

Good News

Newly opened our Namsai Branch
Office: 2nd Mile, Namsai,
Arunachal Pradesh.
(M) 7002786249, 9612845442



26 YEARS OF DEDICATED JOURNALISM

www.thehillstimes.in

THE HILLS TIMES

PUBLISHED SIMULTANEOUSLY FROM GUWAHATI & DIPHU

Voice of the hills people

Vol .No. XXVI

Issue No. 122

RNI-ASSEN/2000/12862

DIPHU, KARBI ANGLONG, SATURDAY, MAY 17, 2025

PAGES 12

PRICE ₹ 8

Assam Cabinet gives nod to more food items at subsidised rates

GUWAHATI, May 16: The Assam Cabinet on Friday approved several key initiatives, including benefits for two investors under the Industrial and Investment Policy of Assam (IIPA), foodgrain subsidies for additional items starting October and setting up a dairy plant by AMUL.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, who chaired the Cabinet meeting, shared the decisions on X.

"In today's meeting of the #AssamCabinet, we resolved to: Allow AMUL to set up a Dairy processing plant with a capacity of 1 lakh litres/day," he said.

The Cabinet also decided to roll out foodgrain subsidy from October, enhance remuneration of ICT teachers and provide benefits under IIPA to two investors, he added.

According to details shared by the chief minister, the Cabinet approved two investment proposals under the IIPA to attract private investment and create job opportunities in the state.

These projects have a combined investment outlay of ₹ 457.98 crore and are expected to generate employment for around 1,000 people.

To give a fillip to dairy production, the Cabinet approved to lease 20 bighas to AMUL for setting up a state-of-the-art product dairy plant at the Institute of

Farm Management Campus, Rani.

AMUL will set up this processing unit with a capacity of 1 lakh litres per day at an approximate cost of ₹ 75 crore, which may go up to ₹ 150 crore.

This plant will benefit around 20,000 dairy farmers and is part of an MoU signed during Advantage Assam business summit 2.0, the chief minister said.

The council of ministers also approved the distribution of subsidised masur dal, sugar and salt to NFSA beneficiaries from October in select districts from November in all districts. Each commodity will be provided in separate packets to ensure customers have a choice to purchase individual products.

After subsidy, the final selling price of masur dal will be ₹ 69 per kg, sugar ₹ 38 and salt ₹ 10.

To secure the future of ICT (Information Communication Technology) instructors, the Cabinet approved the enhancement of their monthly honorarium to ₹ 20,000 from October.

The council of ministers also approved a service guarantee of the instructors until the age of 60.

The ICT employees will also be eligible for the Mukhya Mantri Lok Sevak Aarogya Yojana, along with the Apun Ghar and Apun Bahan schemes, the chief minister added. (PTI)

Assam govt takes tough steps to tackle twin menace

Policy against human trafficking, witch-hunting notified ● A significant move to safeguard human rights: CM

GUWAHATI, May 16: The Assam government on Friday notified a state policy aimed at combating human trafficking and witch-hunting to ensure that all people can live a life of equal worth, free from all forms of abuse.

"The Assam State Policy to Combat Human Trafficking and End Witch-Hunting is now officially notified. A significant move to safeguard human rights and uphold dignity," the Chief Minister's Office (CMO) said in a post on X.

The notification, issued by an order of the governor on May 6, stated that the policy will come into effect from the date of its publication in the official gazette.

According to the policy, the vision is to create a state where all individuals are able to attain their full potential by living a life of equal



worth, free from all kinds of abuse and participate equally in private and public life.

The policy's mission is to "provide a safe and equal society wherein all individuals can claim their entitlements and access all

services, lead a life free from all kinds of violence, experience an enhancement in their capabilities and exercise control over their life circumstances through convergence and synergies among all departments for promoting safety and

security".

The policy acknowledged that human trafficking and witch-hunting are two crimes that disproportionately affect women and girls.

While human trafficking is an organised crime and is considered the fastest growing criminal enterprise, witch-hunting is mostly a social crime rooted in deep-seated regressive cultural practices, it said.

The state's geographical location, with borders with six other North Eastern states besides boundaries with Bangladesh and Bhutan, makes it a 'critical' one, the policy added.

The Assam Witch Hunting (Prohibition, Prevention and Protection) Act, 2018, deals with witch-hunting, making it a cognisable, non-bailable and non-compoundable (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

HT BRIEFS

Witness injured

MORIGAON: A witness in a case in Morigaon judicial court in Assam was injured on Friday when a person allegedly attacked him with a knife, a senior police officer said. The accused was later arrested by the police, he added. Morigaon Superintendent of Police Hemanta Das said two persons had come as witnesses for a case. "While they were waiting on the court premises, a person appeared with a knife and attempted to stab them. One of the witnesses was injured," Das said. The attacker also sustained minor injuries and he was apprehended, he added. The two witnesses were in the court for a case under Dharamtul police station of the district. The SP and other officers rushed to the spot following the incident. "The accused, Osman Ali, had previously been imprisoned for a similar offence. We are investigating the incident," the SP said. He added that a family feud is suspected to be behind the attack.

Assam Congress

GUWAHATI: Assam's Congress unit on Friday lodged a police complaint against BJP MLA and Madhya Pradesh Minister Vijay Shah for his alleged insulting remarks against Colonel Sofiya Qureshi, who briefed the media about "Operation Sindoor". The party's civic and social outreach wing filed the complaint at Dispur police station. The opposition party asserted that Shah's remarks not only "hurt the sentiments of the people but also angered the nation." "Remarks against any official of the armed forces cannot be tolerated. Such remarks will weaken the morale of our forces," said Bhanupriya Dutta, chairman of the civic and social outreach wing. He maintained that at a time when the entire country was rallying behind the armed forces, such comments from a minister were highly condemnable.

Manipur Kuki MLAs, civil society groups meet in Guwahati

GUWAHATI, May 16: Several Kuki MLAs from Manipur, along with representatives of various civil society organisations and Kuki militant groups that have suspended operations, held a closed-door meeting here on Friday to discuss their future course of action with peace gradually returning to the ethnic strife-torn state, sources said.

Members of the Kuki community arrived in the Assam capital on Wednesday and Thursday and are staying at an undisclosed hotel where the meeting was held, a source from the community and privy to the development told PTI.

"It is a closed-door meeting, so it is difficult to know exactly what they are discussing. However, one of them informed that they will mainly deliberate on one point — separate administration for the Kuki-Zo people in Manipur under the aegis of the Constitution so that we can live a life free of discrimination and subjugation," she added.

They are also believed to have discussed how to present their side of the story to the central government in support of their demand for a separate administration within Manipur.

"Peace is gradually returning to the state after the

imposition of President's rule. The next step is to have a lasting peace in Manipur. Therefore, all stakeholders have now started discussions on the future course of action," another source said.

A senior Assam Police officer confirmed the meeting, but said it is taking place without informing the administration here.

"We learnt about the meeting last evening, but they did not inform us. According to our information, around 15 people are discussing their internal issues," he told PTI.

The Centre had imposed President's Rule in Manipur on February 13, days after Chief Minister N Biren Singh resigned from his post.

The Manipur Assembly, which has a tenure till 2027, has been put under suspended animation.

More than 260 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in ethnic violence between Imphal Valley-based Meiteis and hills-based Kuki-Zo groups since May 2023.

Meiteis account for about 53 per cent of Manipur's population and live mostly in the Imphal Valley. Tribals — Nagas and Kukis — constitute little over 40 per cent and reside in the hill districts. (PTI)

Congress has no future: BJP on Chidambaram's remarks on INDIA oppn bloc

NEW DELHI, May 16: The BJP took a swipe at the Congress on Friday over its leader P Chidambaram's remarks on the INDIA bloc, saying even Rahul Gandhi's "close aides" know that the party has no future.

Chidambaram voiced concerns over the INDIA bloc on Thursday, saying he was not sure if the opposition alliance was still intact.

Latching on to the senior Congress leader's remarks, BJP national spokesperson Gaurav Bhatia said when the "INDI alliance" was formed, its common goal was to come to power even if it had to become "Bharat virodhi" (anti-India), abuse Prime Minister Narendra Modi or demoralise the armed forces.

Voters have rejected the "ghamandiya" (arrogant) alliance because its leaders came together to fulfil their self-interest, not to serve people, he alleged.

"Now, Chidambaram has said

that the INDI alliance is dead," Bhatia told PTI.

Another BJP spokesperson, Pradeep Bhandari, said in a post on X: "Congress leader P Chidambaram predicts: 'Opposition will not be intact in future, BJP is a formidable organisation'."

"Even Rahul Gandhi's close aides know Congress has no future," he added.

Speaking at the launch of a book co-authored by Salman Khurshid and Mritunjay Singh Yadav, titled, "Contesting Democratic Deficit", Chidambaram said, "The future (of the INDIA bloc) is not so bright as Mritunjay Singh Yadav said. He seems to feel that the alliance is still intact, but I am not sure."

"It is only Salman (Khurshid) who can answer because he was part of the negotiating team for the INDIA bloc. If the alliance is totally intact, I will be very happy. But it shows at the seams that it is frayed," (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Govt to send delegations for diplomatic outreach to expose Pakistan on terrorism

NEW DELHI, May 16: As part of a major diplomatic offensive, the government will send several all-party delegations to different countries, starting next week, to expose Pakistan-sponsored terrorism on the world forum.

The exercise is aimed at presenting India's stance against Pakistan on terror comes in the wake of Operation Sindoor — the Indian offensive against terror camps in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) following the April 22 terror attack in Pahalgam in which 26 people, mostly tourists, were killed.

Senior leaders, including MPs, of various parties from both the ruling and the opposition, have been sounded out by the government and some parties have also given their go-ahead to the presence of their members for the diplomatic exercise.

Sources said some former min-



isters would lead the delegations of MPs from different parties to a cluster of countries across the world.

While there was no clarity on the exact number of delegations or their members, some leaders said more than 30 MPs could be included in the outreach exercise.

The delegations will visit different countries for a period of 10

days. The MPs will visit different blocs of countries, as earmarked by the government.

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) will brief the MPs before they depart.

Among the parties whose MPs will be part of the delegation are the BJP, Congress, TMC, DMK, NCP (SP), JDU, BJD, Shiv Sena (UBT), (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

UN revises India's economic growth downwards to 6.3% for 2025

'India remains one of the fastest growing large economies'

UNITED NATIONS, May 16: India's economic growth forecast for 2025 has been revised downward to 6.3 per cent, and despite a projected moderation, the country remains one of the fastest-growing large economies, supported by resilient consumption and government spending, the United Nations has said.

The UN on Thursday launched a report titled 'The World Economic Situation and Prospects as of mid-2025'.

"India remains one of the fastest growing large economies, driven by strong private consumption and public investment, even as growth projections have been lowered to 6.3 per cent in 2025," Ingo Pitterle, Senior Economic Affairs Officer, Global Economic Monitoring Branch, Economic Analysis and

Policy Division, UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), said at a press briefing here.

The report said the global economy is at a precarious juncture, marked by heightened trade tensions and elevated policy uncertainty. The recent surge in tariffs—driving the effective US tariff rate up steeply—threatens to raise production costs, disrupt global supply chains and amplify financial turbulence.

The report said that despite a projected moderation, India remains one of the fastest-growing large economies, supported by resilient consumption and government spending.

India's economy is forecast to grow by 6.3 per cent in 2025, down from 7.1 (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

MHA effects key bureaucratic reshuffle in Arunachal

ITANAGAR, May 16: In a major bureaucratic reshuffle, the Ministry of Home Affairs on Friday announced the transfers and postings of 40 IAS and 26 IPS officers from the AGMUT cadre, including four IAS and five IPS officers currently serving in Arunachal Pradesh.

The changes come into effect immediately, according to a notification issued by the ministry.

According to the notification, 2012-batch IAS officer Krishna Kumar Singh, currently serving as the secretary of the Health and Family Welfare Department of Arunachal Pradesh, has been transferred to Delhi.

Lower Dibang Valley deputy commissioner Soumya Saurav (2014 batch) has also been posted to the national capital.

Capital Deputy Commissioner Talo Potom and Lohit deputy commissioner Shashwat Saurabh, both from the (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Sale of pigs, pork banned in Barpeta

BARPETA, May 16: The sale of pigs and pork was banned in Assam's Barpeta district on Friday following the outbreak of African Swine Fever (ASF).

ASF broke out in Gahia village in the Sarukhetri development block.

To contain the spread of the infection, district magistrate Diganta Baishya invoked Section 16 of the Assam Epidemic Disease Act, 2023, to ban the sale of pigs, piglets, pork and related products, said a notification.

Transportation of pigs, both within and outside the district, has been restricted, except for movement on the national highway, it said.

People have been strictly prohibited from disposing of pig carcasses in open fields, water bodies or other exposed areas, the notification said. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

'It has been designed to offer accessible and high-quality education'

HCLTech partners with IIT Guwahati to upskill employees in AI

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 16: HCLTech, a leading global technology company, has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Guwahati to offer employees with upskilling in Artificial Intelligence (AI) and related technologies, said an official statement on Friday.

The HCLTech employees, enrolled in the company's early-career development program—TechBee—will get opportunity to pursue four-year online Bachelor of Science (Honors) degree in Data Science and AI.

"Under the agreement, eligible HCLTech employees will be offered a four-year online Bachelor of Science (Honors) degree in Data Science and AI," the statement added.



It further said that this initiative is designed to equip participants with the skills and knowledge necessary to excel in the rapidly evolving tech landscape, preparing them for future leadership roles within the company.

Commenting on the same, Sub-

baraman B, senior vice president, HCLTech said that the company has long been at the forefront of creating alternative talent pipelines, empowering individuals to build successful careers in technology from diverse backgrounds. "Our TechBee program provides

high school graduates with a unique opportunity to kick-start their careers, and this collaboration with IIT Guwahati adds another valuable pathway for them to pursue their academic ambitions while gaining real-world industry experience," he asserted.

On the other hand, Prof. Devendra Jalihal, director, IIT Guwahati stated that they are excited to collaborate with HCLTech, a global leader in technology and innovation, to advance early-career education in critical fields like Data Science and AI.

"HCLTech's proven expertise in driving digital transformation, combined with IIT Guwahati's academic excellence, makes this online degree program a powerful platform. It has been designed to offer accessible, high-quality education (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

BTA talks: India, US trade ministers to assess progress from today; to give political guidance

NEW DELHI, May 16: India and the US will commence ministerial-level meetings in Washington from May 17 to assess the progress of negotiations for the proposed bilateral trade agreement, provide political guidance to chief negotiators and push forward efforts to deepen economic ties, an official said.

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal will hold deliberations on the agreement first with US Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick and later with US Trade Representative (USTR) Jamieson Greer during his four-day visit, the official said.

"The minister will be holding political-level discussions to give negotiations a political steer. They will assess the progress made in the negotiations in the past two months," the official said. This will be the Goyal's second visit to the US.

The minister-level meeting will be followed by the deliberations between chief negotiators of the two countries from May 19 to May 22.

The meetings come against the backdrop of both countries exploring the possibility of an interim trade arrangement in goods to secure "early mutual wins" ahead of finalising the first phase of the trade agreement by fall (September-October) this year.

The main issues that will figure in the negotiations include market access, rules of origin, and non-tariff barriers.

India's proposal to impose a retaliatory duty under the WTO norms on certain US products over American tariffs on steel and aluminium



would also figure in the BTA deliberations. Officials from New Delhi and Washington aim to take advantage of the 90-day tariff pause window to advance the talks.

The US has suspended the additional 26 per cent tariffs on India till July 9. It was announced on April 2 to bridge the widening trade deficit. However, the 10 per cent baseline tariff imposed on the countries will continue to remain in place.

To give impetus to the talks, India's Chief Negotiator for BTA Rajesh Agrawal, special secretary in the Department of Commerce, and Assistant US Trade Representative for South and Central Asia Brendan Lynch last month held three-day deliberations in Washington.

In March this year, Goyal held bilateral meetings with Greer and Lutnick.

India and the US have already initiated sectoral-level talks for the pact.

To boost bilateral trade, India is seeking duty concessions for labour-intensive sectors like textiles, gems and jewellery, leather goods, garments, plastics, chemicals, shrimp, oil seeds, chemicals, grapes, and bananas in the proposed pact with America.

On the other hand, the US wants duty concessions in sectors like certain industrial goods, automobiles (electric vehicles in particular), wines, petrochemical products, dairy, agriculture items such as apples, and tree nuts.

The terms of reference (ToRs) for the BTA have been finalised by India and the US, which include around 19 chapters covering issues like tariffs, goods, services, rules of origin, non-tariff barriers, and customs facilitation.

The US has on multiple occasions raised concerns over certain non-tariff barriers being faced by American goods in the Indian markets.

The US remained India's largest trading partner for the fourth consecutive year in 2024-25, with bilateral trade valued at USD 131.84 billion. The US accounts for about 18 per cent of India's total goods exports, 6.22 per cent in imports, and 10.73 per cent in the country's total merchandise trade.

With America, India had a trade surplus (the difference between imports and exports) of USD 41.18 billion in goods in 2024-25. It was USD 35.32 billion in 2023-24, USD 27.7 billion in 2022-23, USD 32.85 billion in 2021-22 and USD 22.73 billion in 2020-21. The US has raised concerns over this widening trade deficit. (PTI)

Forex reserves jump USD 4.5 bln to USD 690.61 bln on rise in gold assets

MUMBAI, May 16: India's forex reserves jumped by USD 4.553 billion to USD 690.617 billion for the week ended May 9 on the back of a steep increase in gold assets, the RBI said on Friday.

In the previous reporting week, the overall reserves had dropped by USD 2.065 billion to USD 686.064 billion. The forex reserves had touched an all-time high of USD 704.885 billion in end-September 2024.

For the week ended May 9, foreign currency assets, a major component of the reserves, increased by USD 196 million to USD 581.373 billion, the data released on Friday showed.

Expressed in dollar terms, the foreign currency assets include the effect of appreciation or depreciation of non-US units like the euro, pound and yen held in the foreign exchange reserves.

Gold reserves jumped by USD 4.518 billion to USD 86.337 billion during the week, the RBI said.

The Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) were down by USD 26 million to USD 18.532 billion, the apex bank said.

India's reserve position with the IMF was also down by USD 134 million at USD 4.374 billion in the reporting week, the apex bank data showed. (PTI)

Stock markets end lower on profit taking in IT shares; Bharti Airtel declines nearly 3 pc

MUMBAI, May 16: Benchmark stock indices Sensex and Nifty ended lower on Friday due to profit-taking in IT shares and Bharti Airtel after a sharp rally in the previous session.

The 30-share BSE Sensex declined 200.15 points or 0.24 per cent to settle at 82,330.59. During the day, it lost 383.79 points or 0.46 per cent to 82,146.95.

The NSE Nifty dropped 42.30 points or 0.17 per cent to 25,019.80.

Bharti Airtel dropped by 2.81 per cent after Singtel sold about 1.2 per cent of its direct stake in the firm for around USD 1.5 billion in sync with its active capital management approach to optimise its asset portfolio and drive shareholder returns sustainably.

HCL Tech, State Bank of India, Infosys, Tech Mahindra, Tata Consultancy Services, Bajaj Finserv, Larsen & Toubro, Mahindra & Mahindra and Titan were also among the losers in the Sensex pack.

Eternal, Hindustan Unilever, Asian Paints, ITC, Tata Motors and NTPC were among the gainers.

"Markets languished in negative territory throughout the trading session and ended weak due to selective profit-taking in IT, banking and metal shares."

"However, broader indices like mid and smallcap indices coupled with most sectoral stocks ending in positive territory shows that investors are cautiously optimistic on equities, despite global uncertainties," Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said.

The BSE smallcap gauge jumped 1.18 per cent and midcap index climbed 0.85 per cent.

Among sectoral indices, industrials surged the most by 1.84 per cent, followed by realty (1.72 per cent), capital goods (1.63 per cent), utilities (1.44 per

cent), power (1.37 per cent) and consumer discretionary (0.87 per cent).

IT, tech, BSE Focused IT, metal and bankex were the laggards.

On the weekly front, the BSE benchmark gauge jumped 2,876.12 points or 3.61 per cent, and the Nifty surged 1,011.8 points or 4.21 per cent.

"Markets traded lacklustre after Thursday's surge and ended marginally lower, in the absence of any fresh triggers. The tone remained subdued from the outset, with consolidation in heavyweight stocks across sectors capping the move throughout the session," Ajit Mishra - SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said.

Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Ltd stated that investor sentiment remained upbeat, with sustained momentum in mid- and small-cap stocks, as well as rate-sensitive sectors such as real estate, NBFCs, automobiles, and consumer durables. In Asian markets, Japan's Nikkei 225 index, Shanghai's SSE Composite index and Hong Kong's Hang Seng settled lower while South Korea's KOSPI ended in the positive territory.

European markets were trading with gains. US markets ended mostly higher on Thursday.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude went up 0.09 per cent to USD 64.59 a barrel.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth ₹ 5,392.94 crore on Thursday, according to exchange data.

