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## Assam Rights panel directed to conduct probe

**SC take up plea for investigation of over 171 police encounters in Assam between May 2021 and August 2022**

**NEW DELHI, May 28:** The Supreme Court on Wednesday directed the Assam Human Rights Commission (AHRC) to conduct an independent probe into police encounter cases where proper procedure was allegedly not followed in the state between May 2021 and August 2022.

A bench of Justices Surya Kant and N Kotiswar Singh, which disposed of a plea alleging fake encounters by Assam Police, said that though a few specific instances might warrant further evaluation, a blanket direction based on a mere compilation of cases was not justified. The plea sought an independent investigation into over 171 police encounters in Assam between May 2021 and August 2022.

The bench said among many cases flagged by petitioner Arif Md Yeasin Jwadder for alleged non-compliance with procedural guide-



lines laid down by the court in 2014 on the investigation into encounters, most appear to be factually incorrect.

Barring a few of the cases, it was difficult to conclude that there were flagrant violations of guidelines, the court said.

"We entrust this matter to Assam

HRC for necessary enquiry, independently and expeditiously. It must be ensured that victims and family members are given a fair opportunity," the bench said and directed the Commission headed by a retired high court chief justice to issue a public notice inviting claims of the aggrieved, while en-

suring confidentiality.

The top court granted liberty to the AHRC to initiate further investigations into the allegations of fake encounters and asked the Assam government to extend co-operation and remove any institutional barriers in the inquiry process.

It asked the AHRC to safeguard the privacy of the complainants and to approach the matter with sensitivity. It directed the Assam State Legal Services Authority to provide legal aid to the kin of victims of alleged fake encounters.

On February 25, the top court had reserved its verdict on the plea alleging fake police encounters in Assam and non-adherence to the 2014 guidelines. The Assam government has told the top court that the 2014 guidelines for investigating police encounters were duly followed in (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Gaurav's wife collected IB reports for Pak agency, alleges Himanta

**GUWAHATI, May 28:** Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday alleged that Congress leader Gaurav Gogoi's British wife was collecting various classified government documents on behalf of the Pakistani climate lobby.

Addressing a press conference here, Sarma claimed that the state government has documentary evidence to back up the allegation about Gogoi and his wife's close ties with Pakistan, and he will reveal everything publicly by September 10.

Sarma made the remark hours after the newly appointed Assam Congress chief debunked claims that he had alleged links with the Pakistani establishment and that the ruling party was raking up the issue like a "C-grade Bollywood movie" that is going to "flop miserably".

"His wife monitored Intelligence Bureau (IB) documents and quoted those in her reports. That



means she must have someone in the IB. It is a very serious allegation. I have documents to prove that his wife Elizabeth Colburn was involved in collecting various intelligence reports," the CM claimed.

Sarma said she worked for the climate lobby and had a close relationship with Pakistan.

Talking about Gogoi, Sarma

said, "He is out-and-out a Pakistani agent. Both husband and wife are deeply involved in anti-India activities. Their entire relationship was with the Pakistani establishment... They maintained this relationship till around 2017-18."

Sarma also claimed that the Congress' Pakistan lobby colluded to replace Bhupen Kumar Borah with Gogoi (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Mizoram Gov VK Singh meets Himanta, Assam governor in Guwahati

**GUWAHATI, May 28:** Mizoram Governor VK Singh on Wednesday met his Assam counterpart Lakshman Prasad Acharya and chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma in Guwahati and discussed issues concerning the two states.

Singh met them separately at the Raj Bhavan in Guwahati.

Acharya said a meaningful dialogue took place on cultural diversity, social structure and inclusive development of both states. He said that he had recently congratulated Singh on the historic achievement of Mizoram, becoming the first fully literate state in the country.

"Had the pleasure of meeting Hon'ble Shri Lakshman Prasad Acharya Ji, Governor of Assam. Grateful for the warm hospitality and enriching conversation," Singh said in a post on X. Sarma said, in his meeting with the Mizoram governor, matters related to development and greater coordination between the two states were discussed.

"Discussions focused on enhancing development initiatives and fostering greater coordination on matters of mutual interest between Assam and Mizoram," the Assam Chief Minister's Office (CMO) (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Assam govt will give arms licence to indigenous people in 'vulnerable' areas: CM

**GUWAHATI, May 28:** The Assam government will give arms licences to indigenous people living in "vulnerable and remote" areas for instilling a sense of security in them, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Wednesday.

Addressing a press conference here, Sarma said the decision was taken at a meeting of the state cabinet after reviewing the "demand" of the people living in these areas.

"Assam is a very different and sensitive state. Assamese people living in some areas have been feeling insecure and they have been demanding arms licences for a long time," he said.

"The government will be lenient in giving licences to eligible people, who have to be original inhabitants and must belong to the indigenous community living in vulnerable and remote areas of the state," he added.

Sarma said some of the districts in this category are Dhubri, Morigaon, Barpeta, Nagaon and South Salmara-Mankachar.

"Our people are the minority in these places," he said. (PTI)

## Gaurav Gogoi's remarks on PM politically motivated, affront to NE pride: Sonowal

**NEW DELHI, May 28:** Union minister Sarbananda Sonowal on Wednesday condemned Congress leader Gaurav Gogoi's for his remarks on Prime Minister Modi saying his words are not just politically motivated but are an affront to the pride and aspirations of the people of the northeastern region.

Sonowal said under Modi's leadership, the Northeast has, for the first time since Independence, witnessed genuine respect, recognition and rapid development.

"No other Prime Minister has integrated the Northeast so decisively into the national mainstream, without ever diluting our unique identity," he wrote on X. Sonowal said that at a press conference, Gogoi, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



## Cong cites auto sales figures, claims most Indians locked out of consumption economy

**NEW DELHI, May 28:** Flagging reported drop in the share of passenger cars in the overall auto sales, the Congress on Wednesday claimed that it points to a state of the economy where most Indians are locked out of the consumption economy, there is growing inequality, stagnant incomes and weak investment.

Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh shared a media report which claimed that while the middle class is increasingly unable to transition from two-wheelers to entry-level cars, the sport utility vehicle (SUV) segment is recording a rising share of first-time buyers.

There was no immediate response from the government or the BJP on the claims.

"India Inc is raising the siren once again -? This time for auto sales. In 2018-19, passenger cars made up 65% of total sales of vehicles -? that share is now only 31%. SUVs and multi-purpose vehicles now account for 65% of sales," Ramesh said in a post on X.

Noting that car sales have long been considered an indicator of the econ-

omy's health, Ramesh said the last few years have seen a "decoupling" of the two with medium GDP growth been accompanied by concerning low growth in car sales.

"Buyers are increasingly turning towards the used car market. Auto manufacturers are now producing with an eye on export markets rather than domestic markets," he claimed on X.

"What does this say about the state

of the economy? Most Indians are locked out of the consumption economy -? About 88% of Indian households earn less than Rs 12 lakh annually," Ramesh said. Flagging the issue of "growing inequality", Ramesh said the surging sales of expensive SUVs compared to the stagnant sales of passenger cars points to the elite gaining a disproportionate share of the economy's growth.

He alleged that there was "pernicious inequality" with most lower and middle-income consumers stuck in their current income segments and are unable to rise out of them. Flagging the issue of stagnant incomes, Ramesh said the auto sales figures also reflect that the lower (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



## The city authorities are closely monitoring the situation Heavy to extremely heavy rainfall expected in Assam during next 2-3 days: IMD

**GUWAHATI, May 28:** The India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Wednesday predicted inclement weather across Assam over next 24 hours with the likelihood of heavy to extremely heavy rainfall in western and southern parts of the state in the next 2-3 days.

The weather pattern suggests that a well-marked low pressure area over Northwest Bay of Bengal off Odisha coast at 0830 hours IST on Wednesday with associated cyclonic circulation extending up to 7.6 km above mean sea level tilting southwards with height, an official release by the IMD said.

It is likely to move northwards and concentrate into a depression over North Bay of



Bengal during the next 24 hours, triggering heavy to extremely heavy rain accompanied by thunderstorms and lightnings in the western and southern districts, it added.

The districts include Cachar, Hailakandi, Sribhumi, Dhubri, South Salmara, Goal-

para, Barpeta, Bongaigaon, West Karbi Anglong, Kokrajhar, Chirang, Bajali, Baksa, Tamulpur, Nalbari, Kamrup (Metro), Kamrup, Darang, Udalguri, Marigaon, Nagaon, Hajo, Sonitpur and Dima Hasao.

In Guwahati city, continu-

ous downpours could aggravate waterlogging, slow vehicular movement, and increase the risk of tree falls and localised landslides in vulnerable pockets. The city authorities are closely monitoring the situation and emergency response systems are being kept on alert, the release added. The Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA) has urged people across the state and residents of Guwahati city, in particular, to take necessary precautions and remain vigilant.

