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Assam aiming to be economic frontier of Viksit Bharat: Himanta

'Let us match the PM's commitment with institutional responsiveness'



HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, May 24: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday said Assam government is working to transform the state into economic frontier of Viksit Bharat.

He was speaking at the 10th Governing Council meeting of the NITI Aayog on 'Viksit Rajya for

Viksit Bharat @ 2047' in New Delhi.

He said that at present under the visionary leadership of the Prime Minister, Assam and other North Eastern states are no longer considered the prisoners of history.

"Assam is reclaiming its rightful role as a gateway to Southeast Asia reviving inland waterways, restor-

ing connectivity and building infrastructure that will reposition Assam as a dynamic economic frontier of Viksit Bharat," the chief minister added.

The chief minister also said that the Assam government with an active support of the Central government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi has taken compre-

hensive steps to transform the vision of Viksit Assam.

"The pursuit of a Viksit Assam has long been a cherished aspiration of our people. The Prime Minister's vision of a Viksit Bharat presents us with an opportunity to transform that aspiration into reality and reclaim and rejuvenate the rich legacy of a prosperous

Assam", he said.

Speaking further, Sarma further opined that guided by the vision of the Prime Minister, Government of Assam has embarked on a transformative journey, nurturing the ambitious goal of making India the second largest economy.

"From exports and innovation to digital infrastructure, from railways to rocket launches, India is scripting a new chapter of progress," the chief minister said.

Later, he called for collective efforts incorporating the strength, innovation and inclusive progress of each state to fulfil the vision of Viksit Bharat.

Giving the state of development of Assam before independence, Sarma said that before independence, Assam was a land of prosperity, with a per capita income higher than the national average. The state's premium tea exports had already gained global recognition. Assam (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Himanta meets top industry leaders, seeks fulfilment of investment commitments



NEW DELHI, May 24: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma met top industrialists here and sought fulfilment of their commitments made at an investment summit held in Guwahati in February.

The chief minister met Vedanta Group Chairman Anil Agarwal here on Friday evening and asked him to operationalise the group's investment commitment made during the

Advantage Assam 2.0 investment summit, an official release said.

Agarwal said the group is wholly committed to Assam's growth journey and is keen to expand its footprint in the state's hydrocarbon sector.

Later, Sarma took to 'X' and wrote, "Today in New Delhi, I met the very enterprising Chairman of Vedanta Group Shri (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Banned ULFA(I) leader Rupam Asom held from Assam-Arunachal border area

DIBRUGARH/ TINSUKIA, May 24: The 'operational commander' of proscribed outfit ULFA (I), Rupam Asom, was arrested from a forest area near the Assam-Arunachal Pradesh border on Saturday, a top police officer said.

Operations are underway in the area in search of more cadres of the militant group, he said.

Rupam, who was allegedly running the outfit's extortion racket in parts of Assam, was named in the NIA charge sheet in the killing of Bordumsa Police Station officer-in-charge Bhaskar Kalita in 2018.

Tinsukia Superintendent of Police (SP) Abhijit Gaurav said Rupam's movements were being tracked by security forces for the last four-five months.

"Based on specific intelligence about his presence in Margherita area of Tinsukia district with associates, a joint operation was launched, leading to his arrest. One firearm and incriminating documents were recovered from his possession," the SP said.

He said that Rupam, the 'operational commander' of the banned outfit, was wanted in multiple cases, including the killing of Kalita, extortion, bomb blasts, kidnapping and attacks on security forces.

"The operation is still going on in the area. This is a blow to ULFA (I) activities in the region," Gaurav added. A joint team of Assam Police, Assam Rifles and military intelligence had carried out the operation around 4 am, another police official said. (PTI)

Five tribes announce agitation demanding review of reservation policy

DIMAPUR (NAGALAND) May 24: The Five Tribes Committee on Review of Reservation Policy in Nagaland on Saturday announced its decision to stage peaceful protests in phases, citing the state government's "failure" to respond to their appeal for a review of job reservation policy for backward tribes.

The move, however, has drawn strong opposition from student bodies representing the government-designated Backward Tribes (BTs), who argue that any dilution of the current policy would harm marginalised communities. The five tribes committee consists of representatives from Angami Public Organisation, Ao Senden, Lotha

Hoho, Rengma Hoho and Sumi Hoho.

They had submitted a memorandum earlier to the state government on September 20, 2024, requesting a review of the reservation policy but there was "no" response from the government.

Consequently, the committee issued an ultimatum to the government on April 26 which is set to expire on May 26.

The committee during a consultative meeting with the five apex tribal bodies and frontal organisations held on Saturday at Chumoukedima decided to stage peaceful protest over the silence of the government on the matter.

The committee secretary GK Zhimomi said

that the core demand of the committee is to either scrap the reservation policy altogether or allocate the remaining unreserved quota to five tribes.

The committee is not against any tribe benefiting from reservation and insisted that a review is long overdue as the policy has continued for 48 years, he said. The government "failed" to review the policy in 1987 and in 1989 an order was issued stating that the reservation would continue until further notice, and the order has been in effect ever since, Zhimomi said.

Meanwhile, the Chakhesang Students' Union, Zeliang Students' Union, and Pochury Students' Union — representing (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

GCC nations showed marked shift in support for India's counter-terrorism efforts: India to UAE

'In 2008, after the Mumbai terror attack, the situation was quite different'

DUBAI, May 24: There has been a marked shift in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries' stance on terrorism since the 2008 Mumbai attacks due to the widespread realisation that it is a common enemy of all and there is a need for collaborative efforts to combat the menace, the Indian envoy in the UAE has said.

Sunjay Sudhir, India's Ambassador to the UAE, also hailed the visit of the all-party delegation led by Shrikant Shinde to the country to highlight India's stance on the issue. He termed the visit as very successful.

"The narrative, our thoughts, our perspectives, were well received,

very well reciprocated. And again, it was a clear reciprocation, a clear reiteration of the fact that in the UAE, we have a true strategic partner, a friend, whom we can rely on," the ambassador told PTI.

Ambassador Sudhir also highlighted a shift in the response by the GCC nations - Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates - after the Pahalgam terror attack in comparison to the response they had shown after the Mumbai attack.

"In 2008, after the Mumbai terror attack, the situation was quite different. The response of GCC countries was quite different. This time, it was very different. Our



leadership was very actively engaged with the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Qatar. It's the same GCC, but some things have changed because of widespread realisation that terrorism is something which is a common enemy for humanity, for mankind, and we need to work (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Time to stand united against terror, political brickbats can wait: Supriya Sule

NEW DELHI, May 24: NCP-SP leader Supriya Sule on Saturday said she will convey to world leaders India's firm resolve to fight against terrorism and its supporters and there was no room for politics on the issue of Operation Sindoor as she leads a multi-party delegation to four countries, starting with Qatar.

Sule, the working president of the NCP-SP, is leading a delegation comprising BJP leaders Rajiv Pratap Rudy, Anurag Thakur and V Muraliedharan, Congress leaders Manish Tewari and Anand Sharma, TDP leader Lavu Sri Krishna Devarayalu, AAP leader Vikramjeet Singh Sawhney, and former diplomat Syed Akbaruddin to Qatar, South Africa, Ethiopia and Egypt.

"This is not about politics, this is about India. The attack on innocent tourists at Pahalgam was an attack on the soul of India. Our response to it was measured, to send a clear message of zero tolerance to terror," Sule told reporters here.

On attempts to politicise the issue by the Congress, Sule said NCP-SP chief Sharad Pawar had made it clear on behalf of the party that this was not a time to indulge in politics or resort to criticism.

"We all have some tough questions for the government, but this is the time to stand united with the government. This is the time to show that India is united and has zero tolerance for terrorism. This is not a time to indulge in political brickbats. This will be our policy

whosoever is in power - Nation first, State next, then party, followed by family," Sule said.

The delegation will first travel to Qatar, which is considered to wield influence in the West Asian region and has a role as a mediator in regional conflicts.

The Sule-led group will travel to South Africa, which holds the current G-20 Presidency and then head to Ethiopia, which is also the home to the African Union. The delegation will visit Egypt, an influential country in the Arab world.

Sule said the Ministry of External Affairs had chalked out a detailed programme for the 10-day visit during which the delegation will meet a cross-section of the leadership (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Nine Bangladeshis arrested in Assam

MORIGAOON, May 24: Nine Bangladeshis staying illegally in India were arrested in Assam's Morigaon district on Saturday, police said.

All of them had been declared as foreign nationals by the Foreigners Tribunal but had been evading arrest, they said. "The Morigaon Border Police Branch conducted a secret operation and apprehended them from different locations in the district," they added.

Two each were apprehended from areas under Morigaon, Mikirbhet and Dharamtul police stations, and one each from Jagiroad, Mayong and Lahorigat police station (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Two jail personnel arrested

GUWAHATI, May 24: Two employees of Assam's Sribhumi district jail were arrested on Saturday for allegedly molesting a woman inside the prison, a police officer said. The two accused were caught by their colleagues while attempting to molest the woman.

The jail superintendent, with the help of other staff, held the two accused and informed local police, the officer said.

"The incident was reported around 1.30 am. Local police rushed to the spot. The two were apprehended (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

'Each state received investment proposals of ₹20,000 crore' MoUs worth ₹4.18 lakh cr announced during Rising North East Investors Summit: Scindia

GWALIOR, May 24: Union Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia has said MoUs worth ₹4.18 lakh crore have been announced with regards to the 'Rising North East Investors Summit 2025' underway in Delhi.

The summit was inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at Bharat Mandapam in the national capital on Friday. It aims to highlight the region as a land of opportunity, attracting global and domestic investment, and bringing together key stakeholders, investors and policymakers on a single platform.

"For the first time, a joint programme for all eight states of the north east is underway. Roadshows were held for it in cities like Bengaluru, Mumbai, Ahmedabad,



Chennai, Delhi, Kolkata, and Indore. Meetings were held with various industrial groups. As a re-

sult of this effort, a world-class investment summit was organized. Memorandums of Understanding

worth ₹4.18 lakh crore have been announced," Scindia told reporters on Friday.

"Each state received investment proposals of ₹20,000 crore. Along with industrial group leaders, new entrepreneurs from the eight states and ambassadors from 50 countries participated in the summit. We are committed to ensure these investments take off," said Scindia, the Union Minister for Development of North Eastern Region.

The main focus sectors of investment promotion include tourism and hospitality, agro-food processing, textiles, handlooms and handicrafts, healthcare, education and skill development as well as information technology. (PTI)

'Ayogya body': Cong slams NITI Aayog meeting as exercise in 'hypocrisy', 'diversion'



NEW DELHI, May 24: Calling the NITI Aayog an 'Ayogya body', the Congress on Saturday hit out at the Centre and said the NITI Aayog meeting was yet another exercise in 'hypocrisy and diversion'.

Congress general secretary in-charge communications, Jaishankar, said the governing council of the NITI Aayog will meet under the chairmanship of Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday to reportedly review the progress on the so-called 'Viksit Bharat' goal. "What sort of Viksit Bharat will it be if those in power themselves destroy the bonds of social harmony by their

malicious words and deeds," Ramesh asked in a post on X. The Congress leader continued, "What sort of Viksit Bharat will it be if those in power subvert Parliament, judiciary, universities, media, and Constitutional and statutory authorities to fulfill their nefarious goals?"

"What sort of Viksit Bharat will it be if the values that India always stood for are systematically assaulted in full glare of the world?"

"What sort of Viksit Bharat will it be with sharpening economic disparities and inequalities even as wealth continues to accumulate in the hands of a few?"

Ramesh also asked what sort of Viksit Bharat will it be if India's glorious diversities are "deliberately sought to be insulted and erased".

"What sort of Viksit Bharat is it where not only is freedom of speech under threat but freedom after speech is also endangered," he asked.

"Today's meeting of the NITI Aayog - an 'Ayogya' body if ever there was one - is yet another exercise in hypocrisy and diversion," Ramesh alleged.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will on Saturday chair the 10th governing council meeting of the NITI Aayog, which will focus on states, with a view to make India a developed nation by 2047, an official statement said. The theme of the meeting is (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Andhra CM proposes 3 sub-groups of states to fast-track Viksit Bharat vision by 2047

NEW DELHI, May 24: Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Saturday proposed the formation of three sub-groups of state governments to accelerate progress towards the Viksit Bharat vision by 2047, asserting that his state is committed to contributing significantly to this national aspiration.

Speaking at the 10th Niti Aayog Governing Council Meeting, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Naidu praised India's remarkable economic transformation over the past decade, rising from the world's 10th to 4th largest economy and being on track to become the third.

The Telugu Desam Party chief acknowledged transformative reforms, including Digital India, GST, Startup India, PM Gati Shakti, and Jal Jeevan Mission, which he said, have redefined India's development landscape.

Emphasising India's strengthened global stature, exemplified by Operation Sindoor, Naidu noted that having the right leadership at the right time has been crucial in steering the nation toward its ambitious goals, an official statement said. Naidu proposed three focused sub-groups of states, in collaboration with the Union government and Niti Aayog, to fast-track progress towards Viksit Bharat.

The first sub-group on GDP growth would aim to boost invest-



ments, manufacturing, exports, and job creation, supported by central viability gap funding for PPP projects. The second sub-group on population management would help India leverage its demographic advantage while preparing for future challenges like ageing and low fertility.

The third sub-group would focus on technology-driven governance, utilising AI, quantum computing, drones, and digital platforms for real-time and citizen-centric administration.

Naidu also highlighted that Andhra Pradesh's Swarna Andhra @2047 vision stands as "a bold, inclusive roadmap integrating technology, welfare, and grassroots empowerment".

"The state is committed to contributing significantly to the na-

tional aspiration of Viksit Bharat @2047 (and) a USD 30 trillion economy marked by high-quality infrastructure, equitable development, and empowered citizens."

According to the state government, the chief minister's presentation was well-received, with the Prime Minister lauding "Andhra Pradesh's growth blueprint".

Modi said that "all states should examine and study the reforms of Andhra Pradesh" and that there could be a "lot of inputs in the blueprint for growth projected by CM Naidu for other states also", according to the statement.

Under its Swarna Andhra @2047 vision, the state aims to achieve Zero Poverty by 2029 through the innovative P4 model, which unites government, private sector, and citizen efforts to sup-

port vulnerable families and promote economic upliftment.

The Family Benefit Management System digitally tracks welfare benefits at the household level, ensuring transparency and inclusion. The state's "One Family, One Entrepreneur" initiative fosters entrepreneurship and skill development to boost grassroots employment.

Driving technology-led growth, Andhra Pradesh has established specialised hubs, including Quantum Valley in Amaravati, Drone City in Orvakal, and biomedical manufacturing in Visakhapatnam. AI-powered governance and the Ratan Tata Innovation Hub support startups and job creation.

Aligned with the Prime Minister's Mission Circular Economy, the state is advancing sustainable waste management and balanced regional growth through model economic zones.

"Rooted in family-centric governance, innovation, digital infrastructure, and sustainability, the Swarna Andhra @2047 vision offers a scalable, inclusive model for national development," Naidu added. As India approaches its centenary of its Independence, the chief minister reaffirmed Andhra Pradesh's commitment to lead by example, showcasing how states can drive national transformation through strong, coordinated leadership at state and Union levels. (PTI)

Stainless steel players to take up import issue at global summit in Mumbai next month

NEW DELHI, May 24: Thousands of stainless steel players from across the globe will come together to discuss various opportunities and challenges including issues related to imports at the Global Stainless-Steel Expo 2025 (GSSE 2025) beginning June 4.

India's stainless steel imports rose by about 3 per cent year-on-year to 1.73 million tonnes in FY25, with China, Indonesia, Vietnam and South Korea being the major contributors to the shipments, according to research firm BigMint.

Imports of steel products at cheaper rates adversely affect domestic manufacturers. Over 10,000 industry professionals directly affiliated with the stainless steel industry will discuss and share their suggestions over

the imports, which is one of the key challenges facing the sector, organiser Virgo Communications and Exhibitions (VCE) said in a statement.

Besides, topics like demand creation, emissions target, exports, research and development (R&D) of new technologies, promoting innovation, forging collaborations, and driving growth crucial for the sector will also be taken up at the event which begins on June 4 in Mumbai, VCE said.

The summit will also provide a platform for collaborations or partnerships in the sector, which has registered a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 8-9 per cent in India, surpassing the global average CAGR of 5.8 per cent, the statement said. (PTI)

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Assam aiming to be economic frontier

enjoyed robust connectivity with the global economy—railway lines connected Dibrugarh to Chittagong by 1904, and the Brahmaputra served as a vital waterway linking Assam to ports like Chittagong. The state was firmly positioned as a hub of international trade, Sarma asserted.

Sarma recalled the partition of India in 1947 and opined that the state was left with only a narrow and vulnerable lifeline—the Siliguri Chicken Neck—connecting it to the rest of India. The Chittagong Hill Tracts, despite a population that was over 97 per cent non-Muslim, were awarded to East Pakistan.

"On August 15, 1947, Chakma leaders hoisted the Indian flag in Rangamati, hoping to join India. However, the allocation of Chittagong to East Pakistan dashed those hopes. Despite their appeals, Pandit Nehru declined to intervene. His tacit acceptance of this decision dealt a significant and lasting blow to the Northeast's access to global trade," he claimed. He said, however, again, in 1971, during the creation of Bangladesh, Indira Gandhi had a historic opportunity to negotiate a broader and more secure geographical corridor to the Northeast. Despite her decisive leadership in securing Bangladesh's liberation, this moment too passed without seizing that strategic opportunity. "These were pivotal junctures where bold leadership could have altered the trajectory of Assam and the Northeast. Instead, the region was let down by the political leadership of the time," he said.

Sarma further suggested that to unlock the region's promise, they must implement dedicated transport and logistics corridors, revival of inland waterways and critical railway infrastructure, freight subsidies and long-haul incentives for industries, affordable and reliable power with appropriate cost equalisation mechanisms.

He said that Assam and the Northeast are not peripheral—they are strategic, economic, and cultural frontiers. "They are the gateways to Southeast Asia, rich in human capital and opportunity. Let us correct the failures of past political vision with bold policy clarity today. Let us match the Prime Minister's commitment with institutional responsiveness, and replace inertia with action," he said.

Speaking on the importance of Viksit Assam for Viksit Bharat, the chief minister said that state government has taken decisive steps to build a prosperous, empowered and self-reliant Assam. "The state currently boasts of a robust Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) of USD 68.7 billion, with a remarkable 19 per cent growth recorded in the last fiscal year and an impressive 17.8 per cent compound annual growth rate (CAGR) over the past three years," he added.

Moreover, elaborating the government's strategy for Viksit Assam, the chief minister claimed, "We have identified several key sectors like tourism, textiles, pharmaceuticals, electronics, hydrocarbons, agriculture and infrastructure. We are also investing in future-oriented domains like new-age skills, green jobs and the circular economy". It may be noted that the 10th meeting of the Governing Council of the NITI Aayog chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi witnessed the attendance of Union Ministers, Chief Ministers of the states, Lt. Governors, Union Territories, Vice Chairman NITI Aayog, full-time and ex-officio members of NITI Aayog, and special invitees to the Governing Council.

Himanta meets top industry leaders

Anil Agarwal Ji". "We spoke on operationalising the group's investment commitment made during Advantage Assam 2.0. Vedanta is keen to expand its footprint in the state's hydrocarbon sector," he said. The chief minister also met the Managing Director of ITC Hotels, Anil Chadha, and discussed with him the potential of investment in the hospitality sector. Chadha told the chief minister that his group is very keen on exploring opportunities in the hospitality sector in Assam, the release said.

Informing about the development, Sarma's officer wrote in 'X', "Shri Anil Chadha, MD, ITC Hotels called upon CM Himanta Biswa Sarma in New Delhi today. They discussed the potential of investments in Assam's hospitality sector as Chadha expressed keen interest in exploring opportunities for expansion in the state."

The Advantage Assam 2.0 has secured investment commitments worth ₹ 5.18 lakh crore over the next five years. The chief minister, who is closely monitoring the investment commitments made by different companies during the Advantage Assam 2.0, will hold one-on-one meetings with the industry honchos in the national capital on May 26. "The Hon'ble Chief Minister has started individual discussions with the companies about how to go about realising the investment on the ground, what kind of incentives they might need, the land they would need. We will prepare the preparatory roadmap over the next six months," a senior official privy to the development said. "If even a significant portion of the pledged investments materialises, Assam could emerge as a leading industrial hub in the Northeast and beyond," the official said.

Therefore, the focus now shifts to implementation and execution, ensuring that these investments translate into job creation, infrastructure development, and long-term economic benefits for the state. To achieve this goal, the government of Assam plans to carefully analyse investment proposals in the current financial year and work toward a comprehensive roadmap within the next six months. "The roadmap will focus on addressing key challenges such as land allocation, ease of doing business, and incentive structures to ensure that projects move from paper to reality," the official added. (PTI)

Five tribes announce agitation

the government-designated Backward Tribes (BTs) of Nagaland — have jointly expressed strong concerns and opposition to the memorandum submitted by the 5 Tribes Committee on September 20, which calls for a review of the reservation policy in Nagaland.

In a statement, the three student unions emphasised that the reservation policy "has been a cornerstone for addressing socio-economic inequalities faced by the BTs, warning that any attempts to dilute its provisions would be detrimental to our communities." (PTI)

GCC nations showed marked

together to counter that," Sudhir told PTI. The ambassador said that the UAE was perhaps the first country to issue a clear and categorical statement condemning the attack as an act of terror and calling for the elimination of terrorism in all its forms. The all-party delegation led by Shinde, during its two-day visit, held substantive discussions with senior UAE officials, including Sheikh Nahyan bin Mubarak Al Nahyan, Minister for Tolerance and Coexistence, and Ali Rashid Al Nuaimi, who chairs the Federal National Council Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence, and Interior.

"The way the delegation was received and the reciprocation of our perspective reflects the strength of our partnership," Sudhir said, adding that the UAE's response reaffirmed its commitment to countering terrorism as a common enemy of humanity.

Reflecting on Prime Minister Modi's stern warning to Pakistan of severe consequences for sponsoring terrorism, the ambassador emphasised that India conveyed to the world that there is a limit to patience. "PM Modi has made it clear that there is a limit to patience. We come from the land of Mahatma Gandhi and Gautam Buddha, but nobody can take us for granted," he said, referring to Operation Sindoor as a testament to India's proactive stance. On the broader India-UAE bilateral relationship, Sudhir highlighted the robust growth in ties, particularly in trade, which crossed USD 100 billion in the 2024-25 financial year, well ahead of the target.

He pointed to the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) as a flagship initiative, with India and the UAE leading efforts to enhance connectivity, reduce paperwork, and facilitate the movement of goods, data, and clean energy. "We are testing a proof of concept for IMEC, which could materialise in the next month," he revealed. Sudhir also noted advancements in fintech, with the UAE's credit and debit card system built on India's RuPay stack, and the local currency trade settlement mechanism boosting confidence in the Indian rupee and UAE dirham. (PTI)

Time to stand united against

of the respective countries. "This is a time to tell the world that India is united against terrorism and its sponsors," Sule said. India's multi-party delegations to different countries will emphasise Pakistan's links to terrorism and assert that the recent conflict was triggered by the Pahalgam terror strike and not Operation Sindoor as alleged by Islamabad. (PTI)

Nine Bangladeshis arrested

areas. Police said two of the arrested persons had approached the Gauhati High Court against the Tribunal verdict, but their appeals were overruled. The arrested Bangladeshi nationals are currently undergoing interrogation by police, they added. (PTI)

Two jail personnel

and the woman taken for medical examination," he said. "A case is being registered and investigation started," the officer added. (PTI)

'Ayogya body': Cong slams NITI

"Viksit Rajya for Viksit Bharat@2047". It will be the first major meeting of the prime minister with the chief ministers of all the states and Union Territories after Operation Sindoor. "In line with his commitment to take all the states together as 'Team India' for a Viksit Bharat, Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi will chair the 10th Governing Council meeting of NITI Aayog on May 24, 2025. "The Governing Council meeting will discuss the approach on Viksit Rajya for Viksit Bharat @2047," NITI Aayog said in a statement.

The idea of Viksit Rajya for Viksit Bharat is a call for states to craft bold, long-term, and inclusive vision documents aligned with national priorities yet grounded in local realities, the statement said.