Sensex jumped 1,200.18 points or 1.48 per cent to settle at a seven-month high of 82,530.74 on Thursday. The Nifty surged 395.20 points or 1.60 per cent to reach a seven-month peak of 25,062.10. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

HCLTech partners with IIT

that empowers students to thrive in the ever-evolving technology landscape," Jalil had added. Established in 1994, the Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati has swiftly built world-class infrastructure and state-of-the-art facilities for advanced research. The institute offers a wide range of programs across various disciplines, fulfilling the aspirations of the Northeast region.

This partnership with IIT Guwahati reinforces HCLTech's commitment to nurturing young talent and shaping the next generation of tech leaders. The HCLTechTechBee program offers students the flexibility to pursue higher education while gaining hands-on industry experience, creating a well-rounded, future-ready workforce.

Sale of pigs, pork

Suppressing information related to pig deaths or symptoms of ASF from veterinary or district officials will be treated as a punishable offence, it said.

Gathering of four or more people has been barred within a 1-km radius of the affected zone, it added. (PTI)

MHA effects key bureaucratic

2016 batch, have also been transferred to Delhi.

Meanwhile, three IAS officers from Goa -- Sneha Suryakant Gite and Asvin Chandru A (both 2019 batch), along with Yashaswini B (2020 batch) -- have been transferred to Arunachal Pradesh.

Among the IPS officers, 2013-batch officer Sharad Bhaskar Darade, currently serving as secretary to the governor of Arunachal Pradesh, has been posted to Delhi along with 2014-batch officer Mahesh Kumar Barnwal.

Capital Superintendent of Police Rohit Rajbir Singh and Special Investigation Cell (SIC) SP Anant Mittal, both from the 2015 batch, as well as West Siang SP Abhimanyu Poswal (2018 batch), have also been moved to Delhi.

On the other hand, IPS officers Devesh Kumar Mahla (2012 batch), Surendra Choudhury (2013), and Anurag Dwivedi (2020), all previously serving in Delhi, have now been transferred to Arunachal Pradesh.

Additionally, 2019-batch IPS officer Shivendu Bhusan, who was serving in Mizoram, has also been posted to the state. (PTI)

Govt to send delegations for diplomatic

CPI(M), and some others, the sources said. A leader of a party that has been sounded out for the exercise said they were told to be ready to leave by May 22-23 for a period of 10 days and that the MEA would be in touch with them to provide the necessary details, including the itinerary.

Former Union minister Anurag Thakur and BJP MP from Odisha, Aparajita Sarangi, are among the ruling party members to be part of the delegations, the sources said.

Former Union ministers Ravi Shankar Prasad and Rajiv Pratap Rudy, BJP MPs Samik Bhattacharya and Brij Lal are also expected to be part of the delegations.

At least four MPs from the Congress, besides members of other parties, have been tapped by the government about the diplomatic exercise.

Congress MPs included in the government's list are Shashi Tharoor, Manish Tewari, Salman Khurshid and Amar Singh, and the party has confirmed it would be a part of the delegations, the sources said.

The TMC's Sudip Bandyopadhyay, JDU's Sanjay Jha, BJD's Sasmit Patra, John Brittas of the CPI(M), Priyanka Chaturvedi of Shiv Sena (UBT), Supriya Sule of NCP (SP), the DMK's K Kanimozhi, AIMIM's Asaduddin Owaisi and AAP's Vikramjit Sawhney are also being tapped to be part of the delegations, the sources said.

While Khurshid, a former external affairs minister, has been asked to lead a delegation of seven MPs to south and southeast Asia, covering countries such as South Korea, Japan and Singapore, Baramati MP Sule is likely to lead a delegation to the Middle East and Africa, including the likes of Oman, Egypt, Kenya and South Africa, the sources said.

Congress leader Tewari is likely to lead a delegation to Europe or the Middle East and has been asked about his availability, the sources said.

Tharoor is likely to lead a delegation to the US, they added.

While Thakur will be part of the delegation that will visit the Middle East and Africa, his colleague Sarangi will be part of the delegation to southeast Asia. Sawhney will also be a part of this delegation.

Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Chaturvedi will be part of a delegation to Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Kuwait and Bahrain. This delegation will also include the Congress' Amar Singh.

The sources said former Union minister Ghulam Nabi Azad is likely to be part of one delegation.

Each delegation is likely to have seven to eight members and may visit four to five countries, they added.

While there was no official word on the delegations from the government, Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jai Ram Ramesh told PTI that Union minister Kiren Rijiju had spoken to Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge in this regard.

The prime minister and his party have been defaming the Congress continuously despite the opposition party calling for unity and solidarity, Ramesh claimed.

"Now suddenly the prime minister has decided to send multi-party delegations abroad to explain India's stand on terrorism from Pakistan. The Indian National Congress always takes a position in the supreme national interest and never politicises national security issues like the BJP does. Hence, the INC will definitely be a part of these delegations," he said in a post on X.

Under Operation Sindoor, India carried out precision strikes on terror infrastructure in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir early on May 7 in response to the April 22 Pahalgam terror attack. (PTI)

Himanta, DoNER Minister hold

the Northeast by increasing investments in infrastructure, power, and last-mile logistics.

"We also discussed on a roadmap to streamline supply chains in the North East through more investments in infrastructure, power and last mile linkages," The chief minister added.

Assam govt takes tough

offence, it added. While cases of witch-hunting have visibly dipped after the enactment of this law, it has not been eradicated completely, with 32 cases registered between 2022-24 according to Assam Police data.

"In the above context, there is an urgent need to develop a well-designed comprehensive policy to cover all areas of intervention, ensuring prevention, protection and rehabilitation of survivors of trafficking and witch-hunting. Apart from ensuring the rights of the survivors, the area of preventing such crime and prosecuting culprits is also an area of urgent intervention," the policy stated.

The Department of Women and Child Development will serve as the nodal department for the implementation of this policy. Other departments will be designated as core or allied departments/stakeholders, as specified.

Committees at the state, district and gaon panchayat levels will be set up for interventions at the required level, it added. (PTI)

Congress has no future

the Rajya Sabha MP said. He hoped that the alliance can "still be put together, there is still time".

The former Union finance minister warned that the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) is fighting against a "formidable machinery", which must be challenged on all fronts.

Reacting to Chidambaram's remarks, senior Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader Rajeev Chandrasekhar said even those in the Congress are beginning to realise that the INDIA bloc is known for its corruption.

They re-branded the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) and formed the INDIA bloc, the former Union minister said.

"It is an alliance of dynasty-driven parties, parties without an ideology and with no common vision for India. They are united only by their love for corruption and their fear and hatred of Narendra Modi," Chandrasekhar told PTI. He said people have rejected the opposition alliance and would continue to do so.

"So when Chidambaram and other leaders belatedly become wise and start to understand what the people of India truly want, they realise that the INDI alliance has no future," he said.

"The BJP works hard, has a clear ideology and offers a vision for a united and Viksit Bharat (developed India) driven by the India First approach. Our leaders work round the clock with that goal in mind. We see politics as a way to serve people and the country," Chandrasekhar said.

On the other hand, the INDIA bloc parties have never done anything for people, he alleged.

The INDIA bloc of opposition parties was formed ahead of last year's Lok Sabha polls to counter the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) at the Centre. (PTI)

UN revises India's economic

per cent in 2024. "Resilient private consumption and strong public investment, alongside robust services exports, will support economic growth," the report said.

"While looming United States tariffs weigh on merchandise exports, currently exempt sectors—such as pharmaceuticals, electronics, semiconductors, energy, and copper—could limit the economic impact, though these exemptions may not be permanent," it added.

The 6.3 per cent growth projection for India in 2025 is slightly lower than the 6.6 per cent estimated in the UN World Economic Situation and Prospects 2025 published in January this year. GDP growth for India for 2026 is projected to be 6.4 per cent.

In India, unemployment remains largely stable amid steady economic conditions, though persistent gender disparities in employment underscore the need for greater inclusivity in workforce participation. The report added that in India, inflation is projected to slow from 4.9 per cent in 2024 to 4.3 per cent in 2025, staying within the central bank's target range.

Declining inflation has allowed most of the South Asian region's central banks to commence or continue monetary easing in 2025. The report noted that the Reserve Bank of India, which had kept its policy rate steady at 6.5 per cent since February 2023, began its easing cycle in February 2025. Meanwhile, governments in Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka are expected to continue fiscal consolidation and economic reforms under IMF-supported programs.

The report said that global GDP growth is now forecast at just 2.4 per cent in 2025, down from 2.9 per cent in 2024 and 0.4 percentage points below the January 2025 projection.

"It's been a nervous time for the global economy. In January this year, we were expecting two years of stable, if subpar, growth, and since then, prospects have diminished, accompanied by significant volatility across various dimensions," Shantanu Mukherjee, director, Economic Analysis and Policy Division, UN DESA, said at the press briefing.

He said the global economic growth is forecast at 2.4% for 2025 and 2.5% for 2026.

"This is a downward revision of 0.4 percentage points each year, back from what we were expecting in January. Now this is not a recession, but the slowing down is affecting most countries and regions," Mukherjee said. (PTI)

HDFC Bank launches 'Biz+ Current Accounts' to support MSME growth

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 16: HDFC Bank has launched a new suite of current account offerings under the brand 'Biz+ Current Accounts,' aimed at meeting the diverse needs of India's micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs). The bank, which leads in current account deposits in the private sector, says the new products are designed to provide end-to-end banking support from the very first day of a customer's relationship with the bank. The Biz+ Current Accounts offer a range of core benefits, including cash handling services, robust digital banking platforms, and support from dedicated relationship managers.

The accounts also come bundled with tailored solutions covering various aspects of a business's banking requirements.

Notably, new customers will receive complimentary business and payment protection insurance for the first year, offering added security against unforeseen risks. The bank has structured the Biz+ offering into four variants—Biz Lite+, Biz Pro+, Biz Ultra+, and Biz Elite+—each targeting businesses at different stages of growth, from setup to diversification.

Each variant offers tiered features such as increased cash deposit limits,

tax savings, insurance benefits, and access to credit and payment solutions, with features scaling up according to business needs.

In addition to general features, HDFC Bank has introduced industry-specific adaptability, allowing the accounts to cater to manufacturers, traders, and service providers with customized banking solutions.

The launch is part of the bank's broader strategy to shift from transactional relationships to value-based engagements, according to Parag Rao, Country Head – Payments, Liability Products, Consumer Finance and Marketing at HDFC Bank. He described the move as "a more modular, scalable and business life stage-aligned proposition."

Available across the bank's network of over 9,455 branches, the Biz+ accounts are expected to benefit over 4.5 million existing customers by providing structured, high-value offerings.

These accounts integrate liability and asset products with digital payments and business cards, offering a unified "One Bank" experience.

HDFC Bank emphasized that the Biz+ Current Accounts are part of its continued effort to nurture India's entrepreneurial ecosystem, providing smarter and more comprehensive banking services to help businesses grow.

Agri, pharma, electronics, engineering account for over 50 pc of India's exports in FY25: Govt data

NEW DELHI, May 16:

Agriculture, pharma, electronics, and engineering goods together accounted for over 50 per cent of India's merchandise exports in 2024-25, according to government data, highlighting the country's growing strength in diverse sectors amid efforts to boost manufacturing and value-added exports.

Engineering goods contributed the highest share of 26.67 per cent to India's USD 437.42 billion exports in 2024-25, while agriculture, pharmaceuticals, and electronics accounted for 11.85 per cent, 6.96 per cent, and 8.82 per cent, respectively.

The data showed that the electronic goods sector saw the highest export growth rate at 32.46 per cent, jumping from USD 29.12 billion in 2023-24 to USD 38.58 billion in the last fiscal year. It was USD 23.6 billion in 2022-23 and USD 15.7 billion in 2021-22.

Within this, computer hardware and peripherals, which form 3.8 per cent of the sector, saw 101 per cent growth, doubling from USD 0.7 billion to USD 1.4 billion.

The main destinations for electronic goods were the UAE, the

US, the Netherlands, the UK, and Italy.

Engineering goods' shipments rose 6.74 per cent year-on-year to USD 116.67 billion. Drugs and pharmaceuticals exports grew 9.4 per cent to USD 30.47 billion while that of agri and allied sectors increased 7.36 per cent to USD 51.86 billion in 2024-25.

The main export destinations for engineering goods were the US, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, the UK, and Germany.

From 2014-15 to 2020-21, exports in this segment hovered in the range of USD 73-83 billion. In 2021-22, they jumped to USD 112.2 billion and have remained above USD 100 billion since.

According to the latest data, India drugs and pharmaceuticals are reaching over 200 countries now and since 2014-15, the exports are rising continuously.

In the agri sector, key commodities that recorded healthy growth rates include spices, coffee, tea, tobacco, rice, fruits and vegetables, and marine products.

Spice shipments rose marginally to USD 4.45 billion in 2024-25 from USD 4.25 billion in 2023-24.

Key export destinations included China, the US, the UAE, Bangladesh, and Thailand, with products like chilli, cummin, turmeric, and ginger leading the basket.

On the other hand, India's coffee exports rose to USD 1.81 billion from USD 1.29 billion in 2023-24. The country, which is the seventh largest coffee producer globally, exported mainly Robusta coffee to countries like Italy, Russia, Germany, the UAE, Belgium, and the USA.

Karnataka remains the leading coffee-producing state, followed by Kerala, with several varieties enjoying geographical indication (GI) status.

The export of tea grew to USD 0.92 billion in FY25 from USD 0.83 billion in FY24. Major production states include Assam, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala, with 81 per cent of production consumed domestically.

Similarly, tobacco exports stood at USD 1.98 billion in 2024-25 from USD 1.45 billion in 2023-24. India is the second-largest tobacco producer in the world, with major export destinations including the

UAE, Belgium, Indonesia, Egypt, the USA, and Turkey.

The sector provides livelihoods to around 45.7 million people, with production concentrated in Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and Karnataka.

India's rice exports touched a record high of USD 12.5 billion in FY25 from USD 10.4 billion in 2023-24, maintaining the country's position as the top global exporter with nearly 40 per cent market share. Key destinations included Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, the UAE, the USA, and Yemen.

Exports of fruits and vegetables reached USD 3.9 billion from USD 3.7 billion in 2023-24. India exported grapes, pomegranates, mangoes, bananas, oranges, onions, potatoes, tomatoes, mixed vegetables, and green chillies under the two categories.

Bangladesh, the UAE, the Netherlands, Nepal, and Malaysia were among the largest importers.

Marine product exports were valued at USD 7.2 billion in FY25. The number of countries importing Indian marine products also rose from 105 in 2014-15 to 130 in 2024-25. (PTI)

High-level review meeting chaired by Education Minister Ranoj Pegu at Janata Bhawan 25 Bodo-Medium ME schools to be upgraded into Model High Schools in Assam

HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, May 16: In a landmark development for Bodo-medium education, the Government of Assam has approved the upgrade of 25 Middle English (ME) schools into Model High Schools across the state. This major initiative, spearheaded by the Department of Primary and Secondary Education, aims to enhance the quality and accessibility of education for students studying in the Bodo medium.

The decision was taken during a high-level review meeting chaired by Education Minister Ranoj Pegu at Janata Bhawan on Wednesday. The meeting reviewed the progress and implementation of key schemes under the 2025-26 budget of the education department.

Key topics included in the meeting's agenda were: Distribution of bicycles to Class 9 students, free



admissions for school students, infrastructure and academic quality in upgraded higher secondary schools, promotion of Bodo-medium ME schools, and policies regarding tutor wages, teacher upgrades, and headmaster/principal selection processes.

Minister Pegu emphasised the

importance of timely and effective execution of educational reforms, particularly in underserved and minority-dominated regions.

The All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) has hailed the announcement, calling it a long-awaited milestone. ABSU President Dipen Boro expressed gratitude to the

state government and Minister Pegu, saying "We are pleased to hear that 25 schools have officially been designated as Bodo Medium Model Schools, similar to Tea Garden Model Schools. This is a major step following proposals submitted by ABSU and the Bodo Sahitya Sabha to establish 35 such schools."

He further extended heartfelt thanks to Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma adding, "This initiative will immensely benefit Bodo students and strengthen the educational foundation of our community. It also fulfills a long-standing demand of over a decade. We look forward to the establishment of the remaining proposed schools." The move is seen as a boost to Bodo-medium education, paving the way for better academic infrastructure, teaching resources, and student outcomes in the region.

Karbi Anglong observes National Dengue Day with awareness activities



HT Bureau
DIPHU, May 16: The District Malaria Officer (NCVDC), Karbi Anglong announced the observance of National Dengue Day (NDD) on May 16, aligning with the annual initiative by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare to raise awareness about Dengue fever, a mosquito-borne viral disease that remains a public health concern in India.

The theme for this year's National Dengue Day is "Check, Clean, Cover - Steps to Defeat Dengue."

In Karbi Anglong, the day was

marked by various awareness activities across multiple Medical Block Primary Health Centres (PHCs). The Manja BPHC organized awareness programmes at Longnit High School and Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya, Longnit — both identified as dengue-prone areas.

Prominent officials present at the programme included Dr. Sem Singh, Sr. M&HO-cum-DMO (i/c), Obed Killing, DVBDC (DPO), NCVDC, Karbi Anglong; Krishna Kharka, District Epidemiologist (IDSP, K/A); Kripeswar Ingti, Principal of

Manja BPHC, along with teaching staff and students.

The event featured awareness meetings, source reduction drives, impregnation of bed nets, blood smear collection, and distribution of informative leaflets. The focus was on educating the public about the importance of keeping their surroundings clean to prevent mosquito breeding.

The District Malaria Officer issued key preventive guidelines to control the spread of dengue: Eliminate stagnant water in and around homes — including in coconut shells, unused flower pots, and containers. Sleep under mosquito nets, even during the day, as dengue mosquitoes are day-biters. Wear long-sleeved clothing and use age-appropriate mosquito repellents like electric mats and coils. Seek immediate medical attention if experiencing symptoms such as high fever, joint/muscle pain, eye pain, rashes, or bleeding — and avoid self-medication.

The event aimed to enhance community vigilance and preparedness ahead of the dengue transmission season.

SC body seeks memorial seeks inclusion of Sati Radhika Aai in school syllabus

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, May 16: The 569th Smriti Divas of Sati Radhika Aai was solemnly observed on May 12 at a programme held at the Rangdai Kaibarta Gaon Barnamghar on the outskirts of Jorhat.

Sati Radhika Aai, a revered historical figure from the Scheduled Caste (SC) community, was recognised by Mahapurush Srimanta Sankardev, the great saint, philosopher, and social reformer, for her role in challenging superstitions and caste-based discrimination in society several centuries ago.

The commemorative event was organised by the Jorhat district unit of the Anusuchit Jati Yuba Chatra Parishad, Asom, with support from its Nimati unit, in a low-key manner due to the ongoing border tensions between India and Pakistan.

Amrit Pran Das, State General Secretary of the SC students' body, while addressing the gathering, spoke about the lasting contributions of Sati Radhika Aai and urged the State Government to: Construct a memorial in her honour in Jorhat, include her life and legacy in school curricula, and complete the unfinished commemorative park dedicated to her on Majuli Island.

The event commenced with the lighting of the ceremonial lamp by Dayaram Das, Namgharia of the Rangdai Kaibarta Gaon Barnamghar. The programme was anchored by Dipjyoti Das, district president of the SC students' body.

The function was attended by a cross-section of the local community and prominent citizens of the district, who paid heartfelt tributes to Sati Radhika Aai for her social reform and spiritual legacy.

It is worth noting that three years ago, a public meeting at Pakhimari-gaon Rangamancha, organised by the SC students' body, had demanded the establishment of a university in the name of Sati Radhika Aai, reflecting the community's continued reverence and aspirations to honour her legacy.

NFR completes re-development of Haibargaon Railway Station

Established in 1887, the Haibargaon Railway Station plays a pivotal role in regional connectivity

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 16: The Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) has completed the redevelopment of Haibargaon Railway Station in Assam under the flagship Amrit Bharat Station Scheme, thereby converting Haibargaon Station into a modern, passenger-centric and inclusive travel hub.

Haibargaon, a historically significant neighbourhood in Nagaon, holds an essential place in Assam's transportation and cultural landscape. Established in 1887, the Haibargaon Railway Station plays a pivotal role in regional connectivity. This redevelopment initiative marks a significant step in enhancing passenger experience and revitalizing the local economy through improved infrastructure and amenities.

The redevelopment includes a comprehensive overhaul of the station's circulating area, with structured parking zones, dedicated lanes for pick-up and drop-off, and widened pedestrian pathways. A new grand entrance has also been constructed for passengers, improving both accessibility and the aesthetic appeal of the station. The enhanced façade and improved concourse with modern booking counters reflect a renewed commitment to passenger convenience.



A key focus of the project is inclusivity. Special amenities for Divyangjan, including ramps, tactile tiles, accessible toilets and dedicated PRS counters

Illegal stone mining ravages Doboka Reserved Forest

RTI activist seeks CM's intervention

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, May 16: Widespread destruction of forest land in the Doboka Reserved Forest area of Hojai district due to illegal stone mining has been brought to light by RTI activist Dilip Nath, who has urged Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma to take immediate action.