Daily commuters and long-distance travellers are requested to plan their routines accordingly, avoiding unnecessary movement during periods of intense rainfall, the release added. (PTI)

### ADVERTISEMENT



#### PREVENTION OPTIONS FOR DENGUE INFECTIONS



Dengue fever, a mosquito-borne viral infection, remains a significant health threat. In 2023, India reported 2.89 lakh cases and 485 deaths. As of 2024, over 700 dengue cases were reported in Kamrup Metro

Dengue is spread through the bite of the female mosquito (*Aedes aegypti*) and *Aedes albopictus*. When a mosquito bites a person with dengue, it gets the virus. Then, when it bites a healthy person, it passes on the infection and can cause symptoms ranging from mild to life-threatening. There are 4 serotypes of Dengue Virus which occur in India.

Dengue fever can severely impact pregnant women, young children, and senior citizens. The illness often leads to loss of workdays and financial strain due to medical costs. In some cases, it can also lead to the loss of loved ones, making it a serious public health concern.

There is no specific treatment for dengue, preventive measures like using mosquito repellent, eliminating stagnant water, and wearing protective clothing can help reduce the risk. However, these measures have limitations, including the difficulty of completely eliminating mosquito breeding sites and inconsistent adherence to preventive practices.

Vaccination is a critical tool in the fight against dengue. Effective vaccines can provide long-lasting immunity, reducing severe cases and overall transmission. Currently, there is no licensed vaccine available in India to prevent dengue. Several vaccines are under development and research is ongoing.

In Brazil, a Dengue Vaccine Trial made by Butantan was conducted in 2016 and included 16,235 healthy children and adults (aged 2 to 59 yrs). They received a single dose of vaccine. This trial found that the vaccine in children and adults is safe and effective in preventing against two serotypes of Dengue DEN1 and DEN2 in Brazil. Since Brazil had not reported any cases of DEN3 and DEN4 infections until the first report was published, we don't know yet about this.

The Indian 'DengiAll' vaccine is very similar to Butantan Dengue vaccine. The Phase I and Phase II trials of 'DengiAll' vaccine were conducted in India and it was found to be safe and blood tests showed that after taking vaccine people developed immune response against all four dengue serotypes.

Currently, the Phase III trial of 'DengiAll' is ongoing across multiple sites in 18 states in India, aiming to test and understand if the vaccine is effective in preventing dengue (all four serotypes of the dengue virus) and if it's safe. In this trial, 10335 healthy adults will be enrolled in which 6890 participants will receive 'DengiAll' vaccine and 3445 participants will receive Placebo (It looks like a vaccine but does not contain any active ingredients). More than 2300 participants have already been enrolled in the trial and there are no concerns about safety at this time.

India will only get a dengue vaccine if people come forward to take part in this important study. By participating in this trial, individuals can contribute to the development of a new, safe, and effective dengue vaccine, helping to protect our community and support the fight against dengue.

For more information, please contact Project Research Scientist 1, Phone no: 7002770188. **DIPR /D/HLT/18/29-May-25**



## Possibility of interim trade deal between India, US by June 25: Sources

**NEW DELHI, May 28:** With a team of US officials expecting to visit India next month for trade talks, there is a possibility that the two countries may agree on an interim trade pact by June 25, sources said.

"Talks are moving. Things are on track," they said.

India's chief negotiator, Special Secretary in the Department of Commerce Rajesh Agrawal, concluded his four-day visit to Washington last week. He held talks with his US counterpart on the proposed agreement.

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal was also in Washington last week to give an impetus to trade talks. He met with US Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick twice during his visit.

Both sides are looking at an interim trade deal before the first tranche of the proposed bilateral trade agreement (BTA) as the USA's 26 per cent reciprocal tariff on India is suspended till July 9 this year. It was imposed by the US on April 2.

However, Indian goods still attract the 10 per cent baseline tariff



imposed by America.

In the interim trade deal, New Delhi is pushing for full exemption from the 26 per cent reciprocal tariff on domestic goods.

Both countries have fixed a deadline to conclude the first phase of the proposed BTA by the fall (September-October) of this year.

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.

The two trading partners look to more than double bilateral trade to USD 500 billion by 2030.

According to a report by the finance ministry, a successful US-India bilateral trade agreement could flip current headwinds into tailwinds, opening up new market access and energising exports.

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, and agriculture items such as apples, tree nuts and GM (genetically modified) crops.

While the import of GM crops from the US continues to remain a non-starter due to regulatory norms in India, New Delhi is open to import non-GM products like Alpha alpha hay (a kind of cattle feed), (PTI)

## Nippon India MF eyes deeper retail play, expansion in smaller cities to fuel growth

**KOLKATA, May 28:** Nippon India Mutual Fund (MF) is betting big on deeper retail penetration and expansion in smaller towns to double its investor base to 5 crore over the next 7-8 years, a top official said on Wednesday.

The fund house is particularly bullish on eastern India, where growth continues to outpace the national average, the official added. While the overall mutual fund industry in the region grew 20 per cent year-on-year, Nippon India clocked over 27 per cent growth, with Systematic Investment Plan (SIP) inflows rising 55 per cent in FY24, significantly ahead of the industry's 38 per cent in the region and 34 per cent nationwide.

"Our strategy is clear, we want to go deeper into the retail market, especially in emerging and underpenetrated regions. That's where India's growth lies. Our current investor base is 2 crore out of 6 crore MF unique investors," said Sundeep Sikka, Executive Director and CEO, Nippon India Mutual Fund.

"Nippon India is the largest foreign mutual fund in India. What sets us apart is that we have grown the fastest among the top five, despite not having a banking sponsor," he added.

The fund house added 82 lakh investors in FY24, outpacing several bank-sponsored asset management companies (AMCs), and recorded a 27 per cent year-

on-year growth in assets under management (AUM), he said. With 269 branches nationwide, Nippon India has established a robust presence in eastern India, operating in 50 locations across 11 states and has achieved what it calls a "triple milestone" in the region: ₹ 50,000 crore in AUM, 50 lakh investor folios, and 50 physical touchpoints in FY'25, Sikka added.

"Key cities like Kolkata, Patna and Ranchi have seen phenomenal three-year SIP growth - 170 per cent, 159 per cent, and 162 per cent, respectively - far outpacing industry averages," Sikka said.

Retail AUM in the east has grown by 29 per cent over the past three years, against the industry average of 25 per cent, with cities such as Bhubaneswar and Durgapur outpacing metros like Delhi and Mumbai in growth rates, he added.

Sikka attributed the strong momentum to greater awareness, investor education and a growing shift from unorganised savings to formal investment avenues in tier-II and tier-III cities.

On the product front, Nippon India is maintaining a focus on simplicity - prioritising existing offerings and SIPs over frequent new fund launches.

"We're not in a hurry to flood the market with NFOs. Our aim is long-term, sustainable investor growth," Sikka said. (PTI)

## TCG Crest plans university focused on fundamental, translational research

**KOLKATA, May 28:** TCG Crest, part of The Chatterjee Group (TCG) founded by industrialist Purnendu Chatterjee, on Wednesday announced plans to establish a university focused on both fundamental and translational research.

In a statement, TCG Crest (TCG Centres for Research and Education in Science and Technology) said the initiative aims to leverage

India's talent pool, fostering capabilities and capacities that align with national interest and contribute to the creation of new jobs in key sectors of the economy.

The education ministry, following an advisory from the UGC, has awarded TCG Crest the status of a Deemed to be University under the 'distinct category', the statement added.

Founder Chatterjee said, "Scien-

tific and technological advancement is essential for improving the human condition and for strengthening India's national security, driving economic growth and alleviating poverty".

Located in Kolkata, TCG Crest will build its academic structure on a foundation of advanced research centres and will subsequently introduce PhD, masters and undergraduate programmes. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

## Assam Rights panel directed

the state and that any unnecessary targeting of security forces was demoralising. The Assam government had said the Supreme Court's guidelines for the investigation of police encounters in the 2014 case of PULV. Maharashtra were being "followed to the hilt" and questioned the bonafide of the petitioner Arif Md Yeasin Jwadder. On February 4, the top court said it couldn't get into the merit of the alleged 171 police encounters but would only see whether its guidelines on such extra-judicial killings were duly followed.

The petitioner has challenged a January 2023 order of the Gauhati High Court, which dismissed a PIL over the encounters by Assam Police. In its order, the high court referred to an affidavit of the Assam government stating that 171 incidents took place between May 2021 and August 2022 in which 56 people died, including four in custody, and 145 were injured. On October 22, last year, the top court termed the situation "very serious" and sought details, including on the probe conducted in these matters.

