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Assam academician becomes first Indian to be appointed to Cambridge Int'l council

GUWAHATI, May 15: Academician Professor Upasana Mahanta has become the first Indian to be appointed to the Strategic Higher Education Advisory Council (SHEAC) constituted by Cambridge International.

She has been inducted into the globally prestigious body, which brings together senior leaders in admissions and enrolment from the world's most renowned universities, a statement issued on Thursday said.

The SHEAC includes members from institutions such as the University of Oxford, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), University of Cambridge, University of Toronto, and Monash University.

This council plays a critical role in shaping how Cambridge qualifications are recognised globally, ensuring their alignment with the dynamic landscape of higher education.



education, the statement said.

Hailing from Sivasagar, Mahanta is dean at O P Jindal Global University and is an alumna of Delhi University, Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) and the University of British Columbia in

Canada.

She had earlier served as a faculty member at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Mumbai, and her academic work has focused on law, gender, and social justice. (PTI)

CM defends police action, says decision follows report from the Nagaon police chief NSA slapped on AIUDF MLA Aminul Islam

NAGAON, May 15: Opposition AIUDF MLA Aminul Islam has been detained under the National Security Act (NSA) in Assam's Nagaon for allegedly defending Pakistan and its complicity in the Pahalgam terror attack, officials said on Thursday.

The three-time MLA was arrested on April 24 on sedition charges after he made "misleading and instigating statements in public, which went viral and had the potential to create an adverse situation".

Islam was released on bail on Wednesday, but was instantly detained from Nagaon Central Jail under the stringent NSA for the same charges and lodged at the same place, Nagaon SP Swapnil Deka said.

The police officer declined to share further details, stating that the case is under investigation.



Commenting on the development, chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said: "The Deputy Commissioner and District Magistrate of Nagaon has placed Aminul Islam, MLA from Dhing, under preventive detention under Section 3(2) of the National Security Act,

1980."

"This decision follows a report from the Superintendent of Police, Nagaon, highlighting the MLA's provocative public speech during a panchayat election campaign and the circulation of a video in which he allegedly made baseless and inflammatory claims linking the

Pahalgam terror attack to a government conspiracy," he said.

Another senior police officer said the NSA dossier referred to 23 previous cases registered against the MLA.

Islam was initially sent to four days of police remand, and then to judicial custody. Since April 29, he has been lodged in jail.

In the viral video shot during the panchayat poll campaign by Islam on April 23, the Dhing MLA was heard alleging that the Pahalgam and Pulwama attacks were perpetrated by conspirators who want to polarise the country on communal lines.

The All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) distanced itself from the legislator's comments, stating that the views were his own and not of the party. Terrorists (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

India should move to reclaim areas beyond McMahon Line: BJP MP

ITANAGAR, May 15: Slamming China for renaming some places in Arunachal Pradesh, Lok Sabha MP Tapir Gao on Thursday urged the Centre to take steps for "correcting historical wrongs" by reclaiming areas inhabited by Lhoba Tani and Mishmi communities beyond the McMahon Line.

In a statement, the BJP MP of Aarunachal East constituency said communities living beyond the McMahon Line share "deep civilisational roots with Bharat", and it's time for India to reclaim the regions "that are rightfully part of our country".

Beijing announced Chinese names for 27 places in Arunachal Pradesh -- 15 mountains, four passes, two rivers, a lake and five inhabited areas. China claims Arunachal Pradesh as part of southern Tibet.

"China can rename mountains and rivers as much as it wants, but

it cannot rewrite history," Gao said in a statement, criticising what he called a "deliberate and politically motivated attempt" to distort geographical and cultural facts.

"Arunachal Pradesh has never been part of Tibet. Even the 14th Dalai Lama has made that abundantly clear," he said.

Noting the historical and cultural ties of the indigenous people of the region with the rest of country, Gao said Arunachal Pradesh has always belonged to India and its people, and the Lhoba Tani (Nyishi, Tagin, Bokar, Mishmi) communities living beyond the McMahon Line share "deep civilisational roots with Bharat".

"The McMahon Line may serve as a political boundary, but it cannot divide a shared heritage," he noted.

He urged New Delhi to take steps for correcting "historical wrongs" (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Assam mulls shifting police battalion to evicted site to protect land from encroachment

GUWAHATI, May 15: The Assam government has planned to relocate a state police battalion from the heart of the state capital to the city's outskirts, where an eviction drive took place a few months ago in which two persons were killed and many injured, officials said on Thursday.

To review the area, chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday visited the evicted land at Kachutali in Sonapur revenue circle of Kamrup Metropolitan district and said that the 10th Assam Police Battalion is being shifted to protect the site from future encroachment.

"The area has been shortlisted for a proposed relocation of the 10th APBN. This area falls under the tribal belt and block, where only government projects can be developed," a senior official said.

The official said around 100 bighas (over 33 acres) will be re-



quired for the battalion, while the remaining part of the total about 1,000 bighas (over 330 acres) of the evicted land's green and expansive surroundings, will add to the beauty of the facility, he added.

"The government will ensure all necessary arrangements and amenities are provided to enable the battalion to function effectively and fulfil its mandate," the official said.

During the eviction drive on September 12 last year to clear around 1,050 bighas (over 347 acres) of land, the villagers had allegedly attacked the officials and policemen with sharp weapons, sticks and stones. When police opened fire to disperse the mob, two protesters were killed and nearly 40 people, including 22 government (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Our relations, dealings with Pak will be strictly bilateral: Jaishankar

NEW DELHI, May 15: India's relations and dealings with Pakistan will be "strictly bilateral", which is a national consensus for many years and there is "absolutely no change" in that consensus, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said on Thursday.

Interacting with reporters on the sidelines of an event here, he also said the UN Security Council had underlined the need to hold the perpetrators of the Pahalgam attack accountable, and on May 7 morning, "we held them accountable through the Operation Sindoor".

India carried out precision strikes on terror infrastructure early on May 7 following which Pakistan attempted to attack Indian

military bases on May 8, 9 and 10. The Pakistani actions were strongly responded to by the Indian side.

The hostilities ended with an understanding on stopping the military actions following talks between the Directors General of Military Operations of both sides on May 10.

"To me things are fairly clear. So, let me take this opportunity to spell out our position. One, where Pakistan is concerned, our relations, our dealings with them will be bilateral, and strictly bilateral."

"That is a national consensus for many years, and there is absolutely no change in that consensus that dealings with Pakistan will be bilateral," (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

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"That is a national consensus for many years, and there is absolutely no change in that consensus that dealings with Pakistan will be bilateral," (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

ISRO to launch its 101st satellite on Sunday: Chairman

CHENNAI, May 15: ISRO will launch its 101st satellite on May 18, its Chairman V Narayanan announced on Thursday, and asserted that the space agency's programmes were planned to ensure the safety and security of the country.

"We successfully launched the one-hundredth rocket from Sriharikota in January. India's 101st satellite - the Earth Observation Satellite RISAT-18 aboard the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV-C61) - will be launched on May 18," the Chairman of the Indian Space Research Organisation said.

The PSLV bolsters India's surveillance and disaster management capabilities. He said ISRO's missions were driven by the country's requirements (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

First-ever monthly job data shows India's unemployment rate at 5.1 pc in April 2025

NEW DELHI, May 15: The rate of unemployment in the country, measured in monthly term for the first time, stood at 5.1 per cent in April this year, showed the government data released on Thursday.

The Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation released the first monthly Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) as part of efforts to monitor the proportion of unemployed people among those eligible for jobs in the country in real time.

Until now, the labour force survey was released on a quarterly as well as annual basis.

The latest data collected in current weekly status (CWS) showed that unemployment rate for persons of all ages during April 2025 worked out to be 5.1 per cent in April 2025. The pace of jobless-



ness among men stayed slightly higher at 5.2 per cent compared to that of women at 5 per cent.

Joblessness among those in the age group of 15-29 was 13.8 per cent across the country. The rate of unemployment in urban areas stood at 17.2 per cent, while it was

12.3 per cent in rural areas.

CWS refers to the activity status determined on the basis of a reference period of last 7 days preceding the date of survey.

The study further showed that unemployment rate (UR) among women in the age group of 15-29 was 14.4 across the country (rural-urban), while it was 23.7 in cities and 10.7 per cent in villages.

Joblessness among men aged 15-29 years was recorded at 13.6 per cent in the country, while it was 15 per cent in cities and 13 per cent in villages.

The data also showed that Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) among people aged 15 years and above was 55.6 per cent during April 2025. The participation rate in rural areas was 58.0 per cent while (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Tushar Mehta-headed team of lawyers appointed for trial against Tahawwur Rana

NEW DELHI, May 15: The government has appointed a team of lawyers headed by solicitor general Tushar Mehta to conduct trial against extradited Pakistani-Canadian terrorist Tahawwur Hussain Rana in the 26/11 Mumbai terror attack case.

In a notification, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) said the appointment has been made exercising the powers conferred under the National Investigation Agency Act, 2008 and the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023.

The central government hereby appoints a team of Special Public Prosecutors headed by solicitor general Tushar Mehta and comprising additional solicitor general S V Raju, senior advocate Dayan Krishnan and advocate Narendran Mann for conducting trial and other matters related to the case RC-04/2009/NIA/DLI on behalf of the NIA before the NIA Special Courts at Delhi, High Court of Delhi and Supreme Court of India for three years or till the completion of trial of the said case, whichever is earlier, the notification said.

The RC-04/2009/NIA/DLI pertains to the case registered with the NIA in Delhi involving the trial of Rana and David Coleman Headley in connection with the 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks.

The NIA secured Rana's extradition from the US following years of sustained efforts and arrested him on April 10 upon his arrival here.

Rana is accused of being involved in the larger conspiracy behind 2008 dastardly strikes orchestrated by Pakistan-based terrorist group Lashkar-e-Taiba in which 166 people were killed and over 238 injured.

He was sent to judicial custody on May 9 and lodged in Tihar jail after his custodial interrogation by the NIA.

During the custody, Rana was grilled by the NIA investigators for around eight to ten hours daily to unearth the larger conspiracy behind the 2008 terror attack case.

The 64-year-old Pakistani-origin Canadian terrorist was also accused of making a large number of phone calls to his co-conspirator David (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Hinglaj Mata Temple vital to Hindus: Himanta

GUWAHATI, May 15: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday said that Balochistan holds profound historical and spiritual significance for Hindus, primarily as the sacred home of the Hinglaj Mata Temple, one of the 51 revered Shakti Peethas.

"Nested in the rugged terrains of the Hingol National Park, the temple is believed to mark the spot where the head of Goddess Sati fell, making (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

1 dead as truck falls into Brahmaputra in Sonitpur

TEZPUR, May 15: One person died as a truck fell from a bridge into the Brahmaputra river in Assam's Sonitpur district on Thursday, officials said.

The truck was heading to Kalabor in Nagaon from Tezpur when the accident happened on the Kali-ahomora bridge, they said.

"It seems the truck lost control and fell into the river after breaking the railing (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

'We believe technology should serve the many, not just the few' Assamese innovator's AI chatbot MK3 eyes 100 cr global users with multilingual tool

NEW DELHI, May 15: Assamese innovator Gautam Das on Thursday said he has unveiled a multilingual AI chatbot, MK3, aimed at helping people from all walks of life and targets to reach about 100 crore users globally in the next five years.

He said that the product will help democratise access to artificial intelligence (AI), making it accessible and affordable. "It was built to help users in their language and voice -- whether it's for learning, solving customer queries, or simply getting everyday tasks done," Das said.

MK3 has already received positive feedback from initial trials with students and teachers in Tamil Nadu, who highlighted its user-friendliness and effectiveness in educational settings, he said.

He added that the chatbot does



not require any coding knowledge and is tailored for underserved communities and local-language users. At present, it supports around 17 languages, including Japanese, Hindi, English, Urdu, Assamese,

Bengali, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Chinese, French, Russian, Spanish, Korean, and Swahili.

"We believe technology should serve the many, not just the few," Co-owner of MK3 Shatabadi

Borkakati said adding a key differentiator is MK3's Dynamic Context Orchestration Algorithm (DCOA), a patent-pending system that helps the chatbot intelligently manage tasks, switch languages, and adapt tone based on user needs - all without the user needing to direct it manually. The browser-based tool is also designed with privacy at its core, particularly keeping younger users in mind. It does not request or store any personal data, minimizing digital risks while expanding AI access to wider audiences, she said.

"The goal is to reach 1 billion people in the next five years by making AI more human, more local, and more useful, without asking users to code, subscribe, or struggle, and without compromising their privacy," Das said. (PTI)

Congress questions PM Modi's 'silence' on Trump's 'zero-tariffs' remarks



NEW DELHI, May 15: The Congress questioned Prime Minister Narendra Modi's silence on US President Donald Trump's remarks in Doha, where he claimed that India has agreed to "zero tariffs" on several American goods as against its "highest" tariffs, asking what linkage does it have with the

stopping of Operation Sindoor.

"The Commerce Minister is in Washington DC and President Trump has made yet another grand announcement from Doha. There is total chuppi from our PM. What has he agreed to and what linkage is there between this and the stoppage of Operation Sindoor?" AICC general secretary Jairam Ramesh asked in a post on X.

He also tagged a report quoting Trump that India has offered "zero tariffs" on several American goods as part of its trade deal with the United States.

"India is one of the highest tariff nations in the world. It is very hard to sell into India. They have offered us a deal where basically they are willing to -- literally -- they charge us no tariff. We go from the highest tariff -- you could not do business in India, we are not even in the top 30 in India because the tariff is so high -- to a point where (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

'The market staged a robust rebound, closing with substantial gains'

Stock markets rally: Sensex jumps 1,200 pts, Nifty reclaims 25K peak after 7 months

MUMBAI, May 15: Benchmark BSE Sensex soared by 1,200 points while NSE Nifty closed above the 25,000 mark for the first time in seven months on Thursday following across-the-board buying triggered by expectations of potential trade deal between India and the US.

Rising for the second day, the 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 1,200.18 points or 1.48 per cent to settle at a seven-month high of 82,530.74 with 29 of constituents ending higher.

The index moved in a range in the first half but picked up momentum in the afternoon session following sharp gains in banking, auto, IT and oil & gas shares. Sensex rallied 1,387.58 points or 1.70 per cent to hit a day's high of 82,718.14 in the second half of the session.

The NSE Nifty surged 395.20 points or 1.60 per cent to settle at a seven-month high of 25,062.10. The 50-issue index had closed above 25,000 on October 15, 2024, previously.

"The market staged a robust rebound, closing with substantial gains, driven by a decline in domestic inflation and positive signals from the US regarding a potential trade agreement with



India," Vinod Nair, head of research, Geojit Investments said.

Rate-sensitive sectors such as automobiles and real estate led the rally, supported by upbeat industry forecasts, Nair said adding that investor attention is now turning to the upcoming speech by the Federal Reserve Chair, which is anticipated to provide further clarity on the future policy trajectory, particularly in light of the recent easing in US inflation data.

US President Donald Trump on Thursday claimed that India has offered to drop all tariffs on American goods.

Among Sensex shares, Tata Mo-

tors was the biggest gainer climbing by over 4 per cent. HCL Tech, Adani Ports, Eternal, Maruti, Reliance Industries and Asian Paints were among the gainers. HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank, Bharti Airtel and Infosys added to the rally.

IndusInd Bank emerged as the only laggard.

Broader markets also closed higher with the BSE smallcap gauge climbing 0.94 per cent and midcap index by 0.67 per cent.

All sectoral indices ended higher, with realty surging 1.87 per cent, auto (1.86 per cent), services (1.85 per cent), industrials (1.62 per cent), metal (1.60 per cent),

consumer discretionary (1.57 per cent) and commodities (1.51 per cent).

"While benchmark indices gyrated sharply in early trades, it quickly regained the lost momentum and rallied sharply thereafter on all-around buying support despite pessimism in European and other Asian bourses," Prashanth Tapse, senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said.

As many as 2,639 stocks advanced while 1,325 declined and 150 remained unchanged on the BSE.

In Asian markets, South Korea's Kospi, Japan's Nikkei 225 index, Shanghai's SSE Composite index and Hong Kong's Hang Seng settled lower. Markets in Europe were trading on a mixed note.

US markets ended on a mixed note on Wednesday.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude dropped 3.65 per cent to USD 63.68 a barrel.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth Rs 931.80 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data.

On Wednesday, the BSE Sensex climbed 182.34 points or 0.22 per cent to settle at 81,330.56. The Nifty rose by 88.55 points or 0.36 per cent to 24,666.90. (PTI)

Rupee slumps 18 paise to close at 85.50 against US dollar

MUMBAI, May 15: The rupee depreciated 18 paise to close at 85.50 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday, weighed down by demand for American dollars from importers and foreign fund outflows. Forex traders the rupee declined on dollar demand. However, a surge in the domestic markets and overnight weakness in crude oil prices cushioned the downside.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the domestic unit opened at 85.53 and moved between an intra-day high of 85.48 and a low of 85.73 against the greenback. The unit ended the session lower at 85.50 (provisional), registering a fall of 18 paise over its previous closing level.

On Wednesday, the rupee pared most of its initial gains and ended the day higher by 4 paise at 85.32 against the American currency.

Over the past two trading sessions, the rupee opened on a bullish note, but pared most of the gains and settled with marginal gains against the greenback. After a firm opening, it rose to near 84.62 on Tuesday and 85.05 on Wednesday, and lost momentum during the trading session. Going ahead, Anuj Choudhary, research analyst at Mirae Asset Sharekhan, said "we expect the rupee to trade with a positive bias amid positive domestic markets and rise in risk appetite in global markets. Easing geopolitical tensions between India and Pakistan and easing trade tariff tensions between the US and China may also support the rupee."

"Traders may take cues from PPI, retail sales, Empire State manufacturing index, industrial production and weekly unemployment claims data from the US," Choudhary said, adding that USDINR spot price is expected to trade in a range of 85.20 to 85.90. (PTI)

Apple investment plans in India intact, proposes India to be major manufacturing base: Source



NEW DELHI, May 15: iPhone maker Apple's investment plans for India are intact and the company proposes to have a major manufacturing base for its products in the country, government sources said.

Soon after US President Donald Trump made a statement that he has asked Apple CEO Tim Cook to cut India manufacturing, Indian officials spoke to executives of the Cupertino-based firm.

Apple executives assured the Indian government officials that the company's investment plans are intact and the country would be a major manufacturing base of Apple.

"Apple has said that its investment plans in India are intact and it proposes to continue to have India as a major manufacturing base for its products," the source said. E-mail query sent to Apple in this regard elicited no immediate response.

Earlier in the day, Trump said he spoke to Cook and told him that he doesn't want Apple to make its products in India and instead increase production in the US.

"We have Apple, as you know, it's coming in. And I had a little problem with Tim Cook yesterday. I said to him, Tim, you're my friend. I treated you very well. You're coming in with USD 500 billion. But now I hear you're building all over India. I don't want you building in India. You can build in India if you want

to take care of India," Trump said.

He said that India is one of the highest tariff nations in the world and it is very hard to sell into India.

"They've (India) offered us a deal where basically they're willing to literally charge us no tariff. So we go from the highest tariff. You couldn't do business in India... But I said to Tim... we treated you really good. We put up with all the plants that you built in China for years. Now you got to build us. We're not interested in you building in India. India can take care of themselves. They're doing very well. We want you to build here. And they're going to be upping their production in the United States, Apple," Trump said.

Cook has announced that Apple will source the majority of iPhones sold in the US from India in the June quarter while China will produce the vast majority of the devices for other markets amid uncertainty over tax tariffs.

According to government sources, 15 per cent of iPhone's global output comes from India. Foxconn, Tata Electronics and Pegatron India (majority owned by Tata Electronics) are engaged in manufacturing iPhones.

Foxconn has also started manufacturing Apple AirPods in Telangana for exports.

According to an analysis by S&P Global, iPhone sales in the US were 75.9 million units in 2024, with exports in March from India at 3.1 million units, suggesting a need to double shipments either through new capacity or redirecting shipments bound for the domestic market.

"Apple's Indian exports already headed predominantly to the United States, which represented 81.9 per cent of phones exported by the firm in the three months to February 28, 2025. That increased to 97.6 per cent in March 2025 as a result of a 219 per cent jump in exports, likely reflecting the firm looking to preempt higher tariffs," S&P Global Market Intelligence report said. Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw had in April announced that iPhones worth Rs 1.5 lakh crore were exported from India in fiscal year 2025.

The Apple ecosystem in India is one of the biggest job creators in the country. It is estimated to have employed around 2 lakh people across various vendors in the country. (PTI)

Airtel launches fraud detection solution to identify and block malicious websites

'Our engineers have tried to solve this problem through this launch'

HT Bureau

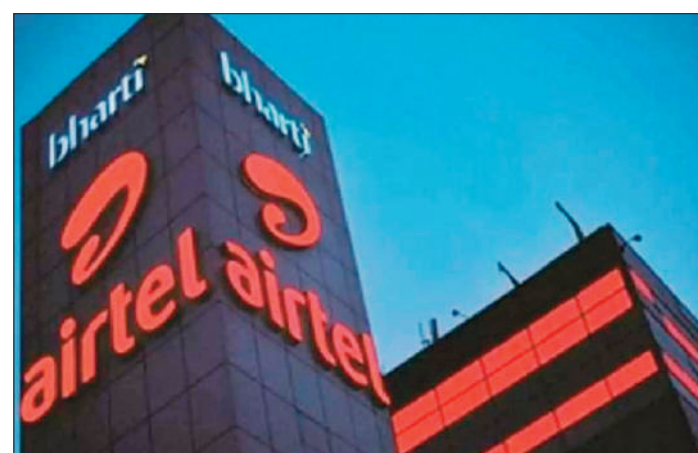
GUWAHATI, May 15: In continuation of its fight against spam, Airtel on Thursday unveiled a new cutting-edge solution that will detect and block malicious websites across all communication Over-The-Top (OTT) apps and platforms including emails, browsers, OTTs like WhatsApp, Telegram, Facebook, Instagram, SMSes and others in real time.

This safe service will be seamlessly integrated with, and auto-enabled for, all Airtel mobile and broadband customers at no additional cost.

"When a customer tries to access a website flagged as malicious by Airtel's advanced security system, the page load is blocked, and customers are redirected to a page explaining the reason for the block," an official statement said.

It further said that the threat of online fraud is growing everyday as a result of digital platforms becoming increasingly ubiquitous across the country and posing a serious risk to consumers.

"There is an alarming surge in such threats in the last few days. Fraudulent schemes have evolved far beyond mere OTP frauds and deceptive calls, with recent reports indicating that millions of individ-



uals have fallen victim to malicious online scams," it added.

Recognizing the gravity of this situation, Airtel has implemented an AI-powered, multi-tiered intelligence platform designed to safeguard customers from the full spectrum of scams and fraud.

Commenting on the initiative Gopal Vittal, vice chairman and managing director, Bharti Airtel, said that over the last few years, we have come across several instances where unsuspecting customers have been defrauded by ingenious criminals of their hard-earned money.

"Our engineers have tried to

solve this problem through the launch of our Fraud Detection Solution. We believe this will provide our customers total peace of mind while browsing the internet without the worry of getting scammed. Our AI based tool scans internet traffic, checks with global repositories and our own database of threat actors in real-time and blocks fraudulent websites. Our solution has already reached a remarkable level of accuracy in the 6 months of trials. We will continue working relentlessly until we have made our networks completely safe from spam and scam," he added.