Addressing a press conference in Nagaon on Thursday, Nath alleged that despite being granted environmental clearance for only one hectare each, certain lessees or contractors have illegally exploited several kilometres of forest area. He named A.R. Laskar and Z. Rahman as beneficiaries of the permissions, who he claimed, have grossly violated forest and environmental laws, causing massive deforestation.

"The activities blatantly violate the Forest Conservation Act, 1980, the Environmental Protection Act, 1986, and the Mines and Minerals Act, 1957," Nath said, stressing that the CAMPA (Compensatory Af-

orestation) guidelines have also been ignored. CAMPA mandates compensatory plantation in an equivalent area to offset the environmental damage caused by forest land diversion.

According to Nath, AR Laskar received environmental clearance in 2017, while Z Rahman was granted permission in 2018. Both were limited to mining one hectare of land but allegedly encroached upon hundreds of acres, leveling hills and degrading the reserved forest, posing a severe threat to local biodiversity and wildlife habitats.

He further demanded a satellite image-based investigation to verify the extent of illegal mining and forest destruction and called on the Chief Minister to personally intervene in the matter to uphold environmental integrity and legal accountability.

The revelations have sparked concern among environmentalists and locals, who fear irreversible damage to the forest ecosystem unless swift and stringent action is taken.

MP Joyanta Basumatary inaugurates renovated Salakati Market Shed in Kokrajhar

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, May 16: Member of Parliament Joyanta Basumatary on Friday inaugurated the renovated Salakati Market Shed in Kokrajhar, a project completed under the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiative of NTPC Bongaigaon, Salakati.

The inauguration ceremony saw the presence of several dignitaries, including Lawrence Islary, MLA of East Kokrajhar, Arnab Maitra, Head of Project, NTPC Bongaigaon, Kabita Deka, ACS and Additional Deputy Commissioner of Kokrajhar, along with senior NTPC officials such as Pares Mathur (AGM, TS), Onkar Nath (AGM, HR), and Sushil Kumar (AGM, CCD). Members of the Salakati Bazar Committee and a large number of local residents also attended the event.

The renovation, completed at a cost of ₹ 35.89 lakh, included the construction of an 8000-litre RCC overhead water tank, repair and cleaning of 200 meters of drains, refurbishment of toilet blocks with a 500-litre PVC tank, and structural repairs of three market sheds covering 70 shops. The project also saw PCC flooring of vendor areas, installation of chequered tiles, water supply points in the fish market, and full electrification including a 250-amp LT panel board. While the initial plan was to renovate four sheds (120 shops), work was completed on three due



to site constraints.

In his address, MP Joyanta Basumatary lauded NTPC for its commitment to grassroots development. "This renovated market shed is a reflection of NTPC's dedication to uplifting community infrastructure, directly benefitting vendors and the local population," he stated.

MLA Lawrence Islary echoed the sentiments and emphasized the importance of joint efforts in community advancement. He urged all stakeholders to maintain and responsibly use the upgraded facilities.

NTPC's Head of Project Arnab Maitra remarked, "NTPC believes in inclusive growth. This project not only strengthens local infra-

structure but also deepens our connection with the community."

As part of the Swachh Bharat Mission and in alignment with Swachhta Pakhwada, MP Basumatary also donated three dustbins to the Salakati Market Committee, promoting clean and sustainable market practices.

The Salakati Bazar Committee expressed deep gratitude to NTPC Bongaigaon, noting that the project fulfilled a long-standing demand and significantly improved both hygiene and economic activity in the area.

The event concluded with all participants pledging to uphold cleanliness and ensure the sustainable use of the newly renovated facilities.

Nagaon girl achieves National scholarship for painting

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, May 16: Aradhya Borah, a student of Jyoti Art School, Nagaon has been awarded the national level Government scholarship for painting for the years 2024-2025 by the Centre for Cultural Research and Training under the Ministry of Culture.

She is receiving training of Assamese manuscript painting under the guidance of internationally recognised artist Sujit Das.

Aradhya is the daughter of Riten Kumar Borah and Pranati Borah of Milanpur Nagaon, Assam. She is a nine-grade student at PM Shri Kendriya Vidyalaya, Nagaon.

She is the only student this year that a national scholarship has been awarded for manuscript painting from Assam. Last year, the two students, Jannat Tamilina Hasan and Fariha Islam, are both from Jyoti Art School in Nagaon have been awarded National Scholarship.

Trekking in National park suspended from May 27

HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, May 16: The Divisional Forest Officer of the Western Assam Wildlife Division, who also serves as the Field Director of Nameri Tiger Reserve, has issued a notification stating that trekking activities in the Core Zone of Nameri National Park & Tiger Reserve will be suspended from May 27, until further notice.

The closure is in compliance with directives from the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of India, and the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA).

The trekking ban is part of the annual monsoon season protocol and wildlife protection measures, typically lasting until October 2025, depending on weather conditions and ecological assessments.

Visitors and tour operators have been advised to plan accordingly and cooperate with the forest authorities to ensure the safety of both wildlife and tourists.

Storm disrupts traffic and power on Diphu-Manja Road Normalcy Restored

HT Bureau

DIPHU, May 16: A sudden storm accompanied by heavy rain and strong winds swept through the 9 Mile area of Diphu-Manja Road around 3 pm on Friday, causing widespread disruption to traffic and electricity services.

The intense winds uprooted trees and snapped large branches, several of which fell across the arterial Diphu-Manja Road, blocking movement in multiple locations. As a result, hundreds of vehicles were stranded on both sides of the road for several hours.

The storm also damaged at least one house in the Manja 9 Mile area, adding to the chaos caused by the sudden weather event.

Responding swiftly, personnel from the Manja Police Station, along with the help of an earth mover, undertook road clearance operations. By evening, the debris was removed, and normal traffic flow and electricity supply were restored.

Authorities have advised residents to remain alert as weather conditions remain unpredictable during the pre-monsoon season.

Dhubri Police bust luxury car smuggling cows, nab notorious smuggler

HT Correspondent

DHUBRI, May 16: In a significant crackdown on illegal cattle smuggling, the Golakganj police successfully intercepted a luxury vehicle and rescued seven cows in the wee hours of Friday. The operation, led by Golakganj police station in-charge Debajit Kalita, took place on National Highway 17 in the Biratnagar Chariali area in Dhubri.

Acting on intelligence, a police team was strategically positioned on the highway and their vigilance paid off when they spotted a speeding HONDA AMAZE vehicle bearing registration number AS 03H 7675, originating from West Bengal and heading towards Gauipur.

Despite repeated signals to halt, the driver of the vehicle attempted to evade the authorities, leading to a high-speed chase. The police team, however, persisted and managed to intercept the car in North Raipur. Capitalizing on the darkness, the driver abandoned the vehicle and fled the scene.

Upon searching the car, the police discovered seven cows crammed inside. This successful operation highlights the persistent efforts of smugglers to circumvent law enforcement. Golakganj police immediately began a search operation and in the evening on Friday, arrested Jahan Uddin Sheikh, a well-known cattle smuggler.



He allegedly used a specific number plate on multiple four-wheelers to transport cows illegally. He reportedly acquired second-hand vehicles from West Bengal for this purpose. A vehicle with the same number plate, carrying cattle, was seized a few days prior by Bikas Mahanta, the officer-in-charge of Paglahat police station under Tamarhat police station.

The arrested individual Jahan Uddin Sheikh, son of Alimuddin Sheikh, originally held from Kaldoba Part-III under Agomoni police station but currently residing in Gaurangbar, North Raipur Part-I of Golakganj.

The Golakganj police have registered a case against him under several sections of the law, Section including Cattle Preservation (ACP) Act, and Read with Section 11 of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (PCA) Act.

It is noteworthy that the smugglers continue to devise new and audacious methods to transport cattle illegally, ranging from concealing them under sacks of potatoes and cartons to utilizing luxury vehicles, boats, and even banana tree coverings.

This latest bust underscores the ongoing challenge faced by the police in curbing cattle smuggling despite heightened security measures. Investigations are currently underway to further dismantle the smuggling network.

Sonowal joins tri-colour march in Dibrugarh

HT Correspondent

DIBRUGARH, May 16: Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal joined tricolour march in Dibrugarh to celebrate the success of Operation Sindoor on Friday.

Sonowal, accompanied by MLA Taranga Gogoi, participated in a massive tricolour march held today in Dibrugarh, from Chowkidingee field to the ASTC bus stand, with the participation of thousands of people. The march, also joined by Dibrugarh Mayor Saikat Patra, Deputy Mayor Ujjal Phukan, and BJP District President Dulal Bora, among others, was organised by the Bharatiya Janata Party to express gratitude for the sacrifices and dedication of Indian soldiers that led to the resounding success of Operation Sindoor.

Speaking to media persons, Sonowal said that the Indian Army's valiant counter-offensive against Pakistan-sponsored terrorism was instrumental in the success of the operation. He asserted that there can be no compromise with terrorism. The Indian Army decisively eliminated the terrorists responsible for the brutal killing of innocent tourists in Pahalgam.

needs of diverse traveller groups, including women, children and senior citizens.

Passengers can now enjoy an upgraded waiting hall adorned with local art and cultural murals, a refreshment room directly connected to the platform, and a redesigned platform surface. Enhanced lighting using multiple themed installations and an improved passenger information system ensures a safe and well-informed travel environment, day and night.

As part of NFR's commitment to sustainability and local empowerment, kiosks under the "One Station One Product" initiative and eco-friendly landscaping have been incorporated. These efforts not only beautify the station premises but also support local artisans and green practices. Despite facing challenges such as the station's low-lying geography and vulnerability to monsoon flooding, NFR has successfully addressed key issues through efficient drainage upgrades, elevated infrastructure planning and better space utilization. The transformation extends beyond physical upgrades to include commercial spaces, a tourist facilitation centre and the development of a children's park and pond, making the station a community-friendly zone.

have been integrated into the station layout to ensure universal accessibility. Modern modular toilets, a baby feeding room, and kids' play area also cater to the

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Silence is the sleep that nourishes wisdom
- Francis Bacon

The Covid death data

The new Covid death data, released recently by the government, reveals everything that confirms what was feared at the time of the pandemic — a massive mismanagement on the part of the government. The new data from the Civil Registration System (CRS), published on May 7, show that about 21 lakh more deaths were registered in 2021, the year of the deadly Delta wave of Covid-19, compared to 2020. This number is about six times the official Covid 2019 death figure. In 2021, the data given by the union government was 3.32 lakh. It is also clear that at the time of the pandemic it fudged the covid death data and went after those who spoke the truth. Clearly, there are areas where it has buried or blacked out the data that was inconvenient to its agenda of running a glorious Hindutva regime; if not, the government and its supporters have disputed the quality of that data, or the conclusions drawn from it. It has also faced allegations of fudging the data, for example, in the case of India's GDP. If the first is to bury bad news, the latter is to project the image of good news. But there is another novel way in which the Modi government tries to institute its achievement of having done better than its predecessors.

The country's official COVID-19 death toll, as of May 2025, has been presented as approximately 5,33,665. This figure, however, forms little more than a drop in the number of actual deaths in the pandemic. Recently, the government released the Report on Medical Certification of Cause of Death, 2021, which suggested that the total deaths in 2021 alone rose by over 21 lakh compared to pre-pandemic levels. Yet, only five lakh of those are officially attributed to COVID-19, revealing a massive underreporting of the pandemic-related fatalities across the country. The total official COVID-19 death toll since the start of the pandemic was representing only 5.2 percent of the total excess deaths recorded in 2021. The Civil Registration System (CRS) data is the first official suggestion of the extent of the undercounting of deaths that occurred during the pandemic.

In a typical, non-pandemic year, the number of deaths in India increases only marginally by about 1–2 percent annually. This small rise is due to gradual population growth and demographic changes such as aging, but is often offset by improvements in healthcare and declining death rates. Significantly higher increases — such as the 26 percent jump in deaths registered in 2021 — are abnormal and typically signal extraordinary events like pandemics or disasters. Between 2007 and 2019, the average annual deaths in India ranged from 8.1 million to 8.6 million, with a mean of about 8.35 million (83.5 lakh) deaths per year. Kerala displayed a higher degree of accuracy in its reporting. While the state saw a significant increase in deaths in 2021, with 339,648 registered deaths, a 35.3 percent rise compared to 2020, the total number of deaths attributed to COVID-19 stood at 72,139.

4 years of service : A journey of transformation

By: Hitesh Kalita

On May 10, 2025, Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma completed four years in office — a period that has seen Assam undergo significant transformation across multiple sectors. Taking the office since 2021, Dr. Sarma's tenure has been marked by a strong push toward peace, infrastructural development, economic development and inclusive development — laying the foundation for a "Viksit Assam" (Developed Assam). His vision of placing Assam among India's top five performing states has gained momentum through measurable action and bold leadership.

The last four years have seen Assam move toward economic self-reliance:

- The state GSDP crossed ₹ 7.5 lakh crore, with double-digit annual growth.
- Major industrial investments have come in from PepsiCo, Adani, Tata, and others.

- ₹ 27,000 crore investments in semiconductor plant which would create approximately 27,000 direct and indirect employment opportunities.

- Rs. 4.91 crore investments committed the state during the 'Advantage Assam 2.0' was held on February, 2025 in Guwahati. This summit showcased Assam's emergence as a prime investment destination in India.

- Namrup Fertiliser Plant, NRL expansion and Stake enhancement, Sikhna Jwla National park and Tallest Statue of Lachit Barphukan

One of the most significant achievements of his tenure has been the return of peace to insurgency-affected areas:

- The withdrawal of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) from most districts has been a major milestone in improving law and order.
- Over 9,000 militants have surrendered in the last four years.

- Historic peace accords were signed with Karbi, Adivasi, and Dimas insurgent groups, paving the way for lasting peace and development. These moves have transformed the security landscape of Assam and opened the door for investment and growth in previously conflict-ridden regions.

Under this government, Assam has witnessed a rapid transformation in its infrastructure:

- Flyovers, bridges and highways have been built across urban centers especially in Guwahati, Jorhat, and Dibrugarh.
- The City Gas Distribution project has brought piped gas to thousands of homes in Guwahati.

- Major hospitality chains like Taj, Marriott, and Radisson are investing in new hotels making Guwahati a growing tourism and business hub. The state has also prioritized connectivity to rural and remote areas

improving access to education and placed special focus on improving healthcare:

- The establishment of AIIMS Guwahati and a network of new medical colleges has expanded healthcare access across the state.
- Expanded insurance coverage under Ayushman Bharat and state health schemes.

- Assam has recorded the sharpest decline in maternal mortality rate in the country.

- Thousands of government schools have been upgraded with digital classrooms and English-medium instruction.

- Indian Institute of Management (IIM), Simanta Sankardev Chair in JNU and Viswa Bharati University

- Over 10,000 teachers have been recruited based on merit and performance.

- New universities and skill development centers are preparing youth for a changing job market.

The administration has focused heavily on transparency and public service delivery:

- The Mission Basundhara project digitized land records and resolved over 8 lakh land disputes.

- e-Office and online citizen service platforms have made governance faster and more accountable.

- Mahila Udyamita Abhijan, Nijut Moina, Khel Maharan, Crackdown on Child Marriages, Drugs, illegal infiltrators.

- Assam Cattle Preservation Bill, Land Pattas to Indigenous people, Mashavdev Kalakshetra, Creation of Barak Valley Departments, Heritage Belt and Block.

- Chief Minister's Secretariat in Dibrugarh, State Civilian Awards, Creation of 9 new departments, Enhanced wages for Tea Garden Labourers, Creation of Co-districts, Secretariat in Silchar.

- Weekly cabinet meetings, direct CM interactions and outreach programs have strengthened citizen trust.

With his strong leadership and wide public support, CM Sarma continues to consolidate political strength in recent elections:

- The BJP-led alliance won major municipal, panchayat 2025 and by-elections for 5 assembly constituencies

- With a target of winning 104 of 126 Assembly seats in 2026, CM Sarma aims to return with an even stronger mandate.

In just four years, CM Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma has redefined leadership in Assam — combining political will with an administrative transformation and transparency. From restoring peace and expanding infrastructure to boosting the economy and reforming education his government has built strong momentum toward making Assam a model state in India. As Assam enters the fifth year of his leadership, the journey toward a "Top 5 Indian State" is no longer a distant dream — it's an emerging reality. (The author can be reached at 9476655257)

An overview on Autonomous state issue

The journey of the Autonomous state movement in Karbi Anglong began with the formation of the Karbi Adorbar in 1940, an organization aimed at preserving the tribes political and traditional identity. The organization evolved in to the socio-political organization for the Karbi youths

can also be attributed as the disintegration of North-eastern states.

On the issue of an autonomous state movement in Karbi Anglong. Several sensitive factors entangled in it such as imposition of Assamese in all educational institutions, suppressive attitude of bureaucrats towards the tribal people causes serious concern among the tribal people of Assam for which the Karbi Students' Association (KSA) had to align with the voice of common Karbi people in 1970 for adoption of Roman Script in all official purposes in the then undivided Karbi Anglong district of Assam and at last the Karbi Students' Association (KSA) emerged with victory on this coveted issue.

In the line of the demand for creation of states like Gurkhaland, Bodoland, Bundelkhan, Vidarbha, Kosal, Kukiland, Kutch, Ladakh etc.,

The leaders of Karbi Anglong had started the demand for creation of a separate homeland in different entities sometimes autonomous state, sometimes separate state and sometimes appealing for Nagaland merger under the different leadership since 1960 who passed through several phases of the demand particularly the Karbi Homeland.

Here are some key points :

1. 1960 - APHLC demanded



Hills state under the leadership of capt. Williamson Sangma in which Karbi leaders also took part vigorously.

2. 1978 - Separate full fledged state under the leadership of late Joy Sing Doloi Terang former C.E.M Karbi Anglong District Council, Diphu.

3. 1979, 18th November - Separate state Demand Committee formed under the leadership of late Sonaram Thaoson and late Longso-dar Engti Kathar.

4. 1980, 15th July - Separate State Demand Committee

formed under the leadership of Ex-Minister Bareleng Terang and Ex-C.E.M and chairman, KADC, Khorsing Bey.

5. 1982, 27th and 28th July - A convention on Separate State Demand Committee held at Deithor steered by Biren Sing Engti, Ex-M.P, late Dorsing Terang, Ex-Minister, late Doniram Rongpi, Ex-Minister etc.

6. 1986, 6 March - Central Autonomous State Demand Committee formed under the leadership of late Sonaram Thaoson, late G.C. Langthasa, Ex-Minister, T. Namphui, K.K. Hojai, Rajen Timung, Ex- MLA, Biren Sing Engti, Ex-M.P.

7. on 17th May, 1986 - In order to fulfil the long standing and popular demand of Autonomous State within Assam under Art. 244(A) of the Constitution of India, a vibrant organization was formed on 17th May, 1986 which was named as Autonomous State Demand committee

(ASDC) and the organization is deeply rooted in the heart of the people of Karbi Anglong and N.C Hills. The Autonomous State Demand Committee was born in the lap of veteran Karbi Leaders like Dr. Jayanta Rongpi, Holiram Terang, Elwin Teron, Dr. Dharam Sing Teron, Babu Rongpi, Bharat kr. Timung, Chomang Kro, Jotson Bey, Sonasing Terang, Chandra kt. Terang, and many more second ranking leaders from fraternal organization of KSA and KNCA.

After the formation of the most desired

passionate organization of leading the autonomous state movement in Karbi Anglong and N.C Hills by that time, the popularity of the organization named ASDC spread far and wide in every nook and corner of both the districts. As a result of the massive mass support and cohesiveness among leaders in leading the movement in 1987, the Assam Government was compelled to declare that ASDC movement is a mass movement and democratic organization.

In the wake of the long drawn mass movement from 1986 to 1995, the movement was able to achieve some autonomy for running the district council by signing a holistic MOU between the Govt. of India, Govt. of Assam and the agitationist leaders on 1st April, 1995 (Signatories were ASDC/KSA/KNCA/ NCHSF/DWS). It is believed to have been signed the agreement is not an easy task although it was not a full

autonomy relating to Autonomous State but it could be considered as hard earned autonomy reflecting the toil of all down-trodden people of both the districts.

But the year 2000 A.D. was a very ill-fated luck to all the leaders, cadres, rank and file of ASDC/KSA/ KNCA and other fraternal organizations. Instead of leading an aggressive and lasting movement to achieve a real autonomy in the name of Autonomous state, veteran leaders divided themselves into different groups identifying that he/she belongs to his/her group and a sense of discrimination and manipulation arose among the party workers while implementing some Govt. schemes in each constituency of the KAAC. Party workers started criticizing their leaders because of the backbiting by their senior leaders. Such behaviour has caused the malicious thinking among the party workers who had been really working for autonomous state. But the so called leaders of Autonomous state movement had utterly ignored to the cherished goal of common people of Karbi Anglong and N.C Hills. These leaders never realized their mistakes but were arrogant to individual opinion. Ultimately, the ASDC had been divided into different small groups by naming various entities in October 2000 onwards.

