with Mexico and Canada in the first tournament to feature 48 national teams, an increase from 32 in 2022.

"Some teams will break new ground in reaching that competition as a result, not only of the move to 48 teams with eight or even nine Asian teams now being able to qualify, but also a product of the tireless work being done by you all," added Infantino.

Infantino did not mention Thursday's proposal by Alejandro Dominguez, the president of South American soccer's ruling body CONMEBOL, that the 2030 World Cup, which will be hosted by six nations, feature 64 teams in order to mark the centennial celebration of the tournament.

In March, FIFA said it would look into the South American proposal when it was first broached by a Uruguayan official. Uruguay hosted the first World Cup in 1930.

The 1930 World Cup, won by the host Uruguay side, featured 13 teams which did not have to pre-qualify — seven from South America, four from Europe and two from North America. Many European teams did not participate because of the difficulty of traveling to South America during the Great Depression. (AP)

Justin Rose stays in the Masters lead with some all-star company

AUGUSTA (US), April 12: The end of a long Friday that reshaped the Masters had Scottie Scheffler sitting in the pine straw under a magnolia tree left of the 18th fairway, waiting for a rules official but looking very much like someone who simply needed to catch his breath.

Rest up for a weekend at Augusta National that doesn't figure to lack for drama.

It starts with Justin Rose, who did just enough in his round of 1-under 71 to be the 36-hole leader for the third time in his career as the 44-year-old from England tries to become the second-oldest Masters champion behind Jack Nicklaus (46).

The leading role returns to Rory McIlroy, who came to life with a birdie-birdie-par-eagle start to the back nine. Maybe that's where his Masters started, because he roared into contention with a bogey-free 66 that renewed hopes of a green jacket to complete the career Grand Slam.

U.S. Open champion Bryson DeChambeau might have learned to putt the Augusta National greens, a scary proposition for someone who already knows how to bash the golf ball. He shot 68 and was a shot behind Rose in his best start ever at the Masters.

And Scheffler?

The defending Masters champion did his best to survive the worst of the conditions, mainly wind that caused a little discomfort and a lot of uncertainty. He made five bogeys over his last 12 holes, the last one by going from under the magnolia, back to the fairway, over the green and then hitting a superb chip to limit the damage.

All that and he was only three behind after a 71.

"We've got a great golf course, conditions should be really good, challenging, and we've got some great guys on top of the leaderboard," Scheffler said. "So it should be a fun weekend."

Indeed.

Sixteen players were separated by five shots at the halfway point, nine of them major champions, three of them with experience winning at Augusta National.

"The leaderboard is stacking up very favorably for what looks like world-class players right up there," Rose said after a round that featured birdies on the par 5s on the front nine and on the par 3s on the back nine.

Rose took a three-shot lead into the second round and had the advantage of playing early, before the wind became strong enough to make flags snap and create just enough indecision. He hit a 9-iron over Rae's Creek to 4 feet for birdie on the par-3 12th, and he stuffed his tee shot on the par-3 16th for another birdie. That allowed him to atone for a few mistakes.

He was at 8-under 136, the third time he has had the 36-hole lead at the Masters.

The buzz came from behind him.

DeChambeau picked up an unlikely birdie by holing a bunker shot on the par-3 fourth hole on his way to a 32 on the front nine that kept him on Rose's heels the rest of the way.

"This is what golf is about," DeChambeau said. "Got a lot of great names up there, and looking forward to an unbelievable test of golf."

And then there was McIlroy, who had two double bogeys over the last four holes Thursday, the latest frustrating chapter for him at the Masters. This time, he managed to forget about it and move on. He went birdie-birdie-par-eagle to start the back nine and was on his way to a bogey-free 66.

"I had to remind myself I was playing well," McIlroy said. "I couldn't let two bad holes dictate the narrative of the 16 good ones. I also had to remind myself this morning not to push too hard too early." (AP)

12th Senior National Rugby National C'ship in Guwahati from April 23

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, April 12: Rugby India announced that the 12th Senior Rugby National Championships 2025 will be held at the iconic Indira Gandhi Athletics Stadium here from April 23 to April 29. The most coveted national championship for Rugby will feature over 600 athletes from 26 states across both men & women category. The hosting of the competition in Assam marks a special occasion in the history of the sport as for the first time the flagship competition will be held in the North East of India and will further boost the development of the sport in the region.