Asian shares mostly lower after mixed session on Wall Street

TOKYO, May 15: Asian shares and US futures slipped Thursday after US stocks drifted to a mixed close on Wall Street. Oil prices fell more than USD 1 a barrel. China moved to reverse some of its "non-tariff" measures against the US as agreed with Washington in their temporary trade war cease-fire and most markets traded in a narrow range.

Japan's Nikkei 225 index dropped 1.1 per cent, however, to 37,705.74. Computer chip-related stocks were among the biggest decliners, with Disco Corp. falling 2.6 per cent and Advantest down 1.8 per cent.

Hong Kong's Hang Seng was the outlier, picking up 0.2 per cent to 23,691.67. The Shanghai Composite index lost 0.3 per cent to 3,393.29, while Taiwan's

Taiex fell 0.2 per cent. In Australia, the S&P/ASX 200 was nearly unchanged at 8,278.30. South Korea's Kospi edged 0.1 per cent lower.

On Wednesday, a choppy day of trading on Wall Street ended with a mixed finish as gains by several big technology stocks helped temper losses. The S&P 500 edged up 0.1 per cent to 5,892.58 and the Dow Jones Industrial Average slipped 0.2 per cent to 42,051.06. The Nasdaq composite rose 0.7 per cent to 19,146.81. Super Micro Computer surged 15.7 per cent after signing a partnership agreement with Saudi Arabian data centre company DataVolt. Advanced Micro Devices gained 4.7 per cent after announcing a USD 6 billion stock buyback programme. (AP)

Contd. from Page 2

NSA slapped on AIUDF MLA

struck at a prime tourist location in Pahalgam in south Kashmir on April 22, killing at least 26 people, mostly tourists, and injuring several others. On February 14, 2019, 40 CRPF personnel were killed in a suicide attack in south Kashmir's Pulwama district. Islam was earlier arrested by Assam Police in April 2020 for making "objectionable" remarks about the condition of quarantine facilities and hospitals treating COVID 19 patients, allegedly calling them worse than detention centres.

At least 61 people, including the AIUDF MLA, have been arrested across Assam for their alleged pro-Pakistan stand following the terror attack in Jammu and Kashmir, the chief minister said on Wednesday. (PTI)

India should move to reclaim

by reclaiming areas inhabited by Lhoba Tani and Mishmi communities beyond the McMahon Line. "It's time we address the historical oversights. India should move to reclaim the areas beyond the McMahon Line where Lhoba Tani and Mishmi people reside, the regions that are rightfully part of our country," he said.

The Centre had on Wednesday rejected as "vain and preposterous" China's renaming of the places in Arunachal Pradesh, and said such attempts will not alter the "undeniable" reality that the state "was, is, and will" always remain an integral part of India. "Bharat's unity is not open to negotiation. Our borders are not mere lines on a map, they represent the soul of our nation. Arunachal Pradesh is not just a territory, it is an identity. And it will always remain Indian," Gao said.

It was the fifth time China has renamed places in Arunachal Pradesh. In April last year, India had reacted sharply when Beijing released a list of standardised names of 30 places in the state.

The Chinese Civil Affairs Ministry released the first list of the standardised names of six places in 2017, while the second list of 15 places was issued in 2021, followed by another list with names for 11 places in 2023. (PTI)

Assam mulls shifting police

officials and police personnel, were injured in the violence. After visiting the site for the first time since the eviction took place, Sarma said that as the entire area falls under the tribal belt and block, the non-tribals living before the declaration of the block can continue to stay, but no new non-tribals can settle here.

"So, we have to send those coming after the formation of the tribal belt and block. We had carried out an eviction drive on around 1,000 bighas of land. However, some land brokers are there, and they call back all the evicted people again for settlement on the same land. So, we have decided to arrest those land brokers under the NSA," he added. Sarma also asserted that the government will create a police battalion so that the land can be protected from future encroachment.

"We will also think about how to utilise the remaining land for public good. We may think of constructing a medical college or university. We may also give allotment to tribal landless people," he added.

The CM said that the government hopes to start the construction work of the battalion in 100 bighas of land in the next six months, and it will require around three years to complete. Talking about the evicted people not leaving the area yet, he said some people are taking shelter near a mosque.

"The common people want to leave, but the land brokers call them again and again. However, they will now know that the government is strict and will not allow anyone to settle here. If these people are Indian citizens and actually landless, then we can allot them land in their respective original places," Sarma said.

The 10th APBN is presently located next to the 4th APBN in Kahilpara area, just around five kilometres from the secretariat complex in Dispur. The government has not made public about what it will do with the vacant land after the facility is shifted to Sonapur. (PTI)

Our relations, dealings with Pak

Jaishankar said. He said Prime Minister Narendra Modi has made it "very clear" that any talks with Pakistan will be only on terror.

"...Pakistan has a list of terrorists, who need to be handed over. They have to shut down terrorist infrastructure, they know what to do," the external affairs minister said.

Jaishankar said New Delhi is "prepared to discuss" with Islamabad what is to be done on terrorism.

On the Kashmir issue, he said, "Only thing that remains to be discussed on Kashmir, is vacation of illegally occupied Indian territory in Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir, we are open to discuss it with Pakistan...the government position is very, very clear." (PTI)

ISRO to launch its 101st satellite

in diverse fields, and it was technologically capable of delivering them. "All our programmes are for the safety and security of our people and country. We don't compete with any other nation. Our mission is planned based on our needs," Narayanan told reporters here when asked if ISRO planned any specific launch for the Indian armed forces.

The country's journey in space began in 1979 when it launched its first rocket. "Then, the SLV3 was 98 per cent successful and our first successful launch was in 1980," he said. (PTI)

First-ever monthly job data

it was 50.7 per cent in urban areas. LFPR among males aged 15 years and above in rural and urban areas were 79.0 per cent and 75.3 per cent, respectively. Among females aged 15 years and above, the rate of labour force participation was 38.2 per cent for rural areas during April 2025.

LFPR refers to the percentage of persons in labour force (i.e. working or seeking or available for work) in the population. Worker Population Ratio (WPR) defines the proportion of those who are employed among total population. WPR in rural areas among those aged 15 years and above was 55.4 per cent in April, the data showed. The ratio in urban areas was 47.4 per cent, while the overall WPR at the national level was recorded at 52.8 per cent last month.

WPR among females aged 15 years and above in rural and urban areas were 36.8 per cent and 23.5 per cent respectively. The overall female WPR of the same age group at the country level was 32.5 per cent.

Considering the need for high-frequency labour force indicators with enhanced coverage, the sampling methodology of PLFS has been revamped from January 2025.

Across the country, a total of 7,511 first-stage sampling units have been surveyed during April 2025.

The number of households surveyed was 89,434 (49,323 in rural areas and 40,111 in urban areas) and number of persons surveyed was 3,80,838 (2,17,483 in rural areas and 1,63,355 in urban areas). (PTI)

Tushar Mehta-headed team of

Coleman Headley alias Daood Gilani, a US citizen currently in prison in that country. Rana had also allegedly travelled in parts of northern and southern India days before the carnage in the country's financial capital on November 26, 2008. Rana has been charged with numerous offences, including conspiracy, murder, commission of a terrorist act and forgery in the country.

The anti-terror agency had registered a case on November 11, 2009 under sections 121 A of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), Section 18 of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act and Section 6(2) SAARC Convention (Suppression of Terrorism) Act against Headley, his childhood friend Rana and others.

During the NIA investigation, the roles of senior functionaries of terror groups LeT and Harkat-ul Jihadi Islami (HuJI) -- Hafiz Muhammad Saeed alias Tayyaji, Zaki-ur-Rehman Lakhvi, Sajjid Majid alias Wasi, Illyas Kashmiri and Abdur Rehman Hashim Syed alias Major Abdurrehman alias Pasha -- had also emerged.

These conspirators worked in active connivance with officials from Pakistan's spy agency ISI, namely Major Iqbal alias Major Ali and Major Sameer Ali alias Major Samir, according to the NIA probe. (PTI)

Hinglaj Mata Temple vital

it one of the holiest sites in Shaktism," the chief minister posted on X. "For centuries, Hindu pilgrims, particularly from the Sindh, Bhavsar, and Charan communities, have undertaken arduous journeys across deserts to seek blessings at this shrine," he said.

Beyond its religious importance, Balochistan serves as a poignant reminder of the ancient cultural presence of Hindus in the region, long before the subcontinent's partition, the CM added. The shrine is also deeply respected by the Baloch people, who affectionately refer to it as "Nani Mandir", reflecting a rare legacy of inter-communal reverence and shared heritage, Sarma added. (PTI)

1 dead as truck falls into

on the right side. We got intimation from the passersby and immediately called NDRF and SDRF personnel," Additional Superintendent of Police Madhurima Das said.

The rescue teams have recovered one body from the site, and further search is going on, she said. (PTI)

Congress questions PM Modi's

they have actually told us that there will be no tariff. Would you say that is the difference? They were the highest, and now they are saying no tariff," Trump said in Doha.

India is currently holding talks for finalising a trade deal with the United States and Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal is in the US for the negotiations. (PTI)

CM reviews thermal power plant site in Bilasipara

Medical College and Energy Park Projects to be set up in Goalpara

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, May 15: In a significant step towards advancing Assam's energy and healthcare infrastructure, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, accompanied by Power Minister Prasanta Phukan, visited multiple project sites in Dhubri and Goalpara districts on Thursday.

The visits included an inspection of the proposed thermal power plant site at Chirakuta Charuwa Bakra in Bilasipara and a review of the planned medical college, hospital, and Energy Park in Goalpara.

According to an official statement, the Chief Minister's visit to Bilasipara focused on assessing the viability of the proposed thermal power plant, a key initiative under the state's long-term energy strategy. The site, located approximately eight kilometres from Bilasipara railway station, spans an area of 3,300 bighas, 2 kathas, and 15 lechas.

During the inspection, CM Sarma was accompanied by Power Minister Phukan, Dhubri Deputy Commissioner Dibakar Nath, and senior officials of the Power Department. He instructed the district



administration to initiate necessary developmental measures to prepare the site for the implementation of the project.

These include the construction of approach roads and other essential infrastructure to ensure the smooth execution of the thermal power plant.

The Chief Minister also addressed the issue of land acquisition and potential displacement of families due to the project.

He assured that any families affected would be rehabilitated ap-

propriately, with the government providing alternative land for their resettlement.

The thermal power project is aligned with the state's ambitious goal of achieving energy self-sufficiency, with a targeted thermal power generation capacity of 5,000 megawatts (MW) by 2035.

As part of this initiative, the government has launched the Assam Thermal Power Generation Product Promotion Policy 2025, which has already attracted investment proposals worth ₹77.3 billion.

The Assam Power Distribution Company Ltd. (APDCL) will serve as the nodal agency for policy implementation, with a single-window clearance mechanism to expedite project approvals and execution.

Following the visit to Bilasipara, the Chief Minister proceeded to Goalpara district, where he reviewed the sites earmarked for two major development projects — a medical college and hospital at Bhandara village under Balijana Revenue Circle, and a proposed Energy Park at Rakhasini.

At Bhandara, CM Sarma inspected the land selected for the medical college and held discussions with senior officials on a range of key issues, especially focusing on connectivity to the site from the National Highway.

He directed concerned departments to begin development in a systematic and planned manner, in keeping with the project's inclusion in the state budget.

Addressing the media during his visit, Sarma affirmed the government's commitment to commence construction of the Goalpara Medical College and Hospital within the current financial year.

He reiterated that this initiative is part of a broader policy objective to establish a medical college in every district, ensuring that people have access to modern healthcare services closer to home.

Later, at the proposed Energy Park site at Rakhasini, the Chief Minister reviewed details concerning land availability and project scope. He issued necessary directives to the concerned department to ensure smooth planning and future implementation of the project.

The Chief Minister was accompanied during the visits by Power Minister Prasanta Phukan, Special Commissioner and Secretary of the Public Works Department Chandan Sarma, Principal Secretary to the Chief Minister KK Dwivedi, Special Chief Secretary (Forest) MK Yadava, Goalpara Deputy Commissioner Khanindra Choudhury, and other senior officials.

These visits underline the Assam government's focus on developing critical infrastructure in energy and healthcare, with clear directives from the highest level to move forward on long-standing and new initiatives within a structured timeframe.

Assam cabinet approves executive order to support families of armed forces personnel

HT Correspondent

KHERONI, May 15: In a significant move aimed at fostering national unity and expressing solidarity with the armed forces, the Assam State Cabinet, in its meeting held on May 10, 2025, at the Chief Minister's Office, Lok Sewa Bhawan, Dispur, approved an Executive Order designed to offer support to the families of military personnel serving at the nation's frontlines.

The Cabinet meeting, which commenced at 12:00 noon in the Cabinet Room, was convened in view of the special circumstances prevailing across the country, which have underscored the importance of collective resolve and emotional cohesion.

In light of these developments, the Cabinet laid emphasis on promoting emotional connectedness and unity among citizens, especially during critical national moments.

As per official sources, the newly approved Executive Order seeks to provide support and reassurance to families of the armed forces, ensuring that they are not left isolated while their loved ones serve in challenging and often hostile environ-

ments. The order is to remain in force for a period of 30 days from the date of issuance.

Additionally, the Cabinet called for financial prudence in public expenditure, highlighting the importance of responsible fiscal management during sensitive national periods.

Departments have been advised to be empathetic in their engagement with the families of service personnel, recognising the psychological and emotional toll that deployments can have on both soldiers and their families.

The Government of Assam, through this directive, has reiterated its unwavering commitment to national solidarity and extended its full support to the defenders of the nation. By taking this step, the state aims to not only support the armed forces but also to inspire a spirit of unity and shared responsibility among the wider public.

The decision marks a thoughtful and timely gesture, aligning the state's administrative efforts with the greater national interest, and ensuring that those who guard the country's borders feel supported at home.

Woman held with over 46 grams of suspected heroin

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, May 15: In a continued crackdown on the illegal drug trade, a team of Jorhat police on Thursday recovered 46.08 grams of suspected heroin from a woman residing in the Naziribari locality of the town.

The accused, identified as Usna Begum (35), was apprehended from a rented house during a raid conducted based on specific inputs, police sources confirmed.

The recovered contraband was reportedly found packaged in 10 containers, raising suspicions of possible distribution intent.

A police official, while confirming the seizure, stated that legal proceedings have been initiated under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, and further investigation is underway to determine the source and network connected to the contraband.

The arrest marks the latest in a series of actions against drug trafficking in the region.

It may be recalled that just last week, another woman was apprehended at Jorhat Town Railway Station while allegedly transporting a suspected heroin consignment from Dimapur.

That case, too, remains under active investigation.

Biswanath Police crackdown on illegal slaughterhouse in Sootea

HT Correspondent

BISWANATH CHARIALI, May 15: In a significant move to curb cattle smuggling and theft, the Biswanath police, under the leadership of Superintendent of Police Subhasish Baruah, carried out a joint operation along with the Sootea Police at Ghahigaon on the northern outskirts of Sootea on Wednesday.

The operation targeted an alleged illegal slaughterhouse that, according to local residents, had been a key source of growing incidents of cattle theft in the Naduar region.

As per information provided in the operation, the police recovered a large number of slaughtered cow heads, four daos (traditional Assamese machetes), a knife, a weighing machine, and other tools typically used in cattle slaughtering.

Additionally, 24 live cows suspected to be stolen were also found hidden at the site.

The illegal slaughterhouse was reportedly being operated by Yusuf Ali and his son Injamul Haque.

During the raid, the police were able to apprehend Injamul Haque,

while efforts are reportedly underway to trace and apprehend other individuals linked to the operation.

Local sources alleged that the facility was illegally supplying between 15 and 20 quintals of beef daily to surrounding areas, including Sootea, Itakhola, Tezpur, and Biswanath Chariali.

The site had long been suspected to be a hub of illicit cattle-related activities, contributing to a spike in cattle theft cases in the greater Naduar area.

As per the provisions of the Assam Cattle Preservation Act, 2021, particularly Section 4, no individual is allowed to trade in beef or cattle without proper authorization from the relevant department. Moreover, Section 8 of the same Act clearly states that beef cannot be sold within a five-kilometre radius of any Hindu, Sikh, Jain settlement or religious place.

In this case, a Hindu village is located just one kilometre from the site of the slaughterhouse, raising serious questions about how such an operation was being carried out in viola-

tion of the law.

Following the raid, a large number of local residents and cattle owners visited the Sootea Police Station, hoping to identify and reclaim their stolen animals.

Many victims who had earlier reported cattle thefts expressed relief at the police's decisive action and demanded strict legal proceedings against those involved in running the slaughterhouse.

The swift and targeted action by the Biswanath SP and his team has received appreciation from conscious citizens, who had long expressed concerns about the growing cattle smuggling racket in the region. Residents have urged law enforcement to remain vigilant and continue such operations to dismantle similar illegal activities in the future.

The operation marks a critical step in reasserting law and order concerning cattle protection in the area and reflects the administration's intent to enforce existing legislation rigorously.

Further investigations are currently underway.

Pijush Hazarika reviews progress of embankment construction along Kopili River

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, May 15: Assam Water Resources Minister Pijush Hazarika conducted an extensive field visit to the flood-prone districts of Nagaon and Hojai on Thursday, to take stock of the ongoing embankment construction works and to review progress on various flood control measures.

The visit, which covered multiple strategic sites along the Kopili River, forms part of the state government's larger effort to mitigate recurring flood and erosion problems that affect large parts of central Assam every monsoon season.

Minister Hazarika began his visit by inspecting the under-construction embankments within the Barhampur constituency of Nagaon district.

The Water Resources Department's Nagaon Division is presently engaged in constructing two significant new embankments: one along the left bank of the Kopili River from Garokhanda, Borchunga to Changsaki, and the other along the right bank from Baregoga to Niz Narikoli.

Together, these embankments span a total length of 9.5 kilometres.

During the inspection, the minister visited key construction sites, including Garokhanda and Changsaki, where he reviewed the progress and quality of work.

Emphasising the urgency of completing the project ahead of the monsoon season, Hazarika directed the engineers and department officials to expedite the remaining work.

He also acknowledged that while the ongoing construction was a significant step, additional stretches of embankment—approximately 8 to 9 kilometres—were still needed to comprehensively address the area's vulnerability to floods and erosion.

He assured that these remaining segments would be executed in a phased manner in the near future.

Fulfilling a promise made during the recent panchayat election campaign, Minister Hazarika also visited Jamunamukh in the Barhampur constituency.

Accompanied by local MLA Jitu Goswami, the minister assessed the flood and erosion challenges faced by the area due to the proximity of the Kopili River.

Following the field assessment, he directed the Water Resources Department to prepare a detailed project proposal for the construction of an 8-kilometre-long embankment using geo-mega tubes, a modern technique designed to reinforce riverbanks and resist soil erosion more effectively.

Gauri Bhagawati honoured as 'Adarsha Matri' International Mother's Day

HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, May 15: Veteran educator and social worker Gauri Bhagawati was felicitated with the title of 'Adarsha Matri' (Ideal Mother) by Barowari Mahila Mancha on the occasion of International Mother's Day. The felicitation ceremony was held at her Seujpur residence on Wednesday in recognition of her decades-long contribution to education and social service. At 87, Bhagawati stands as a towering figure in the community, having served as a respected teacher at Fuleswari Girls' HS School for over thirty years. Beyond her professional life, she has actively participated in numerous social welfare initiatives and is also a devoted mother of three.

The event commenced with the recital of 'Matri Vandana', setting a respectful and reverent tone. Utopla Shrutikar Barua, Secretary of

Barowari Mahila Mancha, spoke on the objectives of the event and highlighted Gauri Bhagawati's illustrious career and enduring legacy as a teacher and social figure. Sitala Devi, President of the Mancha, addressed the gathering on the significance of International Mother's Day, emphasizing the need to recognize the nurturing role of mothers in shaping society. Renowned social worker Sishila Goswami also delivered a brief yet heartfelt speech, shedding light on Bhagawati's multifaceted contributions — both within the classroom and in the larger social landscape. In her acceptance speech, Gauri Bhagawati expressed gratitude and shared her belief that every mother has the power to nurture a sense of patriotism and humanity in children from a young age, which in turn strengthens the foundation of the nation.

NABARD organises JIVA awareness programme in Nagaon

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, May 15: In a significant initiative aimed at promoting natural resource management and sustainable development in rural areas, the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) organised an awareness-cum-orientation programme on the JIVA natural farming concept at Borbeel tribal cluster in Kathiatoli Block, Nagaon district.

The event, held on Wednesday, brought together selected expert farmers from various villages of the Borbeel cluster, along with representatives from the implementing agency Kalong Kapili and the resource support organisation WASSAN, based in Hyderabad. The programme was designed to familiarise local stakeholders with the objectives and operational aspects of the first-of-its-kind JIVA project sanctioned by NABARD's Assam Regional Office.

As stated in an official press release, NABARD has been actively supporting the implementation of a range of rural development projects across the country, including the Integrated Watershed Development Programme with Climate Proofing Interventions (WDCPIs), Integrated Tribal Development Programmes (ITDPs), Umbrella Programme on Natural Resource Management (UPNRM), and Climate Change Projects.

In keeping with its developmental mandate, NABARD has

now introduced the JIVA initiative in Assam, marking a new phase in sustainable agricultural interventions.

Delivering the keynote address, District Development Manager (DDM) of NABARD, Rajendar Perna, stated that NABARD has always strived to support rural development through innovative and sustainable agricultural initiatives.

He noted that the Borbeel tribal cluster was chosen for the JIVA initiative owing to the remarkable commitment shown by its farmers during the implementation of the ITDP-TRIBES and Model Millets Project.

Explaining the concept further, Perna said, "JIVA," a Sanskrit word meaning 'life force,' symbolises the project's core philosophy of revitalising farming systems through agro-ecological practices." He informed the gathering that the JIVA programme aims to pioneer and scale up agro-ecology as a transformational approach, capitalising on the existing social and natural capital of the region. The project will integrate diverse components such as Aquaculture, Livestock, Nutrition Gardens, and Horticulture, while establishing a Bio-Input Resource Centre and Indigenous Seed Banks within the Borbeel TRIBES cluster.

Speaking at the programme, Jyotish Talukdar, Secretary of Kalong Kapili, suggested that 40 identified Champion Farmers would adopt innovative cropping combinations, including cere-

als, pulses, oilseeds, and vegetables, under the integrated farming model. He highlighted the need for experimentation and diversification in crop patterns to ensure better productivity and sustainability.

DK Patra, the representative from WASSAN, elaborated on the technical aspects of the project, stating that there would be a transition from mono-cropping to diversified, multi-crop systems. He emphasised that longer ground coverage by diversified crops would significantly enhance soil organic matter, improving long-term fertility and resilience.

The orientation programme also featured interactive sessions wherein participants shared their experiences, expectations, and feedback. Local farmers expressed interest in adopting the natural farming methods and highlighted the challenges they face in accessing markets and improving returns on their produce.

As part of the programme, a mini-market linkage initiative was organised, showcasing the sale of locally grown raw turmeric by beneficiary farmer Ranjit Rabha to a nearby trader.

Farmers reported that nearly 95 quintals of raw turmeric had been sold this season.