Over and above, many party workers lost their lives, properties and relatives in the name of Autonomous State movement led by ASDC/KSA/KNCA from 1986 to 2000. Now the common people of Karbi Anglong and N.C Hills have clearly come to know the real motive of the so-called leaders spearheading the movement. They have identified them as betrayer rather than trustworthy leaders.

From the current point of view of Autonomous State movement, leaders like Dr. Jayanta Rongpi, Elwin Teron, Dr. Dharam Sing Teron, Babu Rongpi, Bharat Kr. Timung, Chomang Kro are betrayal of Autonomous State movement because they left the public of Karbi Anglong and N.C Hills in the lurch which is now far from achieving the cherished goal. (This concept paper is prepared in honour of victims of Autonomous State movement under the banner of ASD/KSA/KNCA on the occasion of 40th Foundation Day of ASDC)

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

(... continued from last edition)

By: Diganta Barooah

Key features of PMEGP are :

#PMEGP provides credit facilities to beneficiaries, including a subsidy to help them start or expand their businesses.

#The scheme targets the creation of small-scale, self-employment ventures in the non-farm sector.

#Individuals (18 years or older), Self Help Groups (SHGs), and registered institutions like societies, cooperative societies, and charitable trusts are eligible.

#General category beneficiaries receive a 15% subsidy, while special categories (SC/ST/OBC/ Minorities/Women, etc.) and areas like North East and hill regions get a 25% subsidy.

#Loans range from ₹10 lakh to ₹2 crore for new businesses or industries, with a maximum of ₹12 lakhs payable on the margin of the project cost.

#The scheme is implemented by the Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) at the national level and through state-level agencies like State KVIC Directorates and District Industries Centers (DICs).

#PMEGP seeks to provide sustainable employment opportunities for a wide range of individuals, including traditional and aspiring artisans, as well as unemployed youth.

#For projects costing above ₹10 lakh (manufacturing) or ₹5 lakh (services/business), applicants generally need to have completed at least the 8th standard.

#Certain activities, like grocery shops, stationery shops, farm-related activities (except for specific exceptions), and urban/rural transport (except certain exceptions) are not eligible for assistance under PMEGP.

#The scheme includes provisions for training and guidance for beneficiaries, including online Enterprise Development Programme (EDP) training and access to project reports and expert guidance.

#The scheme allocates funds for publicity and promotional activities, including advertising through KVIC and DICs, and utilizes an e-governance approach for monitoring and review.

In a notable development, units in Aspirational Districts and Transgenders have been included in the Special Category. Additionally, geo-tagging of PMEGP units has been initiated to capture details of the products and services offered by these units and to create market linkages for them. Furthermore, prospective entrepreneurs receive free 2-

day Entrepreneurship Development Programme (EDP) training to equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge to succeed.

In 2023-24, the Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP) supported 89,118 enterprises, facilitating entrepreneurship across various sectors. The scheme disbursed ₹3,093.87 crore as margin money subsidy, enabling small businesses to scale operations and sustain growth. As a result, an estimated 7,12,944 employment opportunities were generated, reinforcing PMEGP's role in strengthening self-employment and job creation nationwide.

The Scheme of Fund for Regeneration of Traditional Industries (SFURTI) is a program by the Ministry of MSME, Government of India, aimed at reviving and strengthening India's traditional industries. Launched in 2005, SFURTI fo-

couraging innovation and new product development.

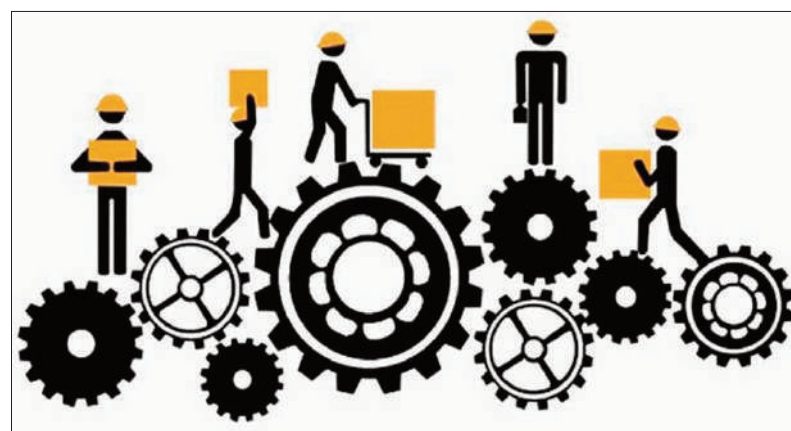
#SFURTI supports the modernization of traditional industries through technology upgrades, providing access to common facilities and improved tools for artisans.

#The scheme emphasizes the need for active stakeholder participation in cluster governance to ensure adaptability to changing market conditions.

#The scheme has been updated with revised guidelines in 2014 to enhance its sustainability and provide for more all-round development of SFURTI clusters.

#The revamped guidelines encourage the creation of Special Purpose Vehicles (SPVs) to further ensure the long-term sustainability of the program.

Since its revamp, SFURTI has approved 513 clusters, with 376 fully functional, covering diverse sectors like handloom, hand-



cuses on cluster development, aiming to make these industries competitive, market-driven, and sustainable, providing employment for artisans and rural entrepreneurs.

Key objectives and features of SFURTI Scheme are :

#SFURTI promotes the organization of traditional industries and artisans into clusters to improve efficiency, access to infrastructure, and market reach.

#The scheme aims to ensure long-term sustainability of traditional industries by providing support for infrastructure, technology upgrades, and market development.

#SFURTI seeks to create sustainable employment opportunities for traditional artisans and rural entrepreneurs, while also improving their skills through training and exposure visits.

#The scheme focuses on enhancing the marketability of products through improved packaging, design interventions, and better marketing infrastructure, en-

crafts, coir, bamboo, and agro-based industries. As of 12th December, 2024, the scheme has generated employment for approximately 2,20,800 artisans and sanctioned ₹ 1,336 Crore for cluster development. SFURTI stands as a critical pillar in preserving India's artisanal heritage while enabling rural economic empowerment and inclusive growth.

Public Procurement Policy for Micro and Small Enterprises:

The Ministry of MSME, Government of India, notified the Public Procurement Policy for Micro and Small Enterprises (MSEs) in 2012. This policy mandates that 25% of annual procurement by Central Ministries, Departments, and Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs) must be sourced from MSEs. Within this 25%, 4% is reserved for MSEs owned by Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes (SC/ST), and 3% is reserved for MSEs owned by women entrepreneurs. Additionally, 358 items are exclusively reserved for procurement from MSEs.

In 2023-24, Central Ministries, Departments, and CPSEs procured a total of ₹74,717 crore worth of goods and services from MSEs, which constituted 43.71% of their total procurement.

This policy benefitted 2,58,413 MSEs, ensuring they had access to significant business opportunities and support through government procurement.

The MSME sector in India is a dynamic and vital part of the economy, contributing significantly to employment, manufacturing, and exports. The sector is facing challenges but is also benefiting from government support and the increasing adoption of digital technologies.

As of February 4, 2025, the Udyam Portal boasts an impressive total of 5,93,38,604 registered MSMEs, with the vast majority classified as micro-enterprises. Beyond their economic contributions, these MSMEs have generated substantial employment opportunities, providing jobs to over 25.18 crore individuals. This extensive employment generation underscores the sector's crucial role in driving economic development and enhancing social stability by offering livelihoods to millions across the country.

In conclusion, the Union Budget 2025-26 outlines a strategic approach to bolster the MSME sector in India, emphasizing increased credit access, entrepreneurial support, and sector-specific initiatives. The significant revisions in classification criteria, coupled with enhanced credit guarantees and customised financial products like credit cards for micro-enterprises, are poised to catalyze growth and innovation. The focus on sectors like footwear, leather, and toys not only aims to boost employment but also positions India as a competitive player in global markets. Furthermore, the government's ongoing initiatives like Udyam Registration, PM Vishwakarma, PMEGP, SFURTI, and the Public Procurement Policy continue to demonstrate a committed effort towards integrating and empowering MSMEs. These measures, combined with the establishment of new institutions and missions for manufacturing and clean technology, reflect a holistic strategy to not only sustain but significantly amplify the role of MSMEs in driving economic growth, employment, and inclusive development in India. (The author is the Assistant Development Officer, Transformation and Development Department, Government of Assam. He can be reached at 9678785439/7002699011or digantabarooah@gmail.com / digantabarooah@yahoo.com)

Russia, Ukraine hold their first direct peace talks in 3 years amid low expectations

ISTANBUL, May 16: Russia and Ukraine held their first direct peace talks in three years Friday, gathering in Istanbul for Turkish-brokered negotiations, but officials and observers expected them to yield little immediate progress on stopping the more than three-year war.

A Ukrainian delegation led by Defence Minister Rustem Umerov sat down with a low-level Russian team headed by presidential aide Vladimir Medinsky, according to Ukraine's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Heorhii Tykhyi, who published a photo of the meeting.

The officials present sat around a U-shaped table, with the Russians and Ukrainians facing each other.

A senior Ukrainian official close to the talks said that Kyiv's delegation was prepared to "achieve a lot today" and with a real mandate to resolve key issues. The official, who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because he was not authorised to make official statements, said the outcome hinges on whether Moscow is equally serious.

Both countries have tried to persuade US President Donald Trump, who has expressed frustra-



tion over the slow progress and threatened to punish foot-dragging, that they are eager to resolve the conflict amid extensive diplomatic maneuvering.

The latest push to end the fighting got off to a rocky start on Thursday, when Russian President Vladimir Putin spurned an offer by Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelenskyy to meet face-to-face.

Delegations from the two countries also flew to different Turkish cities and put together teams of significantly different diplomatic heft for possible talks.

Although expectations for a possible Putin-Zelenskyy meeting were low, the apparent lack of traction in peace efforts frustrated hopes of bold steps being taken in

Turkey toward reaching a settlement.

The two sides remain far apart
The two sides are far apart in their conditions for ending the war, and Trump said Thursday during a trip to the Middle East that a meeting between himself and Putin was crucial to breaking the deadlock.

On Friday, Trump said a meeting with Putin would happen "as soon as we can set it up."

"I think it's time for us to just do it," Trump told reporters in Abu Dhabi.

Comments Friday by Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov appeared to indicate that momentum for a summit is building, as Peskov told reporters top-level

talks were "certainly needed." But he noted that preparing a summit would take time.

Ukraine has accepted a US and European proposal for a full, 30-day ceasefire, but Putin has effectively rejected it by imposing far-reaching conditions.

Meantime, Russian forces are preparing a fresh military offensive, Ukrainian government and Western military analysts say.

Russia's invasion has killed more than 12,000 Ukrainian civilians, the UN says, and razed towns and villages. Tens of thousands of Ukrainian soldiers have died, and likely a larger number of Russian troops, officials and analysts say.

On the battlefield, one Ukrainian soldier said he wasn't hopeful that the talks would bring a swift end to the war.

"I don't think they will agree on anything concrete, because summer is the best time for war," he said, using only the call sign "Cor-sair," in keeping with the rules of the Ukrainian military. "The enemy is trying to constantly escalate the situation."

But he told The Associated Press that many of his fellow soldiers "believe that by the end of the year there will be peace, albeit an unstable one, but peace." (AP)

New York State Senate adopts resolution commemorating 75th anniversary of Indian Constitution

NEW YORK, May 16: In a first, the New York State Senate has formally adopted a resolution honouring the Indian Constitution on the occasion of its 75th anniversary, recognising it as a guiding framework for India's ongoing progress as a nation and celebrating the country's democratic values. New York State Senator Jeremy Cooney, the only member of Indian origin currently serving in the New York State Senate, introduced the landmark resolution, which was adopted in a ceremony on Wednesday.

The event was attended by the Consul General of India in New York, Binaya Pradhan, alongside prominent members of the Indian-American community in New York.

"I am introducing this resolution in honour of the 75th anniversary of the Indian Constitution, a time to celebrate Indian independence and the many brave Indians who risked their lives for the betterment of their fellow countrymen," Cooney said.

This is a significant development since it is the first time that a resolution commemorating the Indian Constitution has been tabled and adopted in a legislative body in the US. In the past, there have been several resolutions tabled to commemorate Indian Independence, Republic Day, prominent festivals and other occasions.

"Celebrating the 75th anniversary of the Indian Constitution! The New York State Senate adopted a resolution commemorating the 75th anniversary of the Indian Constitution, introduced by Senator Jeremy Cooney @SenatorCooney," the Consul General of India in New York said in a post on X.

"The resolution celebrates India's democratic values and its shared commitment to liberty, justice, and equality with the United States. CG @binaysrikant76 joined the ceremony along with members of the Indian-American community, marking a celebration of shared democratic ideals and cultural ties," it added.

The resolution recognises the Indian Constitution as a profound reflection of the founding forefathers' vision and a guiding framework for India's ongoing progress as a nation. "This is a day to be celebrated not just in India but worldwide. Across the globe, Indians are making lasting impacts in their communities. This is an opportunity to

join together to celebrate and reflect on our shared history, culture and heritage," Cooney said.

Cooney also shared his personal journey from being adopted from an orphanage in Kolkata, India, and raised by a single mother in Rochester, New York.

"This anniversary also holds a special importance for me personally. As many of my colleagues know in the Senate, I was adopted from an orphanage in Calcutta and throughout my life, I have worked very hard to maintain a strong connection with India and Indians in my community," he said.

"That connection continues today as we honour the 75th anniversary of the Indian Constitution."

The resolution honours Constitution Day and highlights the shared histories of the United States and India in their respective struggles for independence from colonial rule. It affirms the importance of acknowledging the rich ancestral heritage of New York's diverse communities and affirms a commitment to fostering public awareness and education about this enduring cultural legacy, the Consulate said.

Other members of the Senate recognised India's historic contributions to democratic governance.

State Senator John Liu remarked that India, often described as the "first democracy on the planet", possesses democratic traditions that span centuries.

Cooney said that due to the perseverance of people in India and the leadership of figures like Mahatma Gandhi, "a decades-long struggle for independence finally culminated in the Indian independence and the adoption of the Constitution" in November 1949.

"This story of resiliency and the fight for self-determination is one of the bonds that ties our two great nations together. It was that desire for civil and political rights that fueled independence movements both in the US and in India, making our countries kindred spirits in the fight for independence and sovereignty," Cooney said.

In his address, Cooney expressed heartfelt pride in his heritage, stating, "I am incredibly proud to celebrate our Indian heritage, and this important landmark with my colleagues and all New Yorkers." (PTI)

Survey in Afghanistan for Trans-Afghan Railway to be completed by 2026, says Russian ministers

MOSCOW, May 16: Russia and Uzbekistan are conducting a feasibility survey work in Afghanistan for the Trans-Afghanistan Railway project, which, if implemented, will provide access to landlocked central Asian countries to the Indian subcontinent, Russian ministers said Friday.

The feasibility study of the trans-Afghan railway is due to be ready in early 2026, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexei Overchuk said at the 16th international economic forum Russia-Islamic World: KazanForum 2025.

The trans-Afghan transport corridor will connect the European Union, Russia, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India and Southeast Asia.

Uzbekistan's southern-most town Termez is already linked with North Afghanistan's Khairaton by the Soviet built railway.

"Russian and Uzbek railway specialists are drafting the feasibility study of the trans-Afghan railway construction project together. We are expecting the project feasibility study to be ready in early 2026 so that decisions on its implementation could be made," Overchuk was quoted by independent Interfax news agency as saying.

State-run news agency TASS reported quoted Russian Deputy Transport Minister Dmitry Zverev as describing that the Trans-Afghan Highway will fundamentally change the geography and transport geography of the region. (PTI)

Israeli strikes kill at least 82 people in Gaza as Trump wraps up his Middle East visit

DEIR AL-BALAH (GAZA STRIP), May 16: At least 82 people were killed by Israeli strikes in Gaza on Friday, as US President Donald Trump wrapped up his regional trip. Strikes overnight and into Friday hit across Gaza, including the outskirts of Deir al-Balah and the city of Khan Younis. At least 66 people were killed according to the Indonesian hospital, where most of the bodies were taken. A further 16 bodies were taken to Nasser hospital, said health officials.

The widespread attacks across come as Trump finishes his visit to Gulf states but not Israel. There had been widespread hope that his regional trip could usher in a ceasefire deal or renewal of humanitarian aid to Gaza. An Israeli blockade of the territory is now in its third month.

Speaking to reporters at a business forum in Abu Dhabi on the final day of his trip, Trump said he was looking to resolve a range of global crises, including Gaza. "We're looking at Gaza," he said. "And we've got to get that taken care of. A lot of people are starving. A lot of people are — there's a lot of bad things going on."

Israel said Friday it was continuing its operations against militants in Gaza and that it struck 150 targets in the past day, including anti-tank missile posts and military structures. In northern Gaza, it eliminated several militants who were operating in an observation compound, it said.

The strikes lasted for hours into Friday morning and sent people fleeing from the Jabaliya refugee camp and the town of Beit Lahia. They followed days of similar attacks that killed more than 130 people, according to Gaza's Health Ministry.

After the strikes, dark smoke was seen rising over Jabaliya as people grabbed what they could of their belongings and fled on donkey carts, by car and foot.

"The army entered upon us, bombing, killing... We got out of the house with difficulty, killing and death, we did not take anything," said Feisal Al-Aitar, who was displaced from Beit Lahia.

Netanyahu vows to step up war

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

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

An Israeli official said the strikes on Friday were preparatory actions in the lead-up to a larger operation and to send a message to Hamas that it will begin soon if there

isn't an agreement to release hostages. The official was not authorised to brief media and spoke on condition of anonymity.

The same official said that Cabinet members were meeting Friday to assess the negotiations in Qatar, where ceasefire talks are taking place, and to decide on next steps.

Israeli government spokesman David Mencer told The Associated Press on Friday that Israel's military is intensifying its operations as it has done since Hamas stopped releasing hostages. "Our objective is to get them home and get Hamas to relinquish power," he said. He said Israel will continue pressuring Hamas while negotiating, saying that it's getting results.

On Friday, families of the hostages said they awoke up with "heavy hearts" to reports of increased attacks and called on Netanyahu to "join hands" with Trump's efforts to release the hostages.

"Missing this historic opportunity for a deal to bring the hostages home would be a resounding failure that will be remembered in infamy forever," the families said in a statement released by the hostage forum, which supports them.

On Friday, families of the hostages said they awoke up with "heavy hearts" to reports of increased attacks and called on Netanyahu to "join hands" with Trump's efforts to release the hostages. (AP)

UN peacekeeping force confronted in southern Lebanon

BEIRUT, May 16: The force, known as UNIFIL, said one of its patrols was confronted between the villages of Jmayme and Khrbet Selm Friday by a large group of people in civilian clothing who "attempted to stop the patrol using aggressive means, wielding metal sticks and axes, resulting in damage to the vehicles."

The peacekeepers used "non-lethal force" in response, and there were no injuries, it said in a statement.

Hezbollah supporters in Lebanon frequently accuse the UN mission — which was created to oversee the withdrawal of Israeli troops from southern Lebanon after Israel's 1978 invasion — of collusion with Israel.

Israel has accused the peacekeepers



of turning a blind eye to Hezbollah's military activities in southern Lebanon.

Earlier this week, UNIFIL issued a statement that complained of "aggressive behaviour" by Israeli forces towards its peacekeepers, including shots fired across the border that hit a UNIFIL base south of the village of Kfar Shouba. (AP)

Trump says Iran has proposal from the US on its rapidly advancing nuclear programme

ABU DHABI, May 16: US President Donald Trump said Friday that Iran has an American proposal over its rapidly advancing nuclear programme as negotiations between the two countries go on.

Trump's remarks represent the first time he's acknowledged an American proposal is with Tehran after multiple rounds of negotiations between US Mideast envoy Steve Witkoff and Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi.

Negotiations have gotten into the "expert" level — meaning the two sides are trying to see if they can reach agreements on details of any possible deal.

Trump made the comment aboard Air Force One as he ended his trip to the United Arab Emirates, the last stop on his three-nation tour of the Middle East.

"They have a proposal," Trump said. "But most importantly, they know they have to

move quickly, or something bad is going to happen."

Trump did not elaborate on the substance of the proposal and Iran did not immediately acknowledge having it.

On Thursday, Araghchi spoke to journalists at the Tehran International Book Fair and said that Iran did not have any proposal from the Americans yet.

Araghchi also criticised what he called conflicting and inconsistent statements from the Trump administration, describing them as either a sign of disarray in Washington or a calculated negotiation strategy.

"We are hearing many contradictory statements from the United States — from Washington, from the president, and from the new administration," Araghchi said. "Sometimes we hear two or three different positions in a single day." (AP)

Nepal PM Oli underlines need for global collaboration to save mountain ecosystem

KATHMANDU, May 16: Nepal Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli on Friday underscored the need for honest dialogue, sharing of mutual knowledge, and taking collective action to prevent the effects of climate change, especially in the mountainous region.