"These visions must include time-bound targets," it said. The statement also said that states must leverage their unique geographic and demographic advantages while focusing on human development, economic growth, sustainability, technology, and governance reforms. (PTI)

LIC sets Guinness World Record for most life insurance policies in 24 hrs

NEW DELHI, May 24: Life Insurance Corporation of India on Saturday said it has earned a Guinness World Record title for most life insurance policies sold in 24 hours.

This historic achievement, verified by Guinness World Records, recognises the extraordinary performance of the corporation's dedicated agency network on January 20, 2025, LIC said in a statement.

On January 20, a total of 4,52,839 agents of LIC successfully completed and issued an astounding 5,88,107 life insurance policies across India, it noted.

This monumental effort established a new global benchmark for agent productivity in the life insurance industry within 24 hours, it said.

"It is a powerful validation of the relentless dedication, skill, and tireless work ethics of our agents. This achievement reflects our deep commitment towards our mission to provide vital financial protection to our customers and their families," the statement said.

The record attempt was the culmination of an initiative by LIC MD and CEO Siddhartha Mohanty, appealing to every agent to complete at least one policy on 'Mad Million Day' on January 20, 2025.

Speaking on the occasion, Mohanty thanked all customers, agents and employees for making 'Mad Million Day' historic. (PTI)

Topcem Cement 8th annual camp to offer free cleft surgeries 25 Assam Children

GUWAHATI, May 24: Topcem Cement, one of Northeast India's premier cement brands, in partnership with Mission Smile—a government-registered medical charitable trust—has proudly announced the commencement of its 8th Free Cleft Lip and Palate Surgery Camp in Guwahati.

This year's camp will provide 25 children from Assam with life-changing cleft lip and palate surgeries at the Mission Smile Guwahati Comprehensive Cleft Lip Centre, located at Mahendra Mohan Choudhury Hospital.

The surgeries, which began on May 20, 2025, will continue throughout the week, overseen by a team of leading medical professionals. "This initiative is a testament to Topcem Cement's ongoing dedication to enhancing the lives of underprivileged children affected by cleft deformities, giving them a renewed opportunity for a brighter future, said an official statement on Friday.

Dr Anil Kapur, Sr president of Sales & Marketing at Meghalaya Cements Ltd., shared, "Since we launched this initiative in 2018, Topcem Cement has enabled more than 165 cleft surgeries for children from Assam and Meghalaya. This year, we are honored to support 25 children in Assam.

"Our commitment to making a



positive social impact remains strong, and we look forward to continuing our support for such meaningful causes," he said.

The camp provides free consultations, surgeries, and comprehensive post-operative care. The initiative not only delivers essential medical intervention but also seeks to raise awareness about the importance of early treatment for cleft lip and palate conditions, ensuring that children who might otherwise lack access to care receive the help they need.

Mission Smile, working closely with the governments of Assam and Meghalaya, has played a cru-

cial role in delivering cleft care across both states. Over the past decade, Mission Smile has facilitated more than 25,000 surgeries, with over 1,200 procedures performed each year.

Topcem Cement remains a key supporter in the mission to provide free cleft surgeries and increase awareness about cleft lip and palate issues in Assam and Meghalaya. Through its ongoing partnership with Mission Smile, Topcem Cement is dedicated to reaching even more children in need and offering life-changing solutions to those from underserved communities.

Govt ratifies interest rate at 8.25 pc on employees' provident fund for FY25

NEW DELHI, May 24: The government has ratified the rate of interest on employees' provident fund at 8.25 per cent for FY25, enabling retirement fund body EPFO to deposit the annual interest accumulation in the post-retirement funds of over 7 crore subscribers.

EPFO, on February 28, had decided to retain the interest rate of 8.25 per cent on employees' provident fund (EPF) deposits for the financial year 2024-25, equal to the rate provided in the preceding fiscal. The approved rate of interest for 2024-25 was sent for concurrence of the Ministry of Finance.

"Ministry of Finance has given concurrence to 8.25 per cent rate of interest on the EPF for 2024-25 fiscal year and

labour ministry sent a communication regarding this to the EPFO on Thursday," a labour ministry official told PTI.

Now the interest amount as per the rate ratified for FY25 will be credited into the accounts of over seven crore subscribers of EPFO.

The decision on interest rate was taken at the 237th meeting of the central board of trustees of the EPFO chaired by Union Minister for Labour & Employment Mansukh Mandaviya in New Delhi on February 28. Compared to many fixed-income instruments, EPF offers relatively higher and stable returns, ensuring steady growth on post-retirement savings. (PTI)

Royal Challenge game nights debuts in Guwahati

GUWAHATI, May 24: Royal Challenge Packaged Drinking Water, a brand long associated with bold energy and a rich cricketing legacy, brought its digital-first property, Royal Challenge Packaged Drinking Water Game Nights, to Guwahati, said an official statement on Saturday.

As per the statement, the event, held at Sarokri on GS Road, transformed the venue into a high-octane zone of competition, creativity, and next-gen entertainment—setting the stage for a nationwide series of experiences.

"This foray into virtual arenas is a natural evolution for a brand that has always thrived at the intersection of sport and youthful expression. Just as cricket has captivated generations, interactive play is now emerging as the new frontier of passion, performance, and cultural connection. Royal Challenge Packaged Drinking Water aims to bridge these worlds by creating spaces where community, competition, and creativity collide," the statement added.

The Game Nights event brought together fans, creators, and digital athletes for an electrifying evening. Highlights included cutting-edge VR cricket, a PlayStation gaming zone with cricket-themed titles, and interactive challenges with exciting prizes. Guests also enjoyed a live screening of a marquee league match-blending traditional fandom with modern play under one roof.

"Gaming is an organic extension for Royal Challenge—a brand that has always stood at the crossroads of high-energy sport and bold self-expression," said Varun Koorichh, vice president – Marketing & Portfolio Head at Diageo. "After years of being deeply rooted in cricket, stepping into the digital arena allows us to channel the same competitive spirit in a contemporary, immersive format," he added.

DESIGN, SUPPLY, ERECTION, TESTING AND COMMISSIONING WORKS

E-Tender Notice No.: TRD/LMG/11 of 2025-26 Dated: 22-05-2025. E-Tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following works:

Tender No. EL-TRD-NFR-LMG-OHEMOD32R2 Dated: 22-05-2025.

Name of work: Design, supply, erection, testing and commissioning of 25 kV, 50 Hz, single phase Railway Electrification and TRD modification works in connection to the Re-building of Bridge no. 7 by PSC slab on permanent diversion between Raha-Phulaguri on the section Chaparmukh Jn.-Haibargaon at KM 4/7-8 of Lumding division, N.F. Railway (0.00 RKM/1 TKM). **Tender Value:** ₹91,46,987.58/-, **Earnest Money:** ₹1,82,900/-, **Date & time of closing of tender:** 15:00 hrs. of 16-06-2025. The complete information with the tender documents of above e-tender will be available in website www.ireps.gov.in

Sr. DEE/TRD & GS/Lumding

NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
Serving Customers With A Smile

MAINTENANCE OF RUNNING ROOM AT NEW TINSUKIA AND LEDO

E-Tender Notice No. TSK/Elect/190; dated: 19-05-2025. Works tender through E-Tendering System are invited by the undersigned for the following works: **SN.1. Brief Description of Item:** Day to day maintenance of Running Room New Tinsukia and Ledo including the work of Cleaning, Beautification and Gardening, Watch and Ward round the clock, Supply of newspapers & magazines, washing of linens, meal cooking/preparation and serving for a period of 02 (two) years. **(Tender No. LVIT-14/TSK/LEDO/04).** **Tender Value:** ₹1,77,92,917.77/-, **Earnest Money:** ₹2,39,000.00. **E-tenders will be closed at 13:00 hrs. on 10-06-2025 and Opened at 15:00 hrs. on 10-06-2025.** The complete information with the tender document of above e-tender will be available upto 13:00 hrs on 10-06-2025 in website <http://www.ireps.gov.in>

DRM (Elect)/Tinsukia

NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
Serving Customers with a smile

NAME CHANGE

I have Changed my name from Mohammed Jashim Uddin to Jashim Uddin by swearing a notarial affidavit at Sankardevnagar Hojai (Assam)

NAME CHANGE

I have Changed my name from Mohammed Azmal Ali to Ajmal Ali by swearing a notarial affidavit at Sankardevnagar Hojai (Assam)

AFFIDAVIT

There in the named of Khagen Kr. Dey, Father late Masla has 11 no. 'Rayati' over 4 bigha lands having 569 no. dag of 103 no Miyadi patta at Jagiroad Kuideal block. The land buyer either may contact with Kamal Ch. Deka, Mobile nos.- 6 0 0 2 1 0 7 9 9 7, 9401321796 or Mayong Circle Office, Jagiroad, Morigaon.

Workers expressed heartfelt gratitude, terming the smartphones a 'much-needed support'

200 Anganwadi workers receive mobile phones under ICDS Project in Margherita

HT Correspondent

MARGHERITA, May 24: In a significant move towards digital empowerment, 200 Anganwadi workers under the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) project in Margherita were provided with mobile phones on Saturday. The distribution took place at a formal ceremony held at the Margherita Block Conference Hall.

The initiative is part of the Assam Government's commitment to enhance the efficiency of Anganwadi services by equipping frontline workers with modern tools for data management and service delivery.

The programme was inaugurated by Bhaskar Sharma, MLA of the 83rd Margherita Constituency, who emphasized the



government's mission of "minimum government, maximum governance." In his speech, Sharma underscored the impor-

importance of using technology to improve outreach and operational efficiency at the grassroots level.

The Anganwadi workers expressed heartfelt gratitude, terming the smartphones a "much-needed support" that will aid them in their day-to-day functions, particularly in monitoring nutrition, health, and early childhood education programs.

The event also saw the presence of: Dishen Tipomia, representative of the Margherita MLA, Minati Rani Das, ICDS Project Officer, Rupa Phukan, Margherita Block Coordinator and several Anganwadi workers and community representatives.

In a related gesture of community support, the Bardwi Shikla Ladies Club donated umbrellas to the students of Chedamari LP School, bringing relief to children amid the region's ongoing seasonal weather challenges.

Illegal movable band sawmill dismantled in Dhubri crackdown

HT Correspondent

DHUBRI, May 24: In a significant move against illegal timber operations, forest officials in Dhubri have successfully dismantled a movable band saw mill operating covertly in Boalkhami Part II, under the Nayarhat Police Out Post.

The raid, conducted on a tip-off, underscores the Dhubri Forest Division's renewed commitment to combating deforestation and timber smuggling in the region. Under the direct instructions of newly joined Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) of Dhubri Division, Golap Kumar Bania, a dedicated forest team spearheaded by Sahabaz Sultan, In-Charge of the Sapatgram Forest Depot, executed the successful operation.

The illegal sawmill, ingeniously fitted onto a hand-cart for easy mobility, was found processing round logs without any valid documentation. It was immediately dismantled and seized by the raiding party. Department sources revealed that the seized sawmill had been operating clandestinely for a considerable period, posing a serious and ongoing threat to the forest conservation efforts in the area.



The dismantling of this movable unit is seen as a crucial step in disrupting the supply chain of illegally procured timber. This operation marks the first major enforcement action under the leadership of DFO Bania, who has recently taken charge and clearly signaled a zero-tolerance policy against all forms of illegal forest activities. Officials have confirmed that investigations are ongoing, and the department anticipates more such targeted operations in the coming days as part of a broader crackdown on timber-related illicit practices.

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Woman killed in a devastating fire at Nagaon

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, May 24: A devastating fire broke out on Jail Road in Nagaon town early this morning, resulting in the tragic death of a woman identified as Amarol Kha. The fire caused widespread panic in the area, and a clothing store was completely destroyed.

According to local sources, the woman died while trying to save herself from the fire. Two fire tenders rushed to the scene to extinguish the flames. The cause of the fire is yet to be determined, sources added. The incident has sent shockwaves through the community, with many expressing condolences for the loss of life.

2 drugs peddlers arrested in Jagiroad

HT Correspondent

JAGIROAD, May 24: Jagiroad Police arrested two drug peddlers from Nakhola village under Jagiroad police station on Friday. They were identified as Sanjeev Deka of Nakhola village and Asraf Islam of Nellie, near here. Sources said that Sanjeev was associated with illicit drugs for a long time and on Friday they were caught red handed. Investigation in the incident has been underway.

Unidentified body recovered near railway track

HT Correspondent

JAGIROAD, May 24: An unidentified body of a middle-aged man was recovered today by the Government Railway Police Force (GRPF), Jagiroad, from the railway track between Azuri and Sonabari railway stations in the Morigaon district. According to Mahendra Deka, Officer-in-Charge of Jagiroad Railway Police Station, the deceased is estimated to be around 40 to 45 years old, approximately 5 feet 4 inches tall, with black and white hair. At the time of recovery, the man was wearing butter-colored half pants and a white shirt. The body has been sent to the morgue at Shaheed Tilak-Hemram-Gunaviram Civil Hospital, Morigaon, where it will be preserved for 72 hours to allow for possible identification by family or acquaintances.

33rd Anniversary of Koch Rajbongshi Sahitya Sabha celebrated in Kokrajhar

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, May 24: The Koch Rajbongshi Sahitya Sabha marked its 33rd Foundation Day along with the 16th Annual Conference through a vibrant three-day celebration held at Chithila in Kokrajhar district, concluding on Saturday. The grand literary and cultural gathering witnessed enthusiastic participation from citizens, literary activists, and dignitaries from across the region, reflecting the community's deep commitment to preserving its language and heritage.

A key highlight of the celebration was the release of 33 books written in the Koch Rajbongshi language, a milestone achievement aimed at enriching the community's literary landscape and promoting its linguistic identity.

The event was graced by prominent dignitaries including Jibesh Rai, Chief of the Kamatapur Autonomous Council, Surath Narzary, President of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha, and Hiteswar Barman, Chairman of the KAC, among others. All the speakers commended the Sabha's unwavering efforts in cultural preservation and literary advancement.

The anniversary celebrations featured a variety of activities including cultural performances, literary discussions, and community interaction programs, all of which



underscored the growing pride and engagement with the Koch Rajbongshi language and literature. During the conference, deliberations were held on key issues related to the upliftment and development of the Koch Rajbongshi community's linguistic and literary identity in Assam. Leaders and participants resolved to further strengthen initiatives for education, publication, and cultural promotion in the coming years.

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Seminar on ITR filing for charitable entities

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 24: The Guwahati Branch of the Eastern India Regional Council (EIRC) of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) successfully organized a technical seminar on the topic "Charitable Entities: Income Tax Returns Forms: Assessment Year 2025-26" at ICAI Bhawan, Guwahati.

The event, held on May 23, 2025, drew the participation of professionals and practitioners engaged in taxation and compliance for charitable organizations. The session focused on the newly notified ITR forms, the latest amendments, and key challenges in filing income tax returns for charitable entities for the upcoming assessment year.

Branch Chairperson CA Raginee Goyal delivered the welcome address, highlighting that although the return forms had recently been notified, filing utilities were still awaited. She also set the tone for the seminar, emphasizing the importance of staying updated on tax compliance for non-profit organizations.

CA Gaurab Garodia, the technical speaker for the session, delivered an in-depth presentation that covered the practical aspects of ITR forms, recent legislative amendments, common challenges, and interpretations from courts and tax authorities. His talk encouraged active participation and technical discourse among delegates working closely with charitable institutions.

The session was skillfully anchored and coordinated by Branch Secretary CA Jay Prakash Gupta, while Branch Treasurer CA Piyush Birmiwai delivered the vote of thanks.

During the session, CA Raginee Goyal also presented a report on recent branch activities and announced the upcoming Sub-Regional Conference to be held on 30th-31st May 2025, which is expected to be attended by over 350 Chartered Accountants.

Workshop on Vedic Mathematics held in Sootea

HT Correspondent

BISWANATH CHARIALI, May 24: A day-long workshop on Vedic Mathematics was successfully organised on Saturday at Bhaskar Jyoti Adarsha Vidyaapeeth, Sootea, under the initiative of the Science and Environment Science sub-committee of the Assam Sahitya Sabha. The event aimed to promote interest and ease in learning mathematics, especially among school students.

The workshop was held under the chairmanship of Anjurani Bora, Headmistress of the school, and was inaugurated by Dr. Dilip Kumar Bhuyan, President of the Sootea branch of Assam Sahitya Sabha. Pranab Ojha, senior journalist and President of Sootea Press Club, delivered the welcome address.

Ripunjy Bordoloi, Assistant Science Teacher at Chengamari High School and the Working President of the sub-committee, served as the resource person for



the session. In his address, Bordoloi emphasized the importance of Vedic Mathematics, particularly in cracking competitive examinations, and spoke about the sub-committee's mission to enhance scientific awareness through such educational initiatives.

He urged students to overcome their fear of mathematics and instead develop an interest in the subject. Bordoloi also demonstrated simple mathematical tricks derived from Vedic methods that

can help students solve problems more efficiently.

The event was well-attended by teachers, students, and conscious citizens. Notable attendees included Bhabani Upadhyaya, Nibedita Mech, Pallabi Khatanar, Gourab Bora, and Nayan Harijon. The parents and local community members appreciated the effort made by the Assam Sahitya Sabha's sub-committee in encouraging mathematical learning among young minds.

5 kg Morphine seized by Khatkhathi Police in Karbi Anglong

HT Correspondent

BOKAJAN, May 24: In a significant drug bust, Khatkhathi police recovered and seized 5 kilograms of morphine during a routine check on NH 39 this morning.

The police stopped and searched an LP truck bearing registration number UP 38 AT 6178. During the search, officers found seven suspicious packets inside the truck's cabin, which were later confirmed to contain morphine. The seized narcotics are estimated to be worth ₹ 5 crore in the black market. Preliminary investigation revealed that the truck was transporting the contraband from Manipur towards Uttar Pradesh.

One person, Faim (34), a resident of Choudipur, Uttar Pradesh, was arrested in connection with the case. Further investigations are currently underway.

Cyber Crime Awareness Programme

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, May 24: A crucial cyber crime awareness programme was conducted at Terapanth Bhawan in Kokrajhar on Saturday, aimed at educating the public about the increasing threats posed by cyber-related offences.

The event was jointly organised by the Terapanth Yuvak Parishad, Kokrajhar, in collaboration with the Assam Police, Kokrajhar District.

Officials from the Assam Police served as resource persons, highlighting various types of cyber crimes such as online fraud, phishing scams, identity theft, and the misuse of social media platforms. The session also focused on the rising cases of cyber fraud and online scams prevalent in the region.

Police representatives shared valuable practical advice on cyber safety, including tips for secure online behaviour and guidance on how to report cyber offences promptly.

Additionally, attendees were briefed on the safety measures they can adopt and the legal remedies available to victims of cyber crime, emphasizing the importance of vigilance in the digital age.

Legal challenge filed in domestic violence case

HT Correspondent

KHERONI, May 24: The Gauhati High Court has issued a notice in Criminal Petition No 116/2025 filed by Sushil Singh, Lalmohar Singh, and Munni Devi, residents of Mailoo Basti (Bihari Gaon) under Kheroni Police Station, West Karbi Anglong district. The petition challenges a January 18, 2025 order passed by the Judicial Magistrate First Class in PRC Case No. 109/2024, taking cognizance under Section 84 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023, and Section 4 of the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961.

The petitioners, represented by advocate Rituparna Bora, argue that no substantive evidence supports the charges, particularly against Lalmohar Singh (father of the accused) and Munni Devi (wife of Harendra Singh). The High Court, presided by Justice Mridul Kumar Kalita, has directed that notices be served to all respondents, including Smt. Divya Singh of Kheroni Khachari Gaon, with the matter returnable on March 13, 2025.

In a related development, a shocking case of domestic violence has surfaced involving Divya Singh, wife of Sushil Singh. Married on July 6, 2022, and a TET-qualified teacher, Divya has allegedly been subjected to regular physical abuse, including a recent incident where she was struck on the head multiple times with sticks, resulting in serious scalp injuries requiring 8-10 stitches. Her in-laws, particularly mother-in-law Girja Devi and elder sister-in-law Muni Devi, are also accused of dowry harassment and destroying her mobile phone.

Eyewitnesses at the hospital reported that Girja Devi attempted to flee during a visit by journalists and made disturbing remarks that trivialized the abuse. This incident has once again highlighted the urgent need for stronger enforcement of domestic violence laws and greater public accountability.

World Schizophrenia Day observed at Mangaldai Civil Hospital to Raise Mental Health Awareness

'Disorder requiring long-term treatment, medication, and counseling'

HT Correspondent

MANGALDAI, May 24: The World Schizophrenia Day was observed today with an awareness programme at the Psychiatric Department of Mangaldai Civil Hospital, organized under the initiative of the District Mental Health Programme and District Health Society, Darrang.

The event aimed to raise awareness and dispel misconceptions about schizophrenia, one of the most complex and misunderstood mental health disorders. Anchored by Clinical Psychologist Pushpa Kalita, the session was attended by the officiating superintendent of the hospital, Dr. Utpal Baruah, along with doctors, nurses, medical staff, mental health experts, and nursing students from the Mangaldai Nursing School.

In her introductory remarks, Pushpa Kalita explained the objectives of the observance and emphasized the need for informed awareness among both healthcare professionals and the general public. Dr. Utpal Baruah, in his address, described schizophrenia as a disorder requiring long-term treatment, medication, and counseling, stressing the importance of consistent medical care.

Dr. Noni Gopal Saharia, speaking as a special guest, highlighted the significance of World Schizophrenia Day, which is ob-



served globally every year on May 24 to create awareness and encourage early intervention and support for those affected.

Adding to the discussion, Dr. Jayanta Kumar Deka clarified that although schizo-

phrenia is often perceived as a condition that renders a person dysfunctional, many patients lead productive lives with the right treatment and support. Dr. Afzal Haque echoed the sentiment, urging society to shed

the stigma attached to schizophrenia and to offer emotional and social support to those suffering from the illness.

Psychiatric Social Worker Pranjal Thakuria provided insight into the Mental Health Care Act, 2017, which ensures that individuals with mental illness have the right to access proper treatment. He elaborated on how district-level mental health programs are making care more accessible, with appointments of psychiatrists, clinical psychologists, and social workers at district hospitals.

Other speakers, including Dr. Harish Goswami, Dr. Sahil Kafi, and Dr. Violina Kashyap, also contributed to the session with in-depth discussions on various aspects of schizophrenia, including symptoms, diagnosis, and treatment.

The programme concluded with Jayanta Deva Sharma, assistant at the Psychiatric Department, distributing awareness pamphlets and delivering a vote of thanks. Sahid Ali, the department's record-keeper, efficiently facilitated the smooth conduct of the event.

The observance served as a significant step toward demystifying schizophrenia, advocating mental health rights, and promoting a more inclusive and supportive society for those living with mental illness.

Editor's pick

Starlink in Bangladesh: Foreshadowing a satellite informationised war

By: Chaitanya Giri

Under the leadership of the Chief Advisor to the Interim Government, Mohammad Yunus, Bangladesh has taken concerted steps to operationalise Starlink. On 20 May 2025, Faiz Ahmad Taiyeb, who holds the position of Special Assistant (equivalent to Minister of State) in Bangladesh's Posts and Telecom Ministry, announced the launch of Starlink in the country. With two service packages, Starlink Residence is offered at Tk 6,000 (roughly equivalent to ₹ 4,200) and Starlink Residence Lite at Tk 4,200 (roughly equivalent to INR 3,000). Starlink will incur a one-time equipment setup cost of Tk. 47,000 (approximately equivalent to ₹ 38,000). The exorbitant services do not match the social and economic realities of Bangladesh. Bangladesh has among the highest internet service taxes in the world. Unlike India, which charges 18 percent on telecom services, the Bangladeshi government charges a value-added tax of 18 percent and an over-and-above sector-specific tax of 21 percent. On the corporate tax front, publicly traded telecom service providers are taxed at 40 percent, whereas non-publicly traded service providers shell out an enormous 45 percent. The telecom sector in Bangladesh has been struggling for a long time, with significant revenue losses. Since 2015, the Bangladeshi telecom sector has experienced a 56 percent reduction in the average revenue per user (ARPU). Currently, the ARPU stands at just US\$ 1.3 – one of the lowest globally. With internet penetration at nearly 44 percent, the telecom sector remains a weak contributor to the Bangladesh economy.