They requested continued support from NABARD and Kalong Kapili for branding, processing, and marketing their produce more effectively.

AJYCP holds protest in Ledo, demands urgent repairs of deteriorating NH 315

HT Correspondent

MARGHERITA, May 15: In a spirited demonstration of public concern, more than a hundred members of the Asom Jatiyatibadi Yuba Chatra Parishad (AJYCP), Tinsukia district committee—supported by regional committees from Margherita, Digboi, Pengree, Bordumsa, and Tirap Jagun—took to the streets of Ledo on Thursday, demanding immediate repairs to the crumbling National Highway 315 (NH 315).

The protest, described as a vibrant show of unity and civic urgency, unfolded along the route from Ledo College Tinali to Ledo Bazaar, where AJYCP members marched with placards and raised slogans, highlighting the dilapidated condition of NH 315—an essential arterial route that connects Margherita to Ledo in Assam's coal-rich Upper Assam region.

Once considered a major transportation corridor, NH 315 has now reportedly deteriorated into a severely damaged roadway riddled with massive potholes.

Locals described the potholes as "small ponds", underscoring the severity of the neglect.

According to residents and protesters, the condition of the highway poses grave risks to both motorists and pedestrians, with daily commuters turning into dangerous and exhausting ordeals.

Addressing the gathering, AJYCP Tinsukia district president Prabin Tamuli and vice president Kanchan Borah voiced sharp criticism against what they termed as continued government apathy.

"Despite the daily reliance of thousands of vehicles and pedestrians on this crucial highway, both state and central governments have failed to take any meaningful action," said Tamuli.

Borah, in his remarks, singled out Margherita MLA Bhaskar Sharma for special criticism, stating that even though the legislator frequently travels on NH 315, he appears to have "turned a blind eye" to its deteriorating state.

"The people of Margherita and Ledo deserve better than a highway that endangers lives," said Borah, urging both MLA Bhaskar Sharma and Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma to take urgent steps to re-

store NH 315.

He asserted that proper road connectivity is not only a matter of comfort but also vital to ensuring regional safety, development, and economic activity.

The AJYCP leaders warned that if authorities failed to respond with timely action, the organisation would escalate the movement with even larger demonstrations.

They expressed hope that the protest would serve as a wake-up call for the government and ignite real, visible changes on the ground.

"This rally was not merely a protest—it was a resounding call to action," said Borah.

"The ball is now in the court of the BJP-led Assam government. Will they rise to the challenge and deliver a revitalised National Highway 315?"

The protest concluded peacefully but with a clear and firm message: the citizens of Margherita and Ledo are no longer willing to endure neglect.

The AJYCP, backed by strong local participation, has set the stage for further civic activism if the demand for urgent road repairs goes unheeded.

Prominent social worker Maneswar Basumatary passes away at 65

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, May 15: In a solemn moment for the greater Banagaon region and the Bodo community at large, noted social worker and former general secretary of the Banagaon Anchalik Committee of the All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU), Maneswar Basumatary, passed away on Tuesday evening. He was 65.

According to family members, Basumatary had been undergoing treatment at a private hospital in Guwahati for the past several days due to health complications.

He breathed his last around 6:30 PM on May 14, 2025.

His demise has cast a pall of grief over the local community and organisations he was closely associated with throughout his life.

Following his passing, Basumatary's mortal remains were brought to his native village at Sikkhagaon Banagaon.

On Wednesday, his final rites were performed with full traditional rituals in the presence of family, well-wishers, and people from across communities.

His funeral witnessed a heartfelt turnout, with mourners paying their last respects to the departed soul.

Maneswar Basumatary had held several key positions in his lifetime that reflected his dedication to community service.

He was formerly the president of the undivided Dotma Anchalik Committee of ABSU, and also served as president of the Banagaon



Primary Committee of Bodo Sahitya Sabha, where he worked to promote Bodo language, literature, and education.

He remained a vital part of various social organisations and movements, earning wide-

spread respect for his unwavering commitment to social upliftment and youth empowerment.

He was widely regarded as a towering personality in Banagaon and surrounding areas, known for his ability to connect with people from all walks of life and mobilise collective efforts for community development.

Following the news of his demise, tributes poured in from various quarters. The All Bodo Students Union (ABSU), Bodo Sahitya Sabha, Tribal Sangha, Dularai Bodo Somaj, and the United People's Party Liberal (UPPL) issued statements expressing their grief and honouring the contributions of the late social worker.

His death, they said, leaves a void that will be difficult to fill.

Prominent political figures including Pramod Boro, Chief Executive Member of the Bodoland Territorial Region and president of UPPL, and Lawrence Islay, MLA of Kokrajhar, also conveyed their condolences.

In an official condolence message, CEM Pramod Boro stated, "The society has lost a good social worker. I extend my heartfelt condolences and deep mourning on the demise of Maneswar Basumatary. I pray for the eternal peace of the departed soul."

As the community mourns this significant loss, many remember Basumatary not only as a dedicated organiser and leader but also as a compassionate human being who worked tirelessly for the cause of education, social harmony, and community welfare.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Have patience. All things are difficult before they become easy - Saadi

Kerala's heli-tourism initiative

Kerala is all set to blaze a new trail in the tourism sector with the State Government giving in-principle approval to the heli-tourism policy. A network of chopper services within the State, making use of the four existing airports, and new 'heli-stations' at prominent tourist spots. This is what the policy envisions. It will be implemented through the PPP mode using private sector investment and the facilitatory support offered by the Kerala Government. The Government has set only one condition to go ahead with the project: There should be no financial liabilities to the State exchequer. If the State is required to shoulder any financial liability, prior approval has to be obtained. The policy envisages a facilitator role for the State while establishment of infrastructure and operation of the services linking tourist destinations and airports will be the responsibility of private players. An Expression of Intent (EoI) will soon be floated, inviting private players to channel investment into the project cashing on the new policy. The policy also envisions setting up requisite infrastructure and establishment of service networks in three separate financing modes in association with private players.

In the first mode, Government will own the land while the private players will develop the infrastructure and ensure the operation of facilities. The second mode will see private entities owning and operating heliports, helistations and helipads. The third category envisages infrastructure development by the Government and manning of operations by private entities. To start with, the Government will provide the lands. But setting up infrastructure and securing mandatory approvals from different Ministries, including permits and licences as required by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation and Bureau of Civil Aviation, security for air operations will be the responsibility of the private players. The sites suggested for helipads and helistations are :Varkala, Jatayupura, Ponnudi, Kollam, Munnar, Kumarakom, Alappuzha, Thekkady, Palakkad, Bekal and Wyanad. Another condition is that the operators of heli-tourism services should agree to provide helicopters and supporting facilities, including manpower, for rescue of people and transportation of goods during emergency situations such as natural calamities, for rendering disaster relief, and for speedy transportation of human organs for patients in emergencies.

The nodal agency for coordinating and implementing the project will be the Kerala Tourism Infrastructure Limited under the Department of Tourism. Meanwhile, opinion is sharply divided on the implementation of the seaplane project, another ambitious project of the Kerala Government. Environmentalists fear that the seaplane operations will disturb wild animals, including elephants, tigers and Nilgiritahr, besides aggravating human-wildlife conflicts. The aircraft may have to fly over the National Parks of Mannavanshola, Anamudi Sholai and Mathikettan Sholai and its eco-sensitive zones while approaching the Mattupetty reservoir. To avoid any disturbance to wild animals, the flight path and the height at which the planes would be operating must comply with the rules and regulations. Senior officials, however, say there will be no impact on the wildlife population. It is also unlikely to affect the elephant population in Mattupetty, which has been exposed to anthropogenic disturbances.

The Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises sector in India: Its key features and growth

By: Diganta Barooah

The MSME (Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises) sector in India is a vital part of the Indian economy, contributing significantly to employment, manufacturing, and exports. It's considered a major engine of growth, providing a large number of jobs at a relatively lower capital cost compared to large industries. MSMEs also play a crucial role in industrializing rural and backward areas, helping to reduce regional imbalances and distribute wealth more equitably. The Union Budget of 2025-26 heralds a transformative phase for India's Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) sector by addressing foundational challenges related to scale, access and long-term sustainability. Among the most significant reforms is the upward revision of classification thresholds, aimed at encouraging MSMEs to grow without the fear of losing their status and associated benefits. Under the revised framework, Micro Enterprises can now invest up to ₹ 2.5 Crore (from ₹ 1 Crore) with a turnover limit of ₹ 10 Crore (earlier ₹ 5 Crore); Small Enterprises are allowed investments up to ₹ 25 Crore (from ₹ 10 Crore) and turnover up to ₹ 100 Crore (up from ₹ 50 Crore); while Medium Enterprises can invest up to ₹ 125 Crore (from ₹ 50 Crore) and achieve turnover up to ₹ 500 Crore (earlier ₹ 250 Crore). This recalibration - representing a 2.5 times increase investment and 2 times in turnover thresholds - is expected to boost productivity, encourage adoption of advanced technologies, create employment, and bridge the "missing middle" in India's industrial landscape. Integrated within a broader policy push to expand credit access, promote inclusive entrepreneurship, and rejuvenate

labour-intensive industries, this move is a key step in empowering MSMEs to drive India's progress towards a \$ 5 trillion economy. Recognising the critical role of finance in sustaining and scaling Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), the Union Budget of 2025-26 introduces a robust set of measures to improve credit accessibility and reduce borrowing costs across sub-segments. A key reform is the doubling of the credit guarantee cover for micro and small enterprises from Rs 5 Crore to Rs 10 Crore, a move expected to unlock Rs 1.5 Lakh Crore in additional credit over 5 years. This initiative will empower millions of grassroots entrepreneurs to modernize and expand their ventures. For innovation-driven startups, the credit guarantee limit has been raised from ₹ 10 Crore to ₹ 20 Crore, with guarantee fees reduced to 1% for loans in 27 priority sectors - supporting the government's vision of startups as drivers of inclusive growth and employment. Additionally, export-oriented MSMEs can now access term loans up to ₹ 20 Crore under a reinforced guarantee framework, boosting global competitiveness. Together, these steps reflect a shift toward a credit-rich, trust-based MSME ecosystem central to India's economic aspirations. As part of a holistic strategy to strengthen the MSME ecosystem, the Union Budget of 2025-26 places a renewed focus on labour-intensive sectors that have the potential to generate mass employment and foster inclusive industrial development. A cornerstone initiative in this direction is the Focus Product Scheme for the footwear and leather industry, designed to rejuvenate

India's traditional manufacturing prowess. This scheme targets support for design innovation, component manufacturing, and expansion in the non-leather footwear market. It is expected to create 22 Lakh jobs and achieve a turnover of ₹ 4 Lakh Crore, signalling a major boost to domestic manufacturing. Additionally, recognising India's rising potential in global value chains, the budget introduces a dedicated scheme for the toy sector. This scheme promotes cluster-based development, skill building and modernization to position India as a global hub for toy manufacturing, reducing imports and enhancing exports. Furthermore, in a significant push for regional industrialisation, a National Institute of Food Technology, Entrepreneurship and Management will be established in Bihar, aimed at catalysing the food processing sector in eastern India. Collectively, these initiatives advance the vision of building resilient, job rich and globally competitive MSMEs across the country.

India's MSMEs have rapidly emerged as a powerful force in exports. From ₹ 3.95 Lakh Crore in 2020-21, exports tripled to ₹ 12.39 Lakh Crore in 2024-25, marking a watershed in global competitiveness. The number of exporting MSMEs also soared from 52,849 to 1,73,350 over the same period. Correspondingly, MSMEs' share in India's total exports increased from 43.59% in 2022-23 to 45.79% in 2024-25 (up to May 2024). This surge is underpinned by policy interventions including trade facilitation, digital market access tools, and product standardization - positioning MSMEs at the heart of India's global trade ambitions. The MSME sector, with over 6.3 Crore enterprises,

forms the backbone of India's industrial output, employment generation, and inclusive growth. Structural reforms and targeted schemes have empowered this sector to become digitally integrated and innovation-led. The rising GVA (Gross Value Added) - from 27.3% to 30.1% over three years - underscores its growing footprint in the national economy, despite global disruptions. Government initiatives have focused on enhancing credit access and enabling first-time entrepreneurs, driving inclusive development aligned with the vision of a \$ 5 trillion economy. A host of flagship schemes underscores the government's multi-pronged support for MSMEs. The Udayam Registration Portal has simplified compliance and formalization, while the PM Vishwakarma Scheme uplifts traditional artisans. The Prime Minister's Employment Generation Program (PMEGP) promotes grassroots entrepreneurship, and the SFURTI (The Scheme of Fund for Regeneration of Traditional Industries) Scheme revitalizes traditional industry clusters. The Public Procurement Policy for MSEs (Micro and Small Enterprises) ensures that 25% of government procurement is sourced from MSEs, further mainstreaming their participation in the economy. These schemes not only foster economic inclusion but also elevate India's MSMEs as global players, accelerating the country's journey toward self-reliance and sustainable development.

The PM Vishwakarma Scheme is a Central Sector Scheme launched by the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) to provide comprehensive support to artisans and craftspeople. It aims to recognize these individuals as Vishwakarmas, making them eligible

for benefits like access to collateral-free credit, skill training, modern tools, digital transaction incentives, and market linkage support. The scheme is initially implemented for five years, up to 2027-28. With a total outlay of ₹ 13000 Crore for the period 2023-24 to 2027-28, the fully government funded initiative offers comprehensive support, including skill development, modern tools, toolkit incentives, marketing aid, and collateral-free credit. Formal recognition of artisans and craftspeople as Vishwakarmas, with a certificate and ID card is done under this scheme.

This scheme provides basic and advanced skill training programs, along with a stipend of ₹ 500 per day. An incentive of up to ₹ 15,000 in the form of e-vouchers for purchasing tools at the start of basic training is provided under this scheme. PM Vishwakarma Scheme offers collateral-free "Enterprise Development Loans" of up to ₹ 3 lakh in two tranches (₹ 1 lakh and ₹ 2 lakh) with concessional interest rates and Government of India subvention. This scheme provides an incentive of ₹ 1 per digital transaction (up to 100 transactions monthly). It offers market linkage through quality certification, branding, onboarding on e-commerce platforms like GeM, advertising, and publicity. The Udayam Registration portal, udayamregistration.gov.in, is the official government portal for registering MSMEs in India. It's managed by the Ministry of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSME Ministry) and provides a free, paperless, and user-friendly online registration process. This portal streamlines the registration process, making it easier for businesses to access government schemes, incentives, and other benefits. (... to be continued)

Akash Missile: India's indigenous shield against drone threats at the border

By: Dipak Kurmi

In the late hours of May 8 and into the early morning of May 9, the quiet skies over Jammu and Kashmir erupted with flashes of light and the echoing roars of counterstrikes. What the world witnessed, both through official briefings and viral night-sky videos, was a remarkable demonstration of India's growing self-reliance in military technology. At the heart of this decisive defense operation stood the indigenously developed Akash surface-to-air missile system, a technological marvel that played a critical role in neutralising a massive aerial assault launched by Pakistan.

According to senior defense officials, the Indian Army and Air Force jointly deployed the Akash missile system to intercept and destroy a wave of enemy drones and missiles. These unmanned threats, part of a coordinated attack targeting key military positions near the Line of Control (LoC) and the Western border, were detected in time and intercepted mid-air, averting what could have been significant damage to India's strategic outposts.

The Akash missile system, conceptualised and developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), represents a significant leap in India's air defence capabilities. As a medium-range surface-to-air missile system, Akash is capable of engaging aerial threats such as aircraft, helicopters, drones, and even cruise missiles at ranges up to 25 to 30 kilometers. Traveling at speeds up to Mach 2.5—approximately three times the speed of sound—this missile can reach and eliminate fast-moving targets with high precision. Its agility and speed make it an indispensable shield for defending critical military infrastructure.

What makes the Akash system particularly effective is its robust and multi-layered targeting and command infrastructure. It includes a 3D Central Acquisition Radar (CAR) that actively scans airspace for threats, and a Rajendra radar which provides precise target tracking and guidance. These radars work in tandem with vehicle-mounted launchers and a central Command and Control Centre that processes threat data in real time. This architecture ensures that the Akash system can detect, track, and destroy multiple incoming threats simultaneously and from various directions.

One of the most defining attributes of the Akash system is its mobility and all-weather operability. Engineered for deployment across diverse terrains, it functions effectively in rain, fog, dust storms, and low-visibility battle conditions. Its modular structure and vehicular integration allow rapid deployment to forward positions and dynamic battlefield contexts, offering flexibility unmatched by many legacy air defence platforms.

The events of May 8 and 9 illustrated the system's real-world efficacy. As Pakistani forces launched successive drone incursions and violated ceasefire agreements across sectors of Jammu and Kashmir, the Indian armed forces were swift in their detection and response. Leveraging the Akash system, Indian units intercepted numerous drones before they could reach their targets. Visual evidence captured on mobile phones and widely circulated showed luminous trails of interception, underscoring the precision with which the system executed its role.

In a formal statement, the Indian Army affirmed, "Pakistan Armed Forces launched multiple attacks using drones and other munitions along the entire Western Border. The drone attacks were effectively repulsed and a befitting reply was given to the CFVs (ceasefire violations). Indian Army remains committed to safeguarding the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Nation. All nefarious designs

will be responded with force." Notably, this was not the first major aerial incursion in recent days. On the night preceding this incident—May 7 to 8—Pakistan attempted a similarly massive drone and missile attack aimed at Indian military installations. In response, Indian security forces initiated a comprehensive counter-drone operation, during which over 50 drones were shot down. Additionally, reports confirmed that India targeted and neutralised a Pakistani air defence unit based in Lahore, signalling a strong retaliatory stance.

This back-to-back display of technological and tactical strength points to an evolution in India's defense doctrine, driven by indigenous capabilities. The Akash missile system, with 96% of its components sourced domestically, is not only a testament to India's scientific and industrial prowess but also a symbol of strategic autonomy. In a geopolitical environment marked by rapidly shifting alliances and emerging hybrid warfare threats, such indigenous systems reduce dependency on foreign suppliers and enhance national security preparedness.

India's emphasis on indigenisation is further aligned with its broader vision of "Atmanirbhar Bharat" or self-reliant India. By successfully deploying Akash in combat conditions and showcasing its effectiveness, India sends a clear message to adversaries and allies alike: it is capable of defending its territory with homegrown, cutting-edge military systems. The synergy between DRDO, public sector units like Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL), and the armed forces reflects a mature defense ecosystem that is fast becoming a global benchmark. Another crucial dimension of this development is the technological foresight embedded in the Akash system. Its ability to operate autonomously or in integration with other air defense systems makes it future-ready. With evolving warfare paradigms increasingly reliant on drone swarms, stealth aircraft, and precision-guided munitions, India's air defense doctrine needs systems that are adaptive, scalable, and interoperable. Akash fits this role by offering a comprehensive solution that can be expanded or augmented with newer technologies such as artificial intelligence, real-time satellite linkages, and enhanced radar capabilities.

The threat environment, especially along India's western borders, has witnessed a marked shift towards asymmetric tactics. Low-cost drones, often commercially modified for military use, have emerged as tools of both espionage and low-scale tactical strikes. Against such threats, traditional air defenses are often too slow or resource-intensive to be effective. The Akash missile system fills this gap, offering a cost-effective yet powerful response mechanism. India's successful deployment of Akash in the face of Pakistan's latest aggression also holds international significance. Several countries have shown interest in procuring the Akash system, and its successful battlefield performance enhances its credibility as a potential export. It also strengthens India's position as a responsible and capable defence power committed to upholding peace and stability, especially in the face of provocations.

The recent events along the LoC serve as a stark reminder of the ever-present threat to India's territorial integrity. But they also highlight how far India has come in defending its skies. The Akash missile system, with its swift and accurate response, has not only safeguarded vital military assets but also reinforced public confidence in the nation's defense preparedness. It stands as a proud symbol of India's engineering excellence and strategic vision—a true sky shield that promises to protect the country in times of peril. (The writer can be reached at dipakurmigpltd@gmail.com)

By: Satyabrata Borah

The recent decision by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to approve a \$1 billion loan disbursement to Pakistan, along with a \$1.4 billion loan under the Resilience and Sustainability Facility (RSF), has sparked significant controversy, particularly in India. This approval, announced on May 9, 2025, comes at a time of heightened tensions between India and Pakistan, following a deadly terrorist attack in Kashmir's Pahalgalam on April 22, 2025, which killed 26 people, mostly tourists. India has accused Pakistan of sponsoring cross-border terrorism, a charge that Pakistan denies, and has raised strong objections to the IMF's continued financial support to a nation it alleges uses such funds to fuel unethical conflicts. This article explores the complexities of the IMF's lending decisions, Pakistan's economic dependence on these loans, India's concerns about their misuse, and the broader geopolitical implications of this financial lifeline.

Pakistan's economy is in a precarious state, characterized by high inflation, dwindling foreign exchange reserves, and a chronic balance-of-payments crisis. The country has been a frequent borrower from the IMF, availing loans 25 times since joining the organization in 1950. Over the past 35 years, Pakistan has received IMF disbursements in 28 years, including four programs since 2019, highlighting its prolonged reliance on external bailouts. The \$7 billion Extended Fund Facility (EFF) approved in September 2024, of which the recent \$1 billion is a part, aims to stabilize Pakistan's economy through fiscal discipline, tax reforms, and restructuring of state-owned enterprises. The IMF has praised Pakistan's recent efforts, noting a primary fiscal surplus of 2% of GDP in the first half of FY2025, historically low inflation of 0.3% in April 2025, and an increase in foreign reserves to \$10.3 billion by April's end. These indicators suggest some progress in stabilizing an economy that was on the brink of collapse just a year ago, averting a default threat that loomed large in 2023.

India's objections to these loans are rooted in a longstanding concern that Pakistan's financial inflows, including IMF funds, are fungible and could be diverted to support military activities or state-sponsored terrorism. The Indian Ministry of Finance has argued that rewarding a country with a history of supporting cross-border terrorism sends a dangerous message to the global community, exposing funding agencies to reputational risks and undermining global values. The Pahalgalam attack, attributed to a proxy of the Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba, has intensified these concerns. India points to Pakistan's alleged links to terrorist groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed, some of whose leaders, such as Hafiz Saeed and Masood Azhar, are designated terrorists by the United Nations. Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri has claimed that IMF loans indirectly fund Pakistan's military intelligence operations, a charge echoed by several Indian officials and analysts who argue that the timing of the loan—amid escalating drone and missile attacks by Pakistan on Indian

cities—raises serious questions about the IMF's decision-making process.

The IMF, however, operates within a framework that prioritizes economic stabilization over political or security considerations. Its lending decisions are guided by technical assessments of a country's economic performance and reform commitments, not by allegations of terrorism or geopolitical disputes. The organization has acknowledged India's concerns but maintains that its response is constrained by procedural and technical formalities. The IMF's evaluation of Pakistan's EFF program focuses on metrics like fiscal surplus, inflation control, and reserve accumulation, which Pakistan has partially met. The RSF loan, aimed at addressing climate vulnerabilities, aligns with global priorities to support nations prone to natural disasters, a category Pakistan fits due to its history of floods and environmental challenges. Critics argue that this narrow focus ignores the broader context of Pakistan's actions, particularly its military's deep entanglement in economic and political affairs. A 2021 UN report described Pakistan's military-linked businesses as the country's largest conglomerate, and the military's role in the Special Investment Facilitation Council further underscores its influence, raising risks of policy slippages that could undermine IMF-mandated reforms.