Oli was speaking at the inaugural session of the three-day Sagarmatha Sambaad (mountain dialogue) themed 'Climate Change, Mountains and the Future of Humanity' being organised here. More than 350 national and international personalities, including India's Minister for Environment Bhupendra Yadav, were present at the event.

He said the event was held with the understanding that preserving the Himalayas means preserving the Earth, the oceans, and humanity itself.

"Our homes are being washed away by landslides. Floods and droughts arrive unexpectedly, yet we remain strong. Our emissions are low, but our contributions to environmental conservation are significant. We hope that this dialogue becomes high — high in moral clarity, strong intellectual courage, and a firm shared vision to create a beautiful future," Oli said, as he underlined the need for global collaboration to save the mountain ecosystem.

In her opening remarks, Foreign Minister Arzu Rana Deuba hoped that the event would foster greater cooperation and political will and result in impactful action for combating the spectre of climate change.

"The tragedy is that the Himalayas are facing an unprecedented stress test in real time today, exposing not only the fragile nature of our mountain ecosystems but also glaring evidence of the lack of meaningful global climate action."

"Mountain communities everywhere are especially vulnerable as they depend on nature for their



daily lives. Climate-induced disasters are shaking the very foundation of their existence and livelihood," she said. Noting that the cascading impacts of global warming and climate change far exceed "our capacity and resources to mitigate them,"

Deuba called for "predictable and adequate climate finance as we require greater resources to implement our national and local action plan".

India's environment minister Yadav underscored the need for transboundary cooperation between Nepal and India in the area of conservation of big cats, including snow leopards, "considering the importance of high-altitude biodiversity and mountain landscape" of both countries.

He noted that South Asia is "responsible for only

4 per cent of cumulative global carbon emissions despite being home to almost 25 per cent of the global population".

In his keynote speech, Mukhtar Babayev, representative of the President of Azerbaijan, said, "Melting glaciers and ice sheets are causing sea level rise at an alarming rate, posing a risk for 10 per cent of the world population in the coastal area from South Asia to South Sahara in Africa. It is threatening the very existence of small islands in the Pacific and the Caribbean."

Over 300 participants, including climate experts, environmental activists, government officials, diplomats, and media persons, will attend the three-day event, which will conclude on Sunday. (PTI)

Philippines Senate race a blow to President Marcos as he feuds with Vice President Duterte

MANILA (PHILIPPINES), May 16: Key allies of defeated former President Rodrigo Duterte and two liberal opposition candidates were among top winners in the May 12 Senate race in the Philippines, according to official results released Friday by the Election Commission.

The midterm election outcome provided unexpectedly strong backing for Duterte and boosted his daughter, Vice President Sara Duterte, ahead of her impeachment trial in the Senate in July.

The election also was a blow to President Ferdinand Marcos Jr's administration, whose candidates did not do as well as expected in midterm polls when the president's influence is usually strong, analysts said.

Five of the 12 Senate race winners were endorsed by Sara Duterte, including the president's sister, Imee Marcos, and Camille Villar, another Marcos alliance candidate from a wealthy political family.

Five others were aligned with Marcos, while two surprise winners were from the opposition. Two Duterte allies were among the top five.

Christopher Go, a former Cabinet member under the elder Duterte, led the Senate winners with more than 27 million votes. Ronald dela Rosa, Duterte's first national police chief and executor of his deadly anti-drugs campaign, ranked third.

Erwin Tulfo, a news anchor and candidate from the Marcos slate who was topping pre-election surveys, only managed fourth place. Two opposition members, Bam Aquino and Kiko Pangilinan, took second and fifth place, respectively.

The election results reflected "a vote against the administration," political analyst Ronald Llamas said, adding that it wasn't a vote for the Dutertes because many anti-Duterte candidates also won, including in the lower house of Congress.

"It's a plebiscite on the president, it's a referendum on the government and it looks like they lost there," Llamas said.

Marcos teamed with Sara Duterte to win the 2022 general elections, but their partnership soured over political differences that led to her impeachment in February and her father's subsequent arrest and handover to the ICC.

Marcos can't seek re-election as the president is limited to a single six-year term. Sara Duterte is seen as a strong presidential candidate for 2028 elections but will be barred from office for life if convicted by the Senate.

She was impeached on a raft of charges including alleged misuse of public funds and plotting to assassinate Marcos. She had said the impeachment was a political assassination.

To be acquitted, she needs the votes of at least nine of 24 senators.

At least two other senators who were not part of the elections were seen as supporters of the vice president. Other senators may support her acquittal depending on public opinion during the trial, political pressure from the administration and perceived political benefits, Llamas said.

"Definitely Sara gained in the election in her fight against impeachment," Llamas said. "The impeachment will be uphill but not impossible."

Rodrigo Duterte was elected as mayor of Davao City, his stronghold, with a landslide despite being detained thousands of miles away in the International Criminal Court in The Hague, Netherlands, since March.

He is awaiting trial for crimes against humanity related to his war on illegal drugs that left thousands of suspects dead during his presidency from 2016 to 2022.

Under Philippine law, candidates facing criminal charges, including those in detention, can run for office unless they have been convicted and have exhausted all appeals.

Kristina Conti, an assistant to counsel at the ICC, has said the court also is investigating Dela Rosa and Go for their role in the drug war. (AP)

Advises departments to collaborate with the Border Roads Task Force (BRTF), Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP), and the Indian Army

Commissioner PK Jain reviews Government schemes and development projects in Upper Siang

HT Bureau

NAMSAL, May 16: PK Jain, Commissioner (Health and PHED) and Mentor Secretary of Upper Siang District, visited Yingkiong recently to assess the progress of government schemes and ongoing infrastructure projects. A detailed review meeting was held at the Deputy Commissioner's Conference Hall, attended by key officials and department heads.

The meeting began with a comprehensive PowerPoint presentation by Deputy Commissioner Talo Jerang, who outlined the status of various Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS) and State Sponsored Schemes (SSS) being implemented in the district. He reported on schemes already completed and stressed the importance of establishing clear timelines for those still pending, urging Heads of Departments (HoDs) to expedite their execution.

During an interactive session, HoDs presented the challenges their departments face—both financial and logistical—which have slowed the pace of work. In his address, Jain reflected on his past role as DC of Upper Siang, expressing deep emotional ties to the district. "It is heartening to witness the remarkable improvements in infrastructure, connectivity, electrification, and education since my tenure two decades ago," he said, visibly moved by the district's transformation.

Shri Jain emphasized that the core objective of all government initiatives is to bring tangible, positive change to rural communities. He



directed the DC to convene a coordination meeting with all HoDs to evaluate the actual on-ground impact of each scheme. Additionally, he urged every department to document and share success stories that showcase how these initiatives have benefited the local populace. "A scheme is only truly successful when its results are visible and measurable in people's lives," he stated.

Discussing the Vibrant Villages Programme, Jain highlighted its strategic importance, noting that its progress is being closely monitored by the Union Home Minister. He called for sincere and committed implementation to ensure maximum benefit to remote

border communities.

In a move aimed at bolstering the local economy, Jain advised departments of Agriculture, Horticulture, and Fisheries to collaborate with the Border Roads Task Force (BRTF), Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP), and the Indian Army. He proposed that these forces procure local produce, thereby creating a reliable market for farmers and promoting sustainable livelihoods in the district.

The visit concluded with a renewed commitment from all stakeholders to work collaboratively and ensure the timely and effective delivery of government schemes in Upper Siang.

No Pakistan flag displayed in Nirjuli hoarding: Police clarify after viral post

HT Bureau

NAMSAL, May 16: Following a viral social media post dated May 14, 2025, alleging the display of the Pakistan flag on a hotel hoarding in Nirjuli, local police have conducted a swift inquiry to verify the facts and address public concerns.

In a statement issued today, Nirjuli Police confirmed that the hoarding in question did not feature the Pakistan flag, but rather an Islamic religious symbol, which included a crescent moon, a star, and the number "786"—a numeral commonly associated with Islamic culture. The investigation found no evidence of any anti-national intent behind the display.

The police found that the building and trading license are registered under Tadar Jumsi, wife of Tadar Ukup. The trading license (IMC/DEV-23/2025/349) was issued on February 24, 2025, by the Itanagar Municipal Corporation under the name M/S Ajmat Restaurant and Beef Hotel, located at Bage Tinali, Nirjuli.

"The restaurant holds a valid food safety certificate issued by the Health and Family Welfare Department, Government of Arunachal Pradesh, on January 24, 2025, valid until January 23, 2030," the police said.



Investigation further revealed that the hotel has been operated by Ashfaq Khan, 41, son of Md Shoaib Khan from Jahangirpur village, Sheohar district, Bihar. Khan is currently out of state. The establishment's cook, Md Sohali, 34, from East Champaran, Bihar, holds a valid Inner Line Permit (ILP) under the care of Mrs. Jumsi, valid until February 21, 2026.

"On May 14, 2025, the building owner voluntarily removed the hoarding and submitted it to Nirjuli Police for verification in response to the allegations circulating online. Upon examination, the symbol was identified as religious and cultural in nature, bearing no resemblance to the national flag of Pakistan. Authorities

confirmed there was no malicious intent by the hotel or its owners to provoke or offend public sentiment. Police Vigilance and Public Responsibility:

Nirjuli Police have reiterated their commitment to remain vigilant against any anti-national activity. They urged the public to verify facts before circulating potentially inflammatory content online, emphasizing the importance of cultural sensitivity and compliance with public display norms. The police appealed to all residents to exercise restraint and promote harmony, reminding that while religious symbols are protected under the Constitution, public interpretation can vary, and dialogue should always precede judgment," Police said.

Music has no barrier; it unites and uplifts society: Pani Taram



HT Bureau

NAMSAL, May 16: Music knows no boundaries—it transcends language, culture, and time. It can unite people, promote unity, integrity, communal harmony, and brotherhood. These were the words of Pani Taram, Advisor to the PHED Minister and MLA of Koloriang, as he addressed the official launch ceremony of the Nyishi video album "Nag Anya Sam" at a city hotel in Itanagar.

The album, directed by Bengia Morto and sung by Bengia Tabb and Bengia Rimum, was launched in the presence of a large gathering of people from the music, culture, and film fraternity.

Taram emphasized the transformative power of music and art in

society. "Music can change ideas through its voice. Artists play a vital role in shaping society in artistic ways. In today's world, music holds immense power," he said. He highlighted Arunachal Pradesh's rich cultural heritage and deep-rooted traditional values, calling for professionalization of the art and music industry in the state.

"Artists and cultural practitioners are putting in their best efforts, but they need support. With proper encouragement, music and art can not only preserve our culture but also become a means of livelihood and economic sustainability for artists," he added. Taram assured continued support for the artist community and reiterated his com-

mitment to the promotion of the state's art, culture, music, and traditions.

Legendary singer Taba Yall Nabam, who was the guest of honour at the event, expressed happiness at the growing number of artists in the state. "It is encouraging to see so many artists creating video and audio albums. Once the proposed film institute becomes operational, it will further empower them," she said.

She urged every citizen to support artists engaged in preserving and promoting the rich traditions, language, and dialects of Arunachal Pradesh. "Our tradition is our identity. Let's help those who are engaged in this noble cause to preserve, protect, and promote our cultural heritage," she said.

Veteran singer and cultural leader Bengia Tabb, who has spent 45 years in the music industry, shared his experience during the event. "I have produced several audio albums and performed in countless programs, but this is my first video album. It portrays a touching story of love and affection between a husband and wife, overcoming challenges," he said. Tabb expressed gratitude for the overwhelming response from the audience, many of whom are fellow artists, and expressed hope that the video and its message will be appreciated.

Awareness programme on Arunachal Pradesh Solid Waste Bye-Laws 2023 held



HT Bureau

NAMSAL, May 16: In continuation of the awareness drive for the implementation of the Arunachal Pradesh Solid Waste (Management & Handling) Bye-Laws 2023, a comprehensive awareness programme was conducted today at the APIL Ground, Namsai, targeting several key colonies including Adi Line, Shanti Nagar, Milan Nagar, Jaipur Road, Dangoria Than Road, PHE Colony, Prem Nagar, Forest Colony, Boro Line, Simulbari, APIL Colony, Forest Working Plan Colony, and Kolbari.

The event commenced with a

welcome address by Er. Juntum Potom, Assistant Engineer (Urban Development), who emphasized the objectives of the programme and the need for active community participation in maintaining cleanliness.

Following this, Er. Mosum Sema, Executive Engineer (UD)-cum-Member Secretary, DUDA, Namsai, briefed attendees on waste segregation practices and the collection of user fees for garbage management. She stressed the importance of community ownership and civic responsibility, stating, "Every clean street, every garbage-free corner reflects the pride and

care of its people. We must all take initiative rather than rely solely on the government."

Delivering the keynote address, Shri C.R. Khampa, Deputy Commissioner-cum-Chairman, DUDA, Namsai, highlighted the environmental challenges caused by improper waste disposal. He noted that indiscriminate dumping of waste—especially plastic—into drains, rivers, and forests poses a serious threat to ecosystems and public health, particularly during the monsoon season when clogged drains lead to flooding.

To address this issue, he announced that the Solid Waste Bye-

Laws will be implemented from June 1, 2025, with the following key measures: Mandatory waste segregation at source: biodegradable waste to be composted within household or institutional premises, and non-biodegradable waste to be handed over to DUDA-authorized collection vehicles.

Collection of nominal user fees for garbage services, payable via QR code, UPI, or cash, directly to a government account, establishment of a helpline number for public inquiries and complaints and appointment of Nuisance Detectors to monitor and penalize illegal dumping activities.

DC Khampa reiterated that cleanliness is a shared civic responsibility, urging citizens not just to maintain their homes but to ensure the cleanliness of their colonies and neighborhoods. DUDA, he said, is fully prepared to support local cleanliness drives and make Namsai a model town for sustainable waste management and environmental stewardship.

The programme was well-attended by residents and stakeholders from the targeted colonies, along with officers and staff from the Urban Development Department.

DUDA will continue to organize awareness campaigns in different colonies until May 21, 2025, to ensure widespread understanding and effective implementation of the new waste management bye-laws.

Flash flood wreaks havoc in Down Yupia Road colony

Victims seek urgent relief

HT Bureau

NAMSAL, May 16: At least five houses were completely or partially damaged following a flash flood that struck the Down Yupia Road colony near Papu Nallah in the Itanagar Capital Region. Affected families have urgently appealed for support from the state government and Itanagar Capital District Administration.

Local resident Dongda Raji, speaking to the media, blamed unregulated legal and illegal earth-cutting activities upstream for the disaster. He stated that the flash flood occurred during the night and early hours of



May 15, washing away household items and leaving multiple families displaced. "Everything has been lost. The victims are devastated and urgently need help," he said.

The worst-hit families include: Jikke Tadong, Jikke Yaro, Yura Yama (wife of Yura Lalang), Tagru Yalar (wife of Tagru Tagong) and Nabam Yania.

All affected residents have been forced to take temporary shelter elsewhere. Their homes are either completely destroyed or uninhabitable.

Dongda Raji appealed to the authorities to immediately deploy disaster management teams and provide emergency relief, including food, clothing, and rehabilitation support. He emphasized that the situation is dire and called for prompt intervention by the Capital Administration and State Disaster Response Force.

Director of IPR praises efforts of The Greentoons and the film's director for capturing the essence of the Dree mythology

Trailer of documentary film 'The Mythology of Dree Festival' released in Naharlagun



HT Bureau

NAMSAL, May 16: The trailer of the much-anticipated documentary film "The Mythology of Dree Festival" was officially released on May 15, at Sochna Bhawan, IPR Office, Papu Nallah, Naharlagun. The launch event was graced by Shri Gijum Tali, Director of the Department of Information and Public Relations (IPR), along with Shri Habung Tapa, Chairman of the Capital Complex Dree Festival Committee (CCDFC), Shri Nani Polo, General Secretary of CCDFC,

and Shri Mihin Kano, Cultural Secretary of CCDFC. The event was also attended by IPR officers, actors, crew members of the film, and other invited guests.

The documentary has been produced by The Greentoons Production House and directed by Shri Radhe Tajung, with the support of the IPR Department. The film visually explores the rich mythology behind the Dree Festival, celebrated by the Apatani community.

In his address, Gijum Tali, Director of

IPR, praised the efforts of The Greentoons and the film's director for capturing the essence of the Dree mythology in such a compelling visual format. "This documentary is a commendable initiative. It not only brings to life the traditional stories behind the Dree Festival but also serves as a powerful medium to educate and inspire the younger generation to connect with their cultural roots," he said. Shri Tali stressed that such visual documentation is crucial for the preservation and transmission of indige-

nous heritage.

Habung Tapa, Chairman of the Capital Complex Dree Festival Committee, expressed great enthusiasm and recommended that the full documentary be screened for three consecutive days during the upcoming Capital Complex Dree Festival 2025 celebrations to ensure maximum viewership.

Speaking on the occasion, Nani Polo, General Secretary of CCDFC, extended heartfelt thanks to the IPR Department for sponsoring and supporting the film. "On behalf of the entire Apatani community, I express our sincere gratitude to the IPR Department. We hope that more such projects will be taken up in the future to safeguard and promote our cultural identity," he said.

Dugyir A Padu, District Information and Public Relations Officer (DIPRO), also appreciated the initiative, emphasizing its relevance in today's times. "Younger generations often struggle to grasp orally passed-down myths and traditions. Visual storytelling, like this documentary, bridges that gap and offers clarity and connection. Other communities, including mine, which celebrates festivals like Mopin, should also consider similar projects," she added.

The event concluded with a vote of thanks by Nending Nampi, Managing Director of The Greentoons Production House, who acknowledged the collective effort behind the film and expressed hope that it would be a valuable cultural resource for years to come.

War for taking back PoK should be war of choice: Ex-DGMO Anil Bhatt

NEW DELHI, May 16: Military conflict with Pakistan after the Pahalgalam terror attack has brought into focus the importance of drones in modern warfare, which along with space and cyberspace will write the new paradigm of future wars, a former Director General of Military Operations, who oversaw the Doklam crisis, has said.

In an interview with PTI Videos on Thursday, retired Lt Gen Anil Kumar Bhatt also expressed his displeasure at suggestions in social media by many warmongers who were unhappy with the conflict ending in four days on the grounds that it was an opportunity to reclaim Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.

War, he said, should be the last option and should not be waged since India had achieved its strategic aims.

"Let me tell you, a war or taking back Pak-occupied Kashmir, should be a war of choice, taken by a decision. That is not what was planned this time. Yes, the Indian military was prepared for it, if the escalating ladder took you there," said Bhatt, who is guiding the growth of the private space technology sector in the country after retirement in June 2020.

As DGMO, Bhatt was one of the most senior military officers in the hierarchy, in-charge of ensuring that the armed forces were operationally ready at all times. Reporting directly to the army chief, the DGMO is intimately involved in shaping strategies to deal with immediate and long-term security challenges, besides coordinating with the other two services as well as civilian and paramilitary security forces.

In times of crisis and escalated tensions, it falls

on the DGMO to communicate with his opposite number. Currently, the DGMO is Lt Gen Rajiv Ghai.

Bhatt was DGMO in 2017 when India was locked in a 73-day military standoff with China in the Doklam tri-junction near the Sikkim sector of the Line of Actual Control (LAC). A four-star lieutenant general is the second highest rank in the army, below a five-star general. A field marshal is largely a ceremonial or war-time rank.

"So what I would tell all my fellow countrymen is, war is a serious business. A very, very serious business. And a nation goes for it when all possible options are over. We had options less than war (during the current crisis) and gave a sense to it," said Bhatt, who spent 38 years in the Army.

Bhatt said coordination between the three services is very important as present day wars are fought not in just one domain but multiple fronts.

Asked how important drones were in the latest conflict, he said the unmanned aerial vehicles have created an entirely new paradigm in warfare and the militaries of the world began focusing on it when they achieved spectacular success for Azerbaijan in winning a nearly lost war against a well-armed Armenia.

The drones were Turkish made. Türkiye also supplied drones to Pakistan, which sent swarms of them over Indian air space for surveillance and sometimes lethal payloads.

Bhatt agreed that relatively inexpensive drones costing as little as Rs 2 lakh were able to destroy armoured tanks worth Rs 20-30 crore in the two Azerbaijan-Armenia wars in 2017 and 2020. This



made it clear that war theatres of the future will be dotted with drones.

To that there are two more new elements, Bhatt noted.

"Previously, we used to say that wars are fought on land, sea and in the air. But there are two new domains, very, very effective and important domains -- space and cyber space -- that are now emerging," said Bhatt. He is now director general of the Indian Space Association, the industry body of the space sector.

Bhatt said the space sector is critical to future warfare as satellites play an important role in intelligence gathering, surveillance and reconnaissance, besides guiding missiles and aircraft to their desired targets.

"But in the future every country will have to protect its assets in space and also know what are the adversaries' assets in space," he said.

Bhatt said several countries have demonstrated

anti-satellite weapons and are also developing suicidal satellites that go near an adversary's satellites and destroy it.