Socio-economic indicators from Bangladesh are concerning. The World Bank's Bangladesh Development Update has warned of a rise in the extreme poverty rate from 7.7 percent in 2024 to 9.3 percent in 2025. The World Bank has also predicted that the national poverty rate will grow from 20.5 percent in 2024 to 22.9 percent in 2025. Bangladesh's poverty indicators have set a threshold of Tk. 3,822 on basic monthly expenses. The Starlink Residence Lite service package is more expensive than what nearly a quarter of Bangladesh's population can afford. Starlink's entry at these price points is incongruent with the Bangladeshi market's demands and numerous socio-economic realities in that country. The Interim Government has expedited satellite communication (satcom) internet services to meet US objectives that do not require consideration of market and socio-economic factors.

Yunus is not new to the telecom sector. He is the founder of Grameenphone, a Bangladeshi telecom service provider founded in 1997, which has had majority stakes from the Norwegian provider Telenor. Over the past three to four years, Grameenphone has experienced a decline in its business, largely due to actions taken by the Bangladesh Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (BTRC), especially during the Hasina administration. In 2022, the BTRC suspended Grameenphone from selling both old and new SIM cards, citing its failure to provide quality services to its customers. One of the last actions of the Hasina administration against Yunus was related to Grameenphone, where he was accused of allegedly embezzling US\$ 2 million from the telecom company. The BTRC's observations were vindicated when Grameenphone reported a 53 percent drop in net profit for the first quarter of 2025. With the decline in mobile and data usage, the company, in May 2025, decided to enter the mobile handset sale business, leveraging Grameenphone's distribution networks. It now exclusively sells handsets from the Shenzhen-based manufacturer Transsion Holdings. Similarly, the same Grameenphone distribution network could likely be used to sell high-end Starlink user terminals in Bangladesh.

In his letter written to President Donald Trump on 7 April 2025, Yunus assured "elimination of certain testing requirements, rationalising packaging, labelling, and certification requirements ... and simplifying customs procedures and standards." Whether the BTRC has tested and certified these devices with due consideration to the telecom security of Bangladesh and its neighbourhood is unknown. This assurance was to facilitate the entry of Starlink in Bangladesh within 90 days from February 2025. The assurance has been honoured, and the tariffs previously looming over the Bangladeshi industry have been successfully averted.

Starlink services in Bangladesh will undoubtedly create security challenges within the country and throughout the region, considering that the interim government has been lenient toward terror groups but not toward its political opposition. The Starlink terminal, captured in Manipur in December 2024, belonged to the Revolutionary People's Front (RPF) and its armed wing, the People's Liberation Army, which is based in Sylhet. If the terminal is part of a larger cache of smuggled terminals located in Bangladesh, the initiation of services will activate them, enabling terror groups to utilise these resources during operations in the bordering areas of neighbouring countries. With Starlink's official entry in Bangladesh and its use with Myanmar rebels, likely, any conflict that the US and China proxies would engage in the Padma-Irrawaddy river valleys would be highly informationised, perhaps also being the world's first satellite informationised wars. Starlink would augment digital connectivity in the marshes of Sundarbans and the hilly forests of Chattogram, but this connectivity would be exploited by terror groups and state proxies indefinitely. (Courtesy: ORF)

Deleting the history of Mughal kings from school history books does not serve nationalism

By: Dr. Ram Punivani

The new education policy 2020 is being implemented gradually. Apart from other things it has focused on Indian Knowledge systems and Indian traditions. The changes which pertain to History have deleted Delhi Sultanate and Mughal rule from the books. A good seven centuries of history stands relegated into absentia. This is a pretty long period by any standards. "While NCERT had previously trimmed sections on the Mughals and Delhi Sultanate - including detailed account of dynasties like Tughlaqs, Khaljis, Mamluks, and Lodis and a two-page table on Mughal emperors' achievements as part of its syllabus rationalization during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2022-23, the new textbook has now removed all references to them."

All references to Delhi Sultanate and Mughal rulers have been deleted from 7th standard text book. In addition to the other books wherever the references to Muslim rule is there, that stands deleted. What also stands deleted is the reference to Post-Mumbai (92-93 violence), post-Gujarat violence (2002), the references to Nathuram Godse being a trained pracharak of RSS, the ban on RSS in the aftermath of Gandhi murder among others. While Kumbh Mela finds a place, the stampede causes death of many and the Delhi station stampede has no place.

All this began with the Covid period when the pretext offered was reducing the burden on the students and followed by 'rationalization' which meant deletion of these portions which caused discomfort to

the Hindu Nationalist ideology.

For demonization of Muslims and spreading hate against them, Mughals have been presented as the major villains of our history. Some earlier kings like Alauddin Khilji have also been on the hammer of Hindutva narrative. So far the demonization of Muslims was structured around temple destruction by Muslim kings, which has been contested by rational historians. The spread of Islam by Muslims Kings using their sword was another pillar of this. This point is totally off the mark as conversions to Islam took place due to social interaction with Muslim Arab Traders to begin with. Later many low castes embraced Islam to escape the tyranny of the caste system. The ideology of Hindutva has gone to the extent of presenting this period as a dark period when Holocaust against Hindus took place. No doubt the era of Kingdoms is full of war for political reasons. Kings always wanted to expand their regime and in the process many people were killed. To call it holocaust is totally off the mark. Their (Hindutva) narrative actually takes off from the Communal Historiography introduced by the British to pursue the policy of 'divide and rule'. In this; all the motives of Kings are related to religion and kings are presented as the symbol of the whole religious community.

The Hindu communal historiography took it further by claiming that Muslims and Christians were 'foreigners' who have tormented Hindus. The Muslim communal historiography presented the other side of the coin where Muslims are regarded as rulers and Hindus as subjugated subjects.

They presented that Muslims are the logical rulers of this land.

The later trajectory of this logic did assist the British to divide our composite land into India and Pakistan. Savarkar articulated that there are two nations in this country, and Jinnah went on to demand a separate country for Muslims, Pakistan. Pakistan fell into the trap of Muslim communalism right from the word go and as far its textbooks are concerned they presented the beginning of Pakistan with Mohammad bin Kasim in eight century. Today their history books have totally deleted any reference to Hindu rulers. The hate which the Muslim communalism spread against the Hindus peaked with their school texts removing all the references to Hindu Kings and culture.

In a way India; during the last three decades has been walking on the footprints of Pakistan. The mirror image of Pakistan's trajectory is being copied probably to the last comma. This point was highlighted by Pakistan's poet Fahmida Riyaz. In the aftermath of Babri demolition she wrote "Arre Tum bhi Ham Jaise Nikale, Ab Tak Kahan Chhuphe the bhai" (Oh! you have also turned out like us, where were you hiding so far). Prior to Hindutva ideology coming to total control of Indian education, the RSS shakhs were spreading the communal version of society through multiple mechanisms like its Shakhbaudhis, Ekai Vidyalays, Shishu Mandirs. In due course mainstream media and social media also came to its service.

As such culture is a continuously evolving process. During the period of History under the hammer of Hindutva; lot of so-

cial changes took place. Apart from the architecture, the food habits, dress and literature, the synthesis in the field of religion, the noble traditions of Bhakti and Sufi tradition developed. It was during this period that Sikhism came and flourished.

Now this political ideology may have to change the track. With Muslim rulers out of the way how will they demonize the Muslims now? Newer techniques may be on the way to substitute Aurangzeb or Babar; as now they will be defunct!

History is very central to the concept of Nationalism. Erich Fromm points out that 'History is to Nationalism what poppy is to the opium addict'. Since BJP came to power as NDA in 1998, the major thing they did was what is called 'safronization of education'. Here history has been presented the narrative of glorious and brave Hindu Kings versus evil and aggressive Muslim kings. The charge has been that so far History has been written by Left Historians, who focused on Delhi rulers and who were pro Muslim. The point is that text books did present the details of particular dynasties depending on the historical length of their rule. The history books in the decades of 1980s had a good deal of presentation of Hindu as well as Muslim kings. The narration was not revolving just around religion but the holistic view of communities was presented: trade, culture, literature among others.

Still it is true that ruler, 'King centric history' is not what we need to build our future. We need to focus on diverse sections of society, dalits, women, adivasis and artisans who do not find much place in such narratives. (IPA Service)

One in four jobs globally is exposed to generative AI

By: Dr. Gyan Pathak

About one in four jobs (24 per cent) globally is running a risk to be exposed to Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI), but the exposure is likely to be transformative, not replacement, shows the refined global index of exposure to GenAI. The new ILO-NASK global index shows that the exposure in the high-income countries would be 34 per cent, but in the low-income countries it would be only 11 per cent. In absolute number, 838 million jobs globally are exposed to GenAI, out of which more than half 442 million are in Asia and the Pacific.

In per centage term, 19 per cent jobs in Africa, 22 per cent in Asia and the Pacific, 25 per cent in Arab States, 29 per cent in Americas, and 32 per cent in Europe and Central Asia are exposed to GenAI. In upper-middle income countries exposure level is 25 per cent and in lower-middle income countries it is 20 per cent.

"It is important to stress that these new estimates reflect 'exposure' to GenAI and not the actual impact on employment," says the report titled 'Generative AI and Jobs: A Refined Global Index of Occupation Exposure'. "Infrastructure constraints (electricity, broadband), insufficient digital skills, the cost of technology, and inherent operational difficulties associated with the technology are just some of the barriers to full adoption."

An important aspect also concerns the institutional and societal acceptance of automating tasks and occupations – even when technically feasible. For instance, few consumers may be inclined to watch evening news presented by avatars. Similarly, financial institutions might hesitate to fully delegate decisions such as mortgage approvals or business plan evaluations to AI systems, preferring to retain human judgement, oversight and accountability, emphasised the report. "Indeed, the results indicate that few jobs consist of tasks that are fully automatable with current

GenAI technology; nearly all occupations have some tasks that require human input." The "bundle of tasks" that constitutes occupations acts as a buffer against full automation.

However, the report warns, this does not mean that demand for these occupations will remain stable, as the efficiencies gained from introducing technology may mean that fewer workers are needed. If efforts are not made to help such jobs evolve with GenAI and integrate new tasks, even partial automation of existing tasks could lead to a decline in overall job demand in occupations found in higher exposure gradients. In addition, in some cases, the remaining set of non-automated tasks may result in jobs that are no longer humanly sustainable or desirable, thereby limiting the feasibility of adopting imbalanced technological solutions.

Nevertheless, the estimates do not account for new jobs that may be created, nor the technological advances that could potentially automate more tasks in the future. In that sense, our estimates, says the report, present a static snapshot of the exposure of existing occupations to GenAI at the start of 2025.

At the global level, about a quarter of all employment falls into one of the four exposure gradients, with significant differences between female and male employment, particularly in the top two exposure gradients. The report talks about 4 gradients, from lowest exposure 1 to highest 4.

Among male workers, approximately one-fifth of jobs fall within one of the exposure gradients, with 3.1 per cent in gradient 3 and 2.4 per cent in the highest exposure gradient (gradient 4). In contrast, not only is the total share of female employment in potentially exposed occupations notably higher, but the difference is also concentrated in the top two gradients, with 5.7 per cent of female employment in gradient 3 and another 4.7 per cent in gradient 4.

These disparities are even more pronounced in High-In-

come Countries, where 34 per cent of total employment falls within one of the four exposure gradients, with 17.3 per cent in gradients 3 and 4. However, when disaggregated by gender, 28 per cent of male employment is exposed, with only 3.5 per cent in gradient 4, compared to 41 per cent of female employment, with 14.4 per cent in gradient 3 and 9.6 per cent in gradient 4.

Income-based differences in exposure are striking, with High-Income Countries showing the highest share of employment in one of the four exposure gradients (34 per cent). The total share of exposed employment declines significantly as income levels decrease, reaching just 11 per cent in Low-Income Countries (LICs).

Lower income levels also reduce gender disparities in exposure, primarily due to the lower concentration of occupations in the highest exposure gradients (gradients 3 and 4). Gender disparities are also more pronounced in wealthier regions, particularly in Europe and Central Asia, where 39 per cent of female employment falls into one of the four exposure gradients compared to 26 per cent for men. These patterns reflect both occupational structures and the extent to which GenAI-exposed roles, such as clerical, financial, and customer service jobs, are concentrated in higher-income countries.

These new estimates are consistent with those given in 2023, but more refined. The previous version attributed 2.3 per cent of global employment to the "automation" category, one percentage point lower than the 3.3 per cent assigned to gradient 4. In addition, the 2023 estimate attributed 13 per cent of employment as subject to "augmentation" and an additional 16.2 per cent of employment in "the big unknown".

However, the combined employment share for Gradients 1-3 for the world in the current analysis is 20.5 per cent, 9 per cent points lower than combined shares of augmentation and "the big unknown" (29.2 per cent) reported in 2023. The 2023 findings that women are more affected than men, and that the percentage of employment affected increases as countries' income level increases, still hold. (IPA Service)

Waqf Amendment Act, 2025 : A review

(... continued from last edition)

By: Mohammad Hafeez Khan

Upliftment of the Poor :

Waqf plays a crucial role in serving religious, charitable, and social welfare needs, especially for the underprivileged. However, its impact has often been reduced due to mismanagement, encroachment, and lack of transparency.

Some key benefits of Waqf for the Poor are :

- **Digitization for Transparency and Accountability:**

- A centralized digital portal will track Waqf properties, ensuring better identification, monitoring, and management.

- Auditing and accounting measures will prevent financial mismanagement and ensure funds are used only for welfare purposes.

- **Increased Revenue for Welfare and Development:**

- Preventing misuse and illegal occupation of Waqf lands will boost revenue for Waqf Boards, allowing them to expand welfare programs.

- Funds will be allocated to healthcare, education, housing, and livelihood support, directly benefiting the economically weaker sections.

- Regular audits and inspections will promote financial discipline and strengthen public confidence in Waqf management.

- **Empowerment of Backward classes & other sects of Muslim communities :**

The Bill aims at making the Waqf Board more inclusive having representation from different Muslim sects for better Waqf governance and decision-making.

- The Bill mandates inclusion of one member each from Bohra and Aghakhani communities in State/UT Waqf Boards, if they have functional Waqf.

- Also, the Board will have representation from Muslims belonging to backward classes apart from Shia and Sunni members.

- Includes two or more elected members from municipalities or Panchayats, strengthening local governance in waqf affairs.

- The Board/CWC will have two non-Muslim members excluding the ex-officio members.

Criticisms of the Waqf Amendment Act, 2025 :

- **Increased Government Control :** Critics argue that the Act grants the government the author-



ity to regulate Waqf properties and determine their status, thereby reducing autonomy of the Waqf Boards.

- The deletion of Section 40 of the Act shifts the power to determine whether a property is Waqf to government officials.

- **Dilution of Muslim Representation :** Critics argue that allowing non-Muslim officials on Waqf Boards violates the community's right to manage its religious affairs under Article 26.

- **Ambiguity in Defining a "Practising Muslim" :** The Act lacks a clear definition of "practising Muslims" for Waqf property allocation, which may lead to legal challenges due to varied interpretations by religious scholars.

- **Removal of "Waqf By User" Principle :** Critics fear that removing "Waqf by User", which recognises properties through long-term religious use, may lead to many existing sites losing their Waqf status.

Muslim groups agree that corruption is a serious issue in waqf boards - its members have been accused several times of colluding with encroachers to sell waqf land.

But critics also say that a significant number of these properties have been encroached by individ-

uals, businesses and government bodies – which too requires immediate attention. A report submitted in 2006 by the Justice Sachar Committee - formed by the earlier Congress party-led government to assess the socioeconomic conditions of Muslims in India - had recommended waqf reform, as it found that the revenues from the boards were low compared to the vast number of properties they managed.

The committee estimated that efficient use of the land had the potential to generate an annual revenue of about 120bn rupees (1.4bn; £1.1bn). The current annual revenue, according to some estimates, is around 2bn rupees. The committee also noted that "encroachments by the State, who is the custodian of the Waqf interests, is common", listing hundreds of instances of such "unauthorised occupation" of waqf land by government authorities.

According to government data, at least 58,889 of waqf properties are currently encroached upon, while more than 13,000 are under litigation. The status of more than 435,000 properties remains unknown. The amendments, the government says, address these issues and advance the recommendations made by the Sachar Committee. Parliamentary affairs minister Kiren Rijiju told The

Times of India newspaper that the reforms were also necessary as only an elite section in the Muslim community managed these properties.

But many Muslims see the proposed changes with scepticism. One of the most contentious aspects of the bill is the change to ownership rules, which would impact historical mosques, dargahs and graveyards owned by the board. Many of these properties - in use by Muslims for generations - lack formal documentation as they were donated orally or without legal records decades or centuries ago.

The 1954 Waqf Act recognised such properties under the category of "waqf by user", but the proposed law omits the provision, leaving the fate of a significant number of these properties uncertain.

Professor Mujibur Rehman, author of Shikwa-e-Hind: The Political Future of Indian Muslims, explains that tracing the ownership of such long-standing community properties is complicated, as their management and deed systems have shifted over the centuries from the Mughal system to the British colonial system, and now to the current system.

"You can trace personal properties up to a few generations, but tracing community properties is more difficult, as their management keeps changing over time," Prof Rehman says. Others worry that the new bill may not address the community's concerns but could instead considerably take away the role of Muslims in controlling waqf properties.

That's because the proposed changes include tweaks to the composition of waqf boards, making it compulsory to include non-Muslims as its members.

Some agree that a general law mandating people of all religions to be part of boards that run religious institutions is not a bad idea - as it would make processes more secular.

But the current move appears to favour majoritarian politics, Prof Rehman says. "There seems to be an attempt not only to get the state's control over Muslims' properties, but also of Hindu community over Muslim community's lives."

The Waqf system in India is often seen as a religious matter, but in reality, it is mainly about property management, administration, and governance. The Waqf Act, 1995, and its amendments focus on regulating Waqf properties to ensure they are properly used and managed. The law defines Waqf as the permanent donation of movable or immovable property by a Muslim for purposes considered reli-

gious, charitable, or beneficial to society. However, the key concern is not religious practice but the proper administration of these properties.

The government has the authority to regulate non-religious activities of Waqf institutions, including education, social welfare, and economic development, under Section 96 of the Waqf Act.

The Central Waqf Council (CWC) and State Waqf Boards (SWBs) oversee and regulate these properties to ensure transparency and legal compliance.

Indian courts have ruled that Waqf Boards are statutory bodies responsible for property management, not religious organizations. Several court decisions have reinforced that Waqf property management is a non-religious function :

- Syed Fazal Pookoya Thangal vs Union Of India (Kerala High Court, 1993) – Clarified that the Waqf Board is a government-regulated body, not a religious representative.

- Hafiz Mohammad Zafar Ahmad vs UP Central Sunni Board of Waqf (Allahabad High Court, 1965) – Ruled that a mutawalli (Waqf caretaker) does not own Waqf property but only manages it.

- Tilakayat Shri Govindlalji Maharaj vs State of Rajasthan (Supreme Court, 1964) – Declared that managing temple properties is a secular duty, a principle that also applies to Waqf properties.

The Waqf system in India is primarily about property management, not religion. The government and courts have repeatedly emphasized that Waqf administration is a secular function. The Waqf (Amendment) Bill, 2025, is a crucial step in resolving issues of mismanagement, illegal claims, and lack of transparency. By introducing legal oversight, digitization, and accountability, the bill ensures that Waqf properties serve their intended purpose for the public good while protecting the rights of all citizens.

The Waqf (Amendment) Bill 2025 establishes a secular, transparent, and accountable system for Waqf administration. While Waqf properties serve religious and charitable purposes, their management involves legal, financial, and administrative responsibilities that require structured governance. The role of Waqf Boards and the Central Waqf Council (CWC) is not religious but regulatory, ensuring legal compliance and safeguarding public interest. By introducing checks and balances, empowering stakeholders, and improving governance, the Bill sets a progressive and fair framework for Waqf administration in India.

Heart Lamp and the Fireflies of Resistance Banu Mushtaq's historic Booker triumph



By: Dipak Kurmi

In a literary world long dominated by global tongues and familiar names, a quiet yet resolute voice has pierced the fog of invisibility. On May 20, 2025, Kannada writer, lawyer, and activist Banu Mushtaq made history as the first author writing in Kannada to win the International Booker Prize. Her award-winning work, *Heart Lamp*, a poignant collection of twelve short stories written over three decades, is not only the first Kannada-language work to win the prestigious honour but also the first short story anthology to ever do so.

With this groundbreaking win, Banu Mushtaq has not only illuminated the path for regional literature but also brought into focus the often unheard voices of Muslim women from southern India—characters whom the Booker judges described as “astounding portraits of survival and resilience.” Translated into English by Deepa Bhasthi, the collection spans stories written between 1990 and 2023. The duo now share the £50,000 prize, with Bhasthi becoming the first Indian translator to receive this international accolade.

In her acceptance speech, Mushtaq delivered a moving tribute to the power of storytelling: “This book was born from the belief that no story is ever small; that in the tapestry of human experience, every thread holds the weight of the whole.” She added, “In a world that often tries to divide us, literature remains one of the last sacred spaces where we can live inside each other’s minds, if only for a few pages.” Her words echoed with the richness of her prose—empathetic, human, and unyielding in its pursuit of truth.

Heart Lamp captures the raw and intimate struggles of Muslim women in Karnataka—women silenced by patriarchy and religion, yet unbowed in spirit. Mushtaq, who grew up in Hassan, a small town in Karnataka, lived the life she so deftly fictionalised. Born into a conservative Muslim family, she studied the Quran in Urdu before her father, envisioning a broader world for his daughter, enrolled her in a convent school at age eight where Kannada

was the medium of instruction. Kannada, once an alien tongue to her, would go on to become her literary homeland.

Her journey as a writer was never detached from her personal turmoil. After marrying a man of her choosing at the age of 26, she experienced the stifling grip of domesticity. Her early years of marriage were marred by strife, leading her to the edge of despair. In one haunting incident, she attempted self-immolation, only to be stopped in time by her husband who pleaded with her, baby in arms, not to abandon the family. “I had always wanted to write but had nothing to write (about) because suddenly, after a love marriage, I was told to wear a burqa and dedicate myself to domestic work. I became a mother suffering from postpartum depression at 29,” she revealed in an interview with *Vogue*.

Yet from this crucible of pain and limitation, her creative voice was forged. Mushtaq’s debut story was published during this turbulent phase, and it was the beginning of a literary voyage marked by rebellion, empathy, and insight. Over the decades, she penned six short story collections, a novel, and a collection of essays, all of which interrogated religious orthodoxy, gendered silences, and the structural injustices of society.

Her activism found resonance in the Bandaya Sahitya movement of the 1970s and ‘80s, which encouraged Dalits, women, and other marginalised communities to write their truths and resist systemic oppression. The Kannada word *bandaya*, meaning rebellion, protest, and resistance, encapsulates her entire oeuvre. In fact, Deepa Bhasthi, in her translator’s note, described Mushtaq’s literary spirit as being defined by *bandaya*. It is this spirit that infuses *Heart Lamp*—a radical, tender, and unflinching exploration of marginalised lives.

The book’s stories are neither driven by spectacle nor dramatics; instead, they dwell in the everyday grit and quiet courage of women like Asifa, who gives up education to care for her family, or Mehrun and Arifa, overburdened mothers who wage daily battles to protect their children and sanity. In one striking tale, a woman ex-

hausted from childbirth pleads with God, “Be a woman once, oh Lord!” These are women whose rebellions are not always loud but deeply consequential. As *The Indian Express* noted, “In mainstream Indian literature, Muslim women are often flattened into metaphors—silent sufferers or tropes in someone else’s moral argument. Mushtaq refuses both.”

Her defiance, however, came with consequences. In 2000, after she publicly supported the right of women to pray in mosques, she received death threats and narrowly escaped a knife attack. A fatwa was issued against her. Still, she refused to bow. “I have consistently challenged chauvinistic religious interpretations. These issues are central to my writing even now,” she told *The Week*.

Mushtaq also worked as a journalist in a leading tabloid and later trained as a lawyer to support her family. Despite the burdens of domestic life, social ostracism, and ideological backlash, she continued to write—fiercely and fearlessly. Her earlier translated volume, *Haseena and Other Stories*, won the PEN Translation Prize in 2024, further cementing her status as a formidable voice in Indian literature.