In July 2023, it sought responses from the Assam government and others on the plea challenging the high court order. The petitioner claimed before the high court that over 80 "fake encounters" were conducted by Assam Police from May 2021 till the filing of the writ petition, resulting in 28 deaths. (PTI)

## Gaurav's wife collected IB

as the Assam chief of the opposition party. He questioned the Lok Sabha MP that why didn't he admit to visiting Pakistan before assuming the new role of Assam Congress president or during the panchayat elections campaign last month. "Rahul Gandhi will regret this appointment on September 10. He (Gogoi) has no shame at all. I have never seen such a shameless person in politics ever. He publicly admits that his wife and both children are foreigners, and cares for nobody!" Sarma quipped. "In a family of four, three are not Indian citizens. What nationalistic views are you going to propagate?... The entire Congress will have to suffer the consequences of the decision he has taken for the party's Assam unit," he added.

Sarma claimed that Rahul Gandhi has always promoted "Pakistan-lovers" in the party. "Congress always patronises pro-Pakistan stance. Rahul Gandhi and Gaurav Gogoi had opposed the purchase of Rafale. Now imagine what would have been our situation if we did not have the aircraft during Operation Sindoor?" he questioned. Asked about Gogoi's statement earlier during the day that he had gone to Pakistan only once 12 years ago when his wife was working there, Sarma said, "His visit that I am talking about is not related to wife at all. It was a standalone visit on the invitation of the Interior Ministry of Pakistan."

He also claimed that Gogoi surrendered the Indian passport of his son in 2021, when he was seven years old, but his daughter was born in England.

"We are going to take action on September 10. This is related to national security... It has no relation with elections, which will come and go," Sarma asserted. The BJP leader also wondered if Gogoi had informed his father, former CM Tarun Gogoi, about his visit to Pakistan as he was heading the state government at that time. "If Tarun Gogoi knew it, did he inform the Special Branch and did his son go through the debriefing process? Because whenever anyone visits an enemy nation, debriefing takes place," he added. The Assam CM and the BJP have been attacking Gogoi over his wife's alleged connection with Pakistan's spy agency ISI.

He had claimed that Colburn had travelled 19 times between India and Pakistan. Hitting back hard, Gogoi slammed Sarma over his accusation of the MP's alleged Pakistani links and questioned his mental state due to issues at the home front. He even said the CM's remarks were "ridiculous, baseless, insane and nonsense" and that he was behaving like an "IT cell troll" without talking with facts. (PTI)

## Mizoram Guv VK Singh meets

posted on X. Singh said he had an engaging discussion with Sarma on development, governance, and national interest. "His (Sarma's) commitment to Assam's progress is truly commendable. Wishing him continued success in serving the people," he posted on X.

Meanwhile, Sarma also held a separate meeting with Acharya and briefed him about the various initiatives being taken by his government. "Always a privilege to call upon Hon'ble Governor Shri @Laxmanacharya54 ji. I briefed him on the various initiatives underway in the state to uplift the people and give a thrust to development," he posted on X. Sarma returned to the state after a five-day visit to New Delhi, where he attended a slew of programmes, including the NITI Aayog meeting and the NDA CMs' conclave. (PTI)

## Gaurav Gogoi's remarks on PM

the MP from Jorhat, made some outrageous and deeply disrespectful remarks about the prime minister and the Northeast. At the press conference, Gogoi said he read somewhere that Modi, while referring to China, "made light of the physical features of the people of China, especially with respect to the shape and size of their eyes". "Let me educate the honourable prime minister that when young men and women, boys and girls from the Northeast come to the different parts of India, they are often teased for the very same physical features. This kind of language only perpetuates the harassment and the language that are used to taunt and tease the people of the Northeast," Gogoi said. "The prime minister should be sensitive on these matters because these matters have caused a lot of trauma to young people of the Northeast," he added.

Reacting to the comments, Sonowal said, "His (Gogoi's) words are not just politically motivated, they are an affront to the pride and aspirations of the people of this region." The union minister of ports, shipping and waterways said from signing historic peace accords to rolling out transformative infra projects, the progress is visible, measurable and irreversible.

It is Modi ji's deep affection for the Northeast that is turning our region into India's Gateway to Southeast Asia and the New Engine of national growth," he said. Sonowal said Gogoi would do well to remember that the Assamese 'gamosa' that he wears with pride has been elevated to a global symbol of culture and dignity by Modi himself, through tireless efforts to honour and showcase the traditions of people of Assam.

He claimed over six decades, the Congress ecosystem kept the Northeast in deliberate neglect and isolation. "Today, by making such vile remarks, it has once again shown its true face. I strongly condemn Gaurav Gogoi's statement, and demand that he apologise unconditionally to the people of the Northeast," he said. (PTI)

## Govt committed to development

road, which are expected to significantly improve connectivity in the region. The memorandum includes demands for the completion of a mini stadium at Hongkram, improved road connectivity for Hongkram, construction of a zonal office building for the Rongkhang Karbi Cultural Society along with land allocation, and the provision of potable drinking water and electricity.

Earlier in the day, more than 1,000 opposition workers from the Congress, Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC), and All Party Hills Leaders Conference (APHLC) formally joined the BJP.

## Cong cites auto sales figures

and middle classes are seeing their incomes stagnating amidst medium to high inflation. He further claimed that it also showed weak investment. "Weak consumption in the domestic economy means manufacturers have no incentive to set up new factories or create new capacity for domestic markets," Ramesh said. (PTI)

## Home Kouzina launches contest to find India's favourite family masala

**HT Bureau GUWAHATI, May 28:** Home Kouzina, a home-grown brand known for spotlighting authentic dishes by home chefs, has officially launched a nationwide initiative to discover India's most treasured family spice blends.

According to an official statement, the 'Family Recipe Contest' aims to celebrate the country's rich culinary traditions by inviting home chefs and cooking enthusiasts to share original masala recipes that have been passed down through generations.

The contest, which is open until June 14, 2025, encourages participants to submit their unique family masala mixes—whether it's a single-dish defining blend or a versatile spice mix used in everyday cooking.

The only requirement: the recipe must be an original creation and not a store-bought formulation.

Anita Sahoo, Founder and CEO of Home Kouzina, said in the statement, "At Home Kouzina, we believe the most soulful food isn't found in restaurants—it's crafted in family kitchens. With the 'Family Recipe Contest', we aim to bring hidden spice treasures into the national spotlight and celebrate the home chefs who preserve these culinary traditions." Entries can be submitted through the brand's official website or Instagram handle.

The first 50 entries will receive special vouchers redeemable for Home Kouzina's range of spices and pickles.

The winning recipe will be featured on the company's platform, making it available to food lovers across the country.

Additionally, the winner will receive a holiday to Kerala, India's spice capital.

Participants can nominate themselves or others, as long as the entry is an original family recipe.

The contest aims to honour the passion and heritage behind India's home-cooked flavours, offering a unique platform for culinary legacies to reach a wider audience.

## Stock markets close lower for 2<sup>nd</sup> day; Sensex down 239 pts as ITC tanks over 3 pc

**MUMBAI, May 28:** Stock markets declined for the second straight day on Wednesday with benchmark Sensex falling by 239 points dragged by losses in FMCG major ITC.

The 30-share BSE barometer declined 239.31 points or 0.29 per cent to settle at 81,312.32. During the day, it lost 307.61 points or 0.37 per cent to 81,244.02.

The 50-issue NSE Nifty dropped 73.75 points or 0.30 per cent to close at 24,752.45.

Analysts said the key indices remained largely range-bound ahead of the monthly expiry on Thursday and the release of GDP and industrial production data. FMCG, auto, and pharma shares declined while banking, mainly PSUs, media and energy shares advanced.

Among Sensex stocks, ITC fell over 3 per cent after British multinational BAT trimmed its ownership in the conglomerate by divesting a 2.5 per cent stake for ₹ 12,927 crore (USD 1.51 billion) through a block deal.

IndusInd Bank, Nestle, UltraTech Cement, Mahindra & Mahindra, Power Grid, Asian Paints, Sun Pharma and Tech Mahindra were also among the laggards.

Bajaj Finance, Bharti Airtel, ICICI Bank, Adani Ports and HCL

Tech were among the gainers.

"The domestic indices remained rangebound with a negative bias, primarily due to the lack of support from FIIs and prevailing premium valuations. A lingering concern over India-US trade relations following the end of the 90-day pause period continues to pose an external risk," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Limited, said.

The BSE smallcap gauge climbed 0.50 per cent while mid-cap index dipped 0.22 per cent.

Among sectoral indices, FMCG dropped the most by 1.33 per cent, followed by metal (0.69 per cent), auto (0.67 per cent), consumer durables (0.58 per cent), commodities (0.52 per cent) and consumer discretionary (0.51 per cent).

Financial Services, industrials, telecommunication, bankex, capital goods, services and tech were the gainers.