"There are kamikaze satellites they are talking of... China has been demonstrating such capabilities," Bhatt said.

He said space-faring nations were also developing capabilities to repair satellites orbiting the earth and refuelling them.

"Actually a satellite dies, not because its components go away or something. It dies primarily because its source of energy goes away. So, now techniques are being found to refuel a satellite," Bhatt said.

He said India has nine or 10 military satellites for surveillance purposes and has plans to put in place a constellation of 52 satellites for space-based surveillance.

"These 52 satellites definitely will increase our capability. Today, our gap is filled by companies like Maxar, PlanetM among others. But we would obviously want our own satellites. Shutter control is very important," Bhatt said.

He said the Pahalgalam attack was seen in strategic circles as an attempt by the Pakistan Army to stay relevant in their country after a series of setbacks, including the attack on the Pakistan corps commander residence in 2023 by supporters of former prime minister Imran Khan.

Bhatt said India has drawn a new red line for dealing with Pakistan by warning them of a strong response to every act of terror on Indian soil.

"We have set a new normal -- you cross the red line, we will hit back. Of course it will require us

to be more prepared. But for Pakistan there is no other method," he said.

In his view, the keeping in abeyance of the Indus Water Treaty has been a very effective method. Another method, he added, was for India to keep focusing on its growth story while keeping an eye on Pakistan's activities.

"It's up to you. You put Pakistan on your front screen and drive your car. Or look at the economy and keep driving it. Keep them (Pakistan) in the rear view mirror, it will be enough. Don't distract yourself from what they are doing," he said.

Bhatt recalled former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's observations on war.

"Prime Minister Vajpayee had mentioned once... It is very easy to start a war but it is very difficult to terminate it. And that gave much clarity. In war, the challenge is the ability to then stop a war. And secondly, do you achieve your war aims and at what cost?"

The former army officer said this does not mean that a nation should not be prepared for war.

"If you are prepared for war, you prevent a war. And with any adversary, be it on the north or on the west, we have to be prepared. And the preparation is to prevent a war," Bhatt said.

Bhatt also referred to Israel, saying its name is often suggested as an example in India.

"Israel is in an asymmetric war with a country. There is no country. There is no army. There are no nuclear bombs on the other side. We have to realise we are dealing with an adversary which has a significant army. Not only that, it has a very strong backer," he said. (PTI)

6 terrorists killed in 2 major operations in south Kashmir in 3 days: Officials

'Successful operations were possible because of the coordination and synergy among the security and intelligence agencies'

AWANTIPORA (J&K), May 16: Security forces turned the focus of their anti-terror operations to specific south Kashmir areas in the wake of the April 22 Pahalgalam attack and eliminated six terrorists in the last three days, officials said on Friday.

"The security agencies reviewed their strategy according to the situation in the wake of terror activities in the last one month and our intensified focus was on operations," V K Birdi, Inspector General of Police (IGP), Kashmir, said.

The IGP was addressing a press conference with General Officer Commanding, Victor Force, Major General Dhananjay Joshi and CRPF Inspector General Mitesh Jain at the headquarters of the Victor Force here in south Kashmir's Pulwama district.

Birdi said due to the intensified focus of various security agencies and the coordination between them, two successful operations were conducted and six terrorists killed in the last three days. He termed the elimination of the ultras "significant achievements".

"These successful operations were possible because of the coordination and synergy among the security and intelligence agencies. We are duty-bound to end any terror activity in Kashmir and we are always ready to stop such acts," the IGP said.

The encounters took place in the Keller area of Shopian and Nadar area of Tral in Pulwama on Tuesday and Thursday, respectively.

Three terrorists each were killed in the two operations.

Major Joshi said immediately after the Pahalgalam terror attack, which claimed 26 lives, the security forces designated several areas as focus areas.



"We had intelligence inputs that terrorists had moved to the higher reaches after the melting of the snow. Keeping that in mind, our domination parties were continuously deployed in the higher reaches, mountainous areas and forests," he said. The security agencies received an intelligence input about the presence of terrorists in the Keller area on the night of May 12, Major Joshi said.

"So the domination party that was deployed there for some time relocated itself and in a focused way, closed in on the area. They challenged the terrorists who fired at them, leading to an encounter in which three terrorists were neutralised," he said. About the Tral encounter, the GoC said the operation took place on a different terrain.

"We had inputs and cordoned off the village. The terrorists took positions in different houses and fired at us. Our challenge was the safe evacuation of the innocent civilians, including children. Then, systematically, searches were conducted one by one in the houses and three terrorists neu-

tralised at separate places," he added.

Major Joshi asserted that the successful conduct of both operations shows that the security forces will find terrorists wherever they are and neutralise them.

Of the six slain terrorists, the most prominent was Shahid Kuttay, who was involved in major attacks, including one on a sarpanch in Shopian's Heerpora on May 18 last year and a firing incident at the Danish Resort on April 8 last year, in which two German tourists and a driver were injured, the officer said.

"Kuttay was also involved in fundraising and other activities," he added. The neutralisation of both the modules has dealt a blow to terror outfits and will help stop their activities here, Major Joshi said.

Addressing the presser, the inspector general of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) said the success of these operations could not have been possible without the support and cooperation of the local population.

"It is not only difficult but impossible to wipe out terrorism without the support of people. The successful operations are a proof that the people here want an end to terror in Jammu and Kashmir," Jain said.

Meanwhile, Lieutenant General Pratik Sharma of the Army's Northern Command complimented the forces for the success of the anti-terror operations.

"Lt Gen Pratik Sharma, Army Commander #NorthernCommand, compliments #ChinarCorps for their swift action and precise execution in the joint operation that neutralised three terrorists in #Awantipora. The #IndianArmy stands by its commitment to keeping #JammuKashmir terror free," the Northern Command said on X. (PTI)

Scuffle over lemons sparks communal tension in Rajasthan's Udaipur, 6 detained: Police



JAIPUR, May 16: A minor dispute spiralled into a communal clash in Rajasthan's Udaipur, leaving a vegetable vendor seriously injured, police said on Friday.

The incident took place in the Dhanmandi area of Udaipur late on Thursday evening, they said, adding that six people have so far been detained.

Police said a verbal spat between two men over buying lemons at a vegetable stall near Teej Ka Chowk soon led to a scuffle and within minutes, it turned into a communal clash.

Superintendent of Police (SP) Yogesh Goyal said a group of five to seven people allegedly attacked the vegetable vendor, Satveer (50), with a sharp weapon, leaving him with severe injuries on his face. Satveer was taken to the MB Hospital, where he is undergoing treatment.

The tensions escalated further when two roadside huts and vegetable carts were set on fire. Firefighters reached the scene and doused the flames.

Police teams from four nearby stations, led by the SP himself, arrived at the spot and brought the situation under control. Extra forces have been deployed in sensitive areas to maintain peace.

Markets in the area remained shut on Friday.

"Six people have been detained after scanning CCTV footage that captured the assailants carrying weapons. We are investigating all aspects of the incident and strict action will be taken," the SP said.

Local traders observed a complete market bandh on Friday, shutting down shops at Dhanmandi and Teej Ka Chowk. They demanded immediate arrests and action against allegedly negligent police officials.

Later in the day, a meeting between the traders and the administration helped pacify the situation.

Municipal Commissioner Ramprakash and Additional District Magistrate (ADM), City, Vaar Singh assured the protesters of action on three of their key demands -- arresting the accused, removing illegal vendors from the area and taking disciplinary action against errant officers.

Following this, the traders agreed to reopen their shops. (PTI)

Operation Sindoor reflects PM's firm political will, precise intelligence of agencies: Shah

NEW DELHI, May 16: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday said Operation Sindoor was a reflection of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's firm political will, precise intelligence gathering by various agencies and unmatched strike capability of the country's armed forces.

He said this after inaugurating an upgraded multi agency centre in Delhi for intelligence sharing among various agencies.

"Operation Sindoor is a unique symbol of Prime Minister Modi's firm political will, the precise intelligence of our agencies and the unmatched strike capability of our three armed forces," Shah said.

The multi agency centre, under the Intelligence Bureau, was created in the aftermath of the 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks with an aim to share timely inputs among various stakeholders involved in law enforcement.

Under Operation Sindoor, India carried out precision strikes on terror infrastructure in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir early on May 7 in response to the April 22 Pahalgalam terror attack.

India and Pakistan agreed on May 10 to stop military actions. India has, however, made it clear it has merely paused its operation and its future actions will be guided by Pakistan's conduct.

Modi had said Operation Sindoor was India's new policy against terrorism and the country's unwavering pledge for justice.

"It is the new normal. We have only kept in abeyance our operations against Pakistan and the future will depend on their behaviour," Modi had said in a 22-minute address.

Modi had also sternly warned Pakistan that India will not succumb to nuclear blackmail and sent a clear message to the world: terror and trade, terror and talks cannot go together. (PTI)

Govt followed court orders, will continue to do so: MP CM on row over minister Shah's remarks

BHOPAL, May 16: Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav has said his government has followed court orders and will continue to do so over his minister Vijay Shah's objectionable remarks aimed at Colonel Sofiya Qureshi. The CM's statement comes amid growing demand for the resignation of Shah, the tribal affairs minister.

The Congress has no moral right to demand minister Shah's resignation, he said, adding that the opposition party should first ask Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah to step down from the post. "Whatever order the judiciary has given, our government has followed it. Whatever the court says, we will continue to act accordingly," Yadav told reporters on Thursday on the sidelines of the Tiranga Yatra launched by the BJP from Roshanpura Square here.

When asked about Congress de-

manding Shah's resignation, he said, "Congress will continue to do so. The party should demand (resignation) from (Karnataka CM) Siddaramaiah."

"Congress can only talk. Congress's conduct is that it supported (former Delhi CM Arvind) Kejriwal step by step, even though he went to jail while being the chief minister. Where was Congress at that time? Congress does not even have the right to speak. No one has crossed the limits of shamelessness so much as Congress has done," he said. Shah had made the controversial statements during a public event in a rural area in Indore district on Monday without naming Qureshi. Through his comments, Shah tried to present Colonel Sofia as the "sister of terrorists".

Taking suo motu cognisance of the remarks, the Madhya Pradesh High Court on Wednesday ordered registration of an FIR against him.

Following the court order, an FIR was registered against Shah in Indore district on Wednesday night.

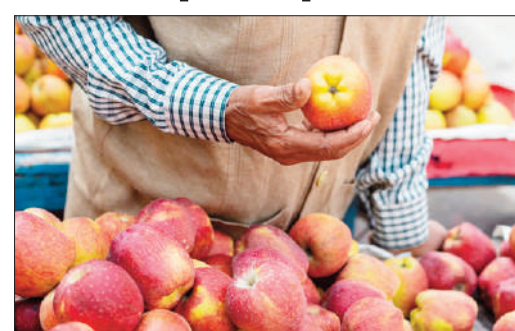
Ever since the controversy erupted, the Congress has been demanding Shah's resignation.

Former Madhya Pradesh chief minister and veteran BJP leader Uma Bharti has also demanded Shah's immediate dismissal from the cabinet.

Col Qureshi gained nationwide prominence after she shared details of 'Operation Sindoor', launched by the Indian armed forces, at press conferences along with Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri and Wing Commander Vyomika Singh.

After a huge controversy arose over his statement, Shah said if anyone was hurt, he was ready to apologise ten times. He also said that he respected Colonel Qureshi more than he respected his sister. (PTI)

Delhi CM lauds traders for deciding to stop import of apples from Turkiye



NEW DELHI, May 16: Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta called for a complete boycott of nations that support terrorism in India while praising Azadpur Mandi traders for deciding to stop importing apples from Turkiye.

The move by the traders came in the wake of Turkiye backing Pakistan and condemning India's recent strikes on terror camps in the neighbouring country and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) under Operation Sindoor. Pakistan also used Turkish drones on a large scale in the recent military conflict with India. Talking to reporters on the sidelines of her visit

to Azadpur Mandi, the chief minister thanked the traders for boycotting Turkish apples.

"It is absolutely right. If any nation is involved against India, the people of this country will boycott them completely."

"I thank these traders for boycotting the import. This is their patriotism," she said.

Gupta said India is united and there should be no trade, talks or relations with countries that are "masters of terrorism".

The Jamia Millia Islamia has suspended all academic collaborations with institutions affiliated with the government of Turkiye, citing national security concerns. The Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) has also suspended its MoU with Turkiye's Inonu University, which was signed earlier this year for faculty and student exchange programmes.

Speaking about the developments, Gupta said there should be "100 per cent" cutting off from such nations that support terror activities in India.

Following its support to Pakistan, calls for boycotting Turkish goods and tourism have surfaced across India, with online travel platforms like EaseMyTrip and Ixigo issuing advisories against visiting the country. (PTI)

IIM-Sambalpur launches bachelors programmes in Data Science and AI, Management and Public Policy

NEW DELHI, May 16: IIM, Sambalpur, has launched two four-year undergraduate programmes in Data Science and AI and Management and Public Policy, becoming the first such institute to offer these courses, according to its Director Mahadeo Jaiswal.

"These undergraduate programmes will have a flexible structure that allows students to gain a certificate after one year, a diploma after two years, a degree after three years, and an honours degree after successfully completing four years, with multiple entry and exit points," Jaiswal told PTI.

"As an institution of national importance, we are committed to offering future-oriented, interdisciplinary education that blends academic rigour with societal relevance. We also aim to cultivate graduates who are not only career-ready but also change-maker capable of navigating and in-



fluencing complex socioeconomic landscape with clarity, compassion and courage," he added.

The two courses are -- Bachelor of Science in Management and Public Policy and Bachelor of Science in Data Science and Artificial Intelligence. Indian Institute of Management (IIM), Sambalpur, will offer

these courses from the 2025 academic session.

The Bachelor of Science in Management and Public Policy programme is designed to meet national managerial aspirations in terms of sustainability, ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance), and community-led development. This pro-

gramme aims to equip a new generation of change-makers to close the gap between policy and practice at the grassroots level. The Bachelor of Science in Data Science and Artificial Intelligence is focused towards developing India's digital capability and global competitiveness. The programme, co-designed with industry leaders builds future ready skill set among young students and encourages the use of ethical AI, reaffirming the institution's pledge to innovation with integrity.

"The Bachelor of Science (BS) will be a four-year fully residential programme. This is a pioneering step towards building future-ready leaders of tomorrow. In line with NEP, our vision is to create responsible leaders with entrepreneurial mindset," Jaiswal said.

While the admission to the AI and Data Sciences course will be through JEE-MAINS, the institute will use

CUET-UG scores for admission to the Management and Public policy programme.

"With the launch of CUET, we have made a big leap towards democratising access to quality higher education in India. As top institutions such as IIM, Sambalpur, introduce specialised undergraduate programmes in Data Science, AI, and Public Policy, it becomes even more important that talent from all parts of the country gets an equal chance to be part of the innovation economy," Rajesh Kumar, Director (CUET), National Testing Agency (NTA) said at the launch.

"Global Capability Centres are shaping the future of work, and through an equitable, transparent, and standardised testing environment, NTA is dedicated to helping drive this transformation by empowering the next generation of globally capable professionals," he added. (PTI)

Shah congratulates ITBP personnel for success in summiting Mount Makalu

NEW DELHI, May 16: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday congratulated the personnel of the Indo Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) for their success in summiting Mount Makalu, the fifth highest peak in the world.

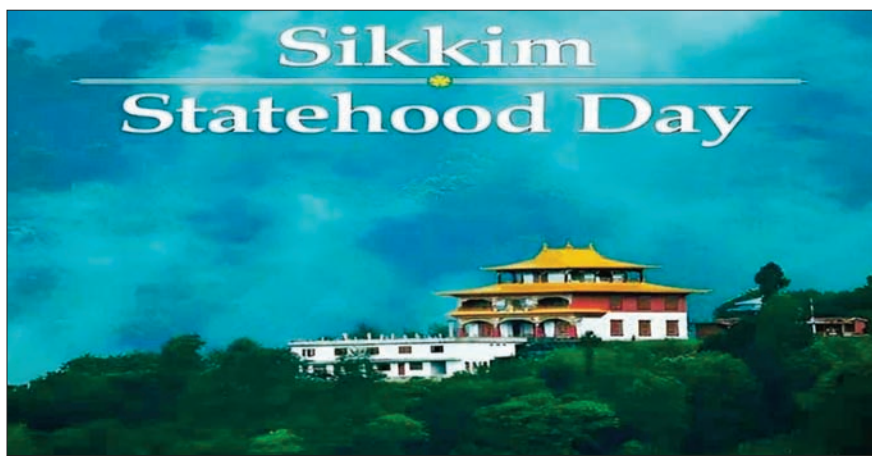
Shah said braving extreme weather conditions, the ITBP personnel unfurled the 'Tiranga' at the peak of the mountain and carried out a cleanliness drive inspired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'Swachh Bharat Abhiyan' and removed 150 kg of garbage.

"Congratulations to the ITBP jawans on their stellar success in summiting Mount Makalu, the fifth highest peak in the world," he wrote on X.

The Home Minister also applauded the ITBP personnel for their courage and commitment.

Mount Makalu is located in the Mahalangur range of the Nepal Himalayas. (PTI)

Sikkim joined India on this day in 1975 following a referendum Sikkim celebrates 50th Statehood Day, wishes pour in



GANGTOK, May 16: Sikkim celebrated its 50th Statehood Day on Friday, with Governor Om Prakash Mathur and Chief Minister PS Tamang congratulating the people of the state on the occasion.

The day began with a Tiranga rally led by Tamang from MG Marg to Paljor Stadium, where thousands of people from all six districts had gathered.

Earlier in the day, Prime Minister Narendra Modi greeted people of Sikkim on its statehood day, lauding its strides in diverse sectors.

In a post on X, the PM said, "Warm greetings to the people of Sikkim on their Statehood Day! This year, the occasion is even more special as we mark the 50th anniversary of Sikkim's statehood!"

He added, "Sikkim is associated with serene beauty, rich cultural traditions and industrious people. It has made strides in diverse sectors. May the people of this

beautiful state continue to prosper."

Enjoying protectorate status under the Union of India after the country's Independence in 1947, Sikkim joined India on this day in 1975 following a referendum, and the northeastern state has since made rapid strides on various socio-economic development parameters.

Speaking on the occasion, Tamang described the state's five-decade journey as one marked by resilience, inclusive growth and cultural preservation.

"As we commemorate the golden jubilee, we reflect with reverence on the journey of the past five decades, a journey marked by resilience, inclusive growth, cultural preservation and the collective spirit of our people," he said.

He reaffirmed the state's commitment to building a "Sunaulo Sikkim, Samridha Sikkim, ani Samarth Sikkim" — a golden, prosperous, and capable Sikkim — aligned

Himanta greets Sikkim's people on 50th anniversary of statehood

GUWAHATI, May 16: Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma extended his best wishes to Sikkim on the 50th anniversary of its statehood on Friday.

He also said the Himalayan state has positioned itself as a model of sustainable development.

"To our sisters and brothers in Sikkim, I send my best wishes on the golden jubilee of your Statehood," Sarma said in a post on X.

Enjoying protectorate status under the Union of India after the country's Independence in 1947, Sikkim became an Indian state in 1975 following a referendum, and the state has since made rapid strides on various socio-economic development parameters.

"Nestled amidst lush greenery and affectionate people, the state has positioned itself as a model of sustainable development," Sarma added.

He wished for the state's continued growth and prosperity. (PTI)

with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of Viksit Bharat.

In his speech, the governor said, "This golden jubilee is a tribute to the courage of our people, the wisdom of our leaders and the enduring partnership between Sikkim

and the great Indian nation."

He said that May 16, 1975, remains etched in the state's collective memory as a turning point when the people of Sikkim, through democratic will and vision, chose to become part of the Indian Union as its 22nd state.

"The Indian Union welcomed Sikkim with open arms and a promise of unwavering support," the governor stated.

He said, "Sikkim stands ready as a strategic border state, a guardian of biodiversity and a pioneer in sustainability to contribute with all our strength, creativity and unity. Let our youth rise, let our economy flourish, let our heritage shine."

Meanwhile, Arunachal Pradesh Governor Lt Gen (Retd) K T Parnaik and Chief Minister Pema Khandu greeted the people of Sikkim on the occasion.

Parnaik described Sikkim as one of India's most peaceful, disciplined, and cleanest states, a beacon of sustainable development from which other states, including Arunachal Pradesh, can take inspiration, according to a Raj Bhavan statement.

"With its breathtaking natural beauty and commitment to ecological harmony, Sikkim is an inspiration. It is not just an organic state but one that blooms with orchids and cultural richness," he said.

Khandu described Sikkim as a land of pristine beauty, cultural richness, and environmental leadership.

"Sikkim continues to inspire with its strides in organic farming, sustainability, and inclusive growth. May Sikkim continue to shine as a jewel of the Northeast, fostering harmony, progress, and prosperity for all," he said in a post on X. (PTI)

Union Minister Chouhan announces ₹ 380 cr package for farmers' welfare in Nagaland



KOHIMA, May 16: In a significant boost to Nagaland's agricultural sector, Union Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has announced a ₹ 380-crore package for farmers' welfare.