Deepa Bhasthi’s translation of *Heart Lamp* has received immense praise, not only for its faithfulness but also for its inventive rendering of Kannada’s rhythm into English. Booker jury chair Max Porter lauded the translation’s ability to “ruffle language to create new textures in a plurality of Englishes.” This reflects a deeper recognition: that translation is not just linguistic but cultural, emotional, and political. Bhasthi herself expressed hope that this win would galvanise more translations from Kannada and other Indian languages into global literary circuits.

The Booker win has stirred echoes of Geetanjali Shree’s 2022 win for *Tomb of Sand*, translated from Hindi by Daisy Rockwell. Together, these victories affirm the growing legitimacy of regional Indian literature on the global stage. As Manasi Subramaniam, Editor-in-Chief of Penguin India, aptly stated, “*Heart Lamp*’s triumph is a powerful reminder that literature in India’s many languages demands our full attention. We owe it our ears.”

In her acceptance speech, Mushtaq offered a metaphor that will likely be remembered for years: she likened the recognition of her work to “a thousand fireflies lighting up a single sky—brief, brilliant, and utterly collective.” It is a metaphor rich with meaning. In a country as linguistically diverse and socially stratified as India, Mushtaq’s fireflies illuminate those dimmed by neglect—Muslim women, regional writers, dissenters, and dreamers.

At 77, Banu Mushtaq has not only chronicled the sufferings and resilience of others; she has lived them. And now, with *Heart Lamp*, she has illuminated the world. Her stories remind us that resistance often takes the form of survival, that literature remains a sacred act of empathy, and that every thread in the tapestry of life indeed holds the weight of the whole. (The writer can be reached at dipakkurmipltd@gmail.com)

Poem

This Is Not A Question

By: Otteri Selva Kumar

No more word's
No more worries
No for silence...

I want silence
About with me and you

What happened with
About your unless speak

So I want
No worries
About no more word's

Did you get angry?
I'm sorry about...

Now my
More questions
Is there for you
I don't ask for...now

About my word's
About with I love your
Inner peace ...

That's what
I'm doing fine with me
Anyway anything
Wrong about you?

This is not a question
Peace of my answer's
For you and yours...

The gentle magic of Ruskin Bond's hill tales

By: Satyabrata Borah

Ruskin Bond, the gentle chronicler of the hills, turned 91 on May 19, 2025, a milestone that invites reflection on a life woven into the fabric of India’s literary landscape. His stories, suffused with the quiet beauty of the Himalayas, have captivated readers for decades, transforming the ordinary into the eternal. From the whispering pines of Mussoorie to the bustling simplicity of small-town India, Bond’s work captures a world that feels both intimately familiar and dreamily distant. His is a legacy not of grand epics but of tender moments, where the rustle of leaves, the chatter of children, or the solitude of a rainy day becomes a vessel for timeless truths. How did this unassuming man, tucked away in the hills, craft a body of work that resonates across generations and borders? The answer lies in the alchemy of his life, his craft, and his unwavering connection to the world around him.

Born in 1934 in Kasauli, a small hill station in Himachal Pradesh, Bond’s early life was marked by both privilege and upheaval. His father, a British officer in the Royal Air Force, instilled in him a love for books, reading to him from classics like Dickens and Kipling under the deodars. Yet, the idyllic moments of childhood were tempered by the turbulence of colonial India and personal loss.

His parents’ separation and his father’s untimely death when Bond was just ten left a profound mark, seeding in him a sensitivity to life’s fleeting joys and sorrows. Sent to a boarding school in Shimla, he found solace in the hills, their rhythms and silences becoming his refuge. It was here, amid the misty slopes and colonial bungalows, that Bond’s imagination took root, nourished by the landscapes that would later define his work.

After a brief, restless stint in England in his late teens, where he worked odd jobs and penned his first novel, “The Room on the Roof”, Bond returned to India. The decision was pivotal. England, with its gray skies and bustling cities, felt alien to the young writer whose heart belonged to the rugged warmth of India’s hills.

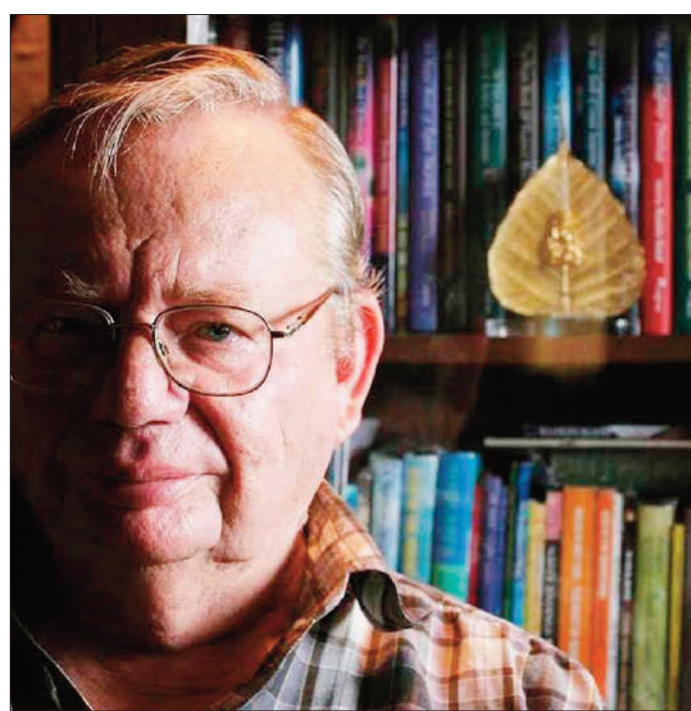
Settling in Dehradun and later Mussoorie, he embraced a life of simplicity, living in modest cottages with views of the Doon Valley or the Garhwal Himalayas. This choice of a quiet, almost reclusive existence allowed him to observe the world with a clarity that translated into his writing. His stories, whether for children or adults, are grounded in this intimacy with place like Landour’s bakeries, Mussoorie’s winding paths, or the monsoon-soaked forests where leopards roam. For Bond, the hills were not just a backdrop but a living presence, a co-author in his tales.

Bond’s literary magic lies in his ability to distill the profound from the mundane. His stories rarely chase grand narratives or dramatic plotlines; instead, they linger on the small, the overlooked such as a boy’s friendship with a tree, a ghost who misses her earthly life, or an old man reminiscing about lost love. In books like “A Flight of Pigeons”, “The Blue Umbrella”, or “Rusty, the Boy from the Hills”, he captures the universal through the particular. His characters, often drawn from the people he met like shopkeepers, gardeners, schoolboys, or eccentric aunts are rendered with such affection that they feel like neighbors. His prose, deceptively simple, carries a lyrical quality, evoking the sights, sounds, and smells of the hills with a few well-chosen words. A sentence like “The rain was like a curtain, shutting off the hills” conjures an entire world, vivid yet understated.

This simplicity is no accident. Bond’s writing process, as he has often shared, is disciplined yet unpretentious. He writes by hand, often in the early mornings, with a cup of tea and the hills for company. His stories emerge from observation, memory, and a deep empathy for the human condition. Unlike many authors who grapple with the weight of ambition, Bond seems to write for the joy of it, for the act of capturing a moment before it slips away. This lack of pretense endears him to readers, who find in his work a rare authenticity. His children’s books, in particular, resonate because they never talk down to their audience. A story like “The Cherry Tree”, where a boy plants a seed and watches it grow despite storms and neglect, speaks to resilience and hope in a way that children instinctively grasp and adults quietly cherish.

Bond’s life in the hills has been both his muse and his anchor. Mussoorie, where he has lived for over six decades, is as much a character in his stories as any human. The town’s colonial charm, its bazaars, and its seasonal rhythms permeate his work. He writes of its quirks with humor and affection: the monkeys that steal spectacles, the postmen who know everyone’s secrets, or the old churches that hum with ghosts. Yet, his love for the hills is not blind. He has written about environmental degradation, the felling of trees, and the encroachment of modernity on his beloved landscapes. In essays like “The Sacred Grove”, he mourns the loss of nature’s sanctity while celebrating its enduring spirit. This balance gives his work its timeless quality, making it resonate in an era of rapid change.

His connection to readers is another facet of his magic. Bond is not a distant literary figure but a grandfatherly presence, accessible through his stories and his life. He has lived modestly, shunning the trappings of fame, and his home in Landour is a pilgrimage site for fans who arrive with books to sign or stories to share. His interactions are marked by warmth and humor, often recounted in his essays or in-



terviews. He once described a young reader who asked if he was still alive, only to be delighted to meet the “ghost” himself. This accessibility extends to his writing, which invites readers into his world without judgment or exclusion. Whether it’s a child reading “Grandma Climbs a Tree” or an adult savoring “Rain in the Mountains”, Bond’s stories offer a refuge, a reminder of life’s simple joys.

The timelessness of Bond’s work also stems from its emotional universality. His themes like friendship, loss, the passage of time, the solace of nature transcend cultural and temporal boundaries. In “Time Stops at Shamli”, a young man’s fleeting encounter with a woman on a train becomes a meditation on missed opportunities, a story that feels as poignant today as it did when published in 1989. Similarly, his ghost stories, like “A Face in the Dark”, blend the eerie with the human, leaving readers with a shiver and a smile. These tales, rooted in the hills, speak to anyone who has ever felt the ache of longing or the comfort of belonging. His ability to evoke these emotions with economy and grace is what makes his work enduring.

Bond’s influence extends beyond his books. His stories have inspired films (*The Blue Umbrella*, *7 Khoon Maaf*), plays, and countless young writers who see in him a model of authenticity. He has received accolades like the Sahitya Akademi Award, the Padma Shri, and the Padma Bhushan, yet these honors seem secondary to the love of his readers. At 91, he continues to write, his pen still tracing the contours of the hills and the human heart. His recent works, like “How to Be Happy” and “The Room of Many Colours”, reflect a man at peace with his legacy, still finding wonder in the world around him.

What makes Ruskin Bond’s literary magic timeless? It is his ability to see the extraordinary in the ordinary, to weave stories that feel like memories, and to live a life that mirrors the values of his work—simplicity, kindness, and a deep love for the natural world. In his quiet hill life, he found not isolation but inspiration, turning the rustle of leaves and the laughter of children into tales that endure. As he celebrates 91 years, Bond remains a beacon of storytelling, reminding us that the smallest moments, when seen with a poet’s eye, can hold the universe. His hills, his words, and his warmth continue to enchant, inviting readers to pause, to listen, and to find magic in the everyday.

Mirijiyori: A saga of love

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

Mirijiyori, written by Rajanikanta Bordoloi, is widely regarded as the first significant social novel in Assamese literature. While Bordoloi is primarily known as a historical novelist, *Mirijiyori* stands out as a beautiful social novel that intricately portrays the life, customs, and culture of the Mishing community. Unlike the earlier attempts at novel writing in Assam, Bordoloi’s work in *Mirijiyori* blends fiction with reality, offering a glimpse into the rural life of the Mishings along the banks of the Subansiri River in North Lakhimpur. Through the love story of Janki and Pane, Bordoloi captures the essence of Mishing society, their relationship with nature, and the harsh social realities they face.

Set in the scenic surroundings of the Subansiri River, *Mirijiyori* follows the lives of Janki and Pane, two young Mishing lovers whose childhood friendship blossoms into a deep romantic bond. However, their love is challenged by societal expectations and family pressure. Pane’s father, Tamed, refuses to accept Janki as a suitable match for his daughter and decides to marry her off to Kamud, a wealthy villager. In a desperate attempt to change his fate, Janki leaves the village, hoping to improve his status and marry Pane one day.

However, fate has other plans for the young lovers. When Pane learns that her father has finalized her marriage with Kamud, she decides to elope with Janki. With the help of her friends, she escapes to the forest along the Subansiri, where the couple starts a new life, living off Janki’s small savings. For a brief moment, it seems as though they have found happiness. But their joy is short-lived. Kamud, along with a group of villagers, tracks them down. Janki is captured and punished severely, while Pane is taken back to her family.

The villagers decide to resolve the matter by bringing it to the local court. The court verdict spares the couple from further harm but orders them to live separately. Janki returns to his aunt’s house, while Pane remains with her family. Kamud, however, remains determined to marry Pane. With her father’s support, he conspires to arrange the marriage forcibly. But Pane, refusing to accept this fate, escapes once again, leaving the entire village in turmoil.

The search for Pane takes a dramatic turn when both Janki and Pane are captured by a group of hill Mishings. The couple’s hope of reuniting is crushed as they are held prisoner.



The villagers decide to resolve the matter by bringing it to the local court. The court verdict spares the couple from further harm but orders them to live separately. Janki returns to his aunt’s house, while Pane remains with her family

authentic portrayal of their traditions, festivals, and connection with nature.

The novel also highlights the social customs and religious practices of the Mishing people, such as their festivals like Bihu and their worship of deities like Karting-Kartan. The natural settings—riverbanks, forests, and fields—serve as a beautiful backdrop to the romance between Janki and Pane. The characters’ deep bond with nature and the river mirrors the traditional lifestyle of the Mishing community.

Although the story is fictional, *Mirijiyori* is grounded in reality, shedding light on the struggles and societal pressures faced by individuals in rural Assam. Bordoloi’s keen observation and narrative skill bring out the complexities of social life, making the novel a significant contribution to Assamese literature. His ability to combine fiction with detailed social commentary sets *Mirijiyori* apart from earlier novels in Assamese.

The tragic end of Janki and Pane evokes both sorrow and empathy, making *Mirijiyori* a powerful example of tragic literature. Through their story, Bordoloi not only immortalized the love and suffering of his characters but also preserved the culture and traditions of the Mishing people for future generations. Even today, *Mirijiyori* remains a timeless tale of love, struggle, and sacrifice—a true saga that resonates with readers across generations. (The writer is the Editor in Chief of the Assamese E-magazine *SAMPROTIK*. He can be reached at himangshur1989@gmail.com or 9954812261, 9864000260)

Pak violated spirit of IWT by inflicting three wars, thousands of terror attacks on India: India tells UN

UNITED NATIONS, May 24: India ripped through Pakistan's "disinformation" at the UN on the Indus Waters Treaty, asserting that Islamabad violated its spirit by inflicting three wars and thousands of terror attacks on India that seek to hold hostage lives of civilians, religious harmony and economic prosperity.

"We are constrained to respond to the disinformation being carried out by the delegation of Pakistan with regard to the Indus Waters Treaty. India has always acted in a responsible manner as an upper riparian state," India's Permanent Representative to UN Ambassador Parvathaneni Harish said on Friday. Harish was addressing the UN Security Council Arria Formula meeting organised by the Permanent Mission of Slovenia on 'Protecting Water in Armed Conflict - Protecting Civilian Lives.'

Harish highlighted four aspects to expose the "disinformation" by Pakistan, which spoke about India's decision to suspend the Indus Waters Treaty.

In the wake of the horrific April 22 Pahalgam attack in Jammu and Kashmir in which 26 civilians were killed, India had decided that the Indus Waters Treaty of 1960 would be held in abeyance with immediate effect until Pakistan credibly and irrevocably abjures its support for cross-border terrorism.

Harish told the UN meeting that India had entered into the Indus Waters Treaty 65 years ago in good faith. Noting that the Preamble of the Treaty describes that it was concluded 'in a spirit of good will and friendship', Harish said throughout these six and a half



decades, "Pakistan has violated the spirit of the treaty by inflicting three wars and thousands of terror attacks on India."

The Indian envoy underlined that in the last four decades, more than 20,000 Indian lives have been lost in terror attacks, the most recent of which was the dastardly targeted terror attack on tourists in Pahalgam. Even as India has shown extraordinary patience and magnanimity throughout this period, Harish said Pakistan's "state-sponsored cross-border terrorism in India seeks to hold hostage the lives of civilians, religious harmony and economic prosperity."

Harish pointed out that India has formally asked Pakistan to discuss the modifications of the Treaty on several occasions in the past two years but Islamabad continues to reject these.

"Pakistan's obstructionist approach continues to prevent the exercise of full utilisation of legitimate rights by India," he said.

Further, Harish said that in the past 65 years, far-reaching fundamental changes have taken place

not only in terms of escalating security concerns through cross-border terror attacks but also growing requirements for producing clean energy, climate change and demographic change.

"Technology for dam infrastructure has transformed to ensure the safety and efficiency of operations and water use. Some of the old dams are facing serious safety concerns," he said adding that Pakistan has continued to "consistently block" any changes to this infrastructure, and any modifications of the provisions, which is permissible under the Treaty. He noted that in 2012, terrorists even attacked the Tulbul Navigation Project in Jammu and Kashmir.

"These cynical acts continue to endanger the safety of our projects and the lives of civilians."

"It is against this backdrop that India has finally announced that the treaty will be in abeyance until Pakistan, which is a global epicentre of terror, credibly and irrevocably ends its support for cross-border terrorism. It is clear that it is Pakistan which remains in

violation of the Indus Waters Treaty."

Earlier in the day, Harish delivered a strong response to Pakistan at a UNSC open debate on 'Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict', calling out Pakistan's "grossly hypocritical" behaviour and asserting that a nation that makes no distinction between terrorists and civilians has no credentials to speak about protecting civilians.

After Pakistan's Ambassador at the UN Asim Iftikhar Ahmad raked the Kashmir issue and spoke about the recent conflict between the two nuclear-armed countries, Harish slammed Pakistan's baseless allegations and said India experienced decades of Pakistani-sponsored terrorist attacks across its borders.

"This has ranged from the horrific 26/11 attack on the city of Mumbai to the barbaric mass murder of innocent tourists in Pahalgam in April 2025. The victims of Pakistani terrorism have been predominantly civilians since its objective has been to attack our prosperity, progress and morale. For such a nation to even participate in a discussion on the protection of civilians is an affront to the international community," Harish said. Tensions between India and Pakistan escalated after the Pahalgam attack, which claimed 26 lives.

India launched 'Operation Sindoor' under which it carried out precision strikes on terror infrastructure in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir in the early hours of May 7, following which Pakistan attempted to attack Indian military bases on May 8, 9 and 10. (PTI)

WH slashing staff in major overhaul of National Security Council, officials say

WASHINGTON, May 24: President Donald Trump is ordering a major overhaul of the National Security Council that will shrink its size, lead to the ouster of some political appointees and return many career government employees back to their home agencies, according to two US officials and one person familiar with the reorganisation.

The number of staff at the NSC is expected to be significantly reduced, according to the officials, who requested anonymity to discuss the sensitive personnel matter.

The shake-up is just the latest shoe to drop at the NSC, which is being dramatically made over after the ouster early this month of Trump's national security adviser Mike Waltz, who in many ways had hewed to traditional Republican foreign policy.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio has been serving as national security adviser since the ouster of Waltz, who was nominated to serve as Trump's ambassador to the United Nations.

The move is expected to elevate the importance of the State Department and Pentagon in advising Trump on important foreign policy moves. But, ultimately, Trump relies on his own instincts above all else when making decisions.

The NSC, created during the Truman administration, is an arm of the White House tasked with advising and assisting the president on national security and foreign policy and coordinating among various government agencies.

Trump was frustrated in his first term by political appointees and advisers who he felt gummed up his America First agenda.

There were roughly 395 people working at the NSC, including about 180 support staff, according to one official. About 90 to 95 of those being ousted are policy or subject-matter experts seconded from other government agencies. They will be given an opportunity to return to their home agencies if they want.

Many of the political appointees will also be given positions elsewhere in the administration, the official said.

The NSC has been in a continual state of tumult during the early going of Trump's second go-around in the White House.

Waltz was ousted weeks after Trump fired several NSC officials, just a day after the influential far-right activist Laura Loomer raised concerns directly to him



about staff loyalty. Loomer has in the past spread 9/11 conspiracy theories and promoted QAnon, an apocalyptic and convoluted conspiracy theory centered on the belief that Trump is fighting the deep state, and took credit for the ouster of the NSC officials that she argued were disloyal.

And the White House, days into the administration, sidelined about 160 NSC aides, sending them home while the administration reviewed staffing and tried to align it with Trump's agenda. The aides were career government employees, commonly referred to as detailees.

This latest shake-up amounts to a liquidation of NSC staffing, with both career government detailees on assignment to the NSC being sent back to their home agencies and several political appointees being pushed out of their positions, according to the person familiar with the decision.

A White House official who spoke on the condition of anonymity confirmed that the overhaul, first reported by Axios, was underway. Andy Baker, the national security adviser to Vice President JD Vance, and Robert Gabriel, an assistant to the president for policy, will serve as deputy national security advisers, according to the White House official.

Waltz, during his short tenure heading the NSC, came under searing criticism in March after revelations that he added journalist Jeffrey Goldberg to a private text chain on an encrypted messaging app that was used to discuss planning for a sensitive military operation against Houthi militants in Yemen.

Waltz has taken responsibility for building the text chain but has said he does not know how Goldberg ended up being included. (AP)

South Lebanon votes in municipal elections that will test support for Hezbollah

BEIRUT, May 24: Residents of southern Lebanon voted Saturday in the country's municipal elections that will test support for Hezbollah in the predominantly Shiite areas, months after the end of the destructive Israel-Hezbollah war.

Hezbollah is running in an alliance with the Amal group of Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri, and both are expected to win mayoral races and the majority of seats in municipal councils. Both groups already won many municipalities uncontested.

South Lebanon is the fourth and last district to vote in the elections since May 4. Among those who voted Saturday were Hezbollah members wounded in the September 17, 2024, explosions of thousands of pagers that blew up near-simultaneously in an operation carried out by Israel. More than a dozen were killed, and nearly 3,000 wounded.

"The will of life is stronger than death, and the will of construction is stronger than destruction," President Joseph Aoun said during a tour of south Lebanon Saturday. He told reporters in his hometown of Aaicheh that he voted for the first time in 40 years.

Saturday's vote came two days after Israel's air force carried out intense airstrikes in different parts of south Lebanon. Residents of villages and towns on the border with Israel, including the village of Kfar Kila, that was almost completely destroyed during the war, cast their ballots at polling stations set up in the nearby city of Nabatieh. Residents of other border villages cast their ballots in the port city of Tyre. (AP)

PM Wong highlights Singapore's collaborative approach amid global shifts in alliances

SINGAPORE, May 24: Singapore will be a "steady and constructive" partner to advance dialogue and fraternity and support a rule-based order amid global shifts in alliances, Prime Minister Lawrence Wong has said, highlighting his government's priorities to help the country secure an assured place in the changed world.

Speaking after his newly re-elected government was sworn in on Friday, Wong said with major world powers reassessing strategies and shifting positions to gain the upper hand, competition is intensifying, and smaller nations risk being caught in the crossfire, or being cut out of the conversation altogether. "In a world of shifting alliances, we will be a steady and constructive partner, one willing and able to contribute to peace and stability, to advance dialogue and

fraternity, and support a rule-based global order," he said.

"Our goal is not just to navigate this uncertain world, but to help shape it for the better, by working with like-minded partners, and upholding shared principles and values, so that small nations too have a place under the sun," Wong said.

He said he would deepen the trade-focused country's relations with the major powers, especially the US and China, engaging with them honestly in a principled manner while not getting caught in their rivalry. The US-China rivalry encompasses several competitive and cooperative aspects, including trade, technology, military, and diplomatic relations.

"Where our interests align, we will work with them (the US and China). Where they do not, we will stand firm and protect Singapore's

security and sovereignty."

He also added that the first priority would be to secure an "assured place" for Singapore in this "changed world".

Singapore, said Wong, will also seek new ties with countries in parts of the world, like Africa and South America, where it does not have much presence yet.

The country's economic strategies will be reviewed and updated for the new landscape, he said, adding that the government will develop "a new economic blueprint for our next phase" to sustain Singapore's competitive edge and create good jobs for Singaporeans.

It will also help businesses, households and workers "weather the storm" as global growth slows in the near term, added 52-year-old Wong who secured a landslide win in the May 3 general election. (PTI)

late Syria's previous rulers by effectively expelling those doing business with them from the global financial system.

They specifically block postwar reconstruction, so while they can be waived for 180 days by executive order, investors are likely to be wary of reconstruction projects when sanctions could be reinstated after six months. The Trump administration said Friday's actions were just one part of a broader US government effort to remove the full architecture of sanctions.

Those penalties had been imposed on the Assad family for their support of Iranian-backed militias, their chemical weapons programme and abuses of civilians.