Speaking on this special occasion, president of Rugby India Rahul Bose said, "Assam has developed into one of the most forward-looking states in the country for sports and we are grateful to the Department of Sports & Youth Welfare, Government of Assam, for supporting us in our endeavour to promote the sport in Assam by agreeing to hold the 12th Senior National Championship. With its excellent infrastructure and famed hospitality, we could not have asked for a better host to kick off our domestic calendar for 2025-26".

The announcement has enthused the entire Rugby community in the state. Expressing his delight the President of Assam Rugby Association, Ramendra Narayan Kalita, said "The land of Assam is blessed with incredible sporting talent and with the right support has the potential to emerge as a powerhouse in the sport of Rugby. Assam Rugby Association will work closely with Rugby India and the Department of Sports to make sure this event is a memorable one for everyone involved."

Expressing delight at the competition being held in Assam, Sports Minister of Assam Nandita Gorlosa, "We are happy to welcome Rugby players from all over the country to our beautiful state. Rugby is one of the most exciting Olympic sports and by hosting this competition in Assam we will look to further the growth of the sport in Assam. We will also be working closely with both Rugby India and the Assam Rugby Association to develop & promote the sport specially at the grassroots."

The senior women's championship will be played on April 23 and 24 while the men will compete later on the April 27 and 28. Odisha and Haryana will start off as the defending champions in women & men respectively.

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Pooran, Markram power LSG to commanding win over GT

LUCKNOW, April 12: Nicholas Pooran's power-hitting and Aiden Markram's calm demeanour shaped Lucknow Super Giants' comfortable six-wicket win over Gujarat Giants in an IPL match here on Saturday.

Pooran (61 off 34) and Markram (58 off 31) shared 58 runs off 29 balls for the second wicket to set the tone for the 181-run chase, which they managed in 19.3 overs.

Earlier, skipper Shubman Gill and Sai Sudharsan struck quick-fire half-centuries during their 120-run opening stand before LSG pulled things back brilliantly to restrict GT to 180 for six.

Sudharsan (56 off 37) struck his fourth fifty of the season and created a platform for a massive total with Gill (60 off 38) but the home team bowlers made a valiant comeback, picking up three quick wickets to put brakes on the scoring rate.

The visitors could manage just 60 in the last eight overs after raising the best opening wicket partnership of the season.

Chasing the target, in Mitchell Marsh's absence, who is sitting out of the match because of his daughter's illness, home skipper Rishabh Pant (21 off 18) opened the innings. Even after getting as reprieve from wicket-keeper Jos Buttler off Mohammed Siraj in the third over, Pant's (21 off 18) struggle continued as he departed while looking for a huge hit off Prasidh Krishna (2/26), caught by Washington Sundar at third man.

But before LSG had got a flying start, scoring 61 runs in the powerplay. Markram was the aggressor in his partnership with Pant as he clobbered a Krishan short ball outside the leg-stump well over deep mid-wicket.

After Pant's dismissal, a confident Markram carried on with his deft touches while power-hitter Pooran dealt in sixes.

Sai Kishore, probably GT's best spinner this season, was taken to task by Pooran and Markram, especially the West Indian who smashed three huge sixes to pick up 24 runs of his first over.

Markram departed in search of another big hit, caught by Gill of Prasidh in the 12th over. He struck nine fours and one six during his knock. Pooran was ferocious towards the square of the wicket on the leg side and decorated his knock with one four and seven huge hits over the fence. By the time Pooran got out, caught by Shahrukh Khan off Rashid Khan, the match was all but over.

Earlier, sent in to bat, Sudharsan gave a flying start to GT, hitting Shardul Thakur's (2/34) short delivery to the backward point for a boundary in the first ball of the match.

Both Sudharsan and Gill collected boundaries in almost every over, punishing the home bowlers.

GT brought up their fifty in the sixth over when Sudharsan whipped a Avesh Khan delivery on the pads over the backward square-leg fence as the visitors scored 64 in the powerplay.