Chouhan, the Minister for Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare, made the announcement during the inauguration of the Administrative-cum-Academic Block and Farmers' Fair at the College of Veterinary Sciences and Animal Husbandry at Jalukie in Peren district on Thursday, a government statement said.

He urged the Nagaland government to draft a detailed agriculture development action plan to effectively utilise the funds and assured full support from the Centre for the state's overall agricultural progress.

Addressing students and farmers at the event, the Minister emphasised the need for a district-wise core team comprising students, Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs), and university professors to regularly engage with local farmers.

These teams would help identify

region-specific crop and livestock varieties suited to the unique agro-climatic zones of Nagaland, ultimately improving productivity and income, he said.

In his address, Governor La Ganesan described the ₹ 380-crore package as a key step toward transforming rural Nagaland.

He highlighted the role of veterinary education in ensuring food security, healthy livestock and sustainable rural livelihoods.

Ganesan encouraged students to become changemakers in the field of veterinary and agricultural sciences, and to see themselves as contributors to Prime Minister Modi's vision of a Developed India by 2047.

Deputy Chief Minister TR Zeliang welcomed the financial support and reiterated the state's dependence on agriculture, with over 70 per cent of the population engaged in farming.

He highlighted the cultural significance of jhum cultivation, while also calling for modern scientific approaches to sustain traditional practices. (PTI)

Five militants arrested in Manipur

IMPHAL, May 16: Security forces have arrested five militants, belonging to various proscribed outfits, in three districts of Manipur, police said on Friday.

All the arrests were made on Thursday in Imphal East, Imphal West and Thoubal districts, a senior officer said.

Two cadres of the banned United National Liberation Front (Koireng) were apprehended from Andro Parking and Khurai Konsam Leikai in Imphal East district, he said.

One firearm and ammunition were recovered from their possession.

An active cadre of the outlawed KCP (PWG) was held from Khangabok Part II in Thoubal district, and he was involved in extortion activities, the officer said.

One member of the proscribed Kanglei Yawol Kanna Lup (SOREPA) was arrested from Khonghampat Awang Leikai in Imphal West district, he said.

A cadre of banned Prepak (Pro) was apprehended from Heirok Part III in Thoubal district, and a cache of arms and ammunition was recovered from his possession, the officer said.

Two rifles, a hand grenade and ammunition were seized from him, he added. Security forces have been conducting search operations in Manipur since ethnic violence broke out two years ago.

More than 260 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in ethnic violence between Meiteis and Kuki-Zo groups since May 2023. The Centre had on February 13 imposed the President's rule in Manipur after Chief Minister N Biren Singh resigned.

The state assembly, which has a tenure till 2027, has been put under suspended animation. (PTI)

Manipur BJP rejects tie up with Congress rumours

IMPHAL, May 16: Amid a swirl of speculations, the BJP has come out strongly against what it terms as a "deliberate disinformation campaign," distancing itself from any suggestion of a tie-up with the Congress party in Manipur.

The party's sharp response comes in the wake of viral posts and reports hinting at a possible realignment of political parties in Manipur.

BJP Manipur General Secretary Deben Singh, on behalf of the party, in a press release, categorically rejected the rumours, calling them "completely unfounded" and "politically motivated."

Without naming specific sources, it criticised sections of the media and social media influencers for "peddling a narrative aimed at creating confusion and instability."

He made it clear that the BJP has neither sought any alliance nor informal understanding with the Congress. Calling for public vigilance, the BJP appealed to citizens not to be swayed by speculative content circulating on social media. The party warned that such falsehoods could aggravate tensions in an already sensitive political environment and urged for the responsible use of free speech, particularly in the digital space. (NNN)

NSCN (IM) chairman asks Nagas to stand by Framework Agreement

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, May 16: NSCN (IM) chairman Q Tuccu on Friday urged the Nagas to take the pledge once again to stand by the Framework Agreement it signed with the Government of India on August 3, 2015, affirming that the pact was based on the historic declaration of Naga independence and Naga plebiscite.

Delivering his speech at the 75th Naga Plebiscite Day celebration at NSCN council headquarters at Camp Hebron, Tuccu said the historic Framework Agreement was signed, cognizant of the unique history of the Nagas that reveals the truth of Naga declaration of independence and Naga plebiscite, which reaffirmed the sovereign right of the Nagas to be independent nation.

"There's no going back to betray

ourselves like falling off the cliff as devilishly planned by the government of India. Too many times the Government of India has played with the Naga issue in the name of agreement after agreement," he said.

Tuccu said enough harm has been done to kill the rights of the Nagas by creating many groups to counterweight the NSCN, the only authentic group that has firmly spearheaded the Naga political movement after the "infamous Shillong Accord".

He said: "We are no novice to the divisive politics planted by the Indian agency."

Tuccu accused the Government of India of scheming a policy to destroy the Framework Agreement by placing it at the level of the Agreed Position of November 17, 2017. He said former interlocutor

RN Ravi, representing the government of India, drafted the Agreed Position and made the working committee of the Naga National Political Groups (NNPGs) sign it.

According to him, the NNPGs compromised the historical and political rights of the Nagas and agreed to accept the Indian Constitution-based Naga political solution.

"Anything that is deceitfully planned against the sanctity of the Framework Agreement is not acceptable to the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (NSCN)," Tuccu asserted.

He reaffirmed that the Naga political solution and the Framework Agreement of August 3, 2015, cannot stay apart.

Tuccu said any attempt to seek solution diluting the Framework Agreement is not acceptable.

Meghalaya nursing student death cast pall of gloom

IMPHAL, May 16: A cloud of grief hangs heavy over the Regional Institute of Medical Sciences (RIMS), Imphal, following the tragic and untimely death of Abiel Sachiana Ch Marak, a second-year B.Sc. nursing student from Meghalaya.

The 22-year-old student, known for her quiet strength, sincerity, and dedication to her studies, was found dead in the morning of Wednesday in RIMS. Abiel, a native of Rongram in West Garo Hills district, was a student of the College of Nursing at RIMS in Imphal.

She had come to Imphal to pursue her dream of becoming a nurse, a profession she deeply respected.

Her sudden demise has left classmates, teachers, and friends devastated, as they struggle to come to terms with the loss of a promising young woman whose presence brought warmth and calm to those around her.

In response to the tragic event, RIMS held a solemn condolence meeting at Jubilee Hall today. Faculty, staff, and students gathered



to pay their respects through floral tributes and heartfelt prayers.

A two-minute silence was observed in memory of Abiel, whose absence was deeply felt.

Prof G Sunil Kumar Sharma, Director of RIMS, expressed his profound sorrow, calling her death an "irreparable loss" and offered sincere condolences to the bereaved family on behalf of the institution.

"The RIMS community stands united in grief and solidarity with Abiel's family," he stated.

While the institution mourns the loss, the incident has also

raised serious concerns.

Meanwhile, authorities have confirmed that an investigation has been launched to determine the cause of death.

As of now, no official statement has been released regarding the cause.

However, the police have not ruled out any possibilities and are treating the matter with due seriousness.

The tragic discovery has sparked unease among hostel residents and students across campus, some of whom have raised concerns over students' safety and mental well-being. (NNN)

Security forces recover 12 firearms, ammunition from gunfight spot in Chandel

IMPHAL, May 16: Two days after 10 militants were killed during a gunfight with security forces in Manipur's Chandel district near the Indo-Myanmar border, efforts are currently underway to identify the deceased, a Defence PRO said on Friday. According to a statement issued by the PRO, security forces recovered 12 firearms, ammunition and a rocket-propelled grenade

(RPG) during subsequent operations in the area. At least 10 militants wearing "camouflage fatigues" were killed in a gunfight with an Assam Rifles unit near New Samtal village in Chandel district along the Indo-Myanmar border on Wednesday, it added. "During subsequent combing operations, seven AK-47 rifles, one RPG launcher, one M4 rifle, and four single-barrel breech-loading ri-

fles, ammunition and other war-like stores were recovered," it stated.

According to the statement, the militants were suspected of being involved in cross-border insurgent activities. It added, "The situation along the border remains under heightened surveillance, in coordination with civil administration and intelligence agencies to ensure peace and stability in the region." (PTI)

Appointment of Tribal Officer as Tribal Welfare Director sought

HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, May 16: The Twipra Student Federation (TSF), an indigenous student body affiliated with the North East Students' Organisation (NESO) on Friday has urged the Tripura government to appoint a qualified tribal officer as the Director of the Tribal Welfare Department.

The body submitted a memorandum to Tribal Welfare Minister Bikash Debbarma, pressing for the immediate replacement of the current director.

In its memorandum, TSF asserted that the department, which is exclusively responsible for the welfare and development of the state's indigenous communities, should be led by someone who intrinsically understands the cultural, social, and developmental needs of the tribal populace.

"It is our firm conviction that there are several competent and experienced tribal officers within the state cadre who possess the necessary administrative skills and grassroots knowledge to lead the department more effectively," the TSF stated. "Appointing a deserving tribal officer would not only improve the department's efficiency but also inspire aspiring tribal civil servants."

His footprints in time: Trailblazers of Meghalaya in the making of modern India

Seminar aims to highlight lives and legacies of various men and women of Meghalaya

SHILLONG, May 16: Meghalaya Chief Minister, Conrad K Sangma, recently inaugurated a two-day national seminar on "His footprints in time: Trailblazers of Meghalaya in the making of modern India," organised by Centre For Historical Research Synod College (CHRSC), Shillong. Also present as the guest of honour was Member of Parliament, Dr W R Kharlukhi.

Speaking during the inaugural session, Conrad K Sangma said that Synod College is always at the forefront of organising seminars that have far-reaching effects and congratulating the organisers said, "This seminar will talk not only about the lives that they have made but also about the lives they have touched but more importantly about the lives they will inspire in the



days to come."

The Chief Minister also stressed on the need to document documentation and research and added, "The documentation of such seminars in the form of compilations, books or papers is important not only to support the research but they become tools of knowledge

sharing."

He also informed the gathering of the Chief Minister's Research Grant that supports research studies and announced this program will be expanded further to support more research scholars.

Further, the Chief Minister said the

trailblazers that would be featured in the two-day seminar would be accorded due recognition for their contributions in different fields and said, "Talking about these men who have left their footprints and have contributed immensely will be a source of inspiration to the younger generation."

The seminar aims to feature, highlight and document the lives and legacies of various men and women of Meghalaya who have made notable contributions in the socio-economic, educational, cultural and political landscape of the state and the nation thus honouring and appreciating the trailblazers.

Family members of noted personalities who contributed in the field of social service, education, politics, etc were felicitated during the occasion. (NNN)

No.CHD/UDD-39/15thFC/Untied/2023/5353 Dated Kokrajhar the 30th April/2025

PRESS NOTICE INVITING TENDER

The Council Head of Department, Urban Development Department, BTC, Kokrajhar invites bids 'affixing court fee of Rs. 8.25 (Rupees eight & paise twenty five) only under 15th FC (Untied) 2nd Installment for the year 2020-21 during 2024-25.

Last date of submission of completed tender is 20.05.2025 (up to 2:00 PM) and will be opened on the same day.

The detailed tender documents may be obtained from the office of the undersigned during office hours till 19.05.2025 up to 3.00 PM on payment of prescribed Bid cost in the form of Bank draft in favour of Principal Secretary, BTR payable at Kokrajhar.

Sd/-CHD
Urban Development Department,
BTC, Kokrajhar

IPR(BTC)/C/2025-26/349

No.CHD/UDD-29/15thFC/Untied/2023/5354 Dated Kokrajhar the 30th April/2025

PRESS NOTICE INVITING TENDER

The Council Head of Department, Urban Development Department, BTC, Kokrajhar invites bids 'affixing court fee of Rs. 8.25 (Rupees eight & paise twenty five) only under 15th FC (Untied) 2nd Installment for the year 2023-23 during 2024-25.

Last date of submission of completed tender is 20.05.2025 (up to 2:00 PM) and will be opened on the same day.

The detailed tender documents may be obtained from the office of the undersigned during office hours till 19.05.2025 up to 3.00 PM on payment of prescribed Bid cost in the form of Bank draft in favour of Principal Secretary, BTR payable at Kokrajhar.

Sd/-CHD
Urban Development Department,
BTC, Kokrajhar

IPR(BTC)/C/2025-26/352

CONSTRUCTION OF TYPE-II QTRS AT TINSUKIA DIVISION

E-Tender Notice No.: TSK/Engg/16 of 2025 dated: 14-05-2025. E-Tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following works:

Name of work: Balance work in connection with (i) At New Tinsukia-Construction of Type-II qtrs (100 units) and (ii) At Tinsukia-Upgradation of Quarters wall (24 units). **Tender Value:** ₹13,25,90,260/-, **Earnest Money:** ₹8,13,000/-. **Date & time of closing of tender:** 15:00 hrs. of 04-06-2025 & opening at 16:00 hrs. of 04-06-2025. The complete information with the tender documents of above e-tender will be available upto 15:00 hrs. of 04-06-2025 in website www.irops.gov.in

DRM (W), Tinsukia

NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY

Serving Customers With A Smile

At Cannes opening, Robert De Niro calls Trump 'America's philistine president'

CANNES, May 16: Much of the cinema world, including Robert De Niro, Leonardo DiCaprio and Quentin Tarantino, descended on the Cannes Film Festival as the French Riviera extravaganza got its 78th edition underway.

Expectations are running high for a potentially banner Cannes. All of the ingredients — loads of stars, top-tier filmmakers, political intrigue — seem to be lined up.

Over the next 12 days, Cannes will play host to megawatt premieres including those of "Mission: Impossible – The Final Reckoning", Spike Lee's "Highest 2 Lowest" and Ari Aster's "Eddington".

DiCaprio skirted the red carpet but drew a standing ovation when he presented De Niro with an honorary Palme d'Or on Tuesday. The moment, which brought together two of Martin Scorsese's most regular stars, came 49 years after "Taxi Driver" was crowned with the Palme d'Or. DiCaprio praised De Niro as "the archetype" actor, while also praising the 81-year-old performer — a fierce critic of US President Donald Trump — for "fighting for our democracy."

When the crowd rose to its feet for a lengthy ovation for De Niro, DiCaprio handed him the Palme. "Thanks, kiddo," said De Niro. After thanking the festival, De Niro quickly turned to speaking about Trump, who recently said he wants to enact a tariff on films made outside the country. "Art is the truth. Art embraces diversity. And that's why art is a threat to the autocrats and the fascists of the world," said De Niro. "America's philistine president has had himself appointed head of one of America's premier cultural institutions. He has cut funding and support to the arts, humanities and education. And now he announced a 100 per cent tariff on films made outside the United States. You can't put a price on connectivity."

The opening ceremony, which preceded the premiere of Amelie Bonnin's French romance "Leave One Day", was attended by



Tarantino, who emerged to grandly declare the festival open, and then promptly dropped the mic and walked off stage.

On Wednesday, Tarantino will pay tribute to Western filmmaker George Sherman. Also in attendance: Sean Baker, the "Anora" director and last year's Palme d'Or winner.

The ceremony capped a busy day at Cannes that included a three-film salute to Ukraine, the introduction of the jury that will decide the Palme d'Or, headed by Juliette Binoche, and the debut of a restoration of Charlie Chaplin's "The Gold Rush" for its 100th anniversary. Cannes is coming off a 2024 festival that produced a number of eventual Oscar contenders, including "Emilia Perez", "The Substance", "Flow" and the best picture winner, "Anora".

Asked Monday if he's feeling the pressure this time around, festival director Thierry Fremaux said the only kind of pressure he believes in is in beer. (Beer on tap in France is "biere a la pression.") Cannes launched the same day Gerard Depardieu, one of France's most famous actors, was found guilty of having sexually assaulted two women on a 2021 film set. In one

of France's most prominent #MeToo cases, Depardieu was given an 18-month suspended prison sentence. The 76-year-old has long been a regular presence at Cannes. This year's Cannes Film Festival, the premier international cinematic gathering, is also unspooling following Trump's call for tariffs on movies made overseas. Confusion over the still-unformed plans characterized most responses. "I don't know what to say, really, about that," Binoche told reporters Tuesday. "We can see that he's fighting and trying in many different ways to save America and save his ass." Along with Binoche, the other eight jurors include Halle Berry and Jeremy Strong, who was unable to attend Cannes last year for the premiere of his Trump film "The Apprentice". Strong referenced that film, which led to his first Oscar nomination, in his comments on the American president Tuesday. "Truth is under assault," said Strong. "Specifically at this temple of film, the role of film is increasingly critical because it can combat those forces in the entropy of truth, and can communicate truths, individual truths, human truths, societal truths, and affirm and celebrate our shared humanity." (AP)

FWICE calls for boycott of Turkish shows on Netflix, Prime Video

MUMBAI, May 16: The Federation of Western India Cine Employees (FWICE) has urged streaming platforms, including Netflix, Prime Video and JioHotstar, to boycott Turkish shows following the country's support to Pakistan amid heightened tensions with India.

In a statement, released on Thursday, the organisation said they stand "firmly for the interest of the nation and industry".

"We are writing to express our serious concern and strong objection regarding the continued streaming and promotion of Turkish shows on various Over-The-Top (OTT) platforms operating in India.

"As is well known, Turkey has consistently extended diplomatic and political support to Pakistan on matters that are detrimental to India's sovereignty and national interest, including on sensitive issues such as Kashmir," the FWICE said.

The union body, which represents workers, technicians, and artists from 36 different crafts working in the Indian media and entertainment industry, further said it is not in India's best interest to allow the content of a nation that does not support its territorial integrity to be consumed widely by Indian audiences.

The FWICE urged the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting to consider taking necessary action to boycott or restrict the streaming of Turkish television shows and films on Indian OTT platforms.

"Such a step will not only send a strong message globally but also encourage the promotion of Indian content and support the large workforce of our domestic entertainment industry. We hope the Ministry will take cognizance of this matter with the seriousness it deserves and initiate appropriate steps in the national interest," it said.

Turkish dramas such as "Binbir Gece", "As the Crow Flies", "Another Self", "Yabani", "Terzi", "Ethos", and "Creature" gained popularity in India in early 2000s.

The development comes after Türkiye criticised India's strike on terror infrastructure in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied-Kashmir in retaliation for the Pahalgam terror attack. Islamabad had also used Turkish drones in the conflict. (PTI)

Anupam Kher meets Robert De Niro at Cannes, calls him 'greatest actor of all times'

NEW DELHI, May 16: Actor Anupam Kher says it was the "most amazing feeling" to meet his "Silver Linings Playbook" co-star and Hollywood veteran Robert De Niro at the ongoing Cannes Film Festival 2025.

De Niro was awarded the honorary Palme d'Or award for Lifetime Achievement at the festival on its opening day, May 13. Kher, who is returning to direction with his upcoming film "Tanvi The Great", shared a video on his Instagram handle on Friday.

In a lengthy note attached to the post, Kher congratulated the Hollywood actor for the award.

"In Cannes: Best hug from the greatest actor of all times! It was the most amazing feeling to meet my friend #RobertDeNiro, his graceful wife #Tiffany and their beautiful daughter #Gia in Cannes! Their love and affection touched me deeply," the actor wrote.

Kher said he showed the first poster of "Tanvi the Great" to De Niro which he appreciated. The actor also introduced his film's crew to D and also made him meet the crew of the film.

"Thank you dearest Mr. De Niro for your love, warmth, that wonderful hug, the delicious lunch and your infectious BRILLIANCE over the years! Having you as a friend is the biggest blessing I could have ever asked for! Also a big THANK YOU to dearest #Tiffany for your hospitality and generosity! And for shooting this video! Jai Ho! #RobertDeNiro #GodOfActing #Cinema #Friends," he added.

Kher's film will be screened in Cannes Market on Sunday. It is the second time for Kher to step into the director's shoes after his 2002 film "Om Jai Jagadish".

The Cannes Film Festival will conclude on May 24. (PTI)

Sidharth Malhotra's 'Vvan - Force of the Forrest' to release in May 2026

MUMBAI, May 16: Folk thriller movie "Vvan - Force of the Forrest", headlined by actor Sidharth Malhotra, will make its debut in Indian theatres on May 15, 2026, the makers announced on Friday.

The project, which hails from Ektaa R Kapoor's Balaji Telefilms Ltd and The Viral Fever (TVF), will be directed by Arunabh Kumar and Deepak Mishra of web series "Pan-chayat" fame.

"The forest has whispered. The force will be unleashed on 15th May, 2026! Get ready for the big screen adventure!" Balaji Telefilms posted on its official social media handles.

"Vvan - Force of the Forrest" also stars actor Tamannaah Bhatia.

The movie, which was earlier scheduled for release on Chhath Puja 2025, is the first project between Balaji Telefilms and TVF after they announced a creative partnership in 2023. (PTI)



My job is to terrify, determined insanity is the last thing you want coming after you: 'MI:8' villain Esai Morales

NEW DELHI, May 16: How does one play a compelling villain opposite an iconic hero like Tom Cruise's Ethan Hunt? It's like creating a Frankenstein where you put together pieces in a way that's credible without being obvious, says Esai Morales, who plays the suave and menacing antagonist in "Mission: Impossible - The Final Reckoning".