Trump administration says it expects action from Syria

Secretary of State Marco Rubio said in a statement Friday that in return for sanctions relief, Trump expects prompt action by the Syrian government on important poli-

Russia, Ukraine swap hundreds more prisoners, hours after mass strike on Kyiv

KYIV, May 24: Russia and Ukraine swapped hundreds more prisoners on Saturday, as part of a major swap that was a moment of cooperation in otherwise failed efforts to reach a ceasefire.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Russia's defence ministry said each side brought home 307 more soldiers, a day after each released a total of 390 combatants and civilians.

The news came hours after Kyiv came under a large-scale Russian drone and missile attack that left at least 15 people injured, according to local officials. Explosions and anti-aircraft fire were heard throughout Kyiv as many sought shelter in subway stations.

In talks held in Istanbul earlier this month that marked the first time the two sides met face to face for peace talks since Russia's 2022 full-scale in-

vasion, Kyiv and Moscow agreed to swap 1,000 prisoners of war and civilian detainees each. It was a rare moment of cooperation in otherwise failed efforts to reach a ceasefire in the 3-year-old war. Russia attacked Ukraine with 14 ballistic missiles and 250 Shahed drones overnight, officials said, adding that Ukrainian forces shot down 6 missiles and neutralised 245 drones. 128 drones were shot down and 117 were thwarted using electronic warfare. The Kyiv City Military Administration said it was one of the biggest combined missile and drone attacks on the capital.

A difficult night for all of us, the administration said in a statement.

The debris of intercepted missiles and drones fell in at least six city districts of the Ukrainian capital. According to the acting head of Kyiv's military

If terrorism is rabid dog, Pakistan is wild handler: Abhishek Banerjee

TOKYO, May 24: If terrorism is a "rabid dog", Pakistan is its "vile handler", and the world must unite to tackle it, Trinamool Congress MP Abhishek Banerjee said on Saturday.

Banerjee, who is part of an all-party delegation to Japan to highlight India's unwavering stand against cross-border terrorism and expose Pakistan, said, "We are here to convey the truth—India refuses to bow down."

The delegation to Japan led by JD(U) MP Sanjay Jha is one of the seven multi-party delegations India has tasked to visit 33 global capitals to reach out to the international community.

"We will not yield to fear. We have learnt to respond in a language that they understand," he said during a fiery speech in Tokyo.

"If terrorism is a rabid dog, Pakistan is its vile handler. We must first unite the world to tackle this wild handler—else it will continue to breed more rabid dogs," he said.

"We will ensure India remains responsible. All our responses and actions have been precise, calculated, and non-escalatory," he said. Tensions between India and Pakistan escalated after the Pahalgam attack, which claimed 26 lives.

India carried out precision strikes on terror infrastructure in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir in the early hours of May 7, following which Pakistan attempted to attack Indian military bases on May 8, 9, and 10. The Indian side responded strongly to the Pakistani actions.

The on-ground hostilities ended with an understanding of stopping the military actions following talks between the directors general of military operations of both sides on May 10.

Banerjee said The Resistance Front (TRF), which is behind the Pahalgam attack, is a proxy organisation of Lashkar-e-Taiba, which is recognised as a UN-designated terrorist group.

"We are all aware of how Pakistan hastily attempted to disassociate Lashkar from the list. Moreover, after the air strikes, public domain images showed senior Pakistan army officials attending the funerals of the terrorists killed in the strikes," he said. "The footage does not lie—it's all in the open. I believe every Indian has a role to play in engaging communities and spreading this message," he said and asked the Indian community members to raise awareness on the issue of terrorism.

Referring to the Indian diaspora as the country's greatest asset, Banerjee said, "You live India, you breathe India. I want you to be the nation's foremost evangelist—proponents of India's message in the global fight against terrorism."

"We urge you to raise awareness of this issue within your circles, through your networks, and via local influencers, in your own unique ways," he said.

"Be the country's most passionate proponents and share this message: India is leading from the front in the global battle against terrorism," he said. The delegation to Japan interacted with members of the Indian diaspora at the Embassy.

It presented a unified front of India, clearly explaining the role of Pakistan in the gruesome terror attacks in Pahalgam on April 22 and how India through Operation Sindoor destroyed the terror bases in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. (PTI)

Trump administration takes first steps in easing sanctions on Syria

WASHINGTON, May 24: The Trump administration granted Syria sweeping exemptions from sanctions Friday in a big first step toward fulfilling the president's pledge to lift a half-century of penalties on a country shattered by 13 years of civil war. While broad, the administration's actions could possibly be reversed.

Syrians say they need permanent relief to secure the tens of billions of dollars in investment needed to rebuild after a conflict that fragmented the country, displaced or killed millions of people, and left behind thousands of foreign fighters.

A measure by the State Department waived for six months a tough set of sanctions imposed by Congress in 2019. A Treasury Department action suspended enforcement of sanctions against anyone doing business with a range of Syrian individuals and entities, including Syria's central

bank. Syria is now led by Ahmad al-Sharaa, a former militia commander who helped drive longtime autocratic leader Bashar Assad from power late last year.

President Donald Trump announced last week that the US would roll back the heavy financial penalties in a bid to give the interim government a better chance of survival.

The Trump administration said businesses and investors are getting the protection against sanctions they need to come back to Syria, calling it the opportunity for a fresh start.

The only other option was Syria becoming a failed state and civil war, said Mouaz Moustafa, a Syrian American advocate who had campaigned for quick, broad relief. Now there is hope for a future democratic Syria.

The congressional sanctions, known as the Caesar Syria Civilian Protection Act, had aimed to iso-

late Syria's previous rulers by effectively expelling those doing business with them from the global financial system.

They specifically block postwar reconstruction, so while they can be waived for 180 days by executive order, investors are likely to be wary of reconstruction projects when sanctions could be reinstated after six months. The Trump administration said Friday's actions were just one part of a broader US government effort to remove the full architecture of sanctions.

Those penalties had been imposed on the Assad family for their support of Iranian-backed militias, their chemical weapons programme and abuses of civilians.

Trump administration says it expects action from Syria

Secretary of State Marco Rubio said in a statement Friday that in return for sanctions relief, Trump expects prompt action by the Syrian government on important poli-



cy priorities. Al-Sharaa's own past has fuelled doubts. The group that he led, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, was originally affiliated with al-Qaida, although it later renounced ties and took a more moderate tone. It is still listed by the US as a terrorist organisation.

But if al-Sharaa's government fails, the US and others fear re-

newed conflict in Syria and a power vacuum that could allow a resurgence of the Islamic State and other extremist groups.

If we engage them, it may work out, it may not work out. If we do not engage them, it was guaranteed to not work out, Rubio told lawmakers this week.

Trump met al-Sharaa last week

in Saudi Arabia, a day after announcing his intention to lift the sanctions: "We're taking them all off. Good luck, Syria. Show us something special."

Rubio said sanctions relief must start quickly because Syria's transition government could be weeks from collapse and a full-scale civil war of epic proportions. But asked by lawmakers this week what sanctions relief should look like overall, Rubio gave a one-word explanation: Incremental.

Moving toward permanent sanctions relief

While some sanctions can be quickly waived through executive actions like those taken Friday, Congress would have to permanently remove the penalties it imposed.

A proposal circulated among administration officials this week broadly emphasised taking all action possible, as fast as possible, according to US officials familiar

with the plan who were not authorised to comment publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Last week, a State Department proposal laid out a three-phase road map with temporary, partial relief initially and setting sweeping conditions for Syrians to meet for any future phases of relief or permanent lifting of sanctions, one of the officials said.

Removing Palestinian terror groups from Syria is first on the list of conditions to get to the second phase. Supporters of sanctions relief say that might be impossible, given the subjectivity of determining which groups meet that definition and at what point they can be declared removed.

Other conditions for moving to the second phase are for the new government to take custody of detention facilities housing Islamic State fighters and to move forward on absorbing a US-backed Kurdish force into the Syrian army. (AP)

Urges India to assert claims beyond McMahon Line

MP Tapir Gao slams China's expansionist policy

HT Bureau

NAMSAL, May 24: Lok Sabha MP from Arunachal East, Tapir Gao, has strongly criticized China's expansionist policy, calling it a threat to regional stability and an infringement on India's territorial sovereignty. In a recent media interaction, the MP firmly rejected China's practice of renaming geographical features within Arunachal Pradesh, stating that such tactics hold no legitimacy or consequence.

"Changing the names of rivers, mountains, cities, and even states in Arunachal Pradesh does not change the ground reality," said Gao. "Arunachal Pradesh is an integral part of India and will always remain so. China's repeated attempts to rename our land are not only futile but also reflect a flawed expansionist agenda."

Taking a bold stand, Tapir Gao suggested that India should assert its claim over regions inhabited by the Loba and Tani tribes, who live across the McMahon Line, a de facto boundary between India and China. He pointed out that



these communities share cultural and ancestral ties with tribes in Arunachal Pradesh, reinforcing India's historical and ethnic linkage to the region beyond the McMahon Line.

He further added that China's continued border provocations

and renaming strategies are part of a broader policy of regional intimidation. "It is ironic that China, which has territorial disputes with at least 17 countries, continues to meddle in Indian territory. Instead of renaming our land, China should focus on re-

solving its numerous international disputes peacefully," Gao said.

Referring specifically to the Right Bank of the Sangpo River (known as the Brahmaputra in India), which originates in Tibet, Gao stated, "India should claim its cultural and territorial rights. We must not allow China's cartographic aggression to go unchallenged."

The MP reaffirmed India's resolve to continue developmental activities in Arunachal Pradesh without interference. "We will carry out developmental works in our own land, for our own people. No amount of renaming or intimidation from China can stop us from progressing," he asserted. Tapir Gao's remarks come in the backdrop of China's recent issuance of a new list of renamed locations in Arunachal Pradesh, a move that has been widely condemned across India. His statement reinforces India's unwavering stance on the sovereignty of Arunachal Pradesh and signals a call for stronger strategic posture in the face of continued provocations.

State Bank of India conducts digital awareness programme in Longding

HT Bureau

NAMSAL, May 24: The Regional Business Office, Namsal of State Bank of India, organised a Digital Awareness Programme recently at its Longding Branch, Arunachal Pradesh aimed at promoting safe digital banking practices and educating the public about cyber threats.

A significant focus of the program was on "Safe Banking with Digital Awareness," where participants learned how to protect their bank accounts and personal data while using online banking services, UPI, and mobile apps. Demonstrations were provided to show secure transaction practices and how to report cyber fraud.

Emphasizing the importance of secure digital habits, the session also included practical tips to safeguard personal digital devices. Attendees were advised on using strong passwords, regularly updating software, avoiding suspicious links, and enabling multi-factor authentication.

The event drew participation from residents, HNI, and business owners, who were sensitized to the growing risks in the digital world.



Representatives from SBI delivered insightful presentations on various types of cyber threats such as phishing, malware attacks, identity theft, and online frauds.

As per today's requirement such initiatives are part of the bank's ongoing commitment to empowering customers with the knowledge to stay secure in the evolving digital landscape. Informational content

and helpdesk support were also made available for attendees.

The program concluded with an interactive Q&A session, reflecting the community's keen interest in adopting safe digital practices plans to continue these awareness drives across other regions to ensure that every customer can bank digitally with confidence and security. (PTT)

Coached by Army, 38 students from remote areas in Arunachal clear Sainik School entrance exam

'It is a story of resilience, mentorship, and the power of belief'



ITANAGAR, May 24: Thirty-eight students from remote areas in Arunachal Pradesh cleared the All India Sainik School Entrance Examination with the help of coaching provided by the Indian Army.

Their success is the result of the coaching programme conducted by the Army's Gajraj Corps from July last year to April, defence spokesperson Lt Col Mahendra Rawat said.

A total of 44 students from Jang

and Dirang in West Kameng district were provided coaching, and 38 of them became successful, he said.

Designed to bridge the educational gap in underserved areas, the initiative provided focused academic training and motivational support to young aspirants, he said.

Army instructors not only helped the students academically, but also instilled the discipline and

confidence in them needed to succeed on a national platform, he said.

"This is more than just a story of exam success, it is a story of resilience, mentorship, and the power of belief. The 38 qualifiers are not only students but role models for many others across the region, proving that talent thrives even in the remotest corners when given the right support," the officer said. (PTT)

MLA Techi Kaso inspects NH-415 four-lane and flyover project in Naharlagun

HT Bureau

NAMSAL, May 24: In a proactive move to address ongoing traffic congestion and expedite infrastructure development, Itanagar Capital Complex MLA and Advisor to the Urban Affairs Minister, Techi Kaso, along with Chief Engineer (Highways) C.S. Choutang of the PWD Highway, conducted a joint inspection of the under-construction four-lane road and flyover project along NH-415 in Naharlagun township, covering the stretch from Papunallah to A-Sector.

The inspection team included senior officers from the Capital Complex administration, Capital Police, the PWD Highway Department, and the executing agency overseeing the project. The officials reviewed the pace of construction, evaluated the on-ground challenges, and assessed the ongoing traffic management measures in place.

During the inspection, MLA Techi Kaso expressed dissatisfaction over the traffic hardships faced by commuters, particularly highlighting the recent traffic advisory that led to a standstill in movement across

Naharlagun on May 20. Concerned by the public inconvenience, he directed the executing agency to intensify the pace of work and implement a 24x7 shift-based execution plan to ensure faster completion.

Kaso emphasized the importance of continuous monitoring to ensure quality and timely delivery of the project. He urged officials to coordinate effectively and prioritize the needs of the public, especially in urban zones where traffic bottlenecks are severely impacting daily life.

In addition, he instructed the Highway Department to carry out immediate repairs and maintenance of the existing road stretch to facilitate smooth vehicular movement and reduce traffic congestion until the permanent infrastructure is completed.

The flyover and four-lane project on NH-415 is a critical infrastructure development aimed at easing traffic pressure and improving connectivity in the growing township of Naharlagun. With MLA Kaso pushing for faster and more efficient execution, residents are hopeful for early relief and improved urban mobility.

Inauguration of Deepak Nabam Living Home Facility in Sopo

Service to humanity is the path to heaven: MLA Nabam Vivek

HT Bureau

NAMSAL, May 24: "Everyone believes that if you serve humanity and do good deeds on earth, then you will reach heaven," said Nabam Vivek, Member of the Legislative Assembly from Doimukh and State President of the People's Party of Arunachal (PPA). The MLA made this heartfelt remark while addressing the gathering at the inauguration ceremony of a newly constructed Kitchen-cum-Dining Hall building at Deepak Nabam Living Home (A Home for No Home) located at Sopo in the Doimukh Circle.

Addressing the occasion, MLA Vivek emphasized the impermanence of life, noting that nothing on earth is permanent, including human beings. "What truly remains after us are our deeds. If we work selflessly for the betterment of mankind, if we dedicate ourselves to acts of kindness, then we leave behind a legacy that inspires others. Good deeds done for humanity are always remembered, praised, and honored," he said. "Even though no one has returned to describe what heaven truly looks like, it is widely believed that those who do good on earth are granted a place there. That is the power of faith and goodwill. I urge everyone who considers themselves good and fortunate to step forward and support those who are in need," he added with earnest sincerity.

Nabam Vivek further lauded the contributions of social worker and humanitarian Deepak Nabam, founder of the Deepak Nabam Living Home. He said that individuals like Deepak Nabam, who dedicate their lives to serving specially-abled individuals and the marginalized sections of society, deserve not only recognition but also active support from the community and the government alike. "As a public representative, I as-



sure my full support to people like Deepak Nabam, who work selflessly in the service of humanity. Their tireless efforts to uplift the neglected and voiceless in our society serve as a beacon of compassion and commitment," said the MLA.

In his speech, Vivek also extended his heartfelt gratitude to Chief Minister Pema Khandu for donating the land for the expansion of the shelter home in Sopo. "As per the vision and guidance of our Chief Minister, I have prepared a comprehensive master plan for the development of the shelter campus. This plan will soon be forwarded to the Deputy Commissioner of Papum Pare for consideration by the government. I am optimistic that the administration will extend its full support so that this noble institution can grow and serve even more people," he added.

He concluded his address with a solemn pledge of continuous

support to Deepak Nabam Living Home, reaffirming his commitment to the cause of humanitarian service.

Papum Pare Deputy Commissioner Jiken Bomjen, who was present as the guest of honor, also addressed the gathering. In his speech, Bomjen praised the outstanding work done by Deepak Nabam and his team. "This is a truly noble initiative. The selfless efforts and unwavering dedication displayed here deserve the collective support of all sections of society. Let us all come together and extend our help to those who are in dire need of care and compassion," he said.

Deepak Nabam, the founder of the Living Home, took the opportunity to thank all stakeholders, including community members, well-wishers, and government officials, for their continued support. He particularly expressed his gratitude to Chief Minister Pema Khandu

and MLA Nabam Vivek for their instrumental roles in promoting the institution and ensuring its growth and sustainability. "For over two decades, our shelter home has stood as a sanctuary for the homeless and specially-abled. The support we've received reaffirms our belief in humanity's collective strength," he said.

The occasion also witnessed a symbolic yet significant event — the reception of the first batch of 50 inmates who were transferred from the old campus in Itanagar to the new facility in Sopo. This marks a major milestone in the relocation and expansion efforts of the Deepak Nabam Living Home, which currently houses over 310 residents.

The event concluded on a hopeful note, with dignitaries, officials, and community members reaffirming their commitment to standing by institutions that uphold the values of humanity, compassion, and inclusive care. (PTT)

Khandu pledges support to 'Viksit Bharat' vision at NITI Aayog meet

ITANAGAR, May 24: Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu on Saturday showcased the state's remarkable socio-economic progress over the past decade, reaffirming its pivotal role in realising Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of a 'Viksit Bharat' by 2047.

Addressing the 10th Governing Council meeting of NITI Aayog in New Delhi, Khandu reaffirmed Arunachal Pradesh's vision to become resilient, empowered, and prosperous, contributing significantly to a developed India characterised by sustainable industrial growth, youth and women empowerment, world-class infrastructure, innovation leadership, and environmental stewardship.

In his address, the chief minister presented key development indicators, including an impressive 11.01 per cent growth in Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP), a significant reduction in multi-dimensional poverty from 24.85% to 13.76%, and strengthened fiscal discipline reflected in a 166% increase in GSDP and a 321.8% rise in state own resources since 2014-15.

"These figures demonstrate Arunachal Pradesh's rapid socio-economic transformation driven by effective governance and robust Central support," he stated.

The chief minister credited the 'double-engine' government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the collective efforts of 'Team Arunachal' for accelerating growth across key sectors such as infrastructure, agriculture, industry, tourism, education, and healthcare.

A major highlight was the ₹ 2,205 crore allocation under the vibrant villages programme for comprehensive development of 455 border villages in phase 1 and an additional 122 villages in phase 2, enhancing connectivity, electrification, and communication along the India-Tibet, India-Myanmar, and India-Bhutan borders.

Khandu detailed significant infrastructure expansion, noting a 251% increase in rural roads and a 143% growth in national highways. Connectivity to remote areas has improved with 2,605 newly installed mobile towers connecting 3,721 villages.

In education and skill development, eight new Navodaya Vidyalayas have been sanctioned, while ₹ 146 crore has been invested under the Swadesh Darshan scheme to boost tourism with a focus on niche sectors such as farm, spiritual, adventure, wildlife, wellness, tribal, and eco-tourism, Khandu pointed out.



He outlined ambitious education reforms under Mission Shikshit Arunachal, targeting completion by 2029. This includes the installation of smart classrooms in 80% of government schools, AI-driven monitoring systems, and comprehensive infrastructure improvements. The state currently boasts a 100% adjusted net enrolment rate, low dropout rates, and a favourable pupil-teacher ratio of 11:1.

Khandu further said that youth em-

powerment initiatives provide 75% scholarships for IIT and AIIMS aspirants, subsidies for aviation and merchant navy training, and robust entrepreneurship support through the revamped Industrial Development and Investment Policy 2025.

He said, healthcare advancements have expanded insurance coverage to 1.8 lakh families, introduced free chemotherapy at the Tomo Riba Institute of Health and Medical Science (TRIHS), established

a renal care centre, and expanded the 300-bed Pasighat hospital.

"The state has strengthened mental health and substance abuse rehabilitation programs and is enhancing digital health infrastructure with telemedicine and digital record-keeping across government facilities," he said.

On energy, Khandu emphasised the state's vast hydropower potential of 58,000 MW, highlighting ongoing projects such as the 600 MW Kameng, 110 MW Pare, the nearly completed 2,000 MW Lower Subansiri, and the under-construction 2,880 MW Dibang Project, India's highest hydropower plant.

Khandu added that governance reforms include leading the Northeast in e-office implementation, with over 41 lakh files processed digitally.

Plans are underway to integrate AI and Big Data analytics into governance and establish a Centre of Excellence in emerging technologies. The state is also strengthening capacity-building efforts via the iGOT Karmayogi platform and preparing for new criminal law implementations, he said.

"Arunachal Pradesh continues to promote outcome-based governance with robust monitoring systems, geo-tagging, independent audits, and district-level co-

ordination through mentor secretaries and guardian ministers," he added.

The chief minister acknowledged positive progress in resolving the longstanding Assam-Arunachal border dispute, with joint surveys expected to resolve over 60% of the boundary dispute.

"Environmental stewardship is central to the state's agenda, anchored by the Pakke Declaration 2047. Initiatives include afforestation, tiger conservation, drone-assisted reforestation, wetland restoration, and sustainable agriculture practices," he said.

Women's empowerment remains a key priority, with nearly half of panchayat representatives being women and over 1.1 lakh women mobilised into more than 13,000 self-help groups, supported by ₹ 75 crore in bank credit, he said.

Schemes like the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhinyam and "One Tribe, One Weave" promote financial inclusion and tribal artisan entrepreneurship, the chief minister added.

The chief minister conveyed a strong message of unity, reform, and citizen-driven development, emphasising that Arunachal Pradesh's people are not mere beneficiaries but active partners in building a brighter future for the state and the nation. (PTT)

Will not be silenced by terrorism, says Tharoor

NEW DELHI, May 24: Congress MP Shashi Tharoor, who is leading a multi-party delegation to five countries, has asserted the mission would be to give the world the message that "we will not be silenced by terrorism" and that "we don't want the world to look away either".

Tharoor made the remarks late last night just before his delegation left for a visit to Guyana, Panama, Colombia, Brazil and the United States.

In a video message posted on X, Tharoor said, "I'm heading off to five countries leading an all-party delegation to Guyana, Panama, Colombia, Brazil and the United States, and the reason we are going is to speak for the nation, to speak about this horrendous crisis we were subjected to in which our country was attacked by terrorists in the cruelest possible way."

The Thiruvananthapuram MP said the delegation is a mission of peace and hope, and will one day remind the world that India stands for all the values "we need to preserve in the world today".

"We need to speak up with clarity and conviction for our country, for our response and to give the world the message that we will not be silenced by terrorism and we don't want the world to look away either," the MP from Thiruvananthapuram said. "We don't want indifference to triumph over the truth. It's a mission of peace. It's a mission of hope. And it's a mission that will one day remind the world that India stands for all the values we need to preserve in the world today of peace, of democracy, of freedom, and not of hatred, killing and of terror. Jai Hind," he said in his video message.

Tharoor also posted pictures of



the delegation members at the airport before boarding the flight.

The delegation led by Tharoor comprises Shambhavi (LJP-RV), Sarfaraz Ahmed (JMM), G M Harish Balayogi (TDP), Shashank Mani Tripathi (BJP), Bhuvanesh-

war Kalita (BJP), Milind Deora (Shiv Sena), Tejasvi Surya (BJP) and former diplomat Taranjit Sandhu. It will travel to Guyana, Panama, Colombia, Brazil and the US.

India's multi-party delegations to different countries will emphasise Pakistan's links to terrorism, including the 9/11 attack in the US, and assert that the recent conflict was triggered by the Pahalgalam terror strike and not Operation Sindoor as alleged by Islamabad.

After the briefing by Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri to four of the seven parliamentary delegations here on Friday, delegates said they will work to bust the Pakistani narrative of projecting India as the aggressor by underscoring the links of Pahalgalam terrorists to the country.

Three delegations were briefed by Misri on Tuesday and are already on tours of their destinations.