India's decision to abstain from voting at the IMF's Executive Board meeting reflects its limited leverage within the organization's structure. The IMF's voting system allows members to either support a proposal or abstain, with no provision for a direct "no" vote. India's abstention, coupled with its vocal dissent, was a strategic move to highlight Pakistan's poor track record—28 loan programs in 35 years with little sustained reform—and the moral implications of funding a state accused of destabilizing the region. Indian officials have pointed to the IMF's own report on the prolonged use of its resources, which notes a "widespread perception" that political considerations influence lending to Pakistan, turning it into a "too-big-to-fail" debtor. This perception is compounded by Pakistan's external debt, which stood at \$130 billion in 2024, and its reliance on handouts from allies like China, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar, alongside multilateral institutions.

The backlash against the IMF's decision extends beyond India. Jammu & Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah has criticized the international community for indirectly reimbursing Pakistan's military actions, while former Afghan MP Mariam Solaimankhil accused the IMF of "bankrolling bloodshed." On social media platforms like X, users have labeled the IMF a "terrorist supporter," arguing that the \$38 billion in loans provided to Pakistan since 1950 have enabled its military to fund terror proxies. These sentiments, while not conclusive evidence, reflect a growing frustration with the IMF's apparent disconnect from the region's security dynamics. Analysts like Sushant Sareen of the Observer Research Foundation have argued that the loans embolden Pakistan's military establishment, which escalates conflicts to distract from domestic

economic failures, as seen in the recent drone attacks on Indian cities.

From Pakistan's perspective, the IMF loans are a lifeline for an economy battered by natural disasters, global commodity price shocks, and internal mismanagement. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's office has claimed that the country's economic situation is improving, with the IMF program paving the way for long-term recovery. Pakistan has denied any role in the Pahalgalam attack and called for an international inquiry, accusing India of unilateral aggression to sabotage its development. The Pakistani narrative frames the IMF's approval as a validation of its economic reforms and a rebuke of India's "high-handed tactics." However, this narrative glosses over the military's dominant role in governance, which undermines civilian-led reforms and fuels India's concerns about fund misuse.

The IMF's decision also reflects broader geopolitical realities. Western powers, which hold significant influence over the IMF, may prioritize Pakistan's stability to prevent a collapse that could destabilize the region or empower extremist groups. The U.S., for instance, has historically supported Pakistan's bailouts, as seen in a 2023 leaked document revealing a U.S.-brokered IMF loan tied to a secret arms deal for Ukraine. China, Pakistan's largest bilateral creditor, also benefits from a stable Pakistan to protect its investments under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). These geopolitical calculations often outweigh India's objections, which, despite its growing global influence, lack the clout to sway IMF decisions dominated by Western interests.

The moral and strategic dilemmas posed by the IMF's loans to Pakistan highlight a critical gap in global financial governance. India's call for integrating "moral values" into lending decisions resonates with several member countries, but the IMF's procedural constraints limit its ability to address such concerns. The organization's focus on economic metrics, while necessary, risks enabling states that exploit financial aid for destabilizing purposes. For India, the challenge lies in rallying broader international support to pressure institutions like the IMF to consider security implications, possibly through forums like the UN Security Council, which has previously criticized Pakistan for hosting terror groups.

The IMF's decision to extend loans to Pakistan, despite India's warnings about terrorism and unethical conflict, underscores the tension between economic imperatives and security concerns. Pakistan's dependence on these funds, coupled with its military's outsized role, fuels suspicions of misuse, particularly in the context of recent escalations. While the IMF's mandate limits its ability to address geopolitical issues, the controversy surrounding its loans to Pakistan exposes the need for a more holistic approach to international lending—one that balances economic stabilization with accountability for actions that threaten regional peace. As tensions between India and Pakistan persist, the IMF's role as a neutral financier will continue to be scrutinized, with implications for global financial integrity and South Asian stability.

India's Air Defense System

By: Himanshu Ranjan Bhuyan

India's air defense system is a vital component of its national security framework, designed to shield the country from the growing array of aerial threats that could endanger its sovereignty and strategic interests. With the rise of sophisticated missile technology, advanced fighter aircraft, and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), India has invested heavily in strengthening its air defense capabilities. This multi-layered approach not only aims to protect its airspace but also plays a crucial role in deterring potential adversaries and ensuring regional stability.

The evolution of India's air defense system can be traced back to the 1999 Kargil War, a conflict that revealed the vulnerabilities in the nation's air defense network. Despite possessing modern air assets, India found its air defense infrastructure insufficient in countering enemy aircraft and missiles. The lessons learned from Kargil led to the realization that a more robust and comprehensive air defense system was essential to safeguard the nation from future aerial threats. In the years following the conflict, India began developing and acquiring a range of advanced technologies to counter potential threats across different domains, including air, surface-to-air, and ballistic missile defense systems.

Central to India's air defense is its commitment to indigenous development. The country's defense research and development organization, the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), has played a pivotal role in creating and advancing various defense systems. India's indigenous ballistic missile defense program, the Advanced Air Defence (AAD) system, and the Prithvi Air Defence (PAD) system are crucial elements of its multi-layered defense network. The PAD system, which is designed to intercept ballistic missiles at high altitudes, and the AAD system, which targets missiles at lower altitudes,

form a dual-layer defense against potential missile attacks. The successful testing of these systems has demonstrated India's ability to defend itself against sophisticated missile threats, significantly enhancing the country's security posture.

In addition to these indigenous systems, India has also bolstered its air defense capabilities through strategic acquisitions from global defense manufacturers. One of the most significant additions to India's air defense arsenal has been the Russian-made S-400 Triumf system. The S-400 is widely regarded as one of the most advanced air defense systems in the world, capable of tracking and targeting a wide range of airborne threats, including aircraft, drones, and ballistic missiles. The system's ability to engage multiple targets simultaneously and at long ranges makes it an invaluable asset in protecting India's airspace, particularly in the face of emerging threats from neighboring countries.

The S-400 system's acquisition is a testament to India's balanced approach to air defense, combining indigenous development with strategic imports. This combination ensures that India remains prepared to address a wide range of potential threats. The system enhances the country's air defense capabilities by providing an advanced, integrated solution for intercepting hostile missiles and aircraft, thereby strengthening its deterrence capabilities. India's decision to acquire the S-400 system has been met with mixed reactions internationally, particularly from the United States, which has expressed concerns over the potential impact of such deals on regional security dynamics. However, India has maintained that its defense procurements are aimed solely at strengthening its defense capabilities and are not directed at any specific country.

Alongside the strategic acquisition of advanced systems like the S-400, India has also developed a range of other air defense assets to address a broader spectrum of aerial threats. The Akash sur-

face-to-air missile system is one such example. Developed indigenously, the Akash system is designed to target aircraft, helicopters, and drones within a range of up to 25 kilometers. The system has been successfully inducted into the Indian Air Force and Army, offering protection to key installations and formations. With its ability to track and intercept multiple targets simultaneously, the Akash missile system forms a crucial part of India's medium-range air defense network.

Another key component of India's air defense system is the SPYDER (Surface-to-air PYthon and DERby) missile system. The SPYDER system, developed in collaboration with Israel, is designed to counter a variety of aerial threats, including enemy aircraft, UAVs, and cruise missiles. The system's quick reaction time, combined with its ability to engage targets at ranges up to 50 kilometers, makes it particularly effective against low-flying and maneuvering threats. Its deployment significantly strengthens India's ability to protect its airspace from a range of potential threats, particularly in regions that are vulnerable to cross-border incursions.

India's commitment to enhancing its air defense capabilities is also reflected in its focus on close-in defense systems designed to protect ground troops and vital infrastructure from low-altitude threats. The Very Short Range Air Defence (VSHORAD) systems, such as the 9K35 Strela-10 and the 2K22 Tunguska, are mobile systems that provide quick-response capabilities against low-flying aircraft and missiles. These systems are critical in protecting sensitive installations, military units, and logistical convoys from surprise aerial attacks.

One of the most significant advancements in India's air defense strategy is its ongoing efforts to develop and deploy next-generation defense systems. The DRDO is actively working on the development of advanced systems like the



Multi-Role Combat Aircraft (MRCA) and the Hypersonic Missile Defense Systems, which promise to take India's air defense capabilities to the next level. These future systems are expected to enhance India's ability to counter threats from stealth aircraft, advanced missiles, and drones, thus ensuring the continued protection of its airspace in the face of evolving technologies.

Beyond conventional threats, India's air defense strategy also incorporates a focus on non-conventional aerial threats, particularly the increasing use of UAVs in modern warfare. Drones, both military and civilian, have become a growing concern for nations worldwide, and India is no exception. In response, India has been working on developing counter-UAV systems capable of detecting, tracking, and neutralizing hostile drones. These systems use a combination of radar, electro-optical sensors, and jamming technologies to counter the rising menace of drone warfare. As UAVs become more sophisticated and accessible, the importance of countering such threats in India's air defense strategy is

likely to grow.

The integration of India's air defense systems with other branches of the military, including the Indian Army and Navy, further enhances the overall effectiveness of the country's defense infrastructure. The coordination between air defense systems, surveillance assets, and fighter aircraft ensures that threats are detected, tracked, and neutralized at the earliest stages of their incursion. This integrated approach not only maximizes the effectiveness of individual defense systems but also ensures that India's air defense network operates as a cohesive and responsive entity capable of countering a wide range of threats.

India's air defense capabilities also play a crucial role in its broader defense and foreign policy objectives. By maintaining a robust air defense system, India not only deters potential adversaries but also ensures regional stability. The country's air defense posture has been a critical component in maintaining peace and security in the South Asian region, particularly in the face of challenges posed by neighboring countries. The air de-

fense systems serve as a visible deterrent against any attempt to destabilize the region through aerial attacks, thus contributing to the larger objective of maintaining a secure and peaceful environment.

In conclusion, India's air defense system is a testament to the country's commitment to safeguarding its sovereignty and national security. Through a combination of indigenous development and strategic acquisitions, India has built a multi-layered, integrated air defense network capable of countering a wide range of aerial threats. As technology continues to evolve, India's air defense capabilities will also continue to advance, ensuring that the country remains prepared to face the challenges of the future. The continuous modernization of India's air defense system not only strengthens its deterrence capabilities but also contributes to regional stability, making it a critical element of the nation's broader security strategy. *(The author can be reached at himangshur1989@gmail.com or 9864539966)*

Operation Sindoor — a reshaping of confrontation

By: Harsh V. Pant | Ankit K

The recent India-Pakistan standoff presents a significant shift in the evolution of modern day warfare. It signifies a transformation in India's military engagement that transcends a traditional understanding of how wars are fought in South Asia and beyond. Operation Sindoor can no longer be seen as a bilateral dispute between the two countries but as an important example of how wars are fought globally, highlighting how technological innovation, strategic calculus, and information manipulation have fundamentally reshaped how military confrontation happens.

Drone warfare is the most revolutionary feature of this war. The use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) is a sharp departure from traditional operating strategies, as emphasised by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his recent speech. In contrast to traditional air combat, which was based on costly and manned fighter jets, contemporary drone warfare is a case of deployment of asymmetric technology. Operation Sindoor has also demonstrated that conventional military force is now not about stand-alone and expensive platforms, but the capability to introduce swarms of inexpensive, expendable reconnaissance and strike vehicles in order to deluge the enemy.

Drones in the matrix

India's reported interception of Pakistan's attempted drone intrusion that reportedly involved between 300 to 400 Songar drones (Turkish-made) across 36 locations demonstrates the scale of this technological revolution. This approach has transformed aerial warfare from a high-stakes, high-risk engagement to a more calculated, probabilistic domain. The SkyStriker Kamekazi drones that India used, allowed India to probe defensive capabilities, gather intelligence about Pakistan's air defence system, and conduct precision strikes with minimal human risk and collateral damage. The proliferation of drone technologies in all modern conflicts underscores a normalisation of aerial warfare capabilities that was unimaginable just a decade ago.

Air defence has moved from fixed, hardware-oriented methods to layered, dynamic networks of defence. India's multi-layered air defence — that is composed of indigenous systems such as Akash and Quick Reaction Surface-to-Air Missiles (QRSAM) together with imported state-of-the-art systems such as Russia's S-400 and the Barak-8 (jointly developed by Israel and India) — is an example of the new strategic philosophy of a layered defence approach, as emphasized in a press release by Lieutenant General Rajiv Ghai, the present Director General of Military Operations. India's Akashteer system, that digitally merges radar information for real-time decision-making, is an evolutionary step in defensive capabilities. No longer are missile systems a concern but the development of an adaptive, smart defence network that is able to process and neutralise several simultaneous threats.

Information, deterrence and doctrine

Information warfare has emerged as perhaps the most sophisticated battlefield in the turn of the event. The confrontation has also exposed how disinformation has transformed itself from a mere propaganda tool to a strategic weapon at an unprecedented scale. Pakistan's information operations demonstrated a nuanced approach to psychological warfare, leveraging digital platforms to create alternative narratives and manipulate international and domestic perceptions, and attempting to fracture India's morale. By circulating doctored videos, fabricated claims and strategically crafted social media content, it was evident that countries can now wage psychological operations that extend far beyond traditional propaganda mechanisms.

The parallels with the modern wars such as the Israel-Palestine and Russia-Ukraine wars are quite evident. Both conflicts illustrate how modern warfare has transcended physical boundaries, transforming information spaces into multiple theatres of engagement. The ability to control narratives, manipulate international attention and create strategic ambiguity has become as crucial as

peace.

There seems a visible shift in India's military warfighting doctrine, signalling a departure from its historically defensive posture to a more proactive, precision-oriented strategic approach. Perhaps the most evident and strategic shift after India's enunciation of its nuclear doctrine can be sensed in the Prime Minister's address on May 12. This doctrinal shift can be characterised by three critical elements. First, the capacity to respond quickly to provocations with accurately measured force; second, the development of a comprehensive and layered defence and offence capability that combines indigenous technologies with cutting-edge imported systems; and third, an advanced escalation control posture that makes precision projection of military power possible without precipitating all-out war. This was reiterated in the May 12 speech by explaining how war has created 'new normal' in the 'new age warfare' for India.

Joint operations by the forces

Of note is a transformation in joint operations by the Indian armed forces, reflected in unprecedented levels of inter-service coordination that cut across



traditional military capabilities. This represents a fundamental shift from kinetic warfare to a more nuanced form of conflict where perception management can be as decisive as military action.

Technological independence has become an imperative strategic necessity. India's show of indigenous platforms such as the Akash missile system and its current work on Project Kusha (a missile project) reflect a larger worldwide trend towards technological independence. It is not just a question of military prowess but also an all-encompassing strategy of minimising foreign dependency, generating economic opportunities through exports of defence products, and asserting technological credibility at the international level.

India's strategic deterrence approach has seen a qualitative transformation. The standoff with Pakistan has shown a sophisticated style of escalation management, where India has signalled strategic capabilities without necessitating full-scale war. This calibrated response model permitted the firm projection of military intent while leaving space for diplomatic flexibility and communication. It was a nuanced departure from traditional models of binary military engagement, where conflicts were normally framed as either total war or total

the conventional organisational silos. The Integrated Air Command and Control System (IACCS) became the operational spine, synchronising action by the Indian Army, the Indian Navy, and the Indian Air Force in real time. It fulfilled inter-service integration from a theoretical concept and transformed it into an operational reality. Internal and external intelligence agencies delivered a unified support that facilitated strategic decision-making and precision targeting.

But the democratisation of warfare technologies also poses challenges and opportunities for India. With cutting-edge technologies becoming more accessible, Pakistan is also now capable of creating asymmetric warfare capabilities that can successfully counter the conventional military power of India. This transformation calls for a complete overhaul of military strategy, intelligence gathering, and defence planning. The most important lesson from this confrontation may be the realisation that contemporary warfare is inherently multi-dimensional. Victory is no longer measured in terms of territorial conquest or brute military power, but in terms of the capacity to combine technological, informational and psychological methods in an operational model. *(Courtesy: ORF)*

Modi pauses war, raises stakes

By: Ashok K Mehta

In his 22-minute address to the nation on Tuesday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi declared a 'pause' in the war. The speech was short by his standards — long by standards of traditional war speeches, flashes of which were seen last week in Churchill's V symbol in London.

Modi was statesmanlike, stern and refreshingly non-political. It carried powerful messages and signals for Pakistan and the international community, especially the Trump administration.

His address follows the shortest 4-day non-contact, stand-off war in which only drones, UAVs and missiles crossed the LoC/IB. No Indian Prime Minister had ever carried out dozens of meetings in full public glare with his Defence Minister, NSA, CDS, Service Chiefs and Cabinet members before the war. Op Sindoor, an innocuous codename, was a sheep in wolf's clothing. Similarly, for a brief 72-hour operation and an undeclared war, there was one briefing too many because very little news or value was revealed.

For a fair and balanced picture of hits and misses, and a rough scorecard, it was essential to watch and read, at the very least, BBC, CNN and Al Jazeera, which have their own biases. Popular Indian TV channels were going insane thanks to overzealous and patriotic veterans egged on by competing anchors not competent to cover combat. Having congratulated all uniformed personnel, spy agencies, scientists and the people of India, Modi laid out the parameters of future response to cross-border terrorism emanating from or sponsored by Pakistan.

Leaders never mention the involvement of their clandestine agencies in combat. Modi indicated, first, the paradigm shift in the use of force to counter CBT: from surgical strikes in PoK in 2016 that Pakistan said did not happen; to air strikes in Balakot, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in Pakistan in 2019 that Islamabad said 'missed the targets'; to Op Sindoor, with demonstrably visible proof of the elimination of terrorist hubs, terrorist leaders and infrastructure in PoK and Pakistan. Second, the total surprise was achieved by delivering Op Sindoor. Third, simply the sophistication in planning, execution and scale of punishment. Fourth, India challenged Pakistan's escape clause of plausible deniability by dispensing with any investigation and exchange of dossiers. Incidentally, the four terrorists — two linked to Lashkar-e-Taiba — got away. This is the first time perpetrators of a heinous terrorist attack have escaped.

Fifth, partial deterrence has been restored, which was severely mauled by a lack of investment in conventional deterrence, especially in air assets to properly manage a two-front contact war. Sixth, at long last the blur between terrorists and their Pakistan Army sponsors has been removed — though some confusion remains. Initially, the military stated that the targets struck were only ter-



Similarly, India has been able to observe the performance of Chinese equipment supplied to Pakistan. Modi said Pakistan has assured it will cease terrorist activity and aggression against India

rorist infrastructure, not civilian or military. Later, as a response to Pakistan striking military targets, India retaliated in kind. To remove the line between proxies and sponsors, both need to be hit ab initio — as Modi hinted. Seventh, Modi has called Rawalpindi's nuclear bluff of lowering the nuclear threshold. Its alleged use of full-spectrum nuclear capability, especially tactical nuclear weapons, has been challenged — though according to Trump, he prevented a nuclear war that would have cost millions of lives.

Eighth, India has established dominance on the escalation ladder by shifting the burden of escalation to Pakistan. During Balakot, after the initial strikes, the IAF declared that the operation was concluded. It did not refer to any Pakistani misadventure, reference to Pak response, that would attract a corresponding retaliation. The dilemma for Pakistan was that to get off-ramp it had to escalate to de-escalate — or forfeit the opportunity for any retribution for India's devastating assaults. Ninth, Modi has raised the stakes in the rules of engagement. By declaring a terrorist attack an act of war, a red line has been drawn — which will not be easy to maintain and keep sacrosanct. What will define a terrorist attack?

It will also challenge the right to self-defence authorised by UNSC Article 51, circumscribed with 2(4) on the prohibition on the use of force and attribution. Simply put, a rethink is required or it will cause grave tur-

bulence and instability in the region. Tenth, Modi made no mention of the US or Trump — his administration orchestrating the stoppage of all firing in the air, on land and at sea. Details of US intervention have been revealed by US Secretary of State and NSA, Marco Rubio, Vice President JD Vance and Trump himself. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif thanked Trump for his effort to maintain peace. In all previous India-Pakistan crises — and there were more than a dozen since 1984 — the US has played a key role in defusing them.

A clarification by the Government on the extent of US involvement is necessary to establish the bona fide of India's strategic autonomy. Eleventh, India's insistence on bilateralism is clouded by the Pakistan National Security Committee decision of April 25th, in response to India's CCS ruling on non-kinetic levies on Islamabad. Amongst other retaliatory actions stipulated, Pakistan has said it "shall exercise the right to hold all bilateral agreements, including Simla Agreement, in abeyance till India stops fomenting terrorism in Pakistan." Twelfth, Modi's reference to Made in India (with foreign collaboration) and high-cost imports of offensive and defensive tools of war in new-age warfare has to be taken with a pinch of salt. The biggest void in India's high-tech capacity is the inability to design and produce a jet engine. Thirteenth, India has been able to test in a combat environment its state-of-the-art equipment — with China watching with a hawk eye.

Similarly, India has been able to observe the performance of Chinese equipment supplied to Pakistan. Modi said Pakistan has assured it will cease terrorist activity and aggression against India. No victory celebrations appear to be planned in Pakistan. Shehbaz Sharif has declared Op Bunyan ul Marsoon successful. The BJP will extract the political dividend from Op Sindoor in the 11th day Tiranga Yatra that started yesterday. Modi's famous last words were: "no terror and talks, no terror and trade, no blood and river waters flow — together." And talks only on terrorism and PoK. This formulation will not end CBT. *(Courtesy: The Pioneer)*

54 people killed in overnight airstrikes on southern Gaza city, hospital says

KHAN YOUNIS, May 15: Multiple airstrikes have hit Gaza's southern city of Khan Younis overnight, killing more than 50 people in a second consecutive night of heavy bombing.

An Associated Press cameraman in Khan Younis counted 10 airstrikes on the city overnight into Thursday, and saw numerous bodies taken to the morgue in the city's Nasser Hospital. Some bodies arrived in pieces, with some body bags containing the remains of multiple people. The hospital's morgue confirmed 54 people had been killed.

The dead included a journalist working for Qatari television network Al Araby TV, the network announced on social media, saying Hasan Samour had been killed along with 11 members of his family in one of the strikes in Khan Younis.

The Israeli military had no immediate comment on the strikes.

It was the second night of heavy bombing, after airstrikes Wednesday on northern and southern Gaza killed at least 70 people, including almost two dozen children.

The strikes come as US President Donald Trump visits the Middle East, visiting Gulf states but not Israel. There had been widespread hope that Trump's regional visit could usher in a ceasefire deal



or renewal of humanitarian aid to Gaza. An Israeli blockade of the territory is now in its third month.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowed earlier in the week to push ahead with a promised escalation of force in Israel's war in the Gaza Strip to pursue his aim of destroying the Hamas militant group.

In comments released by Netanyahu's office Tuesday, the prime minister said Israeli forces were days away from entering Gaza "with great strength to complete the mission... It means destroying Hamas".

International rights group Human Rights Watch said Thursday that Israel's stated plan of seiz-

ing Gaza and displacing hundreds of thousands of people "inches closer to extermination," and called on the international community to speak out against it.