"Markets were extremely rangebound with a negative bias as weak European cues and domestic monthly F&O expiry on Thursday prompted investors to trim their holdings. The minutes of the US FOMC (Federal Open Market Committee) meeting held in early May will provide some hint to the markets on the direction of the interest rates going ahead," Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said.

Ajit Mishra SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd said that despite stable global cues and favourable domestic factors, the market is being weighed down by inconsistent FII inflows, which is reflected in the recent increase in volatility.

In Asian markets, South Korea's Kospi settled in the positive territory while Japan's Nikkei 225 index, Shanghai's SSE Composite index and Hong Kong's Hang Seng ended lower.

Markets in Europe were trading lower.

US markets ended sharply higher on Tuesday. Nasdaq Composite jumped 2.47 per cent, S&P 500 surged 2.05 per cent and Dow Jones Industrial Average climbed 1.78 per cent.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth ₹ 348.45 crore on Tuesday, according to exchange data.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.69 per cent to USD 64.57 a barrel.

On Tuesday, the BSE Sensex dropped 624.82 points or 0.76 per cent to settle at 81,551.63. The Nifty declined 174.95 points or 0.70 per cent to 24,826.20. (PTI)

## Industrial output growth slips to 2.7 pc in April, dragged by mining, power sectors

**NEW DELHI, May 28:** India's industrial production growth slowed to 2.7 per cent in April 2025 due to poor performance of manufacturing, mining and power sectors, according to official data released on Wednesday.

The factory output, measured in terms of the Index of Industrial Production (IIP), rose by 5.2 per cent in April 2024, the data showed.

The National Statistics Office (NSO) also revised upwards industrial production growth for March to 3.9 per cent from the earlier estimate of 3 per cent released last month. The IIP growth was 2.7 in February also.

The NSO data showed that the manufacturing sector's output growth slightly decelerated to 3.4 per cent in April 2025 from 4.2 per cent in the year-ago month.

Mining production contracted by 0.2 per cent as against a growth of 6.8 per cent a year ago.

Power output growth also slowed to 1 per cent in April 2025 against 10.2 per cent in the year-ago period. As per use-based classification, the capital goods segment growth accelerated to 20.3 per cent in April 2025 from 2.8 per cent in the year-ago period.

Consumer durables (or white goods production) grew 6.4 per cent during the reporting month against a growth of 10.5 per cent in April 2024.

In April 2025, consumer non-durables output contracted 1.7 per cent compared to a decline of 2.5 per cent a year ago.

Infrastructure/construction goods reported a growth of 4 per cent in April 2025, down from an 8.5 per cent expansion in the year-ago period.

The data also showed that the output of primary goods contracted by 0.4 per cent in April 2025 against 7 per cent growth a year earlier. (PTI)

## British American Tobacco sells 2.5 pc stake in ITC for ₹ 12,941 crore

**NEW DELHI, May 28:** British multinational BAT Plc on Wednesday trimmed its shareholding in conglomerate ITC by divesting a 2.5 per cent stake for ₹ 12,941 crore through open market transactions.

After the stake sale, BAT's shareholding has dropped to 22.94 per cent in FMCG major ITC from 25.44 per cent earlier. The British firm, however, still remains a significant shareholder of ITC.

According to the bulk deal data available with the NSE, Tobacco Manufacturers (India) Ltd, an arm of British American Tobacco (BAT), offloaded a total of 31.30 crore equity shares, representing a 2.5 per cent stake in ITC.

The shares were sold in the price range of ₹ 413.12 per share to ₹ 413.78 apiece. The total transaction value was ₹ 12,940.98 crore.

After the stake sale, Tobacco Manufacturers (India) Ltd's stake in ITC declined to 17.81 per cent from 20.31 per cent earlier.

BAT through its affiliates -- Rothmans International Enterprises, Myddleton Investment Company and Tobacco Manufacturers (India) Ltd -- owned a combined 25.44 per cent stake in ITC Ltd at the end of the March quarter.

Details of the buyers of ITC's shares could not be ascertained from the National Stock Exchange (NSE). ITC shares fell 1.19 per cent to close at ₹ 421 per piece on the NSE.

In a regulatory filing on the London Stock Exchange, British American Tobacco (Group) on Wednesday said it has completed the block



trade of 31.30 crore ordinary shares in ITC Ltd to institutional investors by way of an accelerated book build process.

The block trade shares represent 2.5 per cent of ITC's issued ordinary share capital. The net proceeds from the block trade amount to ₹ 12,100 crore, it said.

BAT said that the transaction will provide the group greater financial flexibility as it delivers on its commitment to invest behind transformation, deleverage and enhance shareholder returns.

The net proceeds from the trade will also be utilised to extend the Group's existing share buyback programme announced on March 18, 2024, by an additional 200 million pounds, taking the total amount to be repurchased in 2025 to 1.1 billion pounds, it added.

"The extension will begin following completion of the latest tranche of the programme announced on 29 April 2025 and is expected to complete no later than 31 December 2025," BAT said.

BAT's initial investment in ITC dates back to the early 1900s, and the two companies have a longstanding, mutually beneficial relationship. As one of India's leading FMCG enterprises, ITC has delivered significant value for its shareholders.

"ITC is a valued associate of BAT in an attractive geography with long-term growth potential where BAT benefits from exposure to the world's most populous market.

"Whilst this transaction supports delivery on our commitments to BAT shareholders, we continue to view ITC as a core strategic component of our global footprint as we partner on business opportunities in India. I am confident that ITC, under the stewardship of its current management, will continue to create further value for its shareholders," BAT's Chief Executive Tadeu Marroco said.

In March 2024, BAT Plc sold a 3.5 per cent stake in ITC Ltd for ₹ 17,485 crore.

BAT is in the multi-category consumer goods business. Its strategic portfolio comprises global cigarette brands and a growing range of nicotine and smokeless tobacco products, including vapour brand Vuse; heated product brand glo' and Velo, a modern oral (nicotine pouch) brand. (PTI)



## 'Gogoi's 2013 visit to Pakistan represented only a fraction—10 percent—of the full story' 'Rahul Gandhi will regret...', Himanta ups the ante against Gaurav Gogoi

**HT Bureau**  
GUWAHATI, May 28: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday intensified his attack on Congress MP Gaurav Gogoi, making a series of serious accusations that include alleged links to Pakistan's establishment and espionage activities.

Sarma claimed he would unveil "damning" evidence on September 10, raising the political temperature in the state ahead of potential disclosures.

"What I will reveal on September 10 will make Rahul Gandhi regret why he appointed such a person to a leadership role," Sarma declared, referring to Gogoi's position as Congress president in Assam. "There are serious national security implications. We will take action."

Addressing reporters after a cabinet meeting, Sarma alleged that Gogoi's 2013 visit to Pakistan represented only a fraction—"10 percent"—of the full story. He further claimed that Gogoi's wife, Elizabeth Colburn Gogoi, was involved



in collecting sensitive government information for unnamed international climate lobbies. "We have documents to prove that his wife was collecting intelligence outputs of the Government of India," Sarma stated, though he did not present any documentation publicly.

The Chief Minister suggested the alleged operation had links to Pakistan's Interior Ministry and the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). He also questioned the circumstances surrounding Gogoi's

visit to Pakistan, emphasizing its timing before Gogoi entered Parliament and noting that he resided in the Chief Minister's residence at the time as the son of then-CM Tarun Gogoi.

Adding to the allegations, Sarma raised questions about the citizenship status of Gogoi's children. He claimed that Gogoi applied in 2021 to alter his son's citizenship status and surrendered a British passport, while noting that Gogoi's daughter was born in England.

Sarma accused the Congress

party of continuing what he called a historical affinity with Pakistan. "Rahul Gandhi must answer now. The Congress has always patronised Pakistan—and in Gogoi's appointment, they've done it again," he alleged.

In response, Gaurav Gogoi earlier in the day addressed the swirling controversy, confirming that he visited Pakistan once, in 2013, and did so in accordance with all government regulations. He described the visit as above board and transparent.

"My personal and professional life has always been transparent and aligned with the national interest," Gogoi stated. He also defended his wife's record, saying she had worked for an international NGO and had been stationed in Pakistan in 2011 as part of her professional assignments.

With the Chief Minister promising explosive revelations next month and the Congress camp standing firm, the political showdown in Assam appears poised to escalate further.

## Rongkhong to receive development boost, says KAAC Chief at mass joining event

**HT Correspondent**  
DONGKAMUKAM, May 28: Chairman of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), Tuliram Rongkhong, reiterated the Council's commitment to inclusive development across Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong, assuring that Rongkhong MAC area would not be left behind. He made this assurance while attending a mass joining programme as the chief guest at Hongkram Mini Stadium, near Boithalangso in West Karbi Anglong.