The delegation, which is led by Tharoor, visiting the US is likely to underscore Pakistan's links to al Qaeda, which was behind multiple terror strikes across the world, including the 9/11 attack in the North American country. (PTI)

Ramesh's tendency to stir controversies harming Cong: BJP



NEW DELHI, May 24: The BJP on Saturday slammed Jairam Ramesh for his remarks on the NITI Aayog meeting, saying the Congress leader will finish off his party with his tendency to create controversy over some or other issues.

"This is a meeting of Team India to take decisions for the country's development. Jairam Ramesh is finding fault in this too," BJP national spokesperson Syed Shah Nawaz Hussain said.

Calling the NITI Aayog an "Ayogya" (unfit) body, Ramesh, Congress general secretary in-charge of communications, hit out at the Centre and alleged its meeting was yet another exercise in "hypocrisy and diversion". Reacting sharply, Hussain said the Congress leader keeps finding faults in every meeting convened by the government to create some controversy.

"Jairam Ramesh Congress ki Ram Ram kar ke hi chodenge (Jairam Ramesh will finish off the Congress)," he told PTI Videos.

The Congress leader's comments came as NITI Aayog's 10th Governing Council meeting, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, began here on Saturday.

The theme of the meeting is 'Viksit Rajya for Viksit Bharat@2047'. The BJP spokesperson described NITI Aayog's meeting as "Team India's meeting" and assailed the Congress for objecting to it.

"NITI Aayog is a big institution of the country. It makes policies for the country. In its meeting, eminent people, including chief ministers, are sitting together to make the country develop. The Congress has started objecting to it also," Hussain said.

The BJP leader also took a swipe at Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi over his visit to Jammu and Kashmir.

"Bahut der kar di huzoor aate aate" (It took you a long time to visit)," he said, reciting a couplet from a popular Hindi film song.

"Recently, he went to Bihar to do politics at Ambedkar Hostel. Now, he is missing the people of Poonch and Uri," Hussain said.

The Indian Army has given such a befitting reply to Pakistan that it is still feeling the pain, he said.

Gandhi on Saturday met the victims of cross-border shelling by Pakistani troops in Jammu and Kashmir's Poonch and described the damage caused as a "big tragedy", pledging to highlight their plight at the national level. The Congress leader visited Poonch town and interacted for over an hour with the affected population, including the families who lost their members in the shelling between May 7 and May 10. (PTI)

Rahul meets victims of Pak shelling in Poonch

POONCH (J-K), May 24: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Saturday met the victims of the cross-border shelling by Pakistani troops in Jammu and Kashmir's Poonch and described the damage caused as a "big tragedy", pledging to highlight their plight at the national level.

The leader of the opposition in the Lok Sabha visited Poonch town and interacted for over an hour with the affected population, including the families who lost their members in the shelling between May 7 and May 10.

"It is a big tragedy. Many people lost their lives. They (Pakistan army) have hit civilian targets directly. I talked to the people and tried to understand their problems and they have asked me to raise their issue at the national level which I will do," Gandhi told reporters.

Later, in a post on X, he said, "Today I met the families of those who lost their lives in shelling by Pakistani troops in Poonch. Damaged houses, scattered belongings, moist eyes and painful stories of losing loved ones -- these patriotic families bear the biggest burden of war with courage and dignity every time. Salute to their courage."

"I stand strongly with the victim families -- I will definitely raise their demands and issues at the national level," Gandhi added.

He was accompanied by senior Congress leaders, the party's Jammu and Kashmir unit president Tariq Hameed Karra and AICC general secretary G A Mir.

This was Gandhi's second visit to the Union territory since the dastardly April 22 Pahalgalam terror attack that claimed 26 lives, mostly tourists.

Gandhi visited Srinagar on April 25 to meet those injured in the terror attack. He had also met the Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant governor, the chief minister and several stakeholders then.

On Saturday morning, the former Congress chief reached Jammu airport and left for Poonch in a helicopter to visit the areas affected by the cross-border shelling and meet the bereaved families, a party leader said.

The Poonch sector was witness to heightened artillery and mortar shelling after India carried out precise strikes under Operation Sindoor on nine terror hubs in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir on May 7 in response to the dastardly Pahalgalam massacre.

A wave of artillery shelling, missiles and drone strikes by Pakistan killed 28 people, 13 in Poonch district alone, and injured more than 70 between May 7 and 10 across Jammu and Kashmir.

Thousands moved hearth and home from areas near the Line of Control (LoC) and International Border areas to seek refuge in government-run relief camps. (PTI)

Incorrect to describe it as 'conflict in Kashmir': Jaishankar on recent India-Pak clash

NEW DELHI, May 24: The recent confrontation between India and Pakistan was not a "conflict in Kashmir", External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar has asserted, saying such a description would be like putting the perpetrator and the victim of the Pahalgalam attack at the same level.

The "horrific" strike in Pahalgalam was aimed at creating a "fear psychosis", destroying Jammu and Kashmir's tourism sector and was meant to "sow religious discord, he said.

Jaishankar made the remarks during an interactive session at the German Council on Foreign Relations in Berlin late last evening.

When asked about the "international implications of the conflict in Kashmir", he responded: "First of all, this was not a conflict in Kashmir, this was a terrorist attack."

"And a terrorist attack which is part of a pattern which has not only targeted the Union territory of Jammu and Kashmir, but other parts of India as well," Jaishankar said.

"It's very important to clarify because when you project it as a conflict, you're really putting the perpetrator and the victim, without meaning to, at the same level."

"So this was a horrific, particularly brutal terrorist attack because it was meant to create a fear psychosis and destroy the tourism economy

of Kashmir, which is the mainstay," he said.

The external affairs minister was in Berlin in the third and final leg of his three-nation tour of the Netherlands, Denmark and Germany.

Under Operation Sindoor, India carried out precision strikes on nine terror infrastructures early on May 7 in response to the April 22 Pahalgalam terror attack.

Following the Indian action, Pakistan attempted to attack Indian military bases on May 8, 9 and 10. The Pakistani attempts were strongly responded to by the Indian side.

Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri on May 10 announced that India and Pakistan reached an understanding to stop all firings and military actions on land, air and sea, with immediate effect.

In his remarks, Jaishankar said India targeted "terrorist headquarters and terrorist centres" in Pakistan in response to the Pahalgalam attack.

"What we were responding to was terrorism and when we respond to such an attack, I think there was a lot of international understanding," he said.

Jaishankar also referred to a statement issued by the UN Security Council, that said people who did it should be brought to justice.

"And that is exactly what we did on May 7. So we targeted terrorist headquarters and terror-

Three southern CMs skip PM-chaired NITI Ayog meet

CHENNAI, May 24: Three southern Chief Ministers, including from NDA ruled Puducherry skipped the Niti Ayog's Governing Council meeting in New Delhi that was chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday.

CMs of Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Telangana -- N Chandrababu Naidu, M K Stalin and A Revanth Reddy, were scheduled to attend the meeting and put forth their views before the council on respective issues.

While the CM of Congress-ruled Karnataka, Siddaramaiah, was busy with "prior engagement" in the state and sent his speech to be read out in the council, Marxist veteran and Kerala CM, Pinarayi Vijayan deputed his cabinet colleague K N Balagopal on his behalf.

Similarly, Puducherry chief minister N Rangasamy, who heads the AINRC-led NDA coalition in the union territory, also skipped the event, an official source said.

The source, however, did not disclose the reason for Rangasamy skipping the event. It was not clear immediately whether the speech of the chief minister would be read out at the meeting.

In Kerala capital Thiruvananthapuram, government sources said that CM Vijayan has designated state finance minister Balagopal to go in his stead.

However, since it is a meeting of CMs, it is not clear whether Balagopal would be able to attend it, the sources said.

No reason was given for the CM not attending the meeting.

Last year also, Vijayan had not attended a Niti Aayog meeting of CMs in Delhi and had sent Bal-

agopal.

In Bengaluru, a source close to Siddaramaiah said, "The Chief Minister is not boycotting the meeting, but he has a prior engagement in Mysuru".

The source told PTI that the CM has sent his address to the Governing council. He, however, did not clarify who would present Siddaramaiah's address in the meeting.

While AP CM Naidu heads a NDA coalition government in his state, DMK president Stalin and Congress' Revanth Reddy lead the non-BJP ruled Tamil Nadu and Telangana, respectively.

Incidentally, Stalin had last attended the 2021 governing council meeting.

With the opposition AIADMK questioning his motive behind attending today's meeting, he had days ago asserted he would be in the national capital to voice the demand for "fair financial right of Tamil Nadu".

He had said: "I will get firm on the ideology! I will get funds for Tamil Nadu through struggle."

AIADMK top leader Edappadi K Palaniswami had alleged Stalin's Delhi visit was for the sake of family's benefit.

Niti Aayog's 10th Governing Council meeting, chaired by PM Modi, has the theme "Viksit Rajya for Viksit Bharat@2047".

The council, the apex body of Niti Aayog, includes all state CMs, lieutenant governors of Union Territories, and several Union ministers. Prime Minister Modi is the chairman of Niti Aayog.

It is the first major meeting of the PM with chief ministers of all states and lieutenant governors after Operation Sindoor. (PTI)

Pakistan put in abeyance principles guiding Indus Waters Treaty: MEA

NEW DELHI, May 24: India's decision to put the Indus Waters Treaty in abeyance is only a natural outcome of Pakistan putting in abeyance the principles, including friendship and goodwill, guiding the agreement, the Ministry of External Affairs has told a parliamentary committee.

The MEA has said changes in the ground situation, including engineering techniques, climate change and melting of glaciers, have made a renegotiation of the treaty's terms imperative, a line that delegations visiting world capitals will also take in defending India's decision to put the agreement in abeyance after the horrific Pahalgalam terror attack, sources said.

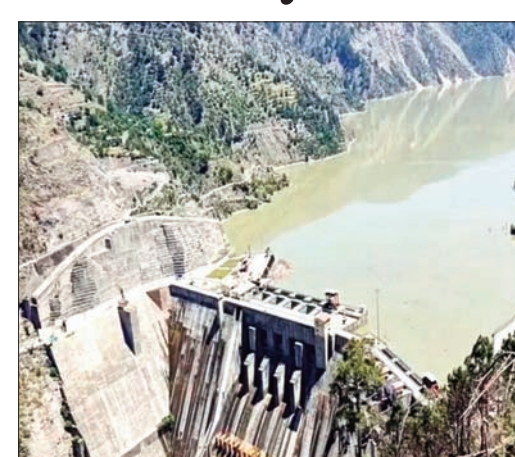
Besides, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri has noted in his briefing that the 1960 treaty in its preamble says that it is concluded in a "spirit of goodwill, and friendship". All these principles have in effect been held in abeyance by Pakistan, he added.

Misri had recently briefed a parliamentary committee on Indian actions, including Operation Sindoor, following the April 22 terror strike in Pahalgalam, and has spoken to all seven multi-party delegations visiting 33 countries and the European Union to explain India's position following the conflict with Pakistan.

The MEA said that Pakistan had been stonewalling India's requests for a government-to-government negotiation over the treaty due to changes in the ground situation since it was signed.

There is a compelling case for the treaty to be renegotiated to make it fit for the 21st century, as it was based on the engineering techniques of the 1950s and early 1960s, the MEA has said.

Other fundamental changes include climate change, melting of glaciers, the variation in quantities of water



available in the rivers and demographics.

These, besides a quest for clean energy, mandate renegotiations for the distribution of rights and obligations under the treaty.

It added, "The treaty in its preamble says that it is concluded in a spirit of goodwill, and friendship. All these principles have in effect been held in abeyance by Pakistan. The unrelenting cross-border terrorism from Pakistan interferes with our ability to exploit the treaty as per its provisions."

The MEA said it is only natural and well within India's right to hold the treaty in abeyance when the fundamental ground situations have changed completely. Drawing a red line, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had recently said that blood and water can not flow together. (PTI)

Don't worry, everything will be normal: Rahul consoles school children in Poonch

POONCH (J-K), May 24: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi Saturday reached out to school students here who lost two of their mates -- 12-year-old twins Zain Ali and Urwa Fatima -- to Pakistani shelling, consoling as well as encouraging them to "study hard, play hard and make lots of friends".

"Don't worry, everything will come back to normal," he said while interacting with the friends of the two deceased children.

During an hour-long whirlwind tour of Poonch town bruised by heavy shelling from across the LoC during the India-Pakistan military standoff earlier this month, the leader of the opposition in the Lok Sabha interacted with the students of the convent school which lost Ali and Fatima.

Though the school escaped the shelling between May 7 and 10 that left 28 dead and over 70 others injured, its two students died in Poonch town on May 7. They were among the 13 civilians who died in Poonch district the worst-hit by the shelling.

"You've seen a bit of danger, you've seen a bit of a frightening



situation. But don't worry, everything will come back to normal. And your way of responding to this problem should be that you study really hard, you play really hard and you make a lot of friends in school. Okay? Will you do that? Good," Gandhi told the students of Christ School.

His presence at the school brightened up the students who were seen clapping and waving at the former Congress president who shook hands with them. "Big hug to all of you. Love you and thank

you," he said before leaving. He visited the families of those who lost their lives in the shelling and inspected damage to the houses and religious places, including a Gurdwara.

Accompanied by party leaders, including AICC General Secretary in charge of the party's Jammu and Kashmir affairs Syed Naseer Hussain, AICC general secretary G A Mir, J-K Congress chief Tariq Hameed Karra and former ministers Vikar Rasool Wani and Lal Singh, Gandhi paid obeisance at

Uddhav's stand on alliance with Raj is 'manase' and 'dil se': Raut

MUMBAI, May 24: Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut on Saturday said their party is positive about an alliance with the Raj Thackeray-led Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) for the "sake of Marathi people".

Estranged cousins Raj and Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray last month sparked speculation about a possible reconciliation with statements indicating they could ignore "trivial issues" and join hands in the larger interest of "Marathi manoes" (Marathi-speaking people), nearly two decades after a bitter parting of ways.

Raut said Sena (UBT) has a positive approach towards an alliance with MNS, which is pronounced "Manase" in Marathi, while attempting to make a wordplay with the party's name.

"Uddhavji's stand regarding an alliance with Raj Thackeray for the sake of the Marathi people is 'manase' and 'dil se' (from the mind and the heart)," Raut told reporters here.

Local body elections in Maharashtra, including for civic corporations of Mumbai, Thane, Nashik, Nagpur and Pune, are slated to be held later this year. (PTI)

Army's sharp social media tactic hammers in Op Sindoor message

NEW DELHI, May 24: It is the message delivered that matters. While Operation Sindoor showcased India's military prowess and firm stand against terrorism, the armed forces put out sleek social media posts and videos, one with rock renditions of lines from Dinkar's ballad 'Rashmirathi', to drive home the point.

India decimated nine terror camps in Pakistan and Pakistan-Occupied-Kashmir under Operation Sindoor with precision strikes early on May 7 in response to the dastardly April 22 Pahalgalam massacre. At 1:44 am that day, the government, in a statement, underlined

that India has demonstrated "considerable restraint" in the selection of targets and method of execution and that "no Pakistani military facilities have been targeted".

Shortly after, the Indian Army's

The poster had "OPERATION SINDOOR" written on it with a small bowl carrying vermilion (worn by married Hindu women) forming the first 'O' of the second word while the second 'O' had a dash of the powder around it.

Since then, the Indian Army has come up with several thematic short videos on social media platforms that have been widely shared and appreciated.

All these videos were made in-house, by the Social Media Section of the Indian Army's Additional Directorate General of Strategic Communication, sources in the military establishment said. (PTI)

Poetry and powerful music

social media handles carried a poignant message with a poster that has now become a defining image of Operation Sindoor.

Along with the message "#PahalgalamTerrorAttack Justice is Served. Jai Hind!" the Indian Army's 1:51 am X post carried a poster that was concise in words but heavy on symbolism.

Drugs worth over ₹ 2 cr seized in Manipur, two held

IMPHAL, May 24: Two persons, including a woman, were arrested in Manipur's Churachandpur district after drugs worth more than ₹ 2 crore were seized from their possession in separate operations, police said on Saturday.

During an operation on Thursday, one drug peddler was apprehended from Mongkot Khoi village after 870 grams of brown sugar worth around ₹ 1.74 crore, twenty soap cases, containing heroin with an estimated value of ₹ 52 lakh, unaccounted cash of ₹ 29.5 lakh and two radio sets were recovered from his possession, a senior officer said.

The seized cash is suspected to be proceeds from drug deals, he said.

The police also apprehended a 46-year-old woman from her residence in Tangnuam village on Friday after 25 soap cases, containing suspected brown sugar weighing 289 grams, and ₹ 8 lakh in cash were recovered from her possession, he added. (PTI)

Meghalaya govt urged to act against drug menace

SHILLONG, May 24: The Jaintia National Council (JNC)-Khliehriat Circle recently urged the state government to address the issue of drug menace in Meghalaya.

In a statement, JNC-KC working president Symbah Baia Sumer said drug menace is a major threat to the society particularly the youth.

"We earnestly urge the concerned government departments to address this issue promptly and seriously," he added.

The appeal was made after the JNC had apprehended two drug users and handed them over to their guardians for better care and treatment.

Sumer said the two apprehended individuals have revealed that there are several drug dealers operating in East Jaintia Hills district. (NNN)

Shirui Hills flag row: Meitei organisation Arambai Tenggol rejects provocation claims

Our intent was never to offend or incite, but only to stand in solidarity with our traditions

IMPHAL, May 24: Following widespread condemnation by Manipur-based Tangkhul Naga organisations regarding the display of Meitei's seven-coloured flag and raising of slogans atop Shirui hill peak by members of Arambai Tenggol, the Meitei organisation on Saturday asserted that misleading content on social media had created unnecessary confusion.

It emphasised that the act should not be interpreted as a territorial claim or provocation.

The controversy erupted after a photo went viral on Friday night, showing Arambai Tenggol members in traditional attire holding the Meitei's seven-coloured flag while raising slogans such as "Long live Manipur" and "Mother Shirui be blessed."

The image, originally posted by a Facebook page named 'Manipur Stylish,' was accompanied by a caption that read: "We, the Arambai Tenggol, raised the SALAI TARET Flags as a bold declaration that Arambai Tenggol stands strong across every corner of our land. This is our sacred soil - no other community has the right to stake any claim over the land of Manipur."

This caption sparked outrage among members of the Tangkhul Naga community, who viewed it as inflammatory and disrespectful.

Arambai Tenggol's clarification came after Tangkhul Naga apex student body Tankhul Katamnao Long strongly condemned the incident, which took place at the venue of ongoing 5th State-Level Shirui Lily festival in Ukhrul district.

In a statement, Arambai Tenggol said, "It is deeply unfortunate that the Tangkhul Katamnao Saklong has been misled by inaccurate and misleading information



circulated by a Facebook page. In sensitive matters such as this, we believe it is imperative to verify the authenticity of sources before arriving at hasty conclusions."

"Misinterpretation of such events only fuels division, and it is evident that certain elements are working with the intent to disrupt peaceful coexistence between the Meitei and Naga communities" it said. It also clarified the symbolism behind the event and the flag.

"Shirui Lily is the state flower of Manipur, symbolising the collective identity of the state and not belonging to any single community. The event was officially organised by the state government and participants were merely engaging in cultural celebration

within the framework of the state's initiatives," it said.

"The image in question, showing members holding the Salai Taret (Seven Clan) flag, is being unnecessarily politicised," it said, adding the flag symbolises the unity and peaceful coexistence of indigenous clans of Manipur and is a regular feature at expeditions, sporting events and cultural occasions whether in India or abroad.

"Displaying this flag in Shirui Hills does not, and should not, be construed as a territorial claim or provocation, it added.

"Carrying the flag in the United States, Europe, or the Himalayas does not imply ownership of those regions, its presence here signifies cultural continuity, not confrontation," it said.

The organisation also asserted that slogans in the viral video footage does not contain any content that disrespects or threatens any community.

"We urge TKS and all concerned individuals to examine the context of the video with care and objectivity. The valley of Manipur, and Arambai Tenggol, embrace and honour the spirit of peaceful coexistence among all indigenous communities who respect the unity and integrity of Manipur," it said.

"We hold deep respect for the indigenous Tangkhul community, their customs, and their sacred hills. Our intent was never to offend or incite, but only to stand in solidarity with our traditions, just as others do across our diverse state and nation. We appeal to all communities to view our actions as part of a peaceful cultural expression, an expression protected under law, and essential in a democratic, pluralistic society like Manipur," it said.

Condemning Arambai Tenggol for the incident, Tangkhul Katamnao Long said, "The Shirui Lily Festival is a solemn celebration of our rare endemic flower, our land, and the enduring spirit of the Tangkhul Naga people" and "to carry out this kind of symbolic aggression in sacred Tangkhul territory is a calculated attempt to disrupt peace and politicise a neutral cultural platform."

The organisation warned that any repetition of such "reckless and inflammatory" action will not go unchallenged.

"While the Tangkhul people have traditionally welcomed all visitors to the Shirui Lily Festival with open arms, their hospitality must not be mistaken for weakness," it added. (PTI)

NSCN-IM opposes scraping of Free Movement Regime



DIMAPUR, May 24: The NSCN-IM, in its latest edition of the periodical news bulletin 'Nagalim Voice', has strongly voiced out against the scraping of the Free Movement Regime (FMR). The news bulletin said, "Nagas have had enough of the Government of India tormenting the Naga people for over 75 years and will not allow the state's hegemony to go unchallenged."

It then said that gone are the times when the Naga people were treated as no better than 'sub-human' and kicked around to suit the administrative convenience of the ruling authorities, British India, India and Burma (Myanmar). "With such disregard for the human rights of the Naga people as indigenous peoples, the Nagas were divided in half between India and Myanmar, without taking the rightful consent of the Naga people", the NSCN-IM mouthpiece said. Not enough of this division, in India, Nagas were again made to come under different administrative controls in Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, and Arunachal Pradesh, it added. "The same thing happened in Burma where the Nagas

were placed under different state controls, Sagaing and Kachin".

The NSCN-IM mouthpiece then said the Government of India is up again testing the nerves of the Naga people, scraping the "time honored Free Movement Regime (FMR) and then starting the border fencing, blatantly ignoring the sentiment of the Naga people residing on both sides of the artificial border".

Significantly, the NSCN-IM news bulletin said the mass protest rallies against these two issues have already witnessed unprecedented heights of Naga nationalism not seen in the history of Naga political movement. "The Naga political struggle is to defend the history, culture and political identity of the Nagas as a people and as a nation", it also said. "This heightened sense of protest has taken the nature of something to call a 'wake-up call' for the final showdown with the government of India. The mode of the mass rally across the four corners of Nagalim is clearly seen, 'No surrender no retreat'", the NSCN-IM mouthpiece added. (NNN)

Tripura: TPYC demands white paper on govt jobs in state over last 7 years

The unemployed youth are running from pillar to post in search of government jobs, while the BJP government continues to delay the employment process. In some cases, the recruitment process is not completed even after two or three years



AGARTALA, May 24: The Tripura Pradesh Youth Congress (TPYC) on Saturday urged Chief Minister Manik Saha to publish a white paper detailing government sector employment during the BJP regime.

At a press conference, TPYC leader Sahajahan Islam claimed the CM has been making contradictory statements about the number of posts filled during the BJP's rule.

"People want to know how many youths have been employed in government departments over the past seven years. On December 18, 2024, Saha said 13,000 posts were filled. On April 28, 2025, he claimed 16,942 jobs were given, and just two days ago, he said 19,262 posts of different categories were filled," Islam added.

He added that based on the CM's own statements, around 6,000 jobs have been filled up in the government sector over the past four to six months.

"We want the CM, who maintains a clean image, to publish a white paper on government sector employment over the past seven years to clear these doubts," he said.

Accusing the state government of failing to address the issue, Islam said the state with a population of 42 lakh has around 7 lakh unemployed youth.

"The unemployed youth are running from pillar to post in search of government jobs, while the BJP government continues to delay the employment process. In some cases, the recruitment process is not completed even after two or three years," he alleged.

Concluding his remarks, Islam issued a warning: "If the Chief Minister does not heed our demand, the Youth Congress will take to the streets, as our organisation has always stood behind the unemployed youth." (PTI)

Meitei group to boycott Manipur Govt, launch civil disobedience campaign

IMPHAL, May 24: A leading Meitei group announced a civil disobedience movement across Manipur from Sunday in protest against Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla's alleged refusal to apologise for the removal of the state's name from a government bus, sparking widespread discontent.