The war began when Hamas-led militants killed 1,200 people in an Oct 7, 2023 intrusion into southern Israel. Israel's retaliatory offensive has killed nearly 53,000 Palestinians, many of them women and children, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which does not say how many were combatants. Almost 3,000 have been killed since Israel broke a ceasefire on March 18, the ministry said.

Hamas still holds 58 of the roughly 250 hostages it took during its Oct 7 attack on Israel, with

23 believed to still be alive, although Israeli authorities have expressed concern for the status of three of those. Israel's offensive has obliterated vast swathes of Gaza's urban landscape and displaced 90% of the population, often multiple times. It halted the entry of all aid, including food and medication, into the territory on March 2, and international food security experts have warned that Gaza will likely fall into famine if Israel doesn't lift its blockade and stop its military campaign.

Nearly half a million Palestinians are facing possible starvation while 1 million others can barely get enough food, according to findings by the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, a leading international authority on the severity of hunger crises.

Human Rights Watch said Israel's plan to seize Gaza and remain there, coupled with the "systematic destruction" of civilian infrastructure and the block on all imports into the territory, were cause for signatories to the Genocide Convention to act to prevent Israel's moves. Israel vehemently denies accusations that it is committing genocide in Gaza.

The group also called on Hamas to free the 58 hostages it still holds in Gaza, 23 of whom are believed to be alive. (AP)

NATO weighs US demand to massively hike defense spending as some struggle to meet current goal

ANTALYA (TURKIYE), May 15: NATO foreign ministers on Thursday debated an American demand to massively ramp up defence investment to five per cent of gross domestic product over the next seven years, as the US focuses on security challenges outside of Europe.

At talks in Antalya, Türkiye, NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte said that more investment and military equipment are needed to deal with the threat posed by Russia and terrorism, but also by China which has become the focus of US concern.

"When it comes to the core defence spending, we need to do much, much more," Rutte told reporters. He underlined that once

the war in Ukraine is over, Russia could reconstitute its armed forces within three to five years.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio underlined that "the alliance is only as strong as its weakest link." He insisted that the US investment demand is about "spending money on the capabilities that are needed for the threats of the 21st century."

The debate on defence spending is heating up ahead of a summit of US President Donald Trump and his NATO counterparts in the Netherlands on June 24-25. It's a high-level gathering that will set the course for future European security, including that of Ukraine.

In 2023, as Russia's full-scale war on Ukraine entered its second

year, NATO leaders agreed to spend at least two per cent of GDP on national defence budgets. So far, 22 of the 32 member countries have done so.

The new spending plan under consideration is for all allies to aim for 3.5 per cent of GDP on their defence budgets by 2032, plus an extra 1.5 per cent on potentially defence-related things like infrastructure -- roads, bridges, airports and seaports.

While the two figures add up to five per cent, factoring in infrastructure and cybersecurity would change the basis on which NATO traditionally calculates defence spending. The seven-year time frame is also short by the alliance's usual standards. (AP)

Indian team meets top UN counter-terror officials India ramps up efforts for UN listing of LeT front The Resistance Front

UNITED NATIONS, May 15: An Indian delegation met top officials of the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT) and Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate here even as New Delhi stepped up efforts to designate The Resistance Front, an LeT proxy, as a UN-listed terror outfit.

The Resistance Front (TRF), a front for Pakistan-based terrorist group Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), had claimed responsibility for the attack that killed 26 people in Jammu and Kashmir's Pahalgalam.

"An Indian technical team, which is in New York, interacted today (Wednesday) with the Monitoring Team of the 1267 Sanctions Committee and other partner countries in the UN. They also met with the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT) and Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED)," sources told PTI.

A readout from UNOCT and CTED of the meeting with the Indian team Wednesday, provided to PTI, said that United Nations Under-Secretary-General Vladimir Voronkov of the Office of Counter-Terrorism

and Assistant Secretary-General Natalia Gherman of the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate "met with a delegation of the Government of the Republic of India."

The development comes in the wake of the horrific April 22 terror attack in Pahalgalam and the retaliatory Operation Sindoor launched by India targeting terror infrastructure in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.

India's push at the UN also comes after the UN Security Council issued a Press Statement in which the members had condemned the Pahalgalam attack "in the strongest terms" but did not mention TRF as the group responsible for the attack.

Voronkov and Gherman expressed condolences for the April 22 attack.

"The discussions with the Indian delegation focused on ongoing collaboration with CTED and UNOCT within their respective mandates, particularly in support of implementing key Security Council counter-terrorism resolutions and the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy," the readout

said. It added that key areas of cooperation include UNOCT-led technical capacity-building initiatives supported by India—such as cybersecurity, countering terrorist travel, supporting victims of terrorism, and countering the financing of terrorism.

The participants also discussed efforts to counter the use of new and emerging technologies for terrorist purposes, in line with the 2022 Delhi Declaration adopted by the Counter-Terrorism Committee under the Chairmanship of India.

This includes the development of non-binding guiding principles—prepared with CTED's support—on threats posed by unmanned aircraft systems and the use of emerging financial technologies for terrorist activities.

Pakistan is currently a non-permanent member of the Security Council and will preside over the powerful 15-nation body in July. Several Pakistan-based terror entities and individuals are listed under the 1267 Al Qaeda Sanctions Committee of the UN Security Council and are subject to an assets freeze, arms embargo and travel ban. (AP)

Trump downplays Putin decision to skip Istanbul talks with Zelenskyy

The Qatari base houses some 8,000 US troops

DOHA (QATAR), May 15: President Donald Trump said Thursday he was not surprised that Russian President Vladimir Putin will be a no-show for anticipated peace talks with Ukraine in Turkey this week.

Trump had pressed for Putin and Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to meet in Istanbul on Thursday. He brushed off Putin's decision to not take part in the expected talks.

"I didn't think it was possible for Putin to go if I'm not there," Trump said in an exchange with reporters as he took part in a business roundtable with executives in Doha on the third day of his visit to the Middle East.

Trump earlier this week floated potentially attending himself. The US president, however, noted on Thursday that Secretary of State Marco Rubio was already in the country for meetings with NATO counterparts. Trump's special envoy, Steve Witkoff, also plans to be in Istanbul on Friday for the anticipated Russia-Ukraine talks.

The push for direct talks between Zelenskyy and Putin comes amid a flurry of negotiations aimed at producing a ceasefire agreement between Russia and Ukraine.

Putin was first to propose restarting direct peace talks Thursday with Ukraine in the Turkish city that straddles Asia and Europe. Zelenskyy challenged the Kremlin leader to meet in Turkey in person.

But the Kremlin has said its delegation at the talks will be led by Putin's aide, Vladimir Medinsky, and include three other officials. Ukrainian presidential adviser Mykhailo Podolyak said Zelenskyy will only sit down with the Russian leader.

Later Thursday, Trump will visit a US installation in Qatar at the centre of American involvement in the Middle East. He has used his four-day visit to Gulf states to reject the "interventionism" of America's past in the region.

Trump will address troops at Qatar's al-Udeid Air Base, which was a major staging ground during the US wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and supported the recent US air campaign against Yemen's Iran-backed Houthis.

The president has held up Gulf nations like Saudi Arabia and



Qatar as models for economic development in a region plagued by conflict as he works to entice Iran to come to terms with his administration on a deal to curb its nuclear programme.

Before addressing the troops, Trump took part in a roundtable with business leaders. The group included top executives from Boeing, GE Aerospace and Al Rabban Capital.

After his address to US troops, he will travel to Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates for the final leg of his Mideast tour. He will visit the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque, the country's largest mosque. The UAE's founder, Sheikh Zayed, is buried in the mosque's main courtyard.

Trump will also be hosted for a state visit in the evening by UAE President Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan at the Qasr Al Watan palace.

Trump earlier this week met with Syrian President Ahmad Al-Sharaa and announced plans to ease sanctions on the war-torn country. The US has deployed more than 1,000 troops in Syria for years to suppress a return of the Islamic State group.

Trump heaped praise on al-Sharaa — who was tied to al-Qaida and joined insurgents battling US forces in Iraq before entering the Syrian civil war — after the two met in Saudi Arabia on Wednesday. The president called al-Sharaa a "young, attractive guy. Tough guy. Strong past. Very strong past. Fighter."

It was a stark contrast from earlier years, when Al-Sharaa was imprisoned by US troops in Iraq.

Until December, there was a USD 10 million US bounty for his arrest.

Trump, speaking in Saudi Arabia on his first day in the region, told Gulf leaders, "It's really incredible what you've done. In the end, the so-called nation builders wrecked far more nations than they built, and the 'interventionists' were intervening in complex societies that they did not even understand themselves."

The Qatari base houses some 8,000 US troops, down from about 10,000 at the height of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.

The gas-rich Gulf country has spent some USD 8 billion over two decades in developing the base, built on a flat stretch of desert about 30 kilometres southwest of Qatar's capital, Doha. The base was once considered so sensitive that American military officers would say only that it was somewhere "in southwest Asia."

Trump said he and the emir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, would also see a demonstration of American air capability, as the US leader looks to boost defence exports to the region.

"You're buying a lot of that equipment actually," Trump said Wednesday when he and Sheikh Tamim signed a series of bilateral and business agreements between the two countries. "And I think we're going to see some of it in action tomorrow at the — we won't call it an air fair, but its going to be sort of an air fair. We're going to be showing a display that's going to be incredible. They have the latest and the greatest of our planes and just about everything else." (AP)

Wisconsin judge accused of helping man evade immigration agents set to enter plea

MILWAUKEE, May 15: A Wisconsin judge accused of helping a man evade US immigration authorities was set to appear in federal court Thursday and enter a preliminary plea.

Milwaukee County Circuit Judge Hannah Dugan is charged with concealing an individual to prevent arrest and obstruction. Prosecutors say she escorted Eduardo Flores-Ruiz and his lawyer out of her courtroom through a back jury door on April 18 after learning that US Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents were in the courthouse seeking his arrest for being in the country illegally. She could face up to six years in prison if convicted on both counts. Dugan was scheduled to appear in federal court Thursday morning for an arraignment, an early step in the criminal justice process. Defendants routinely plead not guilty at this point to give their attorneys time to investigate and to preserve their right to a trial.

The FBI arrested Dugan on April 25 at the courthouse where she works and she was later released from custody. Her arrest escalated a clash between the Trump administration and Democrats over President Donald Trump's immigration crackdown. Her case is similar to one brought during the Trump's first term against a Massachusetts judge, who was accused of helping a man sneak out a courthouse back door to evade a waiting immigration enforcement agent.

Dugan's attorneys filed a motion Wednesday to dismiss the case, saying she was acting in her official capacity as a judge and therefore is immune to prosecution. They also maintain the federal government violated Wisconsin's state sovereignty by disrupting a state courtroom and prosecuting a state judge.

According to court documents, Flores-Ruiz illegally reentered the US after being deported in 2013. Online state court records show he was charged with three counts of misdemeanor domestic abuse in Milwaukee County in March. He was in Dugan's courtroom on April 18 for a hearing.

Court documents say Dugan was alerted to the agents' presence by her clerk, who was informed by an attorney that the agents appeared to be in the hallway. An affidavit says Dugan was visibly angry and called the situation "absurd" before leaving the bench and retreating to her chambers. (AP)

Trump's sanctions on ICC prosecutor halts tribunal's work

THE HAGUE (NETHERLANDS), May 15: The International Criminal Court's chief prosecutor has lost access to his email, and his bank accounts have been frozen.

The Hague-based court's American staffers have been told that if they travel to the US they risk arrest. Some non-governmental organisations have stopped working with the ICC and the leaders of one won't even reply to emails from court officials.

Those are just some of the hurdles facing court staff since US President Donald Trump in February slapped sanctions on its chief prosecutor, Karim Khan, according to interviews with current and former ICC officials, international lawyers and human rights advocates. The sanctions will "prevent victims from getting access to justice," said Liz Evenson, international justice director at Human Rights Watch.

Trump sanctioned the court after a panel of International Criminal Court (ICC) judges in November issued arrest warrants for Israeli

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his former defence minister, Yoav Gallant.

Judges found there was reason to believe that the pair may have committed war crimes by restricting humanitarian aid and intentionally targeting civilians in Israel's campaign against Hamas in Gaza — charges Israeli officials deny.

Staffers and allies of the ICC said the sanctions have made it increasingly difficult for the tribunal to conduct basic tasks, let alone seek justice for victims of war crimes or genocide.

A spokesperson for the ICC and for Khan declined to comment. In February, ICC President Judge Tomoko Akane said that the sanctions "constitute serious attacks against the Court's States Parties, the rule of law based international order and millions of victims."

Order targets chief prosecutor
The February order bans Khan and other non-Americans among the ICC's 900 staff members from entering the United States. It also threatens any person, institution or company with fines and prison

time if they provide Khan with "financial, material, or technological support." The sanctions are hampering work on a broad array of investigations, not just the one into Israel's leaders. The ICC, for example, had been investigating atrocities in Sudan and had issued arrest warrants for former Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir on charges that include genocide.

That probe has ground to a halt even as reports mount of new atrocities in Sudan, according to an attorney representing an ICC prosecutor who is fighting the sanctions in US courts. The prosecutor, Eric Iverson, filed a federal lawsuit against the Trump administration seeking protection from the sanctions. Her client "cannot do, what I would describe as, basic lawyer functions," said Allison Miller who is representing Iverson in the suit.

American staffers at the organisation, like Iverson, have been warned by its attorneys that they risk arrest if they return home to visit family, according to ICC officials. Six senior officials have left the court over concerns about



sanctions. One reason the court has been hamstrung is that it relies heavily on contractors and non-governmental organisations. Those businesses and groups have curtailed work on behalf of the court because they were concerned about being targeted by US authorities, according to current and former ICC staffers. Microsoft, for example, cancelled Khan's email address, forcing the prosecutor to move to Proton Mail, a Swiss

email provider, ICC staffers said. His bank accounts in his home country of the United Kingdom have been blocked.

Microsoft did not respond to a request for comment.

Staffers at a non-governmental organisation that plays an integral role in the court's efforts to gather evidence and find witnesses said the group has transferred money out of US bank accounts because they fear might be seized by the

Trump administration. Senior leadership at two other US-based human rights organisations told the AP that their groups have stopped working with the ICC. A senior staffer at one told the AP that employees have even stopped replying to emails from court officials out of fear of triggering a response from the Trump administration. The cumulative effect of such actions has led ICC staffers to openly wonder whether the organisation can survive the Trump administration, according to ICC officials who spoke on condition of anonymity out of fear of reprisal.

Trump alleged ICC's actions were baseless
Trump, a staunch supporter of Netanyahu, issued his sanctions order shortly after re-taking office, accusing the ICC of "illegitimate and baseless actions targeting America and our close ally Israel."

Washington says the court has no jurisdiction over Israel.

Trump's order said the ICC's "actions against Israel and the United States set a dangerous precedent, directly endangering

current and former United States personnel, including active service members of the Armed Forces."

He said the court's "malign conduct" threatens "the sovereignty of the United States and undermines the critical national security and foreign policy work of the United States Government."

The White House did not respond to a request for comment.

Netanyahu has dismissed the ICC's allegations as "absurd," and Israel's Knesset is considering legislation that would make providing evidence to the court a crime.

Coping with dark humour
Inside the court, staffers have been coping with dark humour, joking about how they cannot even loan Khan a pen or risk appearing on the US radar. This is not the first time the ICC has drawn Trump's ire. In 2020, the former Trump administration sanctioned Khan's predecessor, Fatou Bensouda, and one of her deputies over the court's investigation into alleged crimes committed in Afghanistan while the United States military was operating in the country. (AP)

Massive Tiranga Yatra held in Namsai to honour Indian armed forces for Operation Sindoor

HT Bureau

NAMSAI, May 15: In a powerful display of unity and patriotism, the people of Namsai district came together on May 14, 2025, to participate in a massive Tiranga Yatra held in honour of the Indian Armed Forces.

According to an official statement, the march was organised to express deep gratitude and admiration for the military's success under "Operation Sindoor", which reportedly caused significant damage to Pakistan's terror and defence establishments.

The yatra commenced from the 2nd Mile Junction and concluded at the District Secretariat in Namsai, drawing hundreds of participants from various walks of life.

Leading the event was the Deputy Chief Minister of Arunachal Pradesh, Chowna Mein.

His presence, along with other high-ranking officials, lent significant gravitas to the programme, which was marked by nationalistic fervour and public solidarity with the armed forces.

Also in attendance were the Deputy Commissioner of Namsai, the Superintendent of Police, Heads of Departments (HoDs), Gaon Burahs (village elders), Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI) members, and representatives from Community Based Organizations (CBOs).

Student and youth organisations, women's groups, local bazar committee members, and a large number of general citizens also joined the march in large numbers, making it one of the most broadly supported public mobilisations in the district in recent times.

Participants carried the national flag and raised spirited slogans in support of the nation and its armed forces. As they marched in unison from the starting point to the district headquarters, the atmosphere resonated with patriotic chants, symbolising Namsai's collective appreciation and respect for the bravery and sacrifices of Indian soldiers.

The official statement emphasised that the event was not merely ceremonial, but a significant gesture of national solidarity. It aimed to reaffirm the people's unshakable support for the country's security forces, particularly in light of the recent

military operation.

The march also served to instill a deeper sense of national pride among the younger generation and reinforced the importance of unity in the face of external threats.

Officials described the yatra as a clear message of moral and emotional backing from the citizens of Namsai to the armed forces, acknowledging their role in safeguarding the sovereignty and integrity of the nation.

The success of the event also reflected the coordination and enthusiasm of various civil society groups, government departments, and community leaders who came together to organise the tribute.

As the Tiranga Yatra concluded at the District Secretariat, the spirit of nationalism remained high among the participants, many of whom pledged continued support to national defence efforts.

The yatra, as noted in the official statement, marked a significant chapter in the district's civic engagement and highlighted the growing public consciousness around national security and patriotic responsibility.



Skill development training in IECT for unemployed youth inaugurated in Namsai



HT Bureau

NAMSAI, May 15: In a significant step towards enhancing the employability and digital competence of youth in Arunachal Pradesh, a Skill Development Training Programme in Information, Electronics and Communication Technology (IECT) was officially inaugurated today at the District Industries Centre, Department of Industries, Namsai.

The training programme is being implemented by the National Institute of Electronics and Information Technology (NIELIT), Itanagar, with support from the Directorate of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship, Government of Arunachal Pradesh.

According to an official statement, the inauguration ceremony was held at the premises of the District Industries Centre and was formally presided over by C R

Khampa, Deputy Commissioner of Namsai District.

Addressing the gathering, Khampa underlined the growing importance of skill-based education in today's competitive environment.

He encouraged the youth to take full advantage of the training programme and equip themselves with essential technical skills.

Emphasising the role of digital literacy and computer hardware expertise in the present job market, he motivated participants to aim not only for employment but also for entrepreneurship, aspiring to become job providers rather than job seekers.

The training initiative forms part of the state government's larger vision to foster technical capacity building among unemployed youth.

By addressing the existing skill

gap in the field of emerging technologies, the programme seeks to create a more competent, self-reliant, and industry-ready workforce within the region.

The event was also graced by the presence of R K Bigensana Singh, Director-in-Charge of NIELIT, Itanagar, and Nondo Doka, Assistant Director of the District Industries Centre, Department of Industries.

Both officials reiterated their commitment to supporting the youth of the district and expressed optimism that such initiatives would lay the foundation for long-term development.

As stated in the official communication, the training programme aims to train a total of 80 unemployed youth from Namsai District through three structured courses aligned with the National Skills Qualification Framework (NSQF).

These include the Computer Application Associate course (450 hours, NSQF Level 4), Assembly & Maintenance of Personal Computers (240 hours, NSQF Level 3), and the Course on Computer Concepts (CCC) (90 hours, NSQF Level 2).

The curriculum of each course is designed to impart both theoretical knowledge and hands-on practical skills, ensuring participants are adequately prepared for real-world industry demands.

The first batch, comprising 20 trainees, began their training today.

The remaining participants will be inducted in subsequent batches over the coming weeks.

The training modules will cover a wide range of technical competencies including basic computer operation, software application usage, hardware troubleshooting, and foundational IT concepts.

It is expected that the programme will not only enhance the technical skill set of the participants but will also open up new employment avenues in both public and private sectors.

Furthermore, by promoting digital literacy and vocational education, the initiative is likely to contribute to the broader socio-economic development of the region.

The event concluded with an interactive session between the participants and the dignitaries.

During the interaction, the trainees expressed their enthusiasm for the opportunity and their eagerness to develop skills that could shape a future in the digital economy.

The training initiative stands as a testament to the government's commitment to youth empowerment through targeted skill development efforts.

Awareness campaign on Arunachal Pradesh solid waste bye-laws 2023 begins in Namsai

HT Bureau

NAMSAI, May 15: A week-long awareness campaign on the implementation of the Arunachal Pradesh Solid Waste (Management & Handling) Bye-Laws 2023 was formally launched on May 15, 2025, at the Town Club in Namsai.

The campaign is being conducted to sensitise residents across several colonies regarding the new bye-laws and to promote responsible solid waste management practices at the community level.

The colonies covered on the first day of the campaign include ALC Line, Fire Brigade Colony, Admin Colony, Transport Colony, Teachers' Colony, Medical Colony, Block Colony, WRD Colony, PWD Colony and Buddha Mandir Backside.

According to an official statement, the inaugural event witnessed the participation of officials from the Urban Development Department, stakeholders from the listed colonies, and other concerned residents. The programme opened with a welcome address by Er Juntum Potom, Assistant Engineer (Urban Development), who formally greeted the attendees and explained the objectives of the campaign.

He stated that the initiative is aimed at creating awareness among the public regarding solid waste segregation, disposal mechanisms, and the collection of user fees for garbage management.

Following the introductory remarks, Er Mosum Sema, Executive Engineer (Urban Development)-cum-Member Secretary of the District Urban Development Agency (DUDA), Namsai, made a detailed PowerPoint presentation.

In his presentation, he discussed the significance of proper waste segregation and elaborated on the procedures related to user fee collection for garbage collection services.

He highlighted how the collected fees would support the effective functioning of the waste management system in the district.

Dr Keshab Sarmah, District Programme Officer (DPO), also addressed the gathering.

He spoke about the environmental and health implications of poor waste management and underscored the need for individual responsibility in keeping personal and community spaces clean.

He encouraged residents to ensure proper segregation of waste at the source and maintain cleanliness not only in their own homes but also in their surrounding areas.

Deputy Commissioner of Namsai and Chairman of DUDA, C R Khampa, delivered the keynote address.

In his remarks, he emphasised the importance of

maintaining cleanliness and the need for active participation from the public in implementing the solid waste bye-laws.

He spoke about the responsibility of the present generation in preserving a healthy and clean environment for future generations.

Stressing the need for tree plantation and mindful waste generation, he urged everyone to contribute individually to making Namsai a "CLEAN & GREEN" district.

He also provided clarity on the concept of user fee collection, explaining its necessity and how the funds will be utilised to improve waste management services in the area.

The programme was attended by stakeholders from the identified colonies as well as officers and staff of the Urban Development Department.



The active involvement of the local community and officials reflected a strong collective resolve to implement the bye-laws effectively.

As per the official schedule, the awareness programme will continue in different localities until May 21, 2025.