Addressing a massive gathering, Rongkhong responded positively to the memorandum submitted by the people of Rongkhong constituency, promising that their key demands would be addressed by next year. These include:

Completion of the incomplete Hongkram Mini Stadium, repair and construction of deplorable road conditions in Hongkram, construction of the Rongkhong KCS Zonal Office building and allocation of land and improvement of potable drinking water supply and electricity infrastructure.

He stressed the importance of fulfilling these basic needs while also reaffirming that "Autonomous



State is our main issue."

Recalling the history of the movement for implementation of Article 244(A), Rongkhong expressed solemn remembrance of those who lost their lives during the agitation and subsequent ethnic clashes. "We will compensate every individual who lost their lives during the movement and violence," he declared.

In a major announcement, Rongkhong revealed the sanctioning of multi-crore road projects, including: Jagiroad-Boithalangso road and Dongkamukam-Kheroni-Haflong road, set to begin construction soon.

The mass joining programme, organized by the Rongkhong Mandal Committee under 111 No.

Rongkhong LAC, witnessed the participation of several dignitaries, including MLA Dhorsing Rongkhong, Executive Members (EMs), MACs, KAAC Board Chairmen, and President of BJP WKADC Radip Rongkhong.

In a significant political development, over 1100 members from Opposition parties—primarily from Congress, ASDC, and especially APHLC—joined the BJP. The mass merger was led by APHLC West Karbi Anglong District Vice President Indrajit Timung and Denis Terang.

The event marked a significant show of political consolidation and promises a wave of development for the Rongkhong region in the coming years.

## Rajdhani Express stoppage at Diphu reinstated following MP's petition



**HT Bureau**  
DIPHU, May 28: In a major relief for commuters, the Rajdhani Express train stoppage at Diphu has been officially reinstated, bringing widespread joy to the residents of Karbi Anglong, West Karbi Anglong, and Dima Hasao districts.

The development follows a formal petition submitted by Diphu MP Amarsing Tisso to Union Minister of Railways, Ashwini Vaishnaw, on July 30, 2023. In

his appeal, MP Tisso highlighted the strategic importance of Diphu as the headquarters of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council and the pressing need for better rail connectivity to the national capital, Delhi.

Announcing the reinstatement on his official Facebook page, the MP wrote:

"An exciting development brings immense joy to the residents of Karbi Anglong, West Karbi Anglong, and Dima Hasao districts: the #RajdhaniExpress stoppage at Diphu has been reinstated. This achievement is a direct result of the Government of India's responsiveness to the needs of its people, as I had advocated for this convenience to facilitate timely travel to various destinations. I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to the Hon'ble Union Minister of Railways, Shri Ashwini Vaishnaw ji, for his prompt action in addressing this request."

The reinstatement is expected to significantly benefit travelers from the hill districts by providing direct and timely access to the capital and other major cities.

It may be noted that MP Amarsing Tisso had earlier faced criticism from various quarters for not being able to secure the stoppage. However, this recent success has been seen as a vindication of his efforts to improve regional connectivity and address public concerns.

## 'Dharti Aaba Abhiyan' to begin from June 15

**HT Bureau**  
DIPHU, May 28: The Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India, will launch the Dharti Aaba Abhiyan - Awareness and Benefit Saturation Camps from June 15 to June 30, 2025, as part of a nationwide effort under the PM JANMAN and DA JGUA frameworks.

According to an official statement, the campaign aims to ensure saturation of individual entitlements and raise awareness about central welfare schemes in tribal-dominated regions.

In Karbi Anglong district, the initiative will be spearheaded by the District Administration, with full convergence from key departments including Health & Family Welfare, Panchayat and Rural Development, Agriculture, Social Justice, and Revenue. The camps will deliver a wide range of essential services directly to rural and tribal beneficiaries at the grassroots level.

Services to be provided include Aadhaar enrolment, Ration Cards, Ayushman Bharat (PM-JAY), caste and domicile certificates, Kisan Credit Cards, PM-KISAN enrolment, Jan Dhan accounts, insurance schemes (PMJJBY/PMSBY), social pensions, employment and livelihood schemes like MGNREGA, PM Vish-

wakarma, Mudra Loans, as well as maternal and child welfare services such as PMMVY and routine immunisation. This marks the second phase of the campaign, following a successful round held from November 15 to 26, 2024, which witnessed significant turnout. The inaugural ceremony, held at Diphu Club last year, saw over 400 attendees, including tribal community members, farmers, and village residents.

Village Development Councils played a key role in community mobilisation during the earlier phase.

Encouraged by last year's strong response, the administration is expecting even greater participation in the upcoming round. This year, special attention will be given to reaching Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) and underserved villages to ensure that the benefits of government schemes reach the most marginalised communities.

The District Administration has called on all line departments, field functionaries, and frontline workers to collaborate closely to ensure the smooth execution and success of the campaign, reinforcing the government's commitment to building a more inclusive and empowered tribal India.

## Noted sports organiser and social worker Gouri Shankar Roy passes away

**HT Correspondent**  
NAGAON, May 28: Gouri Shankar Roy, a respected sports organizer and dedicated social worker from Nagaon, passed away on Tuesday at a private hospital in Guwahati following complications related to kidney disease. He was 66.

Roy was a long-time associate of the Nagaon Sports Association, where he served as an executive member. He also held the position of Physical Instructor at Nagaon Bengali Higher Secondary School and was the Vice President of the Nagaon Bengali Sammilan. Known for his elegant handwriting and impactful voice as an announcer, Roy also served as the Secretary and later President of Uday Sangha, a prominent sports body affiliated with the Nagaon Sports Association. In honor of his contributions, Roy's mortal remains were first brought to the premises of Nagaon Bengali Sammilan, where members and locals paid their last respects. His body was then taken to the Nagaon Sports Association office, where the association flag was lowered to half-mast and floral tributes were offered.

**HT Bureau**  
GUWAHATI, May 28: In a proactive move to strengthen flood resilience ahead of the monsoon season, Minister for Food, Public Distribution and Consumer Affairs, Government of Assam, Kaushik Rai, chaired a high-level review meeting on Wednesday at the new conference hall of the District Commissioner's office in Silchar. The meeting was aimed at assessing and reinforcing monsoon preparedness across Cachar district, with a strong focus on flood mitigation, inter-departmental coordination, and ensuring public safety.

The session brought together a wide spectrum of stakeholders, including Cachar District Commissioner, Mr. Mridul Yadav, MLAs Mihir Kanti Shome, Dipayan Chakraborty, Nihar Ranjan Das, and Misbahul Islam Laskar, along with senior officials from key departments entrusted with disaster management, infrastructure, education, and water resources. At the heart of the discussions was the pressing need to manage drainage congestion and avert flood-related disruptions in Silchar and adjoining areas, an annual challenge exacerbated by intense monsoon rains.

Minister Kaushik Rai under-

scored the urgency of adopting a proactive, rather than reactive, approach to flood management. He emphasized that flood preparedness must be viewed not as a routine protocol but as a critical public safety measure, directly tied to protecting both life and infrastructure. He directed all departments to ensure the smooth functioning of drainage systems, operational status of sluice gates, robustness of embankments, and uninterrupted supply of essential commodities in vulnerable zones.

"Flood preparedness is not just a seasonal formality; it is a critical commitment towards safeguarding lives and infrastructure," he stated, urging officials to work in synergy to enhance ground-level readiness.

Among the key directives issued during the meeting was the immediate inspection and readiness of the sluice gate located near the international border, with a call for seamless coordination with the Border Security Force (BSF). The Executive Engineer of the Water Resources Department was instructed to submit a detailed report on the condition and staffing of these gates to the District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA), ensuring swift corrective measures wherever required. Furthermore,

the Minister mandated the formation of an Embankment Monitoring Committee by May 31 to keep a vigilant eye on river embankment conditions throughout the district.

Recognizing the role of educational infrastructure in emergency response, the Minister directed that schools be prepared to serve as temporary shelters in the event of flooding. Instructions in this regard are to be issued by the Inspector of Schools and Circle Development Coordinators, ensuring that contingency plans are well in place at the grassroots level.

The meeting reinforced the government's tri-pronged approach towards flood management: mitigation of risks, effective response in emergencies, and safeguarding public health and hygiene. Minister Rai reiterated that the ultimate objective is zero casualty and minimal disruption, a goal that demands collective vigilance, preparedness, and accountability from all sectors involved.

Through this review, the Cachar district administration, under the guidance of the Government of Assam, showcased a robust and forward-thinking strategy to confront the challenges of the monsoon season.

## Innovator Uddhab Bharali develops machine to split green mung

**HT Correspondent**  
JORHAT, May 28: Renowned innovator and a Padma Shri recipient Uddhab Bharali of Assam has developed a machine to wash mogu maah (split green mung with skin), and remove its skin in a fraction of the time needed to wash it by hand.