In a statement on Saturday, the Coordinating Committee on Manipur Integrity (COCOMI) said that the 48-hour deadline given to the governor to issue a public apology has expired. The committee stated that this development "confirms (the governor's) disconnect from the ground reality and their disdain for the sentiments of the people."

"The governor is henceforth boycotted by all public, civil and cultural platforms and no individual shall invite, attend or organise any function involving his participation until a public apology is made," it added.

COCOMI also announced plans to mobilise non-violent mass protests, rallies, torch processions, and sit-ins across districts of the

state. It urged all citizens to cease cooperation with central government offices as part of "a civil disobedience campaign" against the administration.

President's rule was imposed in the state on February 13.

Additionally, the organisation reiterated its demand for the immediate resignation of the security advisor, the DGP and the Chief Secretary, "for their role in enabling and evading from such disgraceful actions." COCOMI also rejected the inquiry constituted by the state government into the incident of removal of the state's name from a government bus and demanded an independent probe led by a retired sessions or high court Judge.

"This movement is not a protest against peace. It is a protest against surrender of governance to narco terror threats, alienation of Manipur's people, and the erasure of our identity under the guise of PR... Manipur is not a negotiable term. It is our name, our soul and our heritage. We shall defend it until justice prevails," it added. (PTI)

Tripura CM to inaugurate Krishi Sankalp Yatra on May 29

AGARTALA, May 24: Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha will inaugurate the two-week-long Krishi Sankalp Yatra, an outreach drive for farmers in Sepahijala district on May 29, a minister said on Saturday.

The outreach programme initiated as part of nationwide Viksit Krishi Sankalp Abhiyan to be rolled out by the Ministry of Agriculture is expected to contact 1,72,000 farmers.

There will be 72 meetings with the farmers daily during the two-week long programme aimed at sensitising the farmers on how to ensure self-reliance on agriculture production, said the state's Agriculture minister Ratan Lal Nath.

"As part of nationwide Viksit Krishi Sankalp Abhiyan, the state has geared up to undertake a two-week long Krishi Sankalp Yatra on May 29 across the state. The chief minister will remain present at the roll-out programme at Bishramganj in Sepahijala district. The programme will be kicked off in 24 spots of the state on a single day,"



he said. Nath said the farmers will be sensitised on how to increase agriculture production during the ensuing Kharif session and how the Centre and the state government can extend help to them.

The Agriculture department has arranged 'chariots' to cover 864 places in the state during the outreach drive.

"Chariots will lead Krishi Sankalp Yatra and is expected to cover 864 spots of the state to reach out to at least 1,72,000 farmers. Ministers, MLAs and public representatives will also join the mega yatra irrespective of political

colours," he said.

Asserting that farmers will be made aware of the different schemes of the Centre and the state government, the minister said soil testing vans will also be made available to issue soil health cards to farmers.

The outreach programme, Nath said will not only increase the agriculture production of the state but will also bring a positive impact on the socio-economic condition of the farmers.

Out of 58 RD blocks in the state, only 30 blocks are self-sufficient in agriculture production so far. (PTI)

Committee inspects waste management system in Dimapur, Chumoukedima

Team also undertaken inspection of three rivers in Dimapur and Chumoukedima - Dhansiri, Chathe and Pagla

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, May 24: The newly constituted Committee on Environment and Climate Change of the Nagaland Legislative Assembly, led by MLA Achumbemo Kikon as its chairperson, conducted spot verification of garbage dumping sites in Dimapur and Chumoukedima to assess the waste management system there.

Kikon was accompanied by two members of the seven-member committee MLAs Zhalheo Rio and Z Nyusietho Nyuthe.

The team also undertaken inspection of three rivers in Dimapur and Chumoukedima - Dhansiri, Chathe and Pagla - to get a first-hand report of sources of their pollution and initiate long-term measures to clean and rejuvenate them.

After the inspection, the team held a meeting with urban local body councilors of Dimapur Municipal Council, Chumoukedima Town Council and East Dimapur Town

Council to find ways to resolve the problems of waste management, sanitation and pollution.

Later addressing a press conference, Kikon said the committee would focus on proper waste management, noise and air pollution, human-animal conflict and pollution of rivers.

He said it was agreed in the meeting that the three urban local bodies will pass an order on Saturday not to allow human waste to these rivers through septic tank pipes. He added that no riverbed mining will be allowed within the stress of these rivers in Dimapur and Chumoukedima towns.

He said the DCs of the two districts would stop issuing permits for riverbed mining during the stress on the rivers in the towns from now on.

Kikon appealed to the citizens to segregate biodegradable and non-biodegradable wastes before dumping them in civic body-designated places.



Tripura govt keen to develop infra to support AI, 5G network

AGARTALA, May 24: Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha said his government has been developing dedicated infrastructure to support AI and the 5G network in the state.

Saha said that while 5G can transmit information quickly, AI minimises operational complexity by using efficient algorithms to automate a wide range of processes, resulting in more speed, efficiency, and cost savings.

He said the government has allocated land for data centres that will serve as a hub for the entire eastern and northeastern region of the country.

"Today, I am honoured to speak about the transformative power of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and 5G in the northeastern region, including my state, Tripura. As we gather at the North East Investment Summit, I would like to congratulate the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER) for organising this important event," he said.

He was speaking at a session - IT for Ashtalakshmi: Beyond the Bits and Bytes, Into AI and 5G - during the Rising Northeast Investors' Summit-2025 in New Delhi on Friday.

Saha said, "It is a symbiotic relationship between 5G and AI. As AI expands, the cost of connectivity continues to decline. The convergence of 5G and AI is not just about speed, it is going to cater to the demands of next-generation activities."

The powerful combination of 5G and AI means greater innovation opportunities and some very interesting applications, he said.



"Deploying AI applications with the development of 5G will bring opportunities across various industries and sectors," the CM said, adding that by embracing AI and 5G, people can unlock new avenues for growth, innovation, and prosperity.

He said the state has made significant progress in 5G deployment, with all towns and 583 villages already connected with such a network.

The chief minister said the state has implemented paperless administration, reducing the time required to dispose of files from nine days to three days, and saving over ₹ 50 crore per year.

"As we move forward, we plan to leverage AI and 5G to drive growth, innovation, and prosperity across all northeastern states, including introducing single-window digital platforms", he added. (PTI)

LEGENDS REUNITE 35 YEARS AFTER 'NAYAKAN': IT'S ABOUT TIME, SAY KAMAL HAASAN AND MANI RATNAM

CHENNAI, May 24: The actor says time moved too fast, the director wishes he had done every film with him and their bond goes back to their youth. Kamal Haasan and Mani Ratnam have gotten together 35 years after "Nayakan", the gangster film with few parallels, and the two cinema greats look back wistfully at the decades gone by.

"Thug Life" is the follow-up to the 1987 Tamil movie, which chronicled the life of a man who rises from Mumbai slums to become a revered don. The movie, considered one of the finest in the genre in India, won three National Awards and was sent to Oscars as India's official entry in 1988.

In "Thug Life", their second collaboration in the same genre, Haasan, the protagonist, has the same name as his character in "Nayakan" — Sakthivel Naicker.

The film emerged from an idea conceived by Haasan, who later brought in Ratnam to co-develop the story and direct the film. The two friends have also co-produced the movie, scheduled to be released in cinemas on June 5.

Why did it take so long? Ratnam, who made films such as "Raja", "Iruvar", "Bombay", "Dil Se" and two-part epic "Ponniyin Selvan" after "Nayakan", said he wanted to cast Haasan every time he started a project.

"Every film I've done, I wish Kamal was there. So I'm glad. Finally, I'm doing one in which he's there. It's about time," the 68-year-old filmmaker told PTI.

Haasan, 70, sitting next to him, echoed the sentiment. "Time moved faster than us... But better late than never," he said.

Their friendship predates "Nayakan", beginning with the dreams they would discuss at Haasan's Eldams Road home in Chennai, the actor had recalled in an earlier interaction with the press.

Haasan, who started his career as a child star at the age of five with "Kalathur Kanamma" (1960) and became a huge actor-star by the 1980s,

kept an open house for talented people to hang around those days, added Ratnam.

"Tamil cinema had found a new actor-star and he was right on top. But he had his house open. There could be several writers, there could be several actors, several technicians who could just drop in, hang around and have a chat with him. So it was like a breeding ground... It was an amazing place for a technician to grow," Ratnam recounted.

Haasan said they have probably forgotten most of what they discussed during those days but remembers it as a "fearless time".

"It wasn't the lack of responsibility. We wanted the responsibility. But none of it was fiscal. We were ready to do anything. We never thought of money... because both of us did not come into movies to make money. We did not come into the movies to allay poverty. That gave us that advantage of the security of not doing something in a hurry," he said.

Even so, Haasan admitted, he has acted in nearly 150 films which he "need not have done".

"If I grade the rest of the hundred films, there is still a category where I will put certain films in the top row because there can't be one film topping it. Also, another good film will come and put it in its place," he added.

Getting back together after the long years, Haasan said Ratnam and he discussed several ideas before finalising on "Thug Life".

"I don't even remember where all we went... The only thing is that we didn't go into one terrain because he had just completed 'Ponniyin Selvan'," the actor said, referring to Ratnam's two-part adaptation of the historical novel of the same name.

Discussing the name Sakthivel Naicker, Haasan said both liked the name.

"There is a certain amount of sentiment. I don't believe in that luck business because I truly believe there's nothing called luck for those who de-

serve it. I think we enjoyed making the film. I wrote it and he liked the idea," Haasan said. Haasan, also known for movies such as "Pushpaka Vimana", "Indian", "Guna" "Vishwaroopam" and "Vikram", wore several hats on the project but on set, he was just an actor, said Ratnam.

"The producer's job was far away," he added.

Movie making has always been an expensive affair and filmmakers have to make certain compromises to see their vision come alive, said Haasan, citing Satyajit Ray.

"I heard recently that Satyajit Ray sahib designed an ad for his second film or fourth film because his third film did not do well... I was surprised why Satyajit Ray would think of that, but everyone has to think of it... If Ray has done it, how are we to escape it? "The only place you can do it (make movies) without fear and do what you want is in the film institute for which you pay (fees). We collect money, so we are answerable to that ticket," he said.

Ratnam agreed, saying budgetary concerns are part of the business.

"It is an art form, which involves a lot of capital and involves a wider audience. You

have to take that into consideration. I can't just say that I will do only what I want. At what cost and at whose cost? "So there is a balance that you always try, but within that balance it is possible for you to try to be as sensible as you can, as logical and believable as you can," said the filmmaker.

Storytellers face all kinds of hurdles and censorship in telling their stories with a political message but both Haasan and Ratnam have successfully navigated that troubled road. Artists, they said, have always found a way to tell their stories, even in the most challenging circumstances.

"They will always be there, depending on who's dictating you. Sometimes it's a business, sometimes it's politics," Haasan said.

In Ratnam's view, sometimes these restrictions make filmmakers "think out of the box".

"In the land of so many restrictions, there have been brilliant filmmakers who have made films. So, we can't use it as an excuse. It'll be there. It's a fact of life. It's not only for filmmakers, it's true for everybody. It's true for a journalist and it's true for a writer," he added. (PTI)



Alia Bhatt makes her Cannes red carpet debut

NEW DELHI, May 24: Bollywood actor Alia Bhatt attended the 78th edition of the Cannes Film Festival.

The 32-year-old actor opted for an off-shoulder fishtail gown from Schiaparelli haute couture for her red carpet debut at the prestigious film festival.

The attire of pastel colour had intricate floral work throughout. She kept the minimal makeup look with her hair tied in a bun.

The actor shared a series of pictures on her Instagram handle. "Hello Cannes," she wrote in the caption, tagging L'Oreal Paris along.

Alia is the global ambassador for beauty brand L'Oreal Paris, which is celebrating its 28th anniversary at the gala. (PTI)

Rajkummar Rao, Wamiqa Gabbi's 'Bhool Chuk Maaf' earns ₹ 7.20 crore at box office on day one



NEW DELHI, May 24: Rajkummar Rao and Wamiqa Gabbi-starrer "Bhool Chuk Maaf" has collected Rs 7.20 crore nett at the domestic box office on its opening day, the makers announced on Saturday.

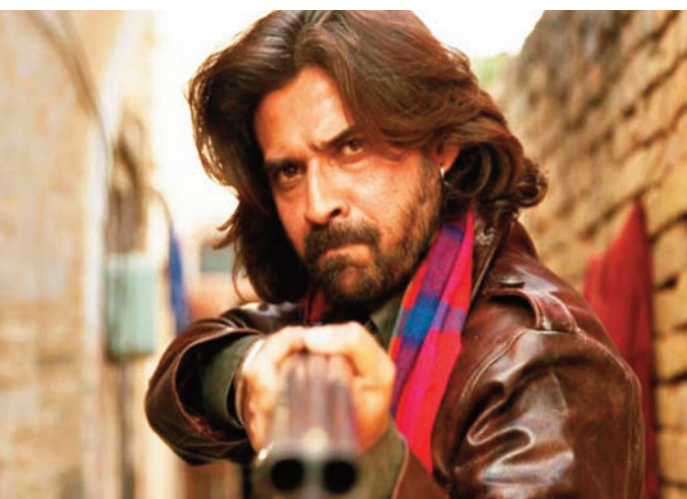
Produced by Dinesh Vijan under his banner Maddock Films, "Bhool Chuk Maaf" is directed by Karan Sharma. The film released in theatres on Friday.

Production banner shared the box office collection of the film on its official X handle. The post featured the film's poster with the box office numbers written over it.

"They didn't just come to watch - they came to feel, laugh, cry, and celebrate together. Families across the country are giving their hearts to this one. Book your tickets now. Watch the biggest family entertainer packed with fun, laughter & all the feels now. #BhoolChukMaaf in cinemas now," read the caption.

"Bhool Chuk Maaf" revolves around a soon-to-be-married man who realises that he is stuck in a time loop and keeps reliving the day before his wedding. The film also stars Seema Pahwa, Sanjay Mishra and Ishiyak Khan. (PTI)

'Son of Sardaar' and 'Jai Ho' actor Mukul Dev dies



MUMBAI, May 24: Actor Mukul Dev, best known for his roles in films like "Son of Sardaar", "Yamla Pagla Deewana", and "Jai Ho", has passed away, a close family friend said on Saturday. He was 54.

"Yes, it is true," actor Mugdha Godse, partner of Dev's elder brother, actor Rahul Dev, told PTI when asked about the reports of Mukul Dev's demise.

The circumstances surrounding Dev's death, including the cause, are yet to be ascertained.

According to Dev's friend Vindu Dara Singh, the actor passed away on Friday at a hospital in Delhi.

"He was unwell for eight to ten days. He passed away at a hospital in Delhi. He was not looking after his health, he was depressed after the demise of his mother," Singh told PTI.

"We were waiting for Mukul to join us for the photo shoot of 'Son of Sardaar 2' but he had stopped answering our calls," he added. Dev made his acting debut with the 1996 movie "Dastak", co-starring Sushmita Sen and Sharad Kapoor. He was largely seen playing supporting roles in Hindi, Punjabi, Bengali and Telugu films and TV shows.

Some of his notable movies included Ajay Devgn's "Son of Sardaar", Salman Khan-starrer "Jai Ho" and "Yamla Pagla Deewana", starring Dharmendra, Sunny Deol and Bobby Deol, as well as "Kohram", "R... Rajkumar" and "War Chhod Na Yaar".

He is also credited as a co-writer of filmmaker Hansal Mehta's critically-acclaimed 2017 movie "Omerta", starring Rajkummar Rao. On the small screen, Dev appeared in popular daily soaps such as "Gharwali Uparwali", "Kumkum", "Kuntumb" and "Kashish". (PTI)

Ray introduced me to world stage: Sharmila Tagore on Cannes screening of 'Aranyer Din Ratri'

MUMBAI, May 24: Satyajit Ray was her first director, her mentor and the man who taught me everything, says veteran actor Sharmila Tagore, who has just returned from the Cannes Film Festival after a restored screening of the master director's 1970 classic "Aranyer Din Ratri".

Tagore, who made her acting debut with Ray's 1959 film "Apar Sansar" at a young age, went on collaborate with the director on four other classics -- "Devil" in 1960, "Nayak" in 1966, "Aranyer Din Ratri" and "Seemabaddha" in 1971.

Looking back at her time of working with Ray, one of the most loved directors from India in world cinema, Tagore said she owes a great deal to the filmmaker, who died in 1992.

"He introduced me to films and opened the door to the world of films. If it hadn't been for him, I wouldn't be where I am

today. So, I owe him a great deal. He was my mentor. I learned so much from him. He taught me everything, practically. I'm grateful that my first film was with Satyajit Ray because I never looked back after that. He introduced me to the world stage," Tagore told PTI in an interview.

The restored version of "Aranyer Din Ratri", titled "Days and Nights in the Forest" in English, is presented and restored by Martin Scorsese's The Film Foundation through its World Cinema Project initiative at L'Immagine Ritrovata in collaboration with Shivendra Singh Dungarpur's Film Heritage Foundation, Janus Films, and the Criterion Collection.

Both Tagore and Simi Grewal, the stars of the 1970 film, attended the film's screening in the Cannes Classics segment where it was presented by Hollywood filmmaker Wes Anderson, a long-time admirer of Ray

who spearheaded its six-year restoration. Anderson, who is a board member of The Film Foundation, worked closely on the restoration of the movie.

The 80-year-old actor, who had served on the Cannes Film Festival's jury in 2009, called the festival a "very film savvy place".

"People come there to only watch films, and they're really very appreciative. It's just not that I got standing ovation, everybody gets it because they're enthusiastic about films and they show their enthusiasm by appreciating you," Tagore said.

"Aranyer Din Ratri", about four men who take a holiday to a forest area and return transformed by the women they meet there, is a "contemporary and complex film," said Tagore, who played the role of Aparna in the movie.

"It's about masculinity, it's about how men perceive themselves. It's a very, very

contemporary but very complex film. You cannot really explain it in one sentence... It was, of course, a wonderful film, a film that has lived on, and 55 years later, it's still very, very, very contemporary and relatable. It's an immortal film. "After the restoration, it's looking resplendent and wonderful. These restorers, the Criterion, Janice, and the Film Foundation of Shivendra Dungarpur, they've done a wonderful service by restoring this film," she said.

The actor is also happy with the Indian presence at Cannes this year as Neeraj Ghaywan's "Homebound" has been screened in the Un Certain Regard category.

"It is also place where you can sell or buy films. Besides, 'Homebound', I don't know if there was any other film (this year), but you've to submit the film and it has to be first shown there before release. (PTI)

CHOPRA FINISHES 2ND IN POLAND EVENT BEHIND WEBER

CHORZOW (POLAND), May 24: Star Indian javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra was not at his best as he managed a second-place finish, failing to hit the 85m mark in a rare outing in his illustrious career, at the Janusz Kusocinski Memorial meet here on Friday.

Chopra could only produce a best throw of 84.14m which came in his sixth and final attempt. He was at the third spot till the end of the penultimate round.

Germany's Julian Weber, who had beaten Chopra for the top spot in the Doha Diamond League on May 16 in a 90m duel, again emerged victorious with his second round throw of 86.12m. He an European champion in 2022 and silver-medallist in 2024.

Two-time world champions Anderson Peters of Grenada was third with a best throw of 83.24m. He was third in Doha also.

In fact, it was a repeat of the Doha top three finish, the only difference was that all three of them were below their best under overcast conditions after rain at



the Silesian Stadium earlier in the day. The 27-year-old Chopra had finally breached the coveted 90m mark with a throw of 90.23m in Doha though Weber had won the top spot with his last attempt of 91.06m. Peters had a best throw of 85.64m in Doha.

In fact, there were only 85m-plus throws in the whole competition, with Weber producing all of them. After his second round 86.12m, Weber had 85.03m and 85.11m in his fifth and sixth attempts. Chopra, the reigning world champion, must be disappointed as since winning gold in Tokyo Olympics in 2021, he had produced below 85m throws in an event only five times before Friday. He had 82.27m while winning gold at the Federation Cup in Bhubaneswar in May last year and 84.52m throw in South Africa in April.

The double Olympic medallist India began with a foul and had 81.28 in his second throw. But he struggled to get a big throw and he was seen consulting

with his coach Jan Zelezny, the legendary and world record holder javelin thrower, who spoke to Chopra from the stands.

Chopra's third and fourth throws were fouls. He had 81.40m in the fifth round, which kept him at the third spot before the 84.14m effort in his last attempt took him to the second spot. He had just three valid throws out of six attempts.

Chopra was earlier slated to compete in the inaugural NC Classic -- an event to be hosted by him on May 24 in Bengaluru -- alongside several Indian and global stars, including Weber and Perers. But the event was postponed in the wake of military confrontation between India and Pakistan. This Poland event is the third competition for Chopra this season. He started in South Africa at the Potch Invitational Track event -- a World Athletics Continental Tour Challenger competition -- in Potchefstroom on April 16, emerging on top with a modest throw of 84.52m. (PTI)

Vijay Singh tied for lead in Senior PGA C'ship at Congressional



BETHESDA, May 24: Vijay Singh started thinking about what he might do with his weekend after bogeying the first three holes at the Senior PGA Championship. "Your mind just goes haywire," he said. "But I've played long enough to know that there's a lot of golf out there."

Then, he showed it. After missing the Masters and PGA Championship this spring because of an undisclosed injury, Singh looked perfectly healthy the rest of the second round with seven birdies to surge to the top of the leaderboard at Congressional Country Club. Shooting a 4-under 68, the former top-ranked player was tied for the lead with Y.E. Yang (68) and Cameron Percy (71) at 6 under halfway through the PGA Tour Championships major.

"I've been driving the ball good," Singh said. "Just hung in there and started making a couple of birdies here and there, picked up the shots, and the back nine I played solid golf."

The 62-year-old from Fiji is aiming for his first career victory at the course in the Maryland suburbs just outside of Washington, which he has played a handful of times, including the 1997 U.S. Open. He tied for 77th then and missed the cut in his last event at Congressional, Tiger Woods' tournament in 2014.

"I've always loved playing here," Singh said, noting that much has changed from his previous tries. "It's totally a different golf course, totally new golf course. The greens are very challenging, to say the least."

Singh, who spent 32 weeks atop the world ranking roughly two decades ago and was known for his rigorous practice habits, has cut that part of his routine in half.

"Once I get on the range and hit, it used to be I'd go out there and hit five, six good shots and I'd say, OK, let's see if I can do 20 of these ones," Singh said. "But now if I hit two or three good shots, I say, I've had enough, that's it."

Yang birdied four of his last five holes Friday.

With conditions changing throughout his round, Percy kept looking for the big American flag to see how windy it was at any given moment and credited growing up in Melbourne, Australia, for knowing how to handle it.

"I think the wind definitely helps me," Percy said. "You get down in the tree lines and you can't feel the wind, and then you walk 200 yards and it's blowing like crazy."

Padraig Harrington headlined a crowded group two strokes back at 4 under. Stuart Cink, Justin Leonard, defending champion Richard Bland and others were 3 under.

Ernie Els followed an opening 69 with a 75 to drop to even par. He won the 1997 U.S. Open at Congressional. (AP)

We'd rather have this now than in an eliminator: Salt on loss to SRH



LUCKNOW, May 24: Royal Challengers Bengaluru opener Phil Salt sees a silver lining in their defeat against Sunrisers Hyderabad and says they rather have a loss like that in the league stage than in the IPL play-offs.

Chasing 232, opening duo of Salt (62) and Virat Kohli (43) provided RCB a blistering start but rest of the batting faltered as RCB were bundled out for 189 in 19.5 overs.

RCB are already through to the playoffs, and Salt said the defeat shouldn't dent their confidence.

"That's one way of looking at it. The other way of looking at it is, you don't mind having this game not in the playoffs. So, yeah, you can take it as a disappointment or you can take it for what it is," he said at the post-match press conference. "We're qualified, we've lost a game. No one likes to lose games of cricket. I'm hating the fact we've lost, as will everybody else in an RCB shirt. You'd rather have that now than you would in an eliminator, let's say."

"So, we're going to get an opportunity to pick the bones out of it and have a look at things we did well and things we didn't do so well and come back." Following the loss, RCB's hopes of a top-two finish now depend on other results. Even a win in their final league game against Lucknow Super Giants will only take them to 19 points. Salt said the team isn't overly concerned about its final league position.