On May 16, 2025, the campaign will be conducted at APIL Ground and will cover the areas of Adi Line, Shanti Nagar, Milan Nagar, Jaipur Road, Dangoria Than Road, PHED Colony, Prem Nagar, Forest Colony, Boro Line, Simul Bari, APIL Colony, Forest Working Plan Colony and Kolbari Colonies.

On May 19, 2025, the session will be held at the Community Hall in Satsang Nagar, targeting the residents of Reliance Colony, Satsang Nagar-I, Satsang Nagar-II, Satsang Nagar-III and Ita Bhatta.

The final leg of the campaign will take place on May 21, 2025, at Gandhi Chowk, Namsai Tinali, for the areas of 2nd Mile, Bazaar Line (Old Market), Police Colony and Thana Road.

The campaign aims to instil a sense of responsibility and awareness among the people of Namsai to ensure the effective implementation of the Arunachal Pradesh Solid Waste Bye-Laws 2023.

CRPF joins hands with DDMA Namsai for disaster management programme

HT Bureau

NAMSAI, May 15: A comprehensive disaster management awareness and preparedness programme was held in Namsai, jointly organised by the District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) and the 186 Battalion of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), with active participation led by Commandant Dharmendra Kumar Singh.

The event, held at Jaipur Road, Namsai, was aimed at strengthening the disaster response capabilities of the district and equipping local stakeholders with essential knowledge and skills to manage emergency situations effectively.

According to an official statement, the programme brought together a wide spectrum of participants, including government officials, emergency responders, police personnel, community volunteers, and APEDA Matra volunteers.

The initiative was focused on raising awareness about disaster risks and training stakeholders in practical response measures, especially in the context of floods and other natural calamities.

During the session, Commandant Dharmendra Kumar Singh delivered an insightful presentation on the vital role played by security forces in disaster response operations.

Drawing from real-life case studies, he highlighted the significance of coordination between civil administration and armed forces in mitigating disaster impacts.

His address stressed the need for integrated efforts and quick response mechanisms to safeguard lives and property during emergencies.



The CRPF team conducted practical demonstrations on basic rescue techniques and first aid procedures.

These hands-on sessions were aimed at empowering participants with the ability to respond confidently and compe-

tently during crisis situations.

The demonstrations included instruction on the proper use of safety gear, life jackets, and rescue boats.

Emphasis was placed on the safe navigation of floodwaters, rescue protocols,

and the importance of ensuring the safety of both victims and rescuers during high-risk operations.

The programme also featured live training exercises that provided step-by-step guidance on the deployment and

handling of life-saving equipment.

Participants were given practical exposure to emergency tools and trained in the application of rescue strategies under simulated disaster conditions.

The exercises were designed to

bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-time response capabilities.

In a significant development for the district's disaster preparedness infrastructure, the District Disaster Management Office (DDMO) in Namsai has now been equipped with much-needed water rescue resources.

Until recently, the DDMO lacked its own rescue boats and had to depend on equipment transported from Dibrugarh, Assam during flood emergencies—a factor that often led to critical delays in response.

The situation has improved considerably this year, with the state government providing rescue boats to the DDMO.

Additionally, a local non-governmental organisation based in Namsai has extended its support by donating two more rescue boats.

This strategic addition to the district's emergency toolkit is expected to significantly enhance its ability to respond swiftly and effectively during flood situations, reducing dependence on external resources and ensuring timely interventions.

The disaster management awareness programme was widely appreciated by all participants.

It not only strengthened the district's preparedness framework but also fostered a sense of shared responsibility among the community and government agencies.

With improved coordination, better equipment, and informed stakeholders, Namsai District has taken a meaningful step forward in bolstering its disaster resilience.

Pakistan's nuclear weapons should be brought under IAEA watch: Rajnath

SRINAGAR, May 15: Pakistan's nuclear weapons should be brought under the supervision of the International Atomic Energy Agency as they are not safe in such a rogue nation, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said on Thursday.

The defence minister's comments came days after Prime Minister Narendra Modi said India would not tolerate "nuclear blackmail" by Pakistan and would punish cross-border terrorism strongly. Shortly after landing in Srinagar in his first trip to Jammu and Kashmir since Operation Sindoor, Singh said how strong India's resolve against terrorism can be gauged from the fact that it has not even paid heed to Pakistan's nuclear blackmail.

"The whole world has seen how irresponsibly Pakistan has given nuclear threats to India several times," he said interacting with troops.

"Today, from the land of Srinagar, I want to raise this question before the whole world: are nuclear weapons safe in the hands of such an irresponsible and rogue nation?" Singh asked.

"I believe that Pakistan's nuclear weapons should be taken under the supervision of IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency)," he added.

The defence minister described Operation Sindoor as the "biggest" action taken by India against terrorism in its history.

"For the last 35-40 years, India has been facing terrorism being carried out from across the border. Today India has made it clear to the whole world that we can go to any extent against terrorism," he said.

By carrying out the terrorist attack in Pahalgam, an attempt was made to hurt India's forehead and to break the country's social unity. "They attacked India's forehead, we have inflicted wounds on their chest," he said.

"The only way to cure Pakistan's wounds is to stop giving shelter to anti-India and terrorist organisations, and not allow its land to be used against India," he added. Recalling then Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's visit to Pakistan 21 years ago, Singh said Pakistan had declared that terrorism will no longer be exported from their soil.

"But Pakistan betrayed India and is still betraying it. Now it has to pay a heavy price for this. And if terrorism continues, this price will keep increasing," he said.

Singh said Prime Minister Modi has clearly redefined India's policy against terrorism, which says that



any terrorist attack on Indian soil will be considered "an act of war".

"The understanding that has been formed between the two countries is that no unwarranted action will be taken across the border," he said.

"If any action is taken, then the matter will go very far. Along with this, our prime minister has also made it clear that terrorism and talks will not go together and if there will be talks, it will be on terrorism and PoK (Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir)," he said.

Singh said the success of Operation Sindoor has made it clear to the terrorist organisations hiding in Pakistan and their masters that they should not consider themselves safe and secure anywhere.

minister said.

Hailing the defence forces, he said, "As Defence Minister, I have had the opportunity to know you all very closely. I know your courage and valour, and at the same time I know your anger towards incidents like Pahalgam. I know that after Pahalgam, there was anger inside you, there was anger inside the whole country. I know how it feels when the blood flowing in the arteries starts getting out of control." "And I am also happy that you gave the right direction to your anger and with great courage and wisdom, you avenged Pahalgam," he added.

India carried out precision strikes on terror infrastructure early on May 7 following which Pakistan attempted to attack Indian military bases on May 8, 9 and 10.

The Pakistani actions were strongly responded to by the Indian side. The Indian military targeted eight Pakistani air bases with missiles and other long-range weapons on May 10 in retaliation for Pakistan's attempts to strike 26 military facilities.

The hostilities ended with an understanding on stopping the military actions following talks between the Director Generals of Military Operations of both sides on the afternoon of May 10. (PTI)

Modi agreed to caste census out of fear: Rahul



DARBHANGA (BIHAR), May 15: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Thursday claimed that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had agreed to hold a caste census "out of fear" of the country's deprived population, to which the opposition was lending its voice.

The leader of the opposition made the remark at a charged-up interaction with students in Darbhanga district of Bihar, where he defied attempts of the local administration to thwart him from reaching the venue. "As you all are aware, my car was stopped at the gate (of Mithila University). But I did not relent. I got out and took a circuitous route to reach here on foot," said the Rae Bareilly MP, who launched 'Shiksha Nyay Samvad', a public interaction programme in Bihar where assembly polls are due later this year.

Gandhi was speaking at the varsity's Ambedkar Hostel, where permission for holding the event had been denied by the administration, evoking outrage from the Congress which rejected the suggestion that the programme be held at an alternative venue.

The former Congress president said, "Do you realise why the government in Bihar could not stop me? It was because I am propelled by the vast pool of energy that you embody. It is the same energy before which Narendra Modi had to bow."

"We told Modi you shall touch the Constitution with your head and he ended up doing so. We had also told him you will have to hold a caste census. On both occasions, Modi acceded to the demands out of fear of a backlash from you people," Gandhi claimed.

"But the fact remains that his government serves the interests of Ambani, Adani and their ilk. The system is working for the benefit of five per cent of the population. Dalits, OBCs and tribals have no say, be it in the government, the corporate world or even the media," he alleged.

He urged the youngsters to not get distracted and remain focused on three demands -- an effective caste census on the lines of the survey conducted in (Congress-ruled) Telangana, reservations in private colleges and universities and release of funds allocated to the sub-plan for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes.

"You can expect little from the NDA. But rest assured that your interests will be taken care of when we come to power, be it in Bihar or at the Centre," he added.

Donning his trademark white polo T-shirt and cargo pants, Gandhi spoke into a hand-held mic and the crowds erupted in chants of 'Jai Bhim' when, towards the end of his speech, he held aloft a portrait of Dr B R Ambedkar.

He also sought to strike a chord with the audience by making one of the attendees, who identified himself as a hosteller hailing from a poor family of daily wage earners, voice his sentiments.

The youngster urged the leader of the opposition to raise in Parliament the issue of discrimination against students from the backward classes and inadequate representation of the underdogs in the media.

"Thanks for sharing your views. Say my namaste to your parents and siblings when you go home," said Gandhi, as he bade goodbye to the student. (PTI)

Former defence secretary Ajay Kumar takes oath as UPSC chairman

NEW DELHI, May 15: Former Defence Secretary Ajay Kumar on Thursday took oath as the chairman of Union Public Service Commission (UPSC).

The oath of office and secrecy was administered by Lt Gen Raj Shukla (ret'd), the senior most member of the Commission, an official statement said. The post of UPSC chairman fell vacant after the completion of Preeti Sudan's tenure on April 29. The UPSC conducts civil services examinations to select officers for the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), Indian Foreign Service (IFS) and the Indian Police Service (IPS), among others. Besides the chairman, it can have a maximum of 10 members. At present, two posts of members are vacant in the commission. A UPSC chairman is appointed for a term of six years or until attaining 65 years of age. Kumar is 1985-batch former IAS officer of Kerala cadre. During his illustrious career of more than 35 years, he has served in key positions in Kerala as well as at the Centre, said the statement issued by the Commission.

Some of his important assignments in the state were Managing Director, Electronics and Information Technology Department; Principal Secretary, Information Technology Department, it said.

At the Centre, Kumar held the significant portfolios of Director, Science & Technology; Joint Secretary, Ministry of Communications and Information Technology; Director General, National Informatics Centre; Additional Secretary, Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology; Secretary, Defence Production, the statement said. (PTI)

Remarks targeting Col Qureshi: SC questions MP minister, will hear his plea today

NEW DELHI, May 15: Every word uttered by a minister has to be with a sense of responsibility at a time the country is undergoing "such a situation", the Supreme Court said on Thursday as it reprimanded Madhya Pradesh Minister Vijay Shah who is facing an FIR for his remarks targeting Col Sofiya Qureshi.

"What sort of statements are you making? You are a responsible minister of the government," Chief Justice B R Gavai told Shah's counsel.

The bench, also comprising Justice Augustine George Masih, said the apex court would on Friday hear Shah's plea challenging the Madhya Pradesh High Court's May 14 order directing an FIR against him for the comments.

"When this country is undergoing such a situation, every sentence or word uttered by a responsible minister has to be with a sense of responsibility," the CJ told Shah's counsel.

The bench went on, "Persons holding such a constitutional office are expected to exercise a

degree of restraint."

Senior advocate Vibha Datta Makhija, appearing for Shah, mentioned the matter for urgent listing and said the high court had taken suo motu cognizance and asked for registration of an FIR.

Later in the day, another lawyer mentioned before the bench a separate letter petition which has sought action against Shah for his remarks against Colonel Qureshi.

"We don't want these publicity litigations. Anybody reads newspaper and file such petitions," the bench said.

The bench said the Madhya Pradesh High Court already took cognizance of the matter.

Earlier in the day, Makhija said the petitioner, the state's tribal affairs minister, had expressed remorse. "It was a statement which was misunderstood as well. That I can justify to your lordships," she said.

She added, "He (Shah) never meant what is being made out by the media."

"Now the FIR is already registered," the bench said. Makhija said the petitioner was seeking a stay on the FIR as he was not heard by the high court.

"I (Shah) am just praying that till I am heard, no action be taken," she said.

The bench asked why the petitioner had not moved the high court seeking relief.

"Merely because somebody is a minister, should we entertain it," the bench asked, adding, "Go and apply before the high court."

When Makhija urged the apex court to see the high court's order, the bench said, "We will have it tomorrow."

In the meanwhile, the senior counsel said, no further action be taken against Shah. She said the matter was listed for hearing before the high court today.

"Nothing is likely to happen in 24 hours," the bench said, "and petitioner can inform the high court that the matter is listed for hearing in the apex court on Friday". (PTI)

AAP, BJP wrangle over Delhi's 'poor' air quality after dust storm

NEW DELHI, May 15: The drop in air quality due to a dust storm has sparked political sparring in Delhi with the opposition AAP claiming the situation was "never this bad" during its rule and the BJP terming the charge an attempt at scoring political brownie points.

An overnight duststorm led to Delhi's air quality slipping into the poor category with an AQI of 236 at 8 am on Thursday after staying steady at a moderate level for the past few weeks.

Former Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal wrote on X that the air pollution situation was "never this bad" during this time of the year under the Aam Aadmi Party's (AAP's) rule.

The ex-CM's views were echoed by his successor and senior AAP leader Atishi who claimed in the social media platform that Delhi's AQI has never been so high in May.

Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) data shows that from 2022-2024, AQI on May 15 never exceeded 243, she said. "Today, the AQI is 500."

Atishi wondered derisively whether Delhi Environment Minister Manjinder Singh Sirsa would take responsibility for the city's worsening air pollution.

Sirsa hit back, saying it was "unfortunate" that a

former chief minister was using a natural phenomenon to score political brownie points. The "real blame" lies on the AAP, which neglected pressing issues during its 10-year rule in Delhi, the BJP leader said.

"Today's spike in AQI was due to a weather event, not misgovernance."

But let's talk about real misgovernance Atishi ji... For 10 years, AAP allowed Delhi to drown in mountains of untreated legacy waste, broken and dust-choked roads with ZERO accountability on pollution!" the city environment minister said on X.

Senior AAP leader and former deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia claimed the AQI had reached 500 and he shared on X a mobile phone screenshot of the air quality figure.

"The four engines of the BJP government are emitting smoke in Delhi. The AQI in Delhi is currently 500 -- meaning poison! Sunlight is not visible, one cannot breathe, eyes burn, and throat is sore. No planning, no accountability, no emergency plan. Only speeches and slogans," he said.

An AQI between zero and 50 is considered 'good', 51 and 100 'satisfactory', 101 and 200 'moderate', 201 and 300 'poor', 301 and 400 'very poor', and 401 and 500 'severe'. (PTI)

Vijay Shah has mentality of 'BJP's troll army', must be sacked: MP Pradesh Cong

BHOPAL, May 15: Madhya Pradesh Congress chief Jitu Patwari on Thursday said Prime Minister Narendra Modi should ask state minister Vijay Shah to resign following Shah's objectionable remarks about Colonel Sofiya Qureshi.

Elsewhere, veteran Congress leader Digvijaya Singh said Shah had a mentality similar to that of the "BJP's troll army", and the PM should clarify whether he shared the minister's comments appropriate.

A First Information Report has been registered against Shah in Indore on the direction of the Madhya Pradesh High Court after his remark about Qureshi, who was a prominent face of the armed forces along with Wing Commander Vyomika Singh during media briefings on Operation Sindoor, led to a major controversy.

"During the India-Pakistan tensions, the prime minister gave two important messages to the country and the world. First, 140 crore Indians are united, and second, 140 crore Indians stand with the army. But the BJP ignored the way your minister Vijay Shah in MP crossed the limits of using abusive language and tried to spread hatred," Patwari told reporters.

While the HC took suo motu cognizance and directed police to register an FIR within four hours, it

took eight hours, he claimed.

"Now this foul-mouthed minister is hoping to get justice by filing an appeal in the Supreme Court, which means instead of sacking him, the BJP is conspiring to protect him," the Congress leader said.

PM Modi must ask the BJP minister to resign or have him dismissed from the Madhya Pradesh cabinet immediately to give a message to the whole world that solidarity and honor of the armed forces are supreme for the nation, he said.

"Instead of protecting him, the Bharatiya Janata Party should obtain his resignation. It will set an example for the politicians who keep speaking nonsense and go unpunished," Patwari said.

PM Modi, during his visit to the Adampur air base, asserted that the government and every single person in the country stood with the army, the Congress leader said, adding that yet, neither the PM nor chief minister Mohan Yadav took any action after Shah's statement triggered a row.

The country is seeing the difference between the prime minister's words and the BJP's actions, said Patwari, adding that until Shah was sacked, the Congress will keep fighting (over the issue) for the honour of the army. (PTI)

Online job scam busted in Delhi; kingpin among 13 held

NEW DELHI, May 15: The Delhi Police busted an illegal call centre operating an online job scam targeting job seekers by posing as recruiters and luring them into making payments, an official said on Thursday.

Police have arrested 14 people, including the kingpin, they said.

According to police, the accused lured the victims into making payments for various fictitious processes like training, documentation and kit delivery, he added.

"The action followed a complaint filed by a woman who had uploaded her resume on Shine.com and Naukri.com in January while seeking a job in the medical field. On January 27, she received a call from a woman identifying herself as Priya, who offered her a job and sought ₹500 as a refundable security deposit." Deputy Commissioner of Police (New Delhi) Devesh Kumar Mahla said.

The DCP said, after transferring the amount, Priya was contacted by a man named Atul, who conducted a telephonic interview and demanded ₹ 3,999 for training. Over the next few days, the com-



plaintant was made to pay an additional ₹ 7,500 for document verification, ₹7,250 for dispatching a work kit, and was eventually asked for ₹ 11,000 for salary account processing. "Her suspicions were aroused by the final demand, and she refused to pay further. Realising she had been cheated, she approached the cyber cell," the officer said.

A case was registered under relevant sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, and an investigation was launched. The trail led police to ATM CCTV footage in Noida, where a masked suspect was seen withdrawing cash from the victim's payment.

"Using technical surveillance, including call detail records and IP logs from Shine.com, police ze-

roed in on a recruiter who matched the suspect's profile. Further monitoring revealed he was operating from a building in Sector-3, Noida," police said in a statement.

On May 14, a raid was carried out at the site by the Delhi Police, with local police assistance, leading to the arrest of Fahiq Siddiqui along with six other men and six women, all found operating the illegal call centre. Police said Siddiqui confessed to the crime. Another accused, Mohit Kumar, was arrested near Laxmi Nagar Metro Station. He allegedly provided bank accounts and SIM cards used in the scam, police said. During the raid, police seized eight laptops, 47 mobile phones, 57 SIM cards, 15 debit cards, 20 Wi-Fi dongles and ₹ 1,31,500 in cash, he added.

The accused had allegedly purchased premium recruiter accounts on job portals and accessed profiles of job seekers to initiate contact. The scam's reach is believed to be pan-India, and details of the seized SIM cards and numbers are being sent to the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C) for further analysis, the DCP said. (PTI)

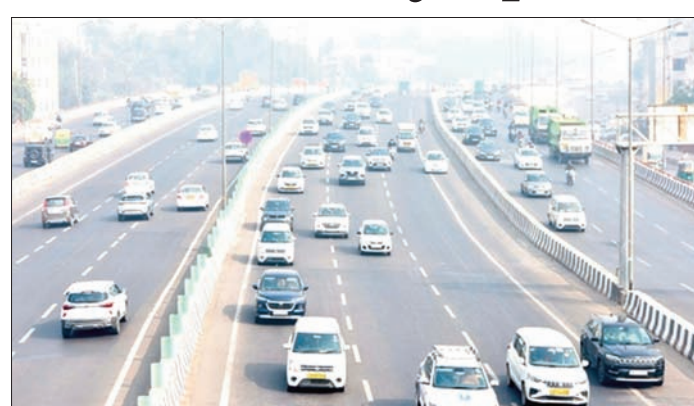
SC concerned over drafting of arbitration clauses, says process misused

NEW DELHI, May 15: The Supreme Court on Thursday expressed concern over drafting of arbitration clauses in commercial agreements and said the arbitration process was being misused to complicate and prolong matters.

A bench of Justices Surya Kant and N Kotiswar Singh raised "serious concerns" over the manner in which ambiguity was embedded into such agreements and instructed courts to show an "unwavering tendency" towards rejecting shoddily drafted clauses at the very threshold.

"The drafting of arbitration clauses in commercial agreements in India leaves much to be desired. Despite arbitration being introduced as a means of ensuring speedy and effective dispute resolution, it is evident and ironic that, in certain cases, the process has been misused to further complicate and prolong the resolution of disputes," it said.

"Whether this stems from administrative oversight or deficient legal advice is a matter best left for separate consideration," the bench



added. The top court said "willful and wanton" wastage of judicial time is highly deplorable and it is high time that arbitration clauses are worded with piercing precision and clarity, and that they are not couched in ambiguous phraseology. "This is a responsibility and onus that every legal counsel, advisor, and practitioner must shoulder most dutifully."

The bench then decided to "advise, if not caution and warn" the legal fraternity against engaging in such practices that result in a crim-

inal wastage of precious judicial time. "Indeed, their professional credentials will not earn any stripes if they indulge in such juggling of words," the bench said.

The observations came on petitions challenging the judgments delivered by the Delhi High Court pertaining to multiple Concession Agreements executed between the Municipal Corporation of Delhi and certain private contractors for the development of parking and commercial complexes.

The apex court said cases, which

prima facie disclose mala fides woven into the agreement they seek adjudication over, must be thrown out of the court.

"Equally, the courts or judicial fora of our country, as a matter of judicial best policy, must show an unwavering tendency towards rejecting shoddily drafted clauses at the very threshold. We would complementarily urge the courts to invoke their suo motu powers in appropriate cases wherein legal firms or counsel are found designing 'arbitration clauses' which deliberately mislead and misguide," it added.

The time, the bench went on, was not far when personal liability must be assigned for such unscrupulous acts, along with the sanctioning of the harshest punitive measures against the actors.

"We are confident that these steps are vital to infuse probity, transparency, and professionalism into Indian arbitration. Needless to say, to uphold the integrity of the arbitral process, the sanctity of such agreements must be preserved," the bench said. (PTI)

Scindia holds meeting with Tripura CM, reviews key development projects

'Unified vision for a vibrant, investment-ready Northeast'

HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, May 15: Union Minister of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER) Jyotiraditya Scindia on Thursday chaired a high-level meeting with Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha to discuss 'Investment Promotion' in the Northeast.

A key outcome of the meeting was the decision to conduct stakeholder consultations involving industry bodies, potential investors, and state officials across the region to formulate a strategic investment roadmap.

Taking to social media platform X, Minister Scindia said he participated in the task force meeting chaired by CM Saha, in the presence of Sikkim's Minister for Tourism & Civil Aviation Tshering T Bhutia, senior officials from the Meghalaya Government, and representatives from the Ministry of DoNER.



"Together, we are driving a unified vision for a vibrant, investment-ready Northeast," Scindia stated.

The Union Minister also held a follow-up review with the Tripura

Chief Minister, senior officials from the state, and MDoNER to assess the progress of key developmental projects.