The prototype of the hand driven machine was installed and demonstrated at the Sonarigaon Number 1 Path Namghar here recently. Isanjyoti Bordoloi, a member of the namghar, told this newspaper that this machine developed by Bharali would be of immense benefit as it would significantly reduce the time and labour in the process of preparing the mahprasad.

The hand driven machine using centrifugal force could clean the skin of five kgs mogu maah in a minute in contrast to several hours of painstaking washing which is generally done by women.

Stating that this machine would be a boon in namghars, temples and other religious events where mogu maah is offered as prasad, Bordoloi further said this machine is similar to the electrically run machine developed by the innovator to prepare pokka mithoi, reducing time, drudgery and the risk of burning one's

hands while rolling the mithois.

Bordoloi stated that the first unit of the mithoi making machine which was installed at this namghar in October 2024, Bharali had announced that he would develop another machine which he presented today which he brought all the way from Lakhimpur by car.

In case of the earlier mithoi making machine, Bharali had only taken the cost of production and this one today was a gift. Bharali told newsmen that this machine was his 181st innovation, which was another contribution for the benefit of society.

Stating that it took several months to develop this machine and make it usable after several trials, he said that he was working in several other projects to make the people's lives more productive and easy, one of them being making bhoot jolokia powder.

Bharali further said that from the minimum amount that he takes for making his products, he would use in his dream project to set up a science technology museum at his place, which students could visit and learn and see the functioning of such machineries.

He said that the aim was to develop a scientific temperament from childhood.

## Retired principal of Gerua Higher Secondary School gets farewell

**HT Correspondent**  
MORIGAOON, May 28: Teachers and students of Gerua Higher Secondary School bid an emotional farewell to their retiring Principal, Bubumoni Goswami, in a formal ceremony held at the school premises on Wednesday.

The farewell meeting, organized to honor the remarkable contributions of the outgoing principal, was chaired by Rajendra Nath Deka, President of the School Management Committee, and moderated by Acting Principal Babul Bora.

The heartfelt event witnessed participation from teachers, students, alumni association members, faculty from the neighboring Gerua Girls' School, and several local dignitaries. Principal Goswami was felicitated with traditional tokens of respect, including sarai, gamusa, books, and a letter of appreciation.

## Governor takes note of flood preparation Asks all government officials and other stakeholders to maintain close coordination

**HT Bureau**  
GUWAHATI, May 28: Assam Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya today took stock of the preparation of the government in meeting the seasonal flood and mitigating the impact arising out of it. A briefing on flood preparedness was held today at the Raj Bhavan which was also attended by Minister Revenue and Disaster Management Keshab Mahanta. The meeting was convened to assess the readiness of both the Central and State government agencies in addressing and mitigating the impact of flood.

The meeting also took stock of the contingency plan as well as the lessons learnt from previous years, and enhance coordination among stakeholders to mitigate flood-related challenges.

Sharing his observation, Governor Acharya stated that during his visit to different districts across the state and his meetings with the district administration, the Governor said that he observed the state is well prepared to face the seasonal flood. He emphasized the importance of learning from



past experiences and improving preparedness strategies. Stressing on the need for coordination between Central and State agencies, he asked all concerned departments to work in close synergy with the Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA) to ensure effective flood management. He also observed that flood

preparedness is a collective responsibility in the service of the people.

Minister Revenue etc Keshab Mahanta while highlighting the proactive measures taken by the State government, informed that right from development blocks to district, field visits have been made compulsory for the concerned officers to gather

data and take comprehensive measure to empower the state from the onslaught of flood. He also said that embankments have been fortified and interactions were held with local residents to better understand ground-level challenges. The minister also thanked the Governor for his valuable guidance and support.

A presentation was given by the Principal Secretary Revenue and Disaster Management and CEO, ASDMA Gyanendra Dev Tripathi, detailing the flood preparedness initiatives across the state. The Governor also took note of contingency planning, infrastructure readiness, and inter-agency coordination protocols.

Officials from various central agencies also participated in the meeting reaffirming their commitment to support the state's flood response mechanisms.

OSD to Governor Prof. Bechan Lal, Commissioner and Secretary to the Governor S.S. Meenakshi Sundaram, Secretary ASDMA Meenakshi Das Nath, along with senior government officials were present at the meeting.

## Barpeta Road Traders' Association honours businessman Binod Mor



**HT Correspondent**  
NAGAON, May 28: Noted social worker and businessman Binod Mor from Nagaon has been conferred with the 'Barpeta Road Karma Surya Samman' by the Greater Barpeta Road Traders' Association.

This honour was bestowed upon him during the association's 20th annual session held recently.

Dhiraj Deuri, President of the Greater Barpeta Road Traders' Association, and Binay Kumar Saha, General Secretary, presented the 'Karma Surya Samman' to Binod Mor. As a prominent social worker, Binod Mor is associated with various social and cultural organizations in Nagaon and is well-known in the district for his contributions.

Notably, Binod Mor has worked towards the advancement of the medical field. His efforts have made a significant impact, and the people of Nagaon are delighted by his achievement. The residents of Nagaon are overjoyed by Binod Mor's recognition, celebrating his dedication to social work and community development.

## Reception Committee Office inaugurated for Rabha Divas Celebration

**HT Correspondent**  
MARGHERITA, May 28: The stage is set for a vibrant celebration of Bishnu Prasad Rabha Divas, to be centrally hosted at the Margherita Xakha Xahitya Xabha. Organised by the Tinsukia District Xahitya Xabha and spearheaded by the Margherita Swarna Xakha Xahitya Xabha, the preparations are well underway, marked by the formal inauguration of the reception committee office on Wednesday. The office was ceremoniously opened by eminent litterateur, poet, and writer Ranjit Dutta, whose esteemed presence added literary prestige and inspiration to the occasion. The inaugural event witnessed the participation of key figures, including Arup Changmai, General Secretary of Tinsukia District Xahitya Xabha; Pabitra Borgohain, President of Margherita Xakha Xahitya Xabha; Dr. Ramen Hazarika, President of the Reception Committee; Sashidhar Shyam, Working President; Ashwini Gogoi, Chief Secretary; and other dedicated committee members.

### PROVISION OF 160 SQ.MM COPPER JUMPER

**E-Tender Notice No.:** TRD-LMG-13 of 2025-26 Dated: 26-05-2025. E-Tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following works: **E-Tender No.:** EL-TRD-NFR-LMG-OHEMOD27R4. **Name of work:** Provision of 160 sq. mm copper jumper in place of 105 sq. mm copper jumper in isolators under Lumding Division. **Tender Value:** ₹70,47,063.70/-. **Earnest Money:** ₹1,41,000/-. **Date & Time of closing of Tender:** 15:00 hrs. on 20-06-2025. The complete information with the tender documents of above e-tender will be available in the website [www.ireps.gov.in](http://www.ireps.gov.in) **Sr. DEE (TRD & GS), Lumding** **NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY** *Serving Customers With A Smile*



## QUOTE OF THE DAY

Give light and people will find the way.  
-Ella Baker

## Rural employment scenario

There is hardly any opening left for employment creation. Touching the bottom level, it shows massive decline in the job availability in rural areas in last two months, indicating fresh economic strain and worsening level of deprivation. As per a report published recently, a surge in the demand for unskilled work under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) was witnessed in April and May this year. According to the latest data from the Ministry of Rural Development, 20.12 million rural households sought employment under the scheme in April. The number of such households increased to 20.37 million in May. The ministry's figure for May is not for the entire month. It pertains to the number of households that sought employment under the MGNREGS up to May 18. The figure for the entire month of May is, therefore, likely to go up even further, showing worsening of the job situation in the rural India. The total number of rural households that sought employment under the scheme in March was 18.64 million. A Central government initiative, the MGNREGS provides at least 100 days of guaranteed employment in a year to rural households whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work and seeks employment under the scheme.

Past trends in the job market have shown that demand for work under the MGNREGS increases whenever farm or non-farm job opportunities decline in rural areas. An increase in the number of rural households seeking employment under the MGNREGS in the beginning of the new financial year points to deepening of strain in the economy and the vulnerability of livelihood in villages. What has made the situation look grim is the fact that despite a surge in the demand for rural employment guarantee scheme among rural households, the Central government has made no increase in its budgetary allocations for the MGNREGS this year. So the Budget for fiscal 2025-26 has allocated Rs. 86,000 crore for the MGNREGS. This is the same amount that was promised for the scheme in the Union Budget of 2024-25. Launched in 2005, the MGNREGS was one of the first major schemes brought by the Manmohan Singh government, which at that time had Left parties supporting it. Soon the MGNREGS became a lifeline for rural workers and proved to be a powerful vehicle for poverty alleviation in villages. It resulted in livelihood security for rural households by providing at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year. The scheme was lauded for its impact on reducing distress migration from villages.