"I can't sit here and tell you that we prefer to finish first, second, third or fourth. We've qualified for the playoffs, and once you're in the playoffs, you've got to go and play in a carefree manner and do what you can to win the trophy," he said.

Salt had missed RCB's match against Chennai Super Kings on May 3 due to fever. The IPL was subsequently paused for a week owing to the India-Pakistan conflict, and RCB's next game against Kolkata Knight Riders was washed out. The Welshman said he is just glad to be back on the field.

"It's a funny one. Obviously, when you're ill, you sit in your bed and wonder if you're ever going to feel better again and you think about all the things that you took for granted when you were healthy."

"As a group, we've not played cricket until tonight in three weeks or so and I don't think I've played in a month, which is a long time. So, more than anything else, I'm just glad that, I'm healthy and I'm feeling good and I'm playing another game of cricket."

SRH assistant coach Simon Helmot said the team is determined to secure a spot in the top half of the standings.

SRH, who began the season with a bang, slipped to eighth with seven losses and five wins from 13 matches. Their ultra-aggressive approach often backfired, and Helmot admitted the team struggled to build consistent partnerships. (PTI)

Srikanth enters first final in six years at Malaysia Masters

KUALA LUMPUR, May 24: Indian shuttler Kidambi Srikanth stormed into his first men's singles final of a BWF event in six years with a straight-game win over Japan's Yushi Tanaka at the Malaysia Masters Super 500 badminton tournament here on Saturday.

The 32-year-old, a 2021 World Championships silver medallist, dished out a superlative game, showing glimpses of his vintage self with sharp net play and attacking flair to outwit world number 23 Tanaka 21-18 24-22 in a thrilling contest.

"I'm pretty happy. It's been a while," Srikanth said after the win. He will face second seeded Chinese Li Shi Feng in the summit clash on Sunday.

This is Srikanth's first final appearance on the BWF World Tour since finishing runner-up at the 2019 India Open.

A former world number one, Srikanth -- currently ranked 65 -- has endured a rough patch over the past few seasons due to form and fitness issues.

"Physically I've been feeling

well, but also the fact that I haven't played too many matches last year, playing qualifying, so may be kind of lost that touch of playing matches. And yeah, somehow everything worked out this time."

"I've been working hard last month. It's just these wins, after a very long time, that is what has been my emotions," he added.

A naturally gifted player, Srikanth became the first Indian to win four BWF titles in 2017 and then led the country to its first-ever Commonwealth Games gold in the team event.

But his struggles began soon after. Though he seemed in good touch in 2019, Srikanth missed the Tokyo Olympics due to a combination of injuries and the cancellation of qualifiers owing to the COVID-19 pandemic.

He continued to suffer minor injuries, particularly ankle-related ones, which affected his consistency. He recovered in time to become the first Indian male shuttler to reach the finals of the 2021 World Championships in Spain.

He also played a pivotal role in India's historic Thomas Cup tri-

umph in 2022, winning all six of his matches, before fading again.

Srikanth had reached the quarterfinals at the Thailand Open Super 300 earlier this year, while his last semifinal appearances came at the Swiss Open and Macau Open in 2023.

Over the past three months, however, he underwent intense training sessions, focused on fitness, and worked on injecting pace into rallies under the watchful eyes of coaches RMV Gurusaidutt and Parupalli Kashyap.

Asked about his plans going forward, Srikanth said: "I haven't really planned anything. It's just about being physically fit, being injury-free, and then playing as many tournaments as possible. I don't really have a target of playing the next tournaments this year."

"So it's just about training and being physically fit and obviously if I play, I will obviously play to win. I really want to give myself enough time to recover, to train, and then play this time."

In the opening game, Srikanth committed a few errors while trying to counter Tanaka's pace and

trailed 1-5.

With some fine straight slices and round-the-head smashes, the Indian closed the gap, but the Japanese kept a five-point cushion with a crisp cross smash.

Srikanth gradually constructed rallies and forced errors from the diminutive Japanese to make it 8-9, though Tanaka held a three-point lead at the break.

The Indian levelled at 14-all and surged to 19-16 lead with a superb cross-court return. A down-the-line smash earned him two game points, and he converted to take the opener. Tanaka again started strongly in the second game, leading 3-0 and 7-2 as Srikanth missed a few chances. But like in the first game, Srikanth responded with aggression, narrowing the deficit to 8-9 and levelling scores with a sharp net kill.

Tanaka made soft errors as Srikanth moved ahead 13-10, but the Japanese fought back to make it 17 all. After an intense battle, Srikanth earned a match point off a net error, but Tanaka saved it to leave the scores level at 20-20. (PTI)

McTominay and Lukaku goals lead Napoli to Serie A title and Conte's 'most unexpected' trophy

ROME, May 24: The two players who Antonio Conte wanted more than any others secured Napoli its second Serie A title in three years.

Scott McTominay scored with an acrobatic bicycle kick before half-time and Romelu Lukaku doubled the lead with a solo goal after the break in the decisive 2-0 home win over Cagliari. Conte became the first coach to win the Italian championship with three different teams.

"Everyone contributed to this -- but the coach most of all," Napoli captain Giovanni Di Lorenzo said. "Napoli needed him to get back on top. He's phenomenal."

Comparing it to his three Serie A titles won at Juventus and one at Inter Milan -- not to mention a Premier League title at Chelsea --

Conte said it was "the most unexpected, the most difficult, and the most stimulating in terms of the challenge." Conte also noted how he had to try and convince players to stay when he arrived last June.

Napoli needed only to do the same or better than defending champion Inter in the final round of matches, so Inter's 2-0 win at 10-man Como wasn't enough for the Nerazzurri. Napoli finished Serie A one point ahead of Inter.

The southern squad's fourth Serie A title overall capped an impressive turnaround after the Partenopei finished 10th during a dismal title defense last season. "The one two years ago was one we were (expecting) for months, whereas this week we had so much anxiety, we couldn't

wait to get on the field and win this in front of our fans," said winger Matteo Politano, who provided the cross for McTominay's goal. Diego Maradona led Napoli to its first two titles in 1987 and 1990. The 2023 team led by Victor Osimhen and Khvicha Kvaratskhelia clinched with five rounds to spare.

Inter was heading toward the title until McTominay went airborne to redirect a pass from Politano in the 42nd minute for his 12th goal this season after transferring from Manchester United. "For me to come and experience this, it's a dream," McTominay said. Lukaku, who was signed from Chelsea in August, controlled a long vertical pass and dribbled by two defenders before scoring in the 51st. It was his 14th

goal along with his league-leading 10 assists. Conte watched the match from the tribune after getting sent off last weekend. But he went down to the pitch at the final whistle and embraced Lukaku, with whom he also won Serie A at Inter in 2021.

McTominay dropped to the pitch in tears when the match finished. Minutes later he was honored as Serie A player of the season.

Napoli players held up signs that read "Again" featuring a "4" for the team's fourth title. Napoli fans began cheering and singing hours before kickoff at the Stadio Diego Armando Maradona and erupted in celebration at the final whistle -- including at jumbo screens that were set up in several of the city's central piazzas. (AP)

'Shubh Aarambh': From Fazilka to Leeds, journey of passionate dad and willing son

NEW DELHI, May 24: There are Dads. And then there are obsessed Dads.

When Lakhwinder Singh Gill, an affluent farmer from Chakh Khare Wala village, which is just 10km from the Indo-Pakistan border, decided to move to Mohali to give wings to his younger child Shubman's crickering talent, he didn't have a Plan B in mind.

The boy was not even nine years old but the only 'toy' he ever played with was a cricket bat gifted by his grandfather Sardar Didar Singh.

Shubman Gill's story is as much about adhering to the 3 'Ds' (Discipline, Dedication and Determination) as it is about a pushy father, who was ready to move mountains to see his son wear that India cap.

And on June 20, when Shubman walks out wearing that navy blue India blazer over his whites

alongside English counterpart Ben Stokes at the iconic Headingley, Lakhwinder can surely raise a toast. It would be for his heady 16-year journey to see that "another boy at another coaching camp" is polished to perfection to become India's next Test captain.

Not all sporting stories need to be sob stories. They could also be stories of resilience, obsession for excellence and the sacrifices made as a family for years.

Moving out of one's comfort zones, missing social gatherings for years, not having an outing as a family. From a distance, all of it might not look that difficult but monotony in pursuit of excellence certainly has a different ring to it.

"We had not attended any wedding festivities for years so that our son's focus on cricket doesn't waiver," Lakhwinder had told PTI when Shubman first came into national prominence with an

Under-19 World Cup hundred against Pakistan in 2018.

The Gill family had the resources from the beginning.

Grandfather Didar could afford a makeshift pitch on his sprawling courtyard at his Fazilka home and the father could risk shifting a family of four to Chandigarh -- far removed from a very comfortable life they had in the village.

Gill's story is a classic case of being at the right place at the right time and also doing his bit when it is absolutely necessary.

Otherwise how in the world would former India seamer Karan Ghavri, who was in Mohali in 2011 for a pace bowler's camp organized by PCA under the aegis of BCCI, find out that there were no batters who could face bowlers at the said camp.

"Kadoo bhai" (as he is known in Indian cricket circuit) took a walk with one of his assistants in close

vicinity of the PCA Stadium and stopped by to watch an Under-14 game where a young boy's technique caught his attention.

He wanted to know more about the boy and approached the only other man around, who stood under the shade of a tree, watching the proceedings intently.

"Who's that boy? Any idea?" he asked the man and as fate had it, it was Lakhwinder watching his son bat.

"That's my son Shubman and he is 12 years old," the father had answered.

The man with 100-plus Test wickets didn't waste one moment before telling Gill to report for pace bowler's camp the very next day.

The result was a 12-year-old standing up to the likes of erstwhile India U-19 seamers like Sandeep Sharma with minimum fuss.

Fast-tracking Gill into the Punjab U-14 side was then a matter of time after Kadoo bhai's strong recommendation.

Serendipity happened not once but twice for Gill.

During India A's 2018 tour of England, MSK Prasad's selection committee was picking the next lot for the List A games.

"Anmolpreet Singh had a great season and one of the five selectors was bent on putting him on that flight. Anmol had runs in domestic cricket and his choice would have been justified. Now Rahul (Dravid), who was the NCA head and India A coach, had a request for the selectors," a former national selector recalled.

"Rahul, everyone knows, is polite to a fault. He had just one request for the panel. He said, 'please select this boy Shubman and accommodate Anmol for another A tour'.

"We couldn't turn down his request and Shubman within months of U-19 World Cup triumph was in India A team," he said.

Anmolpreet had runs but Shubman had something more, technique and temperament. And at the elite level, these two count as much as runs.

Dravid had seen something special and didn't want the boy to hang around in domestic cricket for too long. As Ian Chappell once famously said "too many years in domestic cricket will allow chinks to creep into the system". He played some significant knocks for India A in England during the one-day tri-series but none more important than a double hundred against West Indies A in a 'Test' match a year after. There was no looking back after that. While his Test match batting is still a work in progress but with

wrists which are supple, physique which is sinewy and a languid stance to boot, he has had the game for ODIs.

The snap pull or a short arm jab over mid-wicket or a cover-drive played with minimal back-lift, Shubman in Blues has been Virat Kohli's extension.

In home Tests, he has had his moments but England will be a test of his batsmanship. As far as leadership is concerned, the current IPL is an indicator that he is growing in the role.

And perhaps, if Gill is the captain, Gautam Gambhir is the right man to be there during his inception days.

The ride won't be a smooth one and there are no guarantees of success. But you can't hold it against Shubman for not giving his 200 percent. Indian cricket is hoping for 'Shubh' Arambh. (PTI)

Gill to lead India through 'massive' Test transition; unfit Shami out of England tour

MUMBAI, May 24: Batting star Shubman Gill was on Saturday handed India's Test leadership to steer through a "massive transition" phase starting with next month's tour of England that will be nothing short of a trial by fire for the relatively inexperienced 18-member squad announced here.

At 25 years of age, Gill will be India's fifth youngest Test captain after Mansoor Ali Khan Pataudi (21), Sachin Tendulkar (23), Kapil Dev (24) and Ravi Shastri (25).

He will have the swashbuckling but erratic Rishabh Pant as his deputy for the five-match series that will begin on June 20 in Leeds.

"Last year or so we have looked at Shubman (for leadership). We are hopeful he is the guy who is going to take the team forward. It is a high pressure job but he is a terrific player," said chairman of selectors Ajit Agarkar after announcing the squad, which offered no major surprises.

Gill has appeared in 32 Tests so far and averages a rather modest 35 for his 1893 runs with five hundreds and seven fifties at the top of the order since making his debut in 2020.

The 27-year-old Pant, on the other hand, is a bit more experienced with 43 Tests under his belt and a better average of 42.11 for his 2948 runs lower down the line-up. He has smashed six hundreds and 15 half centuries since coming into the side in 2018.

"Pant is one of our best batters in Test cricket over the last four-five years. A wicketkeeper can see the game well and that's why he is Shubman's deputy," Agarkar added while explaining the big-hitter's role.

The selectors' decision on the team's leadership was on expected lines following the retirement of senior stars Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli, both of whom called it quits within a week of each other earlier this month.

A notable exclusion was pacer Mohammed Shami, who was deemed not fit enough for the long series that will end only in the first week of August.

"He has been trying to get fit for the series but he has had a little bit of a setback last week...and he has got some MRIs done. I would like to mention, I don't think he was going to be available for all five Tests. I don't think his workload is where it needs to be," Agarkar said.

"It's just the medical guys who told us that he's been ruled out of the series. Unfortunately, we were hoping that he's available for some part of the series at least. But if he's not fit at the moment, it's very difficult to be waiting. At the moment he is not fully fit," he added in the press conference.

Among the notable inclusions were young left-hander B Sai Sudharsan and left-arm pacer Arshdeep Singh, who earned their maiden Test call-up.

"Sai has not been picked based on IPL,



he has shown the right temperament and has the game to succeed at the top level...we have been looking at him for a while," Agarkar said, referring to the IPL's top scorer this season with 638 runs at an average of 53 so far for Gujarat Titans.

Like Sudharsan, Arshdeep too has experience of playing in county cricket.

The left-arm pacer, who has been picked ahead of Khaleel Ahmed, is India's leading wicket-taker in T20 cricket but proving himself in the traditional format will be a much tougher challenge.

The squad also features Karun Nair, who returns to the national set-up after eight years. Having last played in 2017,

Nair was dropped from the team soon after becoming the second triple centurion in Tests from India.

From the tour of Australia, Harshit Rana and Sarfaraz Khan have been dropped even though the latter had claimed to have addressed some of his fitness concerns by shedding considerable weight.

Besides Gill, Bumrah was another strong contender for captaincy but the selectors decided to hand over the leadership responsibility to the batter from Punjab.

There were also questions over Bumrah's fitness and Agarkar acknowledged that the star pacer's availability for the full series is a concern.

"I don't think he's available for all five Tests as far as, again, (from what) the physios and the doctors have told us," Agarkar said on Bumrah.

"Whether it's four or three (Tests), we'll see how the series goes and how his body can take the workload. Needless to say, how important he is. So, even if he's fit for whether it's three or four Tests, he's going to win us a few Test matches," he added.

The chosen one, Gill, has a massive challenge at hand, both as a leader and batter.

His rare batting talent is undisputed but he is yet to prove himself in Test cricket, especially in SENA (South Africa, England, New Zealand and Australia) countries. He averages 14.66 in three Tests in

England.

As a captain, he has not got a lot of experience in domestic cricket but has been leading IPL franchise Gujarat Titans for the past couple of seasons.

"It is a massive transition. Both Rohit and Virat were around for a long time," added Agarkar, who said deciding Kohli's replacement at number four would be a call taken by the team management comprising Gill and head coach Gautam Gambhir.

A heavy scorer in domestic cricket, Abhimanyu Easwaran has found a place in the extended squad as a reserve opener. He has been picked in the past as well but could never feature in the playing eleven.

With doubts over Nitish Reddy the bowler, the selectors have picked another fast bowling all-rounder in Shardul Thakur, who last played for India in December 2023.

Thakur was part of India's previous trip to England where he smashed back to fifties in the Oval Test that India won by 157 runs.

India's Squad for Test tour of England:

Shubman Gill (captain), Rishabh Pant (vice-captain), Yashasvi Jaiswal, K L Rahul, Sai Sudharsan, Abhimanyu Easwaran, Karun Nair, Nitish Reddy, Ravindra Jadeja, Dhruv Jurel, Washington Sundar, Shardul Thakur, Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Siraj, Prasidh Krishna, Akash Deep, Arshdeep Singh and Kuldeep Yadav. (PTI)

Gujarat Titans seek top-two finish, CSK a consolatory win



AHMEDABAD, May 24: Gujarat Titans would aim to secure a top-two spot while Chennai Super Kings would continue their planning for future when the two teams meet in the Indian Premier League here on Sunday.

With Royal Challengers Bengaluru losing to Sunrisers Hyderabad, the Titans still control their playoff destiny. A win against CSK will take them to 20 points and ensure a top-two berth, giving them two shots at making the final.

For CSK, already out of playoff contention, the focus will remain on building for the future as they look to test younger players and combinations in what has been a season of mixed returns.

The majority of GT's success with the bat has been built around the top three, comprising Shubman Gill, Sai Sudharsan and Jos Buttler, who would leave for national duty after the team's last league game on Sunday.

With Buttler not being available for play-offs, it is critical that the middle-order gets more time. Shahrux Khan and Sherfane Rutherford got more needed runs under their belt against LSG and would be eager to get another hit in the LSG.

The bigger concerns for GT lie in the bowling department with star spinner Rashid Khan far from his best. He is in the middle of his most expensive IPL season but the team continues to keep the faith in him. GT also need to improve in the pace department, specifically the fourth seamer option beyond Kagiso Rabada, Mohammed Siraj and Prasidh Krishna. The issue might exacerbate when Rabada leaves for national duty following the league stage.

CSK, on the other hand, are likely to finish at the

bottom of the table irrespective of what happens on Sunday afternoon. The game is another opportunity for youngsters like Ayush Mhatre, Urvil Patel and Dewald Brevis to make an impact.

After the loss to Rajasthan Royals in Delhi, CSK head coach Stephen Fleming had no qualms in admitting that his team is fittingly at the bottom of the standings. A win in that context will not mean much but CSK's ultra loyal fan base would want the team to exit with two points. M S Dhoni has kept the suspense on his IPL future alive since his international retirement in 2020. Will the game on Sunday be his last for the fabled franchise? The answer lies only with the charismatic leader.

Teams: Gujarat Titans: Shubman Gill, Sai Sudharsan, Kumar Kushagra, Anuj Rawat, Rashid Khan, Rahul Tewatia, Shahrux Khan, Nishant Sindhu, Ravishrinivasan Sai Kishore, Gerald Coetzee, Jayant Yadav, Arshad Khan, Karim Janat, Sherfane Rutherford, Mahipal Lomror, Washington Sundar, Manav Suthar, Gurnoor Brar, Ishant Sharma, Kagiso Rabada, Prasidh Krishna, Kulwant Khejroliya, Mohammed Siraj, Dasun Shanaka, Kusal Mendis, Jos Buttler

Chennai Super Kings: Shaik Rasheed, Andre Siddarth C, Rahul Tripathi, Devon Conway, MS Dhoni, Shivam Dube, Ravindra Jadeja, Vijay Shankar, Deepak Hooda, Anshul Kamboj, Rachin Ravindra, Jamie Overton, Kamlesh Nagarkoti, Ramakrishna Ghosh, Ravichandran Ashwin, Sam Curran, Matheesha Pathirana, Shreyas Gopal, Mukesh Choudhary, Nathan Ellis, Noor Ahmad, Khaleel Ahmed, Ayush Mhatre, Dewald Brevis, Urvil Patel. Match starts 3.30 IST. (PTI)

SRH vs KKR: No context, only pride at stake

NEW DELHI, May 24: Kolkata Knight Riders will have little motivation left when they take on another ousted outfit Sunrisers Hyderabad in an inconsequential IPL game here on Sunday.

Call it irony, when KKR and SRH played their last match of the 2024 IPL, it was the grand finale where Shreyas Iyer's team had trumped Pat Cummins' men in a one-sided match.

On Sunday however, both sides will only have bragging rights there for the taking with at best a sixth place finish in the offing.

SRH will start as favourites, having thrashed a fancied RCB by 42 runs on Friday night and will be more than game-ready unlike KKR, which last took the field against CSK on May 7 at the Eden Gardens.

Pat Cummins would like to finish this season on a winning note and their formidable batting line-up comprising Travis Head, Abhishek Sharma, Ishan Kishan, Aniket Verma would like to feast on a batting paradise at the Kotla. Ajinkya Rahane's men were supposed to play RCB on May 17, the first match post resumption but Bengaluru weather not only played spoilsport, it also ended their slim play-off hopes.

With the four play-off spots already decided, the problem with a game like



this is that it is more of a formality and tick in the box for broadcasters.

But that won't stop the two teams from trying to win one last time and finishing on a happy note before the mandarins of both teams go back to the drawing board and take stock of what all went wrong during the season.

For KKR, local curator Sujay Mukherjee's (a small time Bengal cricketer of 1970's) obstinacy in dishing out a belter certainly didn't help their cause.

They lost crucial home games and their strike bowler Varun Chakravarty, after a roaring international season, didn't have a great outing by his standards.

The biggest flop for KKR has been their ₹ 23.75 crore call back of

Venkatesh Iyer. 142 runs in 11 matches and if one removes 60 scored in a single game, then the MP cricketer's tally would be a mere 82 runs from 10 games.

Add to it, he doesn't even bowl now and owners Shah Rukh Khan and Jay Mehta can't be faulted if they have some tough questions from CEO Venky Mysore on Iyer's exorbitant price tag.

There is a tendency for a lot of teams to hide behind the veneer of "auction dynamic", a term used to justify illogical buys. Iyer's purchase fits in that category.

KKR's batting failures is highlighted by the fact that skipper Rahane, not known for his T20 prowess, is their best batter in this edition by a

distance with 375 runs in his kitty.

Another statistical input would also surprise many. The KKR captain, not exactly known for his big hits, has 20 sixes in the tournament so far, highest for his team with Windies duo of Sunil Narine and Andre Russell having 16 and 14 maximums to their credit.

The failure of Russell and Rinku to consistently hit big between overs 16 to 20 also cost them dearly.

Teams:

Kolkata Knight Riders: Ajinkya Rahane (captain), Manish Pandey, Angkrish Raghuvanshi, Rinku Singh, Luvnith Sisodia, Quinton de Kock, Rahmanullah Gurbaz, Sunil Narine, Andre Russell, Ramandeep Singh, Anukul Roy, Venkatesh Iyer, Varun Chakravarty, Harshit Rana, Vaibhav Arora, Mayank Markande, Umran Malik, Anrich Nortje, Spencer Johnson.

SRH: Pat Cummins (c), Ishan Kishan (wk), Atharva Taide, Abhinav Manohar, Aniket Verma, Sachin Baby, Smaran Ravichandran, Heinrich Klaasen (wk), Travis Head, Harshal Patel, Kamindu Mendis, Wiaan Mulder, Abhishek Sharma, Nitish Kumar Reddy, Mohammed Shami, Rahul Chahar, Simarjeet Singh, Zee-shan Ansari, Jaydev Unadkat, Eshan Malunga.

Match Starts: 7:30 pm. (PTI)

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Strange selection, says Manjrekar; Irfan, Harbhajan congratulate Gill

NEW DELHI, May 24: Former India batsman Sanjay Manjrekar on Saturday described India's 18-strong Test squad for the tour of England as "strange" but asked for a patient approach towards newly-appointed Test captain Shubman Gill. India will play five Tests against England starting June 20, and batting star Gill has been handed the responsibility to steer the team during a "massive transition" phase following the retirement of top stars Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli.

"Strange team selection overall. But India go to England with nothing to lose. It's a team in transition so we can only wish it the very best & yes, be patient when it comes to returns on investment. #indianteam," Manjrekar, a former batter, wrote on his 'X' handle without explaining the reasons for his observation.

Young left-hander Sai Sudharsan and the seasoned Karun Nair have been brought in to replace Rohit and Kohli, while left-arm pacer Arshdeep Singh has also earned his maiden Test call-up. (PTI)

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