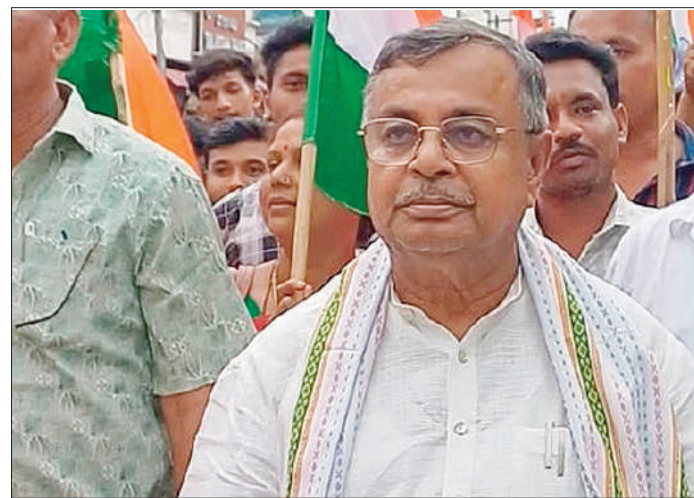
Highlighting Tripura's potential as a gateway for tourism, trade,

agriculture, and investment in the region, Scindia stressed the importance of strengthening core infrastructure to unlock opportunities for inclusive development and contribute to the vision of Viksit Bharat.

Later, CM Manik Saha noted that as the convener of the High-Level Task Force on Investment Promotion in the North Eastern Region—constituted by the North Eastern Council (NEC)—he chaired its second meeting virtually in the presence of Union Minister Scindia and senior government officials.

"It was decided to hold stakeholder consultations with industry associations, potential investors, and officials from all Northeastern states to develop a strategic roadmap for investment promotion. Reputed academic institutions and expert agencies will also be roped in to draft the Investment Policy for the region," Saha said.

Tripura Power minister cancels leave of all department employees during monsoon



AGARTALA, May 15: Tripura Power Minister Ratan Lal Nath has cancelled all leaves of department staff for two months to ensure uninterrupted power supply during monsoon, an official said here on Thursday.

The decision was taken during a high-level review meeting chaired by the Power minister with officials of Tripura State Electricity Corporation Ltd (TSECL) and other power utility companies held on Wednesday.

"Power minister declared that all leaves of departmental staff during the peak monsoon months—May and June—stand cancelled, except in case of serious medical emergencies," said the official.

"Ensuring uninterrupted electricity supply to citizens is our top priority. We must all work together to fulfil this responsibility," the minister said.

The minister also hinted at special post-monsoon benefits for staff members in recognition of their ef-

forts, an official said, quoting the minister.

The monsoon in the northeastern state often signals natural calamities, with relentless rains, fierce storms, and gusty winds wreaking havoc on power infrastructure, including transmission lines.

Power secretary Abhishek Singh, addressing the meeting gave a detailed analytical presentation on department-specific issues, potential risks and laid emphasis on solution-driven approach.

TSECL Managing Director Biswajit Basu said there is no shortage of manpower, vehicles, or essential equipment that would hinder service delivery to ensure uninterrupted power supply during monsoon. He said TSECL is fully prepared for the monsoon.

Tripura Power Transmission Ltd (TPTL) general manager Ranjan Debbarma said that maintenance of high-capacity power lines and substations is nearly complete. Extra precautions have been taken in sensitive areas that experienced mishaps last year.

"Some planned power outages may occur during maintenance, but they are in the greater interest of public safety," he added. (PTI)

Manipur Police denies existence of Kuki group that threatened Meiteis ahead of Shirui Festival

IMPHAL, May 15: Manipur Police have denied the existence of 'Kuki Zo Village Volunteers Eastern Zone' group which had issued a directive threatening members of the Meitei community against entering Kuki areas during the upcoming state-level tourism event of 'Shirui Lily Festival'.

In a statement, police said, "It has come to the notice of Manipur Police that a press statement dated 11th May 2025 issued by one unknown organisation Kuki Zo Village Volunteer-Eastern Zone (KZVV-EZ), is being circulated on social media and local vernaculars. The unknown organisation has warned members of the Meitei community against entering or crossing Kuki-inhabited areas for the upcoming Shirui Festival."

Following an enquiry by the district police, no such organisation has been found, it said, requesting the general public "not to believe such unfounded and baseless press note issued by the unknown organisation".

"Police will make adequate security arrangements to ensure and facilitate free movement of the public during the Shirui Festival," it said.

It also urged the public to cooperate with the police for ensuring security related to Shirui Festival.

The Shirui Festival is held in honour of the state flower Shirui Lily, which is found in the hills of Tangkhul Naga-dominated Ukhrul district. The festival is scheduled from May 20 to May 24.

Meanwhile, NSCN, in a statement, has called the directives of the Kuki group as "outrageous" and



"provocative".

"NSCN shall not tolerate if KZVV EZ makes any wild attempt to disturb the streaming tourists targeting any particular community travelling to Ukhrul/Shirui village. Let this message be loud and clear that the territorial jurisdiction of the so-called Kukiland doesn't cover even an inch of Naga territory in Ukhrul," it said.

On the other hand, Kuki group 'Village Volunteers Eastern Zone' has stated that it has "no affiliation" and "no connection" with the Kuki Zo Village Volunteers Eastern Zone.

More than 250 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in ethnic conflict between Imphal Valley-based Meiteis and adjoining hills-based Kuki-Zo groups since May 2023. (PTI)

Marathoner Shanti Ram Nepal returns to Sikkim

GANGTOK, May 15: Sikkim marathoner Shanti Ram Nepal returned to the state on Thursday, after covering 26 states in just 71 days on foot.

Nepal, who began the solo journey on March 5, was given a traditional welcome on his return at Rangpo, a town bordering West Bengal.

An official said the 34-year-old man, hailing from Samdong in Gangtok district, sought to promote Sikkim's 50 years of statehood in the country.

Sikkim joined the Indian Union on May 16, 1975, and Friday will mark the golden jubilee of the state.

The athlete covered 26 states on foot. He was unable to visit Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh due to "unforeseen circumstances", the official said.

"Shantiram Nepal's homecoming marks not just the end of a physical journey, but a symbolic tribute to national integration and resilience," the official said.

Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang flagged off Nepal's journey on March 5.

He will be felicitated at Paljor Stadium in the state capital Gangtok during the Statehood Day celebration on Friday. (PTI)

10 militants gunned down in Manipur's Chandel



IMPHAL, May 15: Operations were underway on Thursday morning after Assam Rifles gunned down 10 militants in an encounter in Manipur's Chandel district, officials said.

The site of the encounter is close to the India-Myanmar international border in the

hilly terrain of Chandel district, an official said, adding it is 130 km from the state capital Imphal and has scant human habitation.

Kohima-based Defence PRO told PTI, "The operation is still underway on Thursday morning and more information will be shared only when

it is over."

When asked about the identity of the militants involved, a central security official said, "The troops are still conducting operations and the identity is yet to be confirmed."

The Army's Eastern Command said in a post on X on Wednesday, "Acting on specific intelligence on movement of armed cadres near the New Samtal village, Khengjoy tehsil, Chandel district, close to the Indo-Myanmar border, Assam Rifles unit under Spear Corps launched an operation on May 14."

"During the operation, the troops were fired upon by suspected cadres to which they quickly reacted, redeployed and retaliated in a calibrated and measured manner. In the ensuing firefight, 10 cadres were neutralised and a sizeable quantity of arms and ammunition were recovered," it added. (PTI)

Seven militants arrested in Manipur

IMPHAL, May 15: Security forces arrested seven militants belonging to various proscribed outfits from different districts of Manipur, police said on Thursday. The arrests were made in Thoubal, Kakching, Bishnupur and Churachandpur districts.

Two active cadres of People's Liberation Army (PLA), identified as RK Mubisana Meitei (47) and Moirangthem Naresh Singh (28), were arrested from Leirongthel Prita area in Thoubal district on Wednesday. They were involved in extortion activities, a police officer said.

Two 9mm and .32mm pistols with magazines and seven cartridges were seized from their possession, he said.

Security forces arrested an active member of United National Liberation Front (Koireng) from his residence in Kangmong Meisnam Maning Leikai in Bishnupur district on Wednesday. He was identified as Moirangthem Chinglen Singh (44).

Another active cadre of UNLF (Koireng) was arrested from Lamdong area in Kakching district on Tuesday. He was identified as Asem Nanao Singh (31) and was involved in extortion activities in Kakching district, the police officer said.

A militant belonging to the UNLF (Pambei) outfit was also arrested from Minuthong in Imphal East district. The insurgent, identified as Waikhom Rajesh Singh (32), was involved in extortion activities and collected money from cargo agencies in Imphal Valley.

A self-styled 'Sergeant Major' of the banned CKLA/UPLF group was arrested from Saikot village in Churachandpur district on Tuesday, the police officer said. A 9mm pistol along with three cartridges were seized from the possession of the militant, identified as David Ngamjang (25), he said.

Another militant belonging to the KCP (Taibanganba) outfit, who was involved in extortion activities, was arrested from Waikhong in Kakching district on Tuesday. (PTI)

Nagaland entrepreneurs promote state coffee at Istanbul Expo

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, May 15: A nine-member team, including five coffee entrepreneurs, from Nagaland participated in three-day Coffex Istanbul Expo 2025 in Istanbul, Turkey, to promote coffees of the state.

An official statement on Thursday said the team was led by adviser to land resources department G Ikuto Zhimomi. The five coffee entrepreneurs' farms that participated in the expo were Nagaland Coffee, EtéCoffee, Juro Coffee, YES Coffee and Coffee Lady.

During the three-day event held from May 9 to May 11, the team engaged in cupping sessions, workshops, and interactions with international stakeholders in the coffee value chain, gaining firsthand exposure to diverse coffee processing and flavours, understanding market dynamics, including consumer preferences and pricing strategies, cutting-edge technologies and sustainable innovations.

The expo opened opportunities for col-

laboration with international buyers and roasters, especially from Turkey.

The participation in COFFEX ISTANBUL 2025 was a milestone for Nagaland's coffee sector, reinforcing the state's potential in global markets, setting the stage for future growth and recognition of Nagaland's coffee worldwide.

The Consulate General of India in Istanbul, Mijito Vinito Chishi, was instrumental in facilitating the participation by liaising with the Coffee Board of India and the Government of Turkey, which resulted in productive involvement of the Nagaland delegation.

COFFEX ISTANBUL serves as the premier international trade fair and promotion platform for coffee and related industries in the Middle East, uniting coffee enthusiasts and professionals.

The visit aimed to enhance knowledge in coffee cultivation, processing, and marketing, and to explore global trends and market linkages.

NH-10 to remain closed for maintenance work

GANGTOK, May 15: National Highway 10, which connects Sikkim and West Bengal's Kalimpong with Siliguri, will remain closed on May 15, 17 and 19 for maintenance work, an official notification issued by the NHIDCL said. The National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited (NHIDCL) notification stated that the highway will remain closed from 9 am to 6 pm on the three dates. The temporary closure may affect travel plans of tourists heading to or from Sikkim via the Siliguri-Gangtok route. Travelers were advised to plan their journeys accordingly and seek alternate routes wherever possible. (PTI)

Two college students killed in road mishap

DIMAPUR, May 15: Two college students lost their lives and two others were seriously injured when their vehicle veered off a road and plunged into a gorge near New Chimuokmedima village bypass in Nagaland's Chimuokmedima district on Thursday morning, police said. The two deceased were identified as AN Shoho and Zayesito Zeliang. The injured students — Peter and C. Phom — are currently receiving treatment at the Christian Institute of Health Sciences and Research (Referral Hospital) in Dimapur. All four, in their early twenties, resided in a private hostel in Dimapur while pursuing college studies. Police have launched an investigation to find out the reason for the accident. (PTI)

Sikkim CM to lead Tiranga Yatra

GANGTOK, May 15: The ruling Sikkim Krantikari Morcha (SKM) will be organising a 'Tiranga Yatra' here on May 16 to celebrate the success of Operation Sindoor and to honour the unwavering courage and sacrifice of the Indian Armed Forces, a party leader said on Thursday. "Sikkim Chief Minister and SKM chief Prem Singh Tamang will lead the Tiranga Yatra," he said. The Tiranga Yatra will begin at MG Marg here and culminate at Paljor Stadium. The SKM party has urged the people of the state to participate in the rally. (PTI)

NFR registers consistent growth in freight unloading for April 2025

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 15: The North-east Frontier Railway (NFR) has demonstrated sustained operational growth with consistent freight unloading figures, as reflected in the latest statistics for April 2025. According to an official statement issued by the NFR, the zone unloaded a total of 1,245 freight-carrying rakes during the month, continuing its positive trajectory in logistics and freight handling.

This development builds upon the railway zone's performance in the previous fiscal year (2024-25), during which NFR successfully unloaded a total of 13,091 freight rakes across its jurisdiction.

The consistent figures underscore the zone's growing operational efficiency and its critical role in maintaining supply chains across the northeastern states and adjoining regions.

The official statement further detailed the distribution of unloading activity across states in April 2025. Assam, being a key state under NFR's network, witnessed the unloading of 674 freight rakes, of which 315 rakes were loaded with essential commodities, underlining



the priority accorded to basic goods and public necessities.

Other states also recorded notable figures: Tripura saw the unloading of 117 freight rakes, Nagaland 16, Mizoram 6, and Meghalaya 2.

Additionally, Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur recorded the unloading of 8 rakes each.

Beyond the core northeastern states, the railway zone also facilitated the unloading of 231 freight

rakes in West Bengal and 183 in Bihar during the same period, all within the operational jurisdiction of NFR.

The range of commodities transported during the month included essential and industrial goods such as FCI rice, sugar, salt, edible oil, food grains, fertilizers, cement, coal, vegetables, automobiles, tankers, and other items.

These goods were unloaded at

HIRING OF VEHICLE IN TINSUKIA DIVISION

Tender Notice No.: M-TSK-2025-27
 Dated: 09-05-2025. E-Tender are invited by the undersigned for the following work:
 Tender No.: M-TSK-2025-27. Name of Work: Hiring of one (non AC) light motor vehicle similar to Tata Sumo/ Mahindra Scorpio/Bolero/ TUV 300/Kylo or similar make along with driver for official use of CDO/Dibrugarh for a period of 2 years. Tender Value: ₹11,62,084.38/-
 Earnest Money: ₹23,300/- Last date & time for submission of tender at 12:00 hrs. and opening at 15:00 hrs. on 02-06-2025. For complete information with the tender document of above e-tender will be available in website www.ireps.gov.in
 Sr. DME, Tinsukia
 NORTH EAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
 Serving Customers With A Smile

ELECTRICAL WORKS AT MALIGAON

E-Tender No.: DYCEE-PS-MLG-HQ-42-25-26 Dated: 12-05-2025. E-Tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following works: Name of work: At Nambani: A) Electrical work in connection with Renovation of Community Hall at Goshala Colony, including the development of Maligaon Field Goshala. B) At Nambani: Electrical work against renovation of Senior Institute at Goshala Colony. Tender Value: ₹71,14,192/-
 Earnest Money: ₹1,42,300/- Date & time of closing of tender: 15:00 hrs. of 04-06-2025. The complete information with the tender documents of above e-tender will be available in website www.ireps.gov.in
 Dy.CEE/PS/Maligaon/HQ
 NORTH EAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
 Serving Customers With A Smile

ELECTRICAL WORKS

Tender Notice No.: Dy.CEE/PS/MLG/HQ/43/25-26, Dated: 12-05-2025. E-Tender are invited by the undersigned for the following work. Tender No.: DYCEE-PS-MLG-HQ-43-25-26; Name of Work: Electrical work in connection with Air-Conditioning of Sr. Institute at Goshala Colony. Advertised Value: ₹5,93,146/-
 Earnest Money: ₹1,09,900/- Date and time of closing of tender at 15:00 on 03-06-2025. For complete information with the tender document of above e-tender will be available in the website www.ireps.gov.in
 Dy.CEE/PS/Maligaon/HQ
 NORTH EAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
 Serving Customers With A Smile

No. TECH/U&BDTD/BLDG/IFB/2025-26/173
PRESS NOTICE INVITING TENDER

The Executive Engineer, PWD (B&NH), Udalguri district and Baksa district Territorial Building Division, Udalguri on behalf of Governor of Assam invites bids from approved and eligible Contractors registered with Public Works Department (Buildings), Assam/Contractors registered with Bodoland Territorial Council in the category of Class-I (A, B&C), Class-II & Class-III for 03(Three) nos. of works for bids amounting to Rs.38,09,631.00 (approx) (Rupees Thirty Eight Lakhs Nine Thousand Six Hundred Thirty one) only.

Details may be seen at in the office of the undersigned during office hours.
 Sd/- Executive Engineer, PWD, (B&NH),
 Udalguri district and Baksa district Territorial
 Building Division, Udalguri

IPR(BTC)/C/2025-26/334



Scarlett Johansson criticises Academy for overlooking 'Avengers: Endgame' in best picture category

LOS ANGELES, May 15:

It's been six years since "Avengers: Endgame" hit theatres, yet Hollywood star Scarlett Johansson still can't get over one question: "How did this film not receive an Oscar nomination?" The actor, who played Natasha Romanoff/superhero Black Widow in the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) in seven films between 2012 and 2021, is still miffed about "Endgame" not securing a best picture nod.

The film, directed by the Russo Brothers, however, received a sole nomination for visual effects.

"How did this film not get

nominated for an Oscar? Johansson told Vanity Fair magazine, referencing the best picture category.

"It was an impossible movie that should not have worked, that really works as a film — and also, it's one of the most successful films of all time," she added.

In its 17-year history, the MCU only has four Oscar wins to its credit: three for 2018's "Black Panther" (costume design, original score, and production design) and one for its 2022 sequel, "Black Panther: Wakanda Forever" (costume design).

In fact, "Black Panther", starring the late Chadwick

Boseman in the title role and directed by Ryan Coogler, remains the only MCU movie to be nominated in the best picture category. In the interview, Johansson also reiterated that she has no intent of reprising her role as Black Widow in a future Marvel movie. "It would be very hard for me to understand in what capacity (returning) would make sense for me, for the character that I play. I miss my buddies and really would love to be with them forever, but what works about the character is that her story is complete. I don't want to mess with that," she said. (PTI)

BHARAT PAVILION INAUGURATED AT CANNES FILM FESTIVAL

MUMBAI, May 15: The Bharat Pavilion has been inaugurated at the 78th Cannes Film Festival.

The inauguration ceremony was attended by IFFI and NFDC festival director Shekhar Kapur, veteran actor Anupam Kher, and Anne-Louise Mésadieu, Paris Region elected official, Ambassador, and Special Delegate for Diplomatic Relations.

In his inaugural address, Kapur highlighted the transformational power of cinema and India's evolving role as a creative powerhouse on the world stage.

"The art of storytelling is not the art of storytelling, it is the art of teaching others how to listen to your stories. And that's why film festivals are important because we all come over here from all over the world, and we tell each other our stories. That's why we have to go on having film festivals..."

"Our cultures will survive if we share our culture, our stories will survive if we share our stories... We, as people, as humanity, will survive if we tell our stories because underneath every story, there is a mythology that's common to all of us," Kapur said at the inauguration on Wednesday. Kher, who is presenting his film "Tanvi The Great" in Cannes Market, reflected on the journey of Indian cinema and his personal experiences of representing India globally.

"I am eight years younger than my country and we both grew up together. We have really, really done well. This is my first time in Cannes, I'm so happy to be here at the 'Maha Kumbh of cinema'," the 70-year-old actor said.

The IFFI 2025 poster and trailer were also launched at the event.

"IFFI's new poster is a reflection of 'convergence of creativity and technology', India is ready to embrace technology and play a dominant role in the Global content creation space", Gautam Bhanot, GM, Film Promotion (Festivals, Market and International Participation), NFDC India said. One of the key highlights was the launch of the India Film Guide, a comprehensive resource that showcases India's vast filmmaking talent, incentives for international co-productions, and filming locations.

Mésadieu expressed admiration for India's rich cinematic history and its ability to tell stories that transcend borders. She emphasised the importance of such cultural bridges in fostering global understanding and diplomacy.

The Bharat Pavilion is organised by NFDC and FICCI under the aegis of Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, Government of India, at Cannes.

During the festival, Neeraj Ghaywan's "Homebound", starring Ishaan Khatter, Janhvi Kapoor, and Vishal Jethwa, will be screened in the Un Certain Regard segment.

A restored version of legendary filmmaker Satyajit Ray's 1970 classic "Aranyer Din Ratri" is part of the Cannes Classics segment.

Filmmaker Payal Kapadia, who created history by becoming the first from India to win the Grand Prix at Cannes in May last year, is part of the jury panel, led by French star Juliette Binoche, for the 2025 edition of the Cannes Film Festival. (PTI)

'SHOGUN' STAR COSMO JARVIS TO HEADLINE 'YOUNG STALIN' BIOPIC

LOS ANGELES, May 15: Actor Cosmo Jarvis, best known for playing John Blackthorne in the multiple Emmy winning series "Shogun", will play Soviet leader Joseph Stalin in "Young Stalin".

According to Variety, the film will

be directed by Georgian-French filmmaker Gela Babluani.

Billed as a period thriller, "Young Stalin" is being financed by Len Blavatnik's Access Entertainment, which backed Oscar-winning Holocaust film "The Zone of Interest" and

last year's "Conclave".

The movie is based on the acclaimed bestseller "Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar" by Simon Sebag Montefiore.

"Young Stalin" will chronicle the early days of the Soviet leader when he was a bank-robbing gangster in pre-revolutionary Russia.

"Set against the backdrop of Imperial Russia's criminal underworld and revolutionary ferment, the film explores the making of the bloody dictator who would reshape the 20th century through terror, war and ideology — and the largest bank heist in Russian history," according to the logline.

Babluani and Sebag Montefiore have co-written the screenplay for the film that is also being backed by AI Film and Monte Rosso Prods.

Principal photography is set to begin in Tbilisi, Georgia in July.

Jarvis will next be seen in Guy Ritchie's film "Wife & Dog". (PTI)



People lonelier today due to use of technology: music composer Ankur Tewari

MUMBAI, May 15: Technology has played a dual role, enriching creativity while also isolating artists, believes music composer Ankur Tewari, who wants to revive collaboration between musicians through his latest album "City Sessions".

In collaboration with Island City Studios and Tiger Baby Records, "City Sessions" is a singer-songwriter initiative that brings artists together in an immersive studio setting.

The album, which marks the beginning of an intellectual property that reimagines the way music is created, performed and experienced, was released on audio platforms on May 9.

"In today's time, because of so much technology, there are good and bad parts of technology. With technology, people are getting lonelier and working in silos because you can do everything on your own. You see a lot more musicians making music on their computers, in their homes."

"Earlier, there was no home studio. So, people would come out, step out, meet each other, and collaborate face-to-face. Nowadays, even in your workspace, you must be seeing people meeting on Zoom. Human interaction is missing, which is what I felt we needed to bring back," Tewari told an agency interview here.

Humans will always have an upper hand when it comes to technological advancement, he added.

"If you're good, then you'll probably have to outdo AI, and you'll have to get better at your craft. So, you can't be complacent. There's something that you have that AI doesn't have, which is feelings. So, you'll always have the edge. But you'll lose the edge the day you stop feeling."