But the Narendra Modi government right since its inception took a critical position against the MGNREGS. Modi even called the MGNREGS as a "living monument" of the Congress's failure to tackle poverty in 60 years. The MGNREGA proved to be a lifeline for many in 2020, when a lockdown was enforced due to the COVID-19 pandemic, triggering a massive reverse migration to villages. According to a 2022 study conducted by the Azim Premji University in a partnership with the National Consortium of Civil Society Organisations on MGNREGA and Collaborative Research and Dissemination (CORD), the scheme helped compensate between 20 per cent and 80 per cent of the income loss incurred because of the lockdown for the most-vulnerable households. In fact, the MGNREGS played a major role even in the post-Covid crisis of jobs. Reports have noted that the UP-ERA scheme played a significant role in providing employment in rural areas in 2023-24.

## Northeast India's tryst with transformation

The Rising Northeast Investors Summit 2025, being held in New Delhi, is more than just another economic conclave. It is a moment pregnant with possibilities, poised to change the trajectory of a region that has historically remained at the periphery of India's development vision. The Northeast — a land of misty hills, untapped rivers, resilient cultures, and geopolitical significance — is finally being projected not as a distant borderland viewed through a narrow security lens, but as a dynamic growth engine and a gateway to Southeast Asia.

For decades after Independence, the Northeast was mired in insurgency-related challenges. Armed separatist groups such as the Nagas and Mizos in the 1960s and 1970s, followed by the ULFA and NDFB in Assam, sowed years of unrest. Waves of illegal immigration from Bangladesh further complicated the region's demography and social fabric, culminating in agitations like the Assam Movement and the historic Assam Accord of 1985. Consequently, successive Union governments largely viewed the region through a prism of national security, relegating development to a secondary concern. For the common people in the region, Delhi — both literally and metaphorically — was too far to hear their aspirations.

It was only with the Narasimha Rao government's Look East Policy in the early 1990s that the potential of the Northeast as a strategic bridge to Southeast Asia began to be discussed in earnest. Atal Bihari Vajpayee's government gave this nascent vision some institutional form with the creation of the Ministry for Development of the North Eastern Region (DoNER) in 2001. But movement on the ground was sluggish, mired in red tape and strategic ambivalence. The turning point came with then-US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's 2011 call for India to not just "look East" but to "act East." The Narendra Modi government responded by upgrading the Look East Policy to the more proactive

Act East Policy in 2014. In Modi's vision, the Northeast was not merely a corridor but a pivot for India's geopolitical and economic outreach to ASEAN and East Asia.

What followed was an unprecedented push to integrate the Northeast with the national development agenda. Infrastructure became a priority. Over the last decade, the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways allocated 10% of its total budget to the region. This investment translated into the construction of 4,950 km of National Highways, with more than \$5 billion spent. The launch of the North East Special Infrastructure Development Scheme (NESIDS) in 2018, with a billion-dollar corpus for roads, power, and water supply, underlined the government's commitment to bridge the infrastructure deficit. A region that once saw a Union minister only during emergencies or electoral campaigns now finds itself on the regular itinerary of top national leaders.

The Rising Northeast Investors Summit 2025, therefore, is the culmination of years of effort aimed at mainstreaming the Northeast into India's growth narrative. With the Prime Minister, the DoNER Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia, and all eight chief ministers of the region in attendance, the Summit is expected to spotlight the region's untapped economic and investment potential. It is also an opportunity to correct decades of neglect, both perceived and real, and to build confidence among investors, especially foreign ones.

While domestic industrial giants like Reliance, Adani Group, and Oil India Limited have already made substantial investment commitments in the region, the challenge lies in wooing international investors. That cannot be achieved through rhetoric alone. What is required is a realistic, data-backed, and nuanced presentation of the investment climate in the Northeast. State governments must be prepared with sector-specific pitches and long-term policy incentives. Investors, both domestic and inter-

national, must be assured of policy stability, infrastructural readiness, and local cooperation.

Prime Minister Modi rightly underscored the mindboggling potential of the region in tourism. Indeed, with its unparalleled biodiversity, majestic landscapes, rich tribal cultures, and spiritual destinations, the Northeast could easily rival some of Southeast Asia's most popular tourist hubs. Yet, it continues to attract less than 2 lakh foreign tourists annually. This is a mere fraction compared to countries like Thailand, which receives 35 million foreign tourists every year, or even the 2 million annual visitors to Cambodia's Angkor Wat. The Northeast has everything — from the world-renowned Kaziranga National Park, the sacred Kamakhya Temple in Guwahati, the mystical root bridges of Meghalaya, and the glacial beauty of Tawang in Arunachal Pradesh, to the Loktak Lake of Manipur and the hidden treasures of Tripura's Chobimura Hills. However, the absence of global marketing campaigns, inadequate infrastructure, and the lack of international-standard hospitality services have prevented the region from fulfilling its tourism potential.

The summit also highlights other sectors ripe for investment. The region's hydropower potential alone is staggering — estimated at 62,000 MW, of which less than 7% has been tapped. Solar power, too, offers vast opportunity, with a potential of 57,360 MW, yet only 17% of this capacity is installed. With the global energy transition underway, the Northeast can become a hub for green energy investments. Solar parks, small hydroelectric projects, and off-grid wind installations can provide clean power while creating thousands of jobs.

Additionally, the bio-economy, particularly the bamboo sector, holds promise. With abundant forest wealth and traditional knowledge of sustainable harvesting, the

region could become a centre for bamboo-based construction, handicrafts, textiles, and even biofuel. The tea and petroleum sectors, already well-established in Assam, continue to offer further value-addition possibilities, especially with export-oriented refining and branding.

Despite these assets, there remains a tendency to chase high-tech investments such as IT, defence, and semiconductors, perhaps inspired by other parts of India. While there is merit in these aspirations, the Northeast must first consolidate its core strengths. Development cannot be cut and pasted. It must be organic, inclusive, and locally rooted. The focus must be on leveraging the region's comparative advantages — renewable energy, tourism, natural resources, and human capital.

The latter is particularly crucial. With nearly 80% literacy and a young demographic profile, the

## DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Dipak Kurmi

workforce that is both educated and trainable. Many are fluent

in English, which gives them an edge in the global services market. However, the skilling ecosystem is grossly inadequate. Massive investment is required in vocational training, entrepreneurship development, and digital literacy. Institutions of higher learning must be retooled to offer employment-oriented education, and private-public partnerships should be explored to address the skill gap.

As the region marches towards development, it must also tread carefully. Infrastructure development should not come at the cost of its fragile ecology. The bounty of nature is not just a tourist attraction; it is the very soul of the region. Deforestation, rampant construction, and haphazard mining can destabilize entire ecosystems and displace indigenous communities. Sustainable development must be the guiding principle — not a footnote. Eco-tourism, green energy, and climate-resilient agriculture must be promoted to

ensure that the path to progress does not trample upon the very assets it seeks to showcase.

Geopolitically, the Northeast's strategic location — sharing 5,484 km of international borders with Myanmar, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, and China (Tibet) — makes it a vital link in India's regional connectivity plans. Projects such as the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway, the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project, and the possible revival of the Stilwell Road are aimed at creating seamless land-based trade routes to Southeast Asia. Ports like Sittwe in Myanmar and Chittagong in Bangladesh, despite ongoing political instability, can open up access to the Indo-Pacific's busiest sea lanes. These trade corridors could transform landlocked states like Mizoram, Nagaland, and Manipur into bustling economic zones.

For this to happen, however, the states must get their priorities right. Cosmetic reforms will not suffice. A region that has long suffered from an emotional and physical disconnect with the rest of the country needs a comprehensive transformation — one that is not just infrastructural or economic, but also psychological. Governance reforms, peace-building, ethnic reconciliation, and the empowerment of indigenous institutions must walk hand-in-hand with investment summits.