But it was Sudharsan who played the second fiddle as his skipper Gill effortlessly found boundaries with his clean and simple batting.

Gill cut and pulled and also effortlessly went down the wicket to pick up his first six, straight over long-on off Markram.

The skipper brought up his half-century off just 31 balls with a single down the ground of Digvesh Rathi (1/30) in the ninth over.

GT raced to 103 for no loss at the half-way mark.

Sudharsan, however, got a reprieve when Abdul Samad dropped him off Digvesh in the 11th over. He soon completed his fifty with a sweep to the fine leg boundary.

It was raining boundaries from both the batters to all parts of the ground as LSG bowlers appeared clueless.

LSG finally had the first breakthrough in the first ball of the 13th over, when Gill was caught brilliantly just inches from the long-on boundary by Markram off Avesh (1/32).

LSG struck another blow just after the final strategic timeout in the form of Sudharsan. Just after the break, the left-hander went for a lofted over extra cover of Ravi Bishnoi (2/36) but failed to get past Pooran, who took a fine catch.

Bishnoi struck again in the same over when Washington Sundar dragged one onto his stumps.

Jos Buttler failed to do much harm, falling to Rathi. Shardul was on a hat-trick in the final over but missed out on feat. (PTI)

Salt-Kohli brace for Archer Test as RR, RCB eye win

JAIPUR, April 12: Openers Phil Salt and Virat Kohli will brace for a fiery showdown against thunderbolts from express pacer Jofra Archer as Rajasthan Royals and Royal Challengers Bengaluru look to get back to winning ways in the IPL here on Sunday.

Both teams are heading into the contest smarting from defeats. While RCB went down to Delhi Capitals by six wickets, RR were blown away by Gujarat Titans in a 58-run drubbing. RCB, with three wins from five matches, are placed in the top half of the table at fourth, while RR, with a win less in as many games, are languishing at number seven.

After copping the most expensive spell in IPL history on the opening night, British pacer Archer has managed to turn things around.

Relentlessly bowling over 144 kph, the England speedster had batters gasping before knocking them over. He delivered a match-defining spell of 3/25 against Punjab Kings, lighting up the game by shattering in-form batter Shreyas Iyer's stumps with a 148.6 kph thunderbolt. He cranked it up to 152.3 kph against Gujarat Titans earlier this week, and sent back skipper Shubman Gill with a 147.7 kph in-swiger. Come Saturday, Archer will be tasked with the responsibility of getting the crucial scalps of Kohli (186 runs) and fellow England teammate Salt (143 runs), a pairing that can take the game away in a matter of overs.

Archer's resurgence is a shot in the arm for the Royals as apart from Sandeep Sharma, the rest of their bowling attack has struggled to control the scoring rate, some-

thing the RCB batters will look to exploit. Kohli has blown hot and cold this season, despite two half-centuries. But with the explosive Salt, who can take off from ball one, for company, the former India captain has had the luxury of showing controlled aggression. He'll be eyeing more consistency with the bat. Devdutt Padikkal will also be eager to get a big score after underwhelming returns.

RCB will also lean on skipper Rajat Patidar, who's been in fine touch, while Tim David and Liam Livingstone remain potent finishers in the middle and lower order.

The Bengaluru outfit, still searching for its first IPL title, has a strong pace bowling attack in Josh Hazlewood and Bhuvneshwar Kumar, but spin bowlers need to be a little more consistent.

The Royals, on the other hand, will be hoping for a batting resurgence after the GT debacle, when they were bowled out for a 159.

They have the firepower, with Sanju Samson, Riyan Parag, Yashasvi Jaiswal, and Nitish Rana at the top, and the explosive duo of Dhruv Jurel and Shimron Hetmyer waiting down the order.