The whole idea was to move away from this, and (with "City Sessions") we went into how songs were recorded in films before the '70s and '80s. "City Sessions", divided into two parts: Side A and Side B, comprises six original tracks by independent artists Neel Adhikari, Pushan Kripalani aka Slight Diversion and Arijit Datta of the band Airport.

Tewari, who has composed for films such as "Gully Boy", "The Archies", and "Kho Gaye Hum Kahan", said he aims to cultivate a rich community of singers, songwriters, and filmmakers that thrives on collaboration and shared experiences.

"In the world of AI, algorithms, and numbers, we need to probably go back and bring that feeling of community together. So, like in 'City Sessions', everyone is sitting together in a studio, feeding off each other, and is contributing to the song in their beautiful manner. "So, it's like making or giving birth to something together, rather than you making something, sending it to someone, and then that person reacting to it, and working in silos," the composer-

lyricist said.

"City Sessions" has songs in both Hindi and English, and Tewari said he is committed to representation and inclusivity.

He wants to expand this library to include songs in regional languages such as Bangla, Kashmiri, Nepalese, and Manipuri, added the musician.

On the film front, Tewari is thrilled to begin work on Farhan Akhtar's "Don 3", which features Ranveer Singh in the lead. He has also composed music for Vishal Bhardwaj's "Arjun Ustara", starring Shahid Kapoor.

"He (Farhan) is on the fast track. They've killed it with the script. Hopefully, we will be meeting soon to start the work. The original 'Don' music is fantastic. It's iconic. I don't see it as a task, but in a way, it will be a task. But it's about the way you respond to the script in terms of music," he said.

Asked whether it is justified to ban the work of an artist, for instance "Abir Gulal", the composer said: "When it has to release (it will). The art also finds its destination... Anything that's been created with love should be released, should be consumed by people, because it can make a difference in their lives." The release of "Abir Gulal", a Hindi film featuring Pakistani star Fawad Khan in the lead, is in limbo in the wake of the Pahalgam terror attack. Also starring Vaani Kapoor, the movie was set to be released on May 9. (PTI)



Bologna end 51-year wait for a major trophy, beat AC Milan to win Italian Cup

ROME, May 15: Bologna ended a 51-year wait for a major trophy when it beat AC Milan 1-0 to win the Italian Cup.

Dan Ndoye returned from injury to score the only goal and help Bologna to its first Italian Cup since 1974. The club, which is owned by Canadian Joey Saputo, has only won two second-division titles in between.

It was also coach Vincenzo Italiano's first win in a final, having lost back-to-back Europa Conference League title matches while in charge of Fiorentina and finishing runner-up in the 2023 Italian Cup.

"They were three hefty disappointments," Italiano told broadcaster Mediaset. "I didn't think I could immediately come back and get my own back. But we succeeded and I'm happy."

"I add an important trophy to my mantlepiece and I truly dedicate it to the guys, who were extraordinary."

Italiano had been flung in the air by his players in celebration immediately after the final whistle. Many of them were in tears of joy, much like some of the thousands of Bologna fans in the stands. And the 47-year-old coach was eager to get back to the festivities. "Now let me go and celebrate, because this is something really incredible," Italiano said with a smile at the end of his television interview.

It is Italiano's first season at Bologna after replacing Thiago Motta, who left to Juventus after steering the team to its first-ever Champions League qualification. Motta was fired by Juventus earlier this season.

The result secured Bologna a



spot in next season's Europa League and left Milan with the very real likelihood of missing out on European competition.

It could spell the end of Sérgio Conceição's short stint in charge of the Rossoneri, with Milan eighth in Serie A after a disappointing season.

Both teams came to Rome looking to end an Italian Cup drought, as Milan last lifted the trophy 22 years ago — losing two finals in the intervening years. The match was played at a high tempo from the start and both goalkeepers were called into making impressive saves in the

opening 10 minutes.

Tension threatened to boil over toward the end of the first half and Bologna captain Lewis Ferguson was left bloodied with what looked like a broken nose after a sliding tackle on Rafael Leão, who caught him on the face with his leg as he was up-

ending.

Bologna broke the deadlock eight minutes into the second half. Riccardo Orsolini was tackled by Theo Hernández in the area but the ball fell to Ndoye, who carved out some space before curling into the right side of the net. (AP)

Chopra begins DL campaign in Doha with aim to regain javelin title, Jena also in fray

DOHA, May 15: Celebrated Indian javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra will begin his Diamond League campaign here on Friday against a familiar but formidable field of rivals, eyeing a perfect start to the season in which he would be defending his world championship crown later this year.

At a venue where he will have sizeable crowd support thanks to expatriate Indians, Chopra will face two-time world champion and 2024 Olympics bronze-winner Anderson Peters of Grenada, Jakub Vadlejch of Czechia, who won here in 2024, the German duo of Julian Weber and Max Dehning, Kenya's Julius Yego and Roderick Genki Dean of Japan.

Almost all of them have been there Chopra's rivals at major competitions for a while now. A notable absentee is 2024 Paris Olympics gold-winner Arshad Nadeem of Pakistan.

Chopra's compatriot Kishore Jena, who won a javelin silver medal at the Asian Games but is struggling of late, will also be one of the 11 competitors.

Jena (Personal Best: 87.54m) competed here in 2024 as well, finishing ninth with a throw of 76.31m. Vadlejch won here with a best throw of 88.38m while Chopra was 2cm behind with 88.36m. Peters was third with 86.62m. Chopra, who won gold at the Tokyo Olympics and then

a silver at the 2024 Paris Games, first competed in the Doha DL in 2018 when he finished fourth with a best throw of 87.43m.

After winning gold in the Tokyo Olympics in 2021, he took the title here in 2023 (88.67m) and finished second in 2024 (88.36m). He will be looking to regain the Doha DL title.

"I'm always overwhelmed by the support I get from the Indian people in Qatar - there aren't enough words to thank them," said the 27-year-old who is now coached by world record-holder and multiple-time Olympic champion Jan Zelezny of Czechia.

Chopra, who has a personal best of 89.94m, is looking to hit the 90m mark, something that Zelezny did for fun in his prime, with the best being a jaw-dropping 98.48m.

"I know the fans expect big things from me when I compete here - and with good conditions and a great atmosphere that's definitely possible - but I pride myself on my consistency, which I believe is one of my greatest strengths. For me, that's more important than just chasing a number." National record-holders Gulveer Singh and Parul Chaudhary are also competing in the men's 5000m and women's 3000m steeplechase events respectively, making this the country's maximum representation ever in a DL event. (PTI)

Last-day drama for Dutch soccer league with PSV Eindhoven somehow ahead of Ajax

AMSTERDAM, May 15: (AP) How exactly PSV Eindhoven leads the Eredivisie ahead of the last round on Sunday has left players and fans in disbelief.

Wild celebrations in PSV's stadium followed a 4-1 win over Heracles, helped by two first-half goals from United States midfielder Malik Tillman. All PSV supporters who stayed in their seats late Wednesday watched their cellphones for updates on fast-faltering leader Ajax's game at Groningen. Then it came. Ajax gave up a goal in the ninth minute of stoppage time to draw 2-2 and extend its winless streak to four games that erased a nine-point lead in the Dutch standings.

Tillman and his teammates, including U.S. defender Sergiño Dest, cavorted around the field to share a euphoric moment for the defending Dutch champion.

Just like that, PSV's one-point deficit to Ajax in the live standings became a one-point lead with one more game on Sunday.

The magic number is "90+9" in the final week. Last Sunday, PSV's title chance hung by a thread when it trailed by two goals after 10

minutes at third-placed Feyenoord. The score was tied before Noa Lang's goal in the ninth minute of stoppage time sealed a 3-2 win.

Ajax then slumped to a 3-0 loss at home to mid-table NEC Nijmegen, setting up more late drama Wednesday.

PSV, coached by former Ajax boss Peter Bosz, tops the standings for the first time since February in a title race that looked over three weeks ago.

A run of six straight wins for PSV put pressure on the storied Amsterdam club now looking at a historic season-ending collapse in 35-year-old coach Francesco Farfoll's first season.

Farfoll seemed to have ensured a renaissance season for Ajax after a chaotic 2023-24 that ended with no trophies and 35 points behind champion PSV.

On Sunday, PSV plays at Sparta Rotterdam, kicking off at the same time (2:30 p.m. local, 1230 GMT) as Ajax hosts Twente. If there is a consolation for Ajax, both former European champions will finish in the top two places and go direct to the lucrative Champions League next season. (AP)

PARIS, May 15: With Paris Saint-Germain already crowned champions and Marseille and Monaco assured of Champions League spots next season, attention turns to the race to avoid relegation on the final matchday in France's Ligue 1.

At the bottom of the standings, last-place Montpellier has been demoted. It remains to be seen which other club will be relegated to the second tier next season, with Saint-Etienne and Le Havre fighting for their survival.

A former French league powerhouse, Saint-Etienne dominated French soccer during the 1960s and '70s. Having just returned to the top-flight, the 10-time French champions have struggled throughout the season despite brilliant individual efforts from Zuriko Davitashvili and Lucas Stassin.

Ahead of its final match against Toulouse at home on Saturday, Saint-Etienne is second-to-last in the standings, but just one point behind 16th-place Le Havre, which is in the relegation playoffs spot. Saint-Etienne needs to win, hoping that Le Havre either loses or draws at Strasbourg.



"Our presence in the playoffs? It doesn't just depend on us, we know that. We can win this last match and still be relegated," Saint-Etienne coach Erik Horne said. "We're going to have to create an incredible atmosphere and take the fans with us."

Two other teams, Reims and Nantes, have yet to secure their place in the elite heading into the final matchday. Both teams are two points ahead of Le Havre. Nantes hosts Montpellier, and Reims travels to Lille.

PSG striker Ousmane Dembélé is in a good position to succeed his former teammate Kylian Mbappé as the league's top scorer.

Dembélé, who was named the league's best player of the season, has been prolific since PSG coach Luis Enrique repositioned him in a false nine role — a center-forward who, instead of leading their team's offensive line, drops into deeper positions. Among the favorites for the Ballon d'Or, Dembélé has scored 21 league goals, two more than Marseille's Mason

Greenwood. Behind them, Rennes forward Arnaud Kalimuendo has found the net 17 times.

PSG, which won a record-extending 13th Ligue 1 title with six games to spare, plays its final match at home against Auxerre. Second-place Marseille hosts Rennes. Monaco, which is one point behind Marseille, travels to Lens.

PSG is hoping for its first-ever treble. In addition to the Champions League final against Inter Milan on May 31, Enrique's team will have another shot at more silverware against Reims the week before in the French Cup final.

The final spot in the Champions League is the last big prize up for grabs on Saturday.

Nice, Lille, Strasbourg and Lyon all lost on the penultimate matchday and can no longer secure a top-three finish. With 57 points each, the three teams are battling for the fourth place, which gives a ticket for the third preliminary round of Europe's elite tournament. With 54 points, seventh-place Lyon can still aim for the fourth spot but will need to beat Angers and hope that the trio of teams all lose. (AP)

Ligue 1: Saint-Etienne face must-win match to avoid relegation

No. 1 player gives tennis fan Pope Leo XIV racket on Italian Open off day

VATICAN CITY, May 15: Pope Leo XIV has made peace with Yannik Sinner.

The top-ranked tennis player visited the new pope, gave him a tennis racket and offered to play, during an off day for Sinner at the Italian Open.

Leo, the first American pope, is an avid tennis player and fan and had said earlier this week that he would be up for a charity match when it was suggested by a journalist.

But at the time, Leo joked "we can't invite Sinner," an apparent reference to the English meaning of Sinner's last name.

By Wednesday, all seemed forgotten.

"It's an honor," Sinner said in Italian as he and his parents arrived in a reception room of the Vatican's auditorium. Holding one of his rackets and giving Leo another and a ball, the three-time Grand Slam champion suggested a quick volley. But the pope looked around at the antiques and said, "Better not."

Leo, a 69-year-old from Chicago, then appeared to joke about his white cassock and its appropriateness for Wimbledon, perhaps a reference to the All England Club's all-white clothing rule. He asked how the Italian Open was going. "Now I'm in the game," Sinner said. "At the beginning of the tournament, it was a bit difficult."

Sinner has a quarterfinal match on Thursday in his first tournament back after a three-month ban for doping that was judged to be an accidental contamination.

He will next face freshly crowned Madrid champion Casper Ruud. Sinner is attempting to become the first Italian man to win the Rome title since Adriano Panatta in 1976.

During the audience, Angelo Binaghi, the head of the Italian Tennis and Padel Federation, gave Leo an honorary federation card.

"We all felt the passion that Leo XIV has for our sport and this filled us with pride," Binaghi said in a statement. "We hope to embrace the Holy Father again soon, maybe on a tennis court."

The pope and Sinner posed for photos in front of the Davis Cup trophy that Sinner helped Italy win for the second consecutive time last year. Also on display in the room was the Billie Jean King Cup trophy won by Italy in 2024, the biggest women's team event in tennis. (AP)

He can't go to the field and not give 100 percent: Hussain explores factors behind Kohli retirement

LONDON, May 15: Virat Kohli's monumental contribution to Test cricket goes beyond numbers and his unrelenting spirit to not settle for anything "normal" may have prompted his decision to retire, said former England captain Nasser Hussain.

Kohli retired from the five-day game on Monday ahead of the five-match series in England beginning on June 20. The 36-year-old was not the only biggest promoter of Test cricket but also ended as India's most successful Test captain.

"He is the ultimate winner, he sees the end goal as a win, and he is desperate for that," Hussain said on Sky Sports Cricket podcast. "Everything for Kohli is about winning. Why do you think he's so good in run chases? He can't go on the field and not be a hundred per cent, he can't ever go: 'I'll just do my best today.'"

"That may have formed part of his retirement decision, he doesn't want to be a normal cricketer, just doing a little bit

here and there. He made India into the force they are today."

Kohli amassed 9230 runs in 123 Tests to end as India's fourth highest leading scorer. However his performance dipped in the last five years, reducing his average to 46.9 from the high 50s witnessed at the peak of his career.

"I have been a massive Virat Kohli fan over the last 14 years - his stats speak for themselves - but he was so much more than that. It was his aura, swagger, and passion. We know Indian cricket fans, and the game means so much to them," said Hussain. "They want their captain to show them what it means to the team, and no one embodied that passion for cricket in India more than Kohli. He was an unbelievable player."

"He took India to No 1 in the world, and they stayed there for about 42 months. He completely changed the way they play cricket. Whoever takes on that mantle has got something to live up to," added Hussain.

On the same podcast, another

former England captain Michael Atherton said Kohli's retirement has left a huge void to fill in the Indian team.

Shubman Gill is being tipped to take over captaincy from Rohit Sharma, who retired last week. With R Ashwin retiring midway in the series Australia, the Indian team finds itself in the middle of a huge transition phase. "We're not sure who is going to take his place at No 4 yet, and you kind of pity the person who has to follow because you've just had about 15 years of Kohli and before that, it was Sachin Tendulkar," said Atherton.

"You couldn't take your eyes off Kohli, that's what I always felt like watching him."

"It was noticeable to me that in his retirement statement, he referenced the challenges that Test cricket had given him. I loved watching him play every day of his 123 Tests. He put his heart and soul into Test cricket, and that energy and passion never seemed to dim," he added. (PTI)



Javelin is a very small community and everyone is competing for their country and everyone wants to give their best

Gujarat Titans set to miss Buttler in play-offs, Moeen Ali not to return for KKR

NEW DELHI, May 15: England T20 stalwart Jos Buttler will leave for national duty after completing Gujarat Titans' last three league engagements as the IPL play-offs are clashing with his country's white ball series against the West Indies starting May 29.

Titans are poised to finish among the top two teams post league stages with 16 points from 11 games with three remaining games against Delhi Capitals (away, May 18), Lucknow Super Giants (May 22) and Chennai Super Kings (May 25).

As per ESPNcricinfo report, Sri Lankan left-hander Kusal Mendis will replace Buttler during the play-off stages.

Among the other notable English players, Moeen Ali from Kolkata Knight Riders is also not coming back along with Jofra Archer (Rajasthan Royals), Sam Curran and Jamie Overton (both CSK).

However, Liam Livingstone is rejoining RCB for the remainder of the tournament along with Aussie Tim David. Moeen Ali is apparently nursing an "unspecified injury".

As reported by the PTI on Wednesday, Bangladesh left-arm seamer Mustafizur Rahman's participation in the IPL remains doubtful even though Delhi Capitals signed him as Jake Fraser McGurk's replacement.

The left-arm pacer is yet to get a No Objection Certificate from Bangladesh Cricket Board and is currently in UAE to play five T20Is against UAE and Pakistan between May 17 to 30.

The commitment to international cricket is sacrosanct and it will be interesting if BCB sanctions Mustafizur's absence from international cricket.

There is still some time and DC are hopeful that with help of the BCCI, a certain agreement could be reached.

Meanwhile, South African seamer Marco Jansen will be rejoining Punjab



Kings squad but will only play the remaining league matches before joining the national squad for the World Test Championship final preparation against Australia.

All Proteas players have been asked

by the CSA to report back by May 26, a day after the original date of the final. The IPL final has been shifted to June 3 after a week-long suspension due to a military showdown between India and Pakistan. (PTI)

We were never really close friends: Neeraj Chopra on Arshad Nadeem

DOHA, May 15: Seeking to set the record straight, star javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra on Thursday clarified that he and Arshad Nadeem were never really close friends and said "things won't be the same" after the recent India-Pakistan conflict.

In the aftermath of last month's Pahalgam terror attack, the decorated athlete and his family were bombarded with abuse on social media for inviting Pakistan's Nadeem to the now-postponed NC Classic in Bengaluru.

On the eve of the Diamond League here, the two-time Olympic medallist and reigning world champion put things in perspective when asked about his off-field equation with Nadeem, who won the gold medal in the Paris Games last year after the Indian finished at the top of the podium in the Tokyo edition in 2021.

"First I would like to clarify that I don't have very strong relationship with Nadeem, we were never really close friends or something. But, because of this (tensions on the Indo-Pak border), it will not be like before. But if someone talks to me respectfully I reciprocate the respect," Chopra told reporters during a press conference.

"Yes, as an athlete we have to talk, I have some good friends from the athlete community from all round the world, not only in javelin throw, but also other events. If somebody talks to me respectfully, I will also talk to him with full respect."

"Javelin is a very small community and everyone is competing for their country and everyone wants to give their best."

The Paris Games silver-winning star from Haryana had earlier said he was deeply hurt to see his and his family's integrity being questioned in abusive social media posts after an invitation was extended to Nadeem to compete in the tournament held in his honour.

Chopra had then clarified that invites for NC Classic were sent out a day before the Pahalgam terror attack in which 26 people, mostly tourists, were killed



by terrorists with links to Pakistan..

Chopra, who roped in the legendary Jan Zelezny as his coach after a highly successful partnership with Klaus Bartonietz, said he has settled nicely with the three-time Olympic gold medallist Czech legend after facing some challenges in the beginning.

"Initially it was a bit different to work with Jan (current coach). He has a different style than Klaus and it was challenging in the beginning, but now it's going very well."

"Because Jan is a legend, his presence has also helped me not only in training but also with other things, like how to be stronger mentally, .. how to compete in tournaments with a strong mindset.."

"I feel very good because I work with Jan Zelezny, everyone knows about Jan Zelezny. The tournament in South Africa was like a training competition, it has gone well for me, and I am now am ready for tomorrow," Chopra said..

The 27-year-old said both Zelezny and Klaus' coaching philosophy is different and he had to make some adjustments..

"I trained differently with Klaus, like we would do throwing tomorrow and lifting today, but with Jan... in morning we would do throwing and afternoon lifting. So, it was a new experience for me.."

"In the beginning it was hard but, after few weeks, I really started to like it and everything is going well after some great sessions. We changed few little things in technique, and I also had some problem in my groin in the past. But this time, I never missed any session, so I feel very good."

Chopra said he prefers to train abroad as it helps him to stay focussed..

"Normally, I train outside India, in South Africa, or, sometime in between the season, in Europe, so that I can focus more on my training competition."

"When I go back to India I have to do a lot of other things. In the beginning it was hard but competing with so many great athletes has helped with my confidence. I spend most of my time training abroad so it also helps me to remain focussed."

Chopra also said that he would have loved to continue his association with Klaus, the biomechanics expert from Germany, but the German wanted to spend more time with his family..

"It was great working with Klaus .. I worked with him for almost 4-5 years and I won Olympics and World Championships medals with him. He was really good... I told him that I wanted to continue working with you but, you know, he was 76, and he wanted to spend more time with his family." (PTI)

No need to panic after Ro-Ko retirement, says Manjrekar



NEW DELHI, May 15: Former cricketer Sanjay Manjrekar feels there is no need to panic following the twin retirements of Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma, drawing parallels with how Indian cricket bounced back after the legendary "Fab Four" stepped away from the longest format.

Within the span of a week, two modern-day stalwarts-- Kohli and Rohit have bid adieu to Test cricket, prompting concerns about India's red-ball future.

Manjrekar drew comparison to the time when Indian cricket saw the exits of the "Fab Four" comprising Sachin Tendulkar, Rahul Dravid, VVS Laxman, and Sourav Ganguly.

"I know there'll be a few fans concerned. There was a sense of panic when the fab four quit all at the same time, but guess what? A couple of years later, India was the number one Test team in the world," Manjrekar said in an Instagram video he posted.

India had risen to the top of the ICC Test rankings soon after that transitional phase.

"So, as long as I believe in this very strongly, as long as the sport is popular in India and there are enough young players, youth, desperate to play for India, and there are thousands in India, which means anybody who sort of comes through that kind of a grind has to be quality talent," said Manjrekar.

The 59-year-old also highlighted how the phase following the Fab Four's retirement coincided with the emergence of a more potent bowling attack.

"It will take a bit of time, but let's not panic. Remember what happened after Fab Four, the Indian bowling quality improved."

"The same could happen here as well. You'll discover new stars and new bowlers, and India will continue to be one of the top teams in the world."

With veteran off spinner R Ashwin retiring from the format last year, India will be without its three most experienced players for the marquee-five match Test series in England, starting next month.

Manjrekar though did flag India's overseas batting fragility.

"You need some time. Because in overseas conditions, batting is very important and that is where our current fragility lies. (PTI)

BCCI, NCA left red-faced as Mayank's back injury resurfaces

NEW DELHI, May 15: The BCCI Centre of Excellence (erstwhile NCA) was left severely embarrassed after India's fastest bowler Mayank Yadav suffered yet another breakdown as a back injury ruled him out of the remainder of the IPL.

"Yadav sustained a back injury and is ruled out for the remainder of the season," the IPL media release stated. New Zealand's William O'Rourke will replace him in Lucknow Super Giants for the rest of the tournament. Mayank, who made a comeback after six months of intense rehabilitation under the Sports Science and Medical team at the COE, played two matches and gave away 100 runs in eight overs taking just two wickets. His speed had dropped by at least 15 kmph and from a side-on bowler, he had become a chest-on operator after re-modelling his action.

For the record, Mayank has played nine T20 games between March 30, 2024 and May 4, 2025, which is precisely 13 months and four days. In these nine games, he played four T20s for Lucknow last year when he burst into the scene hitting speed guns at mid 150 clicks consistently. (PTI)

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