Morales debuted as Gabriel, a mysterious and highly dangerous man with a dark past tied to Cruise's spy agent Hunt, in 2023's "Mission: Impossible - Dead Reckoning". He reprises the role in the latest chapter "The Final Reckoning", set for release in India on Saturday.

"Sometimes the scariest people aren't the ones that yell or threaten. It's this cool dissociated psychopathy that is intelligent and determined... This kind of determined insanity is the last thing you want coming after you," Morales told PTI in an exclusive virtual interview.

The actor, also known for star-

ring in movies such as "Bad Boys" and "La Bamba" as well as OTT shows "Ozark" and "Tidans", said portraying a villainous character on screen is a game of borrowing and subtracting.

"It takes a lifetime of watching the human condition in order to create a character where you borrow from yourself and you add and subtract other elements. It's almost like a Frankenstein (monster) where you have pieces and you put them together in a way that's credible," the 62-year-old said.

As a villain, Morales said his aim was to portray someone so unsettling and chilling that audiences would be disturbed by even the idea of meeting a character like this in the real world. "Not everyone gets what you intend to do. So my job isn't to make it obvious. My job is to terrify, my job is to make you not want to encounter someone like this in real life. So I take account of what it is that scares me, what it is that makes me

scary. And I apply it," he said.

In "Dead Reckoning", Gabriel serves as the agent of The Entity, a powerful and rogue artificial intelligence that threatens global stability. And he is the one who will battle it out with Hunt for the control of the AI programme in "The Final Reckoning".

Gabriel's personal history with Hunt's past gives an emotional weight to their conflict, making him not just a villain but a personal nemesis for Cruise's character. Morales said he has deep respect for both Tom Cruise and director Christopher McQuarrie.

Cruise has headlined the franchise in eight films, starting with "Mission: Impossible" in 1996. He has followed it up with successful sequels — "Mission: Impossible 2" (2000), "Mission: Impossible III" (2006), "Mission: Impossible – Ghost Protocol" (2011), "Mission: Impossible – Rogue Nation" (2015), "Mission: Impossible – Fallout" (2018) and "Mission: Impossible –

Dead Reckoning" (2023).

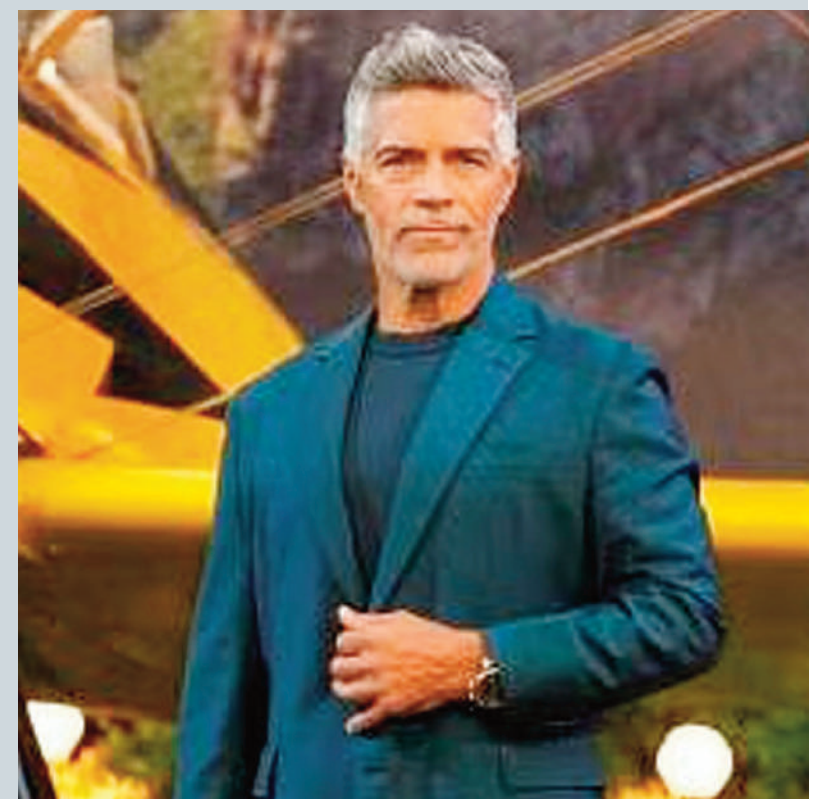
McQuarrie joined the franchise as the director with "Rogue Nation" and has been a regular ever since.

"You're talking about two people who've combined their efforts and created a team that will spare no expense. The joy that they take in creating joy for their audiences is infectious," Morales said.

"We have hard lives and we go to the movies to travel where we can't travel, to experience what we normally can't experience. So filming is kind of like creating another world that other people can tap into," he added.

According to Morales, the most suitable format for watching "The Final Reckoning" is IMAX, which is an "immersive experience".

"You're there and it's all around you. Every frame is designed to serve the story. And in certain cases there are little clues here and there that I think the audience will find fun," he said. (PTI)



THE MOMENT WHICH PUT OSCAR PIASTRI ON TRACK FOR F1 STARDOM WITH MCLAREN AS ALPINE STRUGGLES

IMOLA, May 16: It's the tweet that changed everything for Oscar Piastri.

A blunt 48-word message in 2022 paved the way for the Australian driver to lead the current Formula 1 standings with McLaren, rather than struggling to get into the top 10 with Alpine.

"I understand that, without my agreement, Alpine F1 have put out a press release late this afternoon that I am driving for them next year," Piastri wrote.

"This is wrong and I have not signed a contract with Alpine for 2023. I will not be driving for Alpine next year."

Nearly three years on from Piastri — who was then Alpine's

reserve — snubbing the team for McLaren in such a public way, it's clear he made the right choice. Piastri has won four of the six races this season and is on a streak of three wins in a row. He has 131 points this year, while Alpine has seven points in total and last won a race nearly four years ago.

Piastri is targeting a fourth consecutive win in the Emilia-Romagna Grand Prix on Sunday, but suspects the bumpy Imola track could mean tougher competition for McLaren than two weeks ago in Miami.

"When you've won four out of six, it's been a great start. I've been enjoying the success we've been having on track, but for me

what's been very satisfying is all the work we've done behind the scenes to achieve that," he said Thursday.

"It's quite a different feeling when you win a race because you feel like you've just gotten by or had good circumstances. But to now be winning because we have an incredibly quick car and I feel like I'm driving well, that's very satisfying."

Alpine's rocky season Alpine isn't challenging the top teams on pace but it's in pole position for drama.

The Renault-owned team had been expected for months to drop Australian driver Jack Doohan, a rookie, for the fast but inconsistent reserve Franco



Colapinto.

At the Miami Grand Prix, team principal Oliver Oakes dismissed that claim, but two days after the Miami race, Oakes suddenly resigned. A day later, Alpine dropped Doohan — whose best race result was 13th — after the Miami Grand Prix and promoted Colapinto.

The Argentine driver, a mid-season replacement at Williams in 2024, is happy to be back in F1 but expressed reservations Thursday about how the whole process has been handled.

Colapinto said it's "never nice circumstances" to get a seat at another driver's expense, and expressed concern his new deal — which only runs for five

races — isn't long enough to really show what he can do.

Italian fans have something to cheer

The first of two races in Italy this year is already delighting the home fans.

For the first time since 2021, they have an Italian driver in Mercedes' 18-year-old Kimi Antonelli, and Ferrari's red-clad tifosi fans get their first sight of Lewis Hamilton racing for the team on Italian soil.

Piastri, too, has been connect-

ing with his Italian heritage as he met with some "very, very distant relatives" and became an honorary citizen of Lucciana Nardi in Tuscany, where his family name originated. (AP)

IPL resumes with the RCB vs KKR face-off; Virat Kohli's outing in focus

BENGALURU, May 16: Brought to a halt by the recent India-Pakistan border tensions, the IPL will resume on Saturday with Royal Challengers Bengaluru taking on Kolkata Knight Riders in a high-stakes contest where the spotlight will firmly be on Virat Kohli following his recent Test retirement.

The unexpected 10-day break has left both the RCB and the KKR with different goals to achieve and common challenges to hurdle over.

The RCB are second on the table with 16 points from 11 matches, and a win here can propel them to the playoffs.

KKR are sixth on the table with 11 points from 12 games, and a slip-up will evaporate the defending champions' hopes of making the knockouts.

They are also faced with the challenging task of hitting the pre-break intensity straightaway at the Chinnaswamy stadium.

The hosts are coming off a four-match winning streak while the tourists have managed to stitch two victories in three matches before the league came to a grinding halt. Questions remain on whether they can regain that competitive edge after a passage of uncertainty.

But RCB are better-placed to surmount these difficulties, and the sight of skipper Rajat Patidar batting rather fluently at nets might



have soothed a lot of nerves.

Patidar had injured his finger during the home match against Chennai Super Kings, forcing him to wear a splint.

The hosts also have most of

their foreign recruits back in the hut after returning home in the wake of the Indo-Pak military face-off.

The likes of Phil Salt, Lungi Ngidi, Tim David, Liam Living-

stone and Romario Shepherd are available for this match and beyond.

The jarring notes will be the injury-enforced absence of Devdutt Padikkal and pacer Josh Hazle-

wood.

RCB will also hope that Mayank Agarwal, who has replaced Padikkal in the line-up, will rise to the occasion.

Hazlewood has a shoulder injury and the franchise has not yet given clarity on his availability.

However, the loudest cheers will be reserved for Kohli, who announced his retirement from Test cricket earlier this week.

If social media calls are anything to go by, the faithfuls are planning to don the white jersey to honour a batter who lorded over the traditional format.

However, Kohli does not require such external motivation to stoke his inner fire and, rest assured, the 36-year-old will be eager to churn out some impactful knocks, perhaps a silent riposte after a rather abruptly ending his Test career.

The Knight Riders, riddled with their own issues, might just be the opponents that Kohli needs to vent a few strands of frustration, if indeed there is any.

Batting has been KKR's Achilles Heel this season as apart from captain Ajinkya Rahane and young Angkrish Raghuvanshi, none of their batters have managed to contribute consistently.

They would like a few more runs from the bats of Venkatesh Iyer, Andre Russell and Rinku Singh. (PTI)

I would not have let Rohit miss Sydney Test: Ravi Shastri

NEW DELHI, May 16: Had he been the India coach on the previous tour of Australia, Ravi Shastri would not have allowed captain Rohit Sharma to drop himself from the Sydney Test despite loss of form.

Rohit had missed the first Test for personal reasons and did not feature in the last game of the series, taking a "selfless decision" as he could manage only 31 runs in the five innings he played on that 2024-25 tour.

India had lost the Test series 1-3.

Shastri said he spoke to Rohit during one of the IPL games this season and let him know how he would have handled the situation in Australia.

"I saw Rohit a lot at the toss. At the toss, you don't get enough time to speak. Though I did put my hand on his shoulder in one of the games, I think it was in Mumbai and told him, if I was coach you would have never not played that last Test match."

"You would have played that last Test match because the series wasn't over," Shastri said on the latest edition of the ICC Review.

Rohit recently retired from

the Test format, having quit T20 format earlier.

"And I'm not someone who threw in the towel with the scoreline 2-1. If your mindset is you feel you are at that's not the stage, you leave a team," said the former India head coach.

Shastri said he would've pushed for Rohit's inclusion in Sydney.

"That was a 30-40 run game. And that's exactly what I told him. The pitch was so spicy in Sydney. Whatever kind of form he was in, he's a match-winner," said Shastri.

"If he had gone, sensed the situation, sensed the condition and smashed it for even 35-40 at the top, you never know. That series would have been level. But that's each one to his own."

"Other people have different styles. This would have been my style and I let him know it. It's sitting in my heart for a long time. I had to get it out. And I told him that."

Both Rohit and Virat Kohli have quit the traditional format ahead of India's tour of England, marking the beginning of the new World Test Championship cycle. (PTI)

Was sad and angry when I was not picked and then called up as injury replacement: RCB skipper

BENGALURU, May 16: Rajat Patidar, who is leading Royal Challengers Bengaluru this IPL, revisited the 2022 season when he was left "sad" and "angry" after being ignored by the franchise despite assurances, only to be called up later as an injury replacement.

Patidar also admitted that being handed over the captaincy by the inimitable Virat Kohli ahead of IPL 2025 did put him under pressure, but supportive words from the legend calmed him.

Patidar has been one of RCB's middle-order mainstays this season, scoring 239 runs in 11 games as the southern franchise aims for a maiden men's IPL title.

"I had got a message (ahead of the mega auction for IPL 2022) that you be ready... that we will pick you. I had a little hope that I will get another chance (to play for RCB). But I wasn't picked in the mega auction. I was a little sad," said Patidar on an RCB Podcast.

However, the 31-year-old Madhya Pradesh cricketer didn't have to wait long to again wear the RCB colours as one of his state-mates got injured. But Patidar was not really keen on coming back to Bengaluru, knowing that he would hardly get an opportunity to play in a star-studded lineup.

"I (had) started playing in my local matches in Indore (after not getting picked in the auction). Then, I got a call that 'we are picking you as a replacement for Luvnith Sisodia', who was injured. To tell you frankly, I didn't want to come as a re-

placement because I knew that I won't get a chance to play there, and I always feel that I don't want to sit there (in dugout)."

"I wasn't angry. It was like, if they didn't pick me (during the auction), then I won't get it (get to play). I was angry for a while but then I was normal," said Patidar, who led Madhya Pradesh to the 2024-25 Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy final.

Being handed over the reins of a side that has the iconic Kohli in its ranks did put pressure on Patidar, but the star batter's backing gave him confidence.

"I had a lot of questions like, there are so many (big players) in the team. Virat Kohli is such a big player, how will you do it under him. I know how supportive he is about this (captaincy change)."

"I knew I have his full support. Like I said, this is a learning for me, it's an opportunity for me."

"So, I will learn as much as I can from him. Because no one has the experience and ideas that he has in every role -- be it batting, as an individual and as a captain," said Patidar.

The day he was unveiled as the RCB skipper was one of the most memorable days for Patidar and he says he went "completely blank" while receiving the plaque from Kohli.

"I have seen him (Kohli) since I started watching TV, in the IPL, off the field, in the Indian team... To take that thing (captaincy plaque) that he has been doing for so many years... and he is giving it to me with his own hands. (PTI)

8th Hangpan Dada Memorial District-Level Tournament kicks off

HT Correspondent

TAWANG, May 16: The 8th edition of the Hangpan Dada Memorial District-Level Tournament for under-16 boys and girls in football and volleyball was officially inaugurated on Thursday at the Gyalwa Tsangyang Gyatso High Altitude Stadium, here. The grand opening ceremony witnessed the presence of a host of dignitaries and community leaders.

The tournament was formally inaugurated by Tawang MLA Namgye Tsering, in the presence of Tawang Deputy Commis-

sioner Kanki Darang; Incharge District Sports Officer Sangey Tsering; president of Monpa Mimang Tsogpa, Tawang Unit Pema Chowang; secretary general of Tawang Monpa Employees Society Kesang Norbu; and District President of NPP Phurpa Lama, along with other senior public leaders and officials. In his inaugural address, MLA Namgye Tsering paid rich tribute to Hangpan Dada, the valiant soldier who laid down his life in service to the nation. He urged the youth to draw inspiration from the life and sacrifice of Hangpan Dada

and commit themselves to the nation's progress and unity. He also extended heartfelt gratitude to the State Government for instituting the tournament in Hangpan Dada's memory. The MLA also used the platform to call upon the youth to shun drugs and take pride in keeping their surroundings clean. "Tawang being a prominent tourist destination, maintaining cleanliness is essential for sustainable tourism," he emphasized.

A total of six boys' and two girls' football teams, and two boys' and two girls' volley-

ball teams are participating in this year's edition of the tournament, promising a thrilling display of sportsmanship and talent from across the district.

The inaugural U-16 Boys' Football match saw Tawang team defeating Mogto team with a convincing 5-0 scoreline. In the U-16 Girls' Volleyball match, Lungta team clinched victory against Tawang, winning both sets 25-11 and 25-9. The tournament not only honors the memory of a national hero but also serves as a platform to nurture young sporting talent in the district.

Schauffele, Scheffler have rounds muddled by double bogeys at PGA Championship

CHARLOTTE (USA), May 16: The PGA Championship put the top three players in the world together for the first time in three years on Thursday and the conversation turned to mud.

Scottie Scheffler and Xander Schauffele each had clumps of mud on their golf balls from the middle of the 16th fairway — the hardest hole at Quail Hollow — and saw their shots curve hard to the left, over the green and into the water, leading to double bogeys. It was like that for most of the day, the product on a course that has been soaked by heavy showers in the three days leading up to the second major of the year, and more rain from late last week. The PGA of America put out a notice on the eve of the first round saying that the ball would be played as it lies because the turf was "outstanding and drying by the hour."

"We are looking forward to an exciting opening round," the statement said.

Maybe just not this variety.

"It's frustrating to hit the ball in

the middle of the fairway and get mud on it and have no idea where it's going to go," said Scheffler, the No. 1 player in golf the last two years. "I understand it's part of the game, but there's nothing more frustrating for a player. You spend your whole life trying to learn how to control a golf ball, and due to a rules decision all of a sudden you have absolutely no control over where that golf ball goes. "But I don't make the rules," he said. "I just have to deal with the consequences."

He managed a 2-under 69, helped by twice holing shots from off the green — a chip-in from deep rough behind the 12th green (after another mud ball from the fairway), and putting in from just off the green at the par-5 15th for eagle.

And then came the double bogey — by each player in the marquee group — on the 16th.

"I did a good job of battling back today and not letting a bad break like that — which cost me a couple shots — get to me," Scheffler said. "Did a good job

battling after that and posting a decent score."

Schauffele, the No. 3 player in the world and defending PGA champion, opened with a 1-over 72 and was leaning back in a leather chair in the locker room when he looked up and saw television replaying his shot on the 16th. He was aiming beyond the bunker right of the green and figures he probably should have been aiming toward where the gallery was watching.

"A lot of guys are dealing with it, but it's just unfortunate to be hitting good shots and to pay them off that way. It's kind of stupid," he said.

McIlroy shot 74 and the Masters champion declined to speak to the media. He might not have been a good authority on mud balls because McIlroy was rarely in the fairway, hitting only four of them for the round.

He also made double bogey on the 16th because of a different kind of conditions. McIlroy hit so far left that he was beyond the fairway down a grassy hill, the

golf ball well above his shoes. As he tried to swing, his left foot spun out and he was lucky to make contact, advancing it some 30 yards, still in the rough.

Nos. 1, 2 and 3 in the world all made a 6.

"I kept the honor with making a double on a hole, and I think that will probably be the first and last time I do that in my career unless we get some crazy weather conditions," Scheffler said. That made him laugh. Little else did, particularly the decision to play the ball down. The U.S. Open never allows players to lift, clean and place the golf balls in the short grass. The PGA Championship did once during a rain-soaked week at Baltusrol in 2016. Scheffler and Schauffele argued that Quail Hollow is pristine enough that cleaning mud off golf balls would not allow for a better lie than if it were dry.

He said American courses — different from links golf for the British Open — are overseeded and lush and are bound to pick up mud, particularly when the sun

returns after heavy rain.

"I understand how a golf purist would be, Oh, play it as it lies." But I don't think they understand what it's like literally working your entire life to learn how to hit a golf ball and control it and hit shots and control distance, and all of a sudden due to a rules decision that is completely taken away from us by chance," Scheffler said. "In golf, there's enough luck throughout a 72-hole tournament that I don't think the story should be whether or not the ball is played up or down," he said. "When I look at golf tournaments, I want the purest, fairest test of golf, and in my opinion maybe the ball today should have been played up."

Schauffele disliked the idea of hitting the fairway and having a 50-50 chance at a good shot from there because of mud splashes. Toward the end of his round, he was happy to have mud on the top of his golf ball instead of the sides. Then it was only a matter of how it would affect distance instead of direction. (AP)



Government of Assam
Panchayat & Rural Development
Department

Unabated Development IN ASSAM



Shri Narendra Modi
Prime Minister

Central Function of

Grihapravesh of 55,000 PMAY-G Houses

Launch of 'Lakhimi Mistri'

(Women Mason initiative under PMAY-G)

Various programmes of ASRLM & Department of Agriculture



Chief Guest

Shri Shivraj Singh Chouhan

Union Minister of Agriculture, Farmers Welfare and Rural Development
Government of India

Guest of Honour

Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma

Chief Minister, Assam

In the august presence of

Shri Atul Bora

Minister, Agriculture, Horticulture etc.
Assam

Shri Ranjeet Kumar Dass

Minister, Panchayat & Rural Development etc.
Assam

Venue: Srimanta Sankaradeva Kalakshetra Panjabari, Guwahati

17 May 2025

1:00 PM

Published by Panchayat and Rural Development Department, Assam

DIPR /DF/HLT/213/17-May-25