Teams (From):

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

Rajasthan Royals: Sanju Samson (c), Yashasvi Jaiswal, Shubham Dubey, Nitish Rana, Riyan Parag, Dhruv Jurel (w), Shimron Hetmyer, Jofra Archer, Maheesh Theekshana, Tushar Deshpande, Sandeep Sharma, Fazalhaq Farooqi, Kunal Singh Rathore, Akash Madhwal, Kumar Kartikeya, Kwena Maphaka, Wanindu Hasaranga, Yudhvir Singh Charak, Ashok Sharma, Vaibhav Suryavanshi. Match starts at 3.30 pm. (PTI)

DC vs MI: Rohit faces spin test, Rahul up for Bumrah challenge

NEW DELHI, April 12: An out of sorts Rohit Sharma will strive to keep himself relevant going forward in the Indian Premier League (IPL) when he is challenged by Delhi Capitals' effective troika of spinners in Mumbai Indians' next clash here on Sunday.

As Rohit is fighting for form, MI will bank on their lethal weapon Jasprit Bumrah to deliver and ask some probing questions to KL Rahul, easily opposition's best batter on view, and other batters.

Delhi Capitals, the team to watch out for during the first quarter, will start as favourite in this game. The hosts are eyeing their fifth consecutive win while MI, under lone warrior Hardik Pandya, would want to avoid the ignominy of five defeats in six games.

In IPL, just one defeat can make or break momentum and Mumbai Indians are on the cusp of having another nightmarish season after finishing at the bottom of the table in the last edition. In times of crisis, fans expect their much-loved stars to put their hand up and contribute handsomely and Rohit needs to come out all guns blazing. He has managed only 38 runs in four matches he has played so far.

But it would be easier said than done against a Delhi attack, that has the best-performing spin unit led by skipper Axar Patel. There is peerless Kuldeep Yadav, who is ably supported by rookie Vipraj Nigam. Kuldeep, whom former Australian skipper Michael Clarke, termed as the best bowler in the tournament so far, has finished his quota in all games, taking 8 wickets at a brilliant economy rate of less than six runs per over.

Vipraj, a fine all-rounder in the making, has five wickets at an economy rate of a shade over 8 while skipper Axar has so far gone wicketless.

However against MI, the Capitals skipper might once again open the bowling against Rohit, who doesn't enjoy a match-up against left-arm spinners or wrist spinners. If Axar brings himself on first up or gives the ball to either Kuldeep or Vipraj, it would be an interesting battle on watch.

At the same time, Rohit has enjoyed a degree of success against Mitchell Starc and what the Australian has up his sleeves will be there for everyone to see.

For MI, the failure of Rohit, Tilak Varma and vice-captain Suryakumar Yadav has proved to be a huge issue. While Tilak and Surya have enjoyed some sporadic success, they haven't been authoritative. A fit-again Bumrah didn't look rusty in his first game in three months. The home top-order would have a slightly difficult challenge is terms of quality as to what they have faced till now.

Jake Fraser-McGurk has looked completely out of place but it hasn't affected the team as it hasn't chased big totals in two of the four games.

Facing Shardul Thakur, Prince Yadav, Mukesh Choudhary or Bhuvneshwar Kumar is very different from decoding Bumrah, easily the best fast bowler across formats in world cricket.

The Bumrah vs Rahul will be a mouth-watering contest where a supreme artist will try to outwit a technician par excellence with a wide range of strokes in his repertoire.

It will be Delhi Capitals' first game at home this season. They have played two matches at Visakhapatnam which is a "second home" for the franchise because co-owners GMR have business interest in the region. The tracks at Kotla have undergone a sea change in last couple of seasons with plenty of runs on offer. The current DC team management, comprising head coach Hemang Badani and Director of Cricket Venugopal Rao, would probably won't want such a pitch.

It can't be confirmed whether the coaching staff has requested for a slightly tacky track where the ball grips, making it a low-scoring affair.

Teams (From):

Mumbai Indians: Hardik Pandya (C), Jasprit Bumrah, Suryakumar Yadav, Rohit Sharma, Tilak Varma, Trent Boult, Naman Dhir, Robin Minz, Karn Sharma, Ryan Rickelton, Deepak Chahar, Allah Ghazanfar, Will Jacks, Ashwani Kumar, Mitchell Santner, Reece Topley, Krishnan Shrijith, Raj Angad Bawa, Satyanarayana Raju, Bevon Jacobs, Arjun Tendulkar, Lizaad Williams, Vignesh Puthur.

Delhi Capitals: Axar Patel (C), Faf du Plessis, Karun Nair, Sameer Rizvi, Jake Fraser-McGurk, Ashutosh Sharma, KL Rahul, Abishek Porel, Donovan Ferreira, Tristan Stubbs, Madhav Tiwari, Tripurana Vijay, Manvanth Kumar, Vipraj Nigam, Ajay Mandal, Darshan Nalkande, Mukesh Kumar, Mohit Sharma, T Natarajan, Mitchell Starc, Dushmantha Chameera, Kuldeep Yadav.

Match starts: 7:30 pm. (PTI)

ICC may tweak two-ball rule in ODIs

NEW DELHI, April 12: Addressing the long-standing concern that ODI cricket is heavily tilted in favour of batters, the International Cricket Council (ICC) may tweak the use of two-ball rule in the 50-over format, it has been learnt. The ICC Cricket Committee, headed by former India skipper Sourav Ganguly, has made the recommendation to use one ball in ODIs. The two new ball-rule is in place for more than a decade now. The recommendation needs to be ratified by the ICC Board of Directors before being included in revised playing conditions. The ICC Board will discuss the issue on Sunday in Harare. As of today, two new white Kookaburra balls are used in ODIs. With bowlers operating with separate new balls from each end, the ball remains hard, giving advantage to the batters to score freely. (PTI)

CSK have got right players, not putting the white flag up just yet: Michael Hussey

CHENNAI, April 12: Chennai Super Kings batting coach Michael Hussey threw his weight behind the current squad despite a fifth straight defeat, insisting that the five-time champions have the "right players" and are not raising the white flag just yet.

CSK crumbled to an embarrassing eight-wicket defeat to Kolkata Knight Riders here on Friday after recording their lowest-ever score at the Chepauk of 103 for nine.

"I still think we've got the right players. We've just got to try and help them find some confidence and consistency and then hopefully we can sort of grow and build from that, whether that's with the bat, ball or in the field," Hussey told the media after the match.

"There's a lot of talk about the style of our play. But the players we've got, we don't want to ask them to play in a completely different way; that's natural to them.

"They've got here to the IPL for playing really well in their way. I'm certainly not one to try and get them to play in a different way. They play at their best because that's the way they play," he added.

Hussey dismissed suggestions that CSK have stacked their squad with players past their prime or are hesitant to back young talent. CSK's middle-order comprises India players Rahul Tripathi, Shivam Dube, Vijay Shankar and Deepak Hooda who have failed collectively this season.

"I would argue that they're beyond their prime. I don't agree with that. We've had players in the twilight of their career come and play at CSK in the past. I think of Shane Watson. I think of Ajinkya Rahane."

"They've performed really well for CSK. I still think that the players that we've got still have some good cricket in front of them and can offer us a lot. We can find their best and see some great performances from them. "With regards to youngsters, we want to pick guys when they're ready to perform. We've got some very good players that are waiting for their chance. No question about that.

"But sometimes when teams give up and think, 'we can't win the tournament anymore. Well, we'll just try the youngsters now'. That's what, we're still here to try and progress in the tournament as far as we can. We're certainly not putting the white flag up just yet," Hussey added.

The former Australia and CSK player said CSK hope to find their way into the top four and are ready to scrape for it.

"You only have to get into scraping to that fourth place. In a long tournament like the IPL, it is about momentum. Certainly the momentum is not with us at the moment whatsoever."

"If we can change that momentum and get some confidence going and get a few wins on the board, the confidence will grow. You never know, we might be able to scrape into one of those last positions in the table come playoff time."

Hussey acknowledged CSK have been below-par in all three aspects of the game. "We have certainly been below par in all three facets of the game. (But) we're not out of it altogether. We've got to stick tight, identify the areas we can improve and just get back on that horse as quickly as we possibly can." "If we start to fracture, if we start to change things too much, which has certainly not been a CSK trait in the past, then things can go worse before they get better. We need to do a bit of soul searching." (PTI)

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Associate Editor- Nilomoni Borah **Editor - Rameswar Chauhan**