The Rising Northeast Investors Summit 2025 may well be remembered as a milestone — but only if the enthusiasm it generates is matched by sustained policy follow-up. The Centre and the states must move beyond announcements and MoUs. They must show the world that the Northeast is not just a site of investment, but a partner in India's growth story. In the final reckoning, the region does not need charity or condescension. It needs partnership, vision, and respect. That alone will complete its journey from a forgotten frontier to a fulcrum of national resurgence. (The writer can be reached at dipakurmi@gmail.com)

## Exports, its prospects in the economy of Assam

By: Giganta Barooah

Assam is the largest economy in the North East Region and serves as a gateway to the North East India besides some of the countries neighbouring India. The GDP of Assam in 2021-22 at constant prices, was estimated at ₹ 2.7 trillion, a growth of 9.1% over the preceding year. During 2011-12 to 2019-20, the GDP at constant prices grew at an AAGR of 7.8%. It is however observed that Assam's per capita GSDP lags several other North Eastern states, including the national average. While 70% of the population in Assam is engaged in agriculture, its contribution to the Gross State Value Added (GSVA) in the economy has gone down slightly from 19.9% in 2011-12 to 19.1% in 2020-21. As regards industry, although Assam has rich natural and mineral resources, it is largely concentrated into a few sectors such as tea, petroleum refining, jute textiles, cement, and rubber. The share of industry in GSVA has risen from 30.6% to 33.6% during the period. It may however be observed that the share of services has reduced significantly from 44% in 2011-12 to 36.1% in 2020-21. As regards Assam's exports, the merchandise exports in 2021-22 stood at US\$ 450.4 million, a rise of 8.4% as compared to 2020-21. Assam's export basket is highly concentrated, with tea, the most important export item comprising half of the share in total exports.

However, it may be noted that the share of tea in total exports has reduced considerably from 84% in 2015-16 to 50.4% in 2021-22. In terms of value, tea exports have declined from US\$ 333.4 million in 2015-16 to US\$ 227.1 million in 2021-22. While reduction of tea exports from Assam is a cause of concern, the fall in share of top ten principal commodities in Assam's export basket from 98% to 90%, during the period, indicates the advent of diversification in merchandise exports.

Further, 59% of the State's total exports in 2021-22 went to Bhutan, Bangladesh, UAE, Russia, and the UK. In 2021-22 India's top exports to Bhutan were of coal and petroleum products, to Bangladesh were of petroleum products and cosmetic and toiletries, and to UAE were of tea and cosmetics and toiletries. Tea was the top exported product in UAE and Russia as well. It may be noted that there were significant exports to Iran from Assam until recently, mostly on account of tea. The exports have exhibited a fall in recent times (from US\$ 86 million in 2015-16 to US\$ 22 million in 2021-22).

Being landlocked, Assam has been highly dependent on Kolkata Port for export facilitation, which is however gradually reducing with Kolkata port's share in Assam's exports down from 60% in 2020-21 to 42% in 2021-22. Exports to bordering countries have also increased, leading to increasing importance of Land Customs Stations and Integrated Check Posts and expanding opportunities for higher border trade.

Assam houses an Inland Container

Depot (ICD) at Amingaon, the only ICD present in the North East India for supporting trade. However, the ICD remains largely unutilized, leading to high costs for its stakeholders. Border trade infrastructure too, despite having high potential for trade is not being leveraged to the fullest as is evident by the fact that out of the 7 Land Customs Stations located in Assam, exports were recorded at only Darranga and Kamardwa.

Coming to connectivity, air connectivity, which is particularly important for transportation of perishable produce from the region is presently limited. There is a need to connect Assam with all other states in the North East Region by air and build infrastructure that facilitates temperature-controlled transportation.

Assam's intricate inland waterway network is in the process of being integrated seamlessly with Kolkata, Haldia and Mongla ports, the upcoming multi-modal logistics park at Jogighopa and other industrial centres. This will provide an efficient alternative for transit movement between mainland India and North Eastern Region and a cost-effective route for movement of goods between India and Bangladesh. The road network, a prerequisite for ensuring last mile connectivity and smooth integration with various international corridors, needs upgradation and maintenance. Lastly, Assam's rail connectivity, crucial for movement of bulk cargo, remains underutilized. Swift upgradation and revival of old routes such as the Mahisasan (Assam)-Shahbajpura (Bangladesh) route is needed for seamless multimodal movement across the region.

**Branding of Geographical Indication (GI) Products :**

Several handicrafts and agricultural products in Assam have been conferred geographical indication (GI) status yet not many have been successful in reaping its benefits. Although GI tagged products such as muga silk and Assam orthodox tea have been able to attract global demand, their exports remain much below their potential.

Assam can also draw from the experiences of countries abroad. For example, Colombia which is effectively leveraging GIs for boosting exports. Colombia has focused extensively on branding; certification; research, and development; building partnerships; and intellectual property protection to make the Colombian coffee a globally renowned product. To boost the unique selling proposition of each GI tagged product there needs to be a robust IP protection mechanism. Several GI products such as Judima wine also pose potential for promoting tourism. Besides, different uses of the GI tagged products need to be explored in addition to identifying more products which can be accorded with GI status such as Phalap tea.

**Boost Exports of Tea from Assam :**

Once the global leader in tea production, the present trend of Assam's dwindling share in both domestic tea production and in India's total tea exports is worrisome. The following strategies can be adopted to strengthen exports of

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tea so that Assam can reclaim its position :-

✓ **Enable capacity building among tea farmers:**

Despite Assam seeing a rise in the number of small tea holdings, participation of small-scale producers in exports is limited. The Tea Board of India along with other tea associations in the State should organize training programmes to make tea garden owners aware about the opportunities abroad. The Board may also like to set up a designated helpdesk for addressing export related queries of exporters, both in virtual and physical form. In addition, the State may study the success story of Kenya Tea Development Agency which has managed in turning lakhs of small-scale tea growers in Kenya into proud owners of one of the largest tea-exporting firms in the world. Learnings may be drawn from its inclusive business model that focuses on providing the farmers with services such as farm-to-factory logistics, regular training, marketing knowhow and access to finance, among others.

✓ **Make Assam an aggregator of tea exports from India :**

Presently, West Bengal serves as the hub for tea exports and most of the activities pertaining to value addition like blending, branding, packaging etc. are undertaken in West Bengal. With almost all the states in the North Eastern Region involved in tea cultivation, Assam can potentially be developed as an export hub for the region. In this regard, adequate logistics facilities should be set up around ICD Amingaon to facilitate aggregation and exports of tea from Assam as well as the NER.

✓ **Diversify tea exports :**

Although India's yield is highly variable compared to other countries, this very reason gives it an edge over other countries when it comes to the varieties

of tea the countries can offer. The demand for blends such as oolong, white, green, purple tea, among others, is also rising globally. Since these are priced higher than the conventional tea types, the Tea Board may like to explore the global demand and accordingly help Assam to dedicate resources towards production of these blends. Furthermore, exports of orthodox tea, which is loose leaf tea produced using traditional methods, could be explored as it fetches higher price than the CTC (Crush, Tear and Curl) tea which is processed using machinery.

**Boost Exports of Services from Assam :**

Assam boasts of a large pool of educated and English-speaking population, moderate climatic conditions and diverse topography, factors conducive for establishment of service provider companies. Yet, the presence of Business Process Outsourcing (BPO), Information Technology (IT) and other service-oriented companies is low and mostly restricted to Guwahati.

The following sector-specific strategies can be proposed which will place Assam on the sub-regional map as a services hub.

✓ **Install adequate Infrastructure for Information Technology and BPO Clusters:**

By ensuring adequate infrastructure such as uninterrupted electricity and strong network coverage, by enabling smooth processes for operations, and by providing tax breaks, the IT, BPO and allied services sector in Assam can emerge as the next success story of India.

✓ **Upgrade Health Infrastructure and Promote Medical Tourism:**

More specialty hospitals such as the recently inaugurated cancer hospitals built under the joint initiative of Tata Trusts and the State government need to be set up in Assam. Further the State's strategic location gives it an opportunity to serve the neighbouring countries like Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Myanmar for medical services. The State may thus set up a medical tourism department to establish Standard Operating Procedures, ensure their implementation across the state and for helping tourists regarding the formalities and procedures.

✓ **Boost Tourism:**

Besides being rich in flora and fauna, having moderate climatic conditions and being home to a plethora of scenic, historic and cultural places of interest, tourism in Assam has not picked up. For the recently launched Tourism Policy to be a success, the State government may ensure standardisation of services delivery for maintaining quality and uniformity in services throughout the State. Besides hospitality infrastructure needs to be built while maintaining the organic beauty of the environment, something akin to the state of Kerala which has evolved as a wellness tourism destination. The State may also take a cue from the initiatives taken by Rajasthan Tourism Development Corporation towards offering a range of curated travel packages which can be booked at the

click of a mouse on the website.

**Strengthen Exports of Agricultural and Horticultural Products :**

Assam and the North East Region (NER) of India, in general, are well endowed with agricultural and horticultural produce. To realize the export potential of the State as well as the entire region, the following strategies may be adopted-

✓ **Draft a District Policy for agricultural, horticultural, and forest-based exports :**

Assam has untapped potential for exports of inter alia, oranges, pineapples, ginger, lemons, banana, and jackfruit, particularly for the identified markets having high demand. A district policy should be designed and implemented that enables district-wise production and exports of the produce based on the competitiveness.

Common facilities such as packing houses, warehouses, cold storage etc. should be set up for use by the district.

✓ **Boost exports of different varieties of rice :**

Assam is blessed with a rich variety of rice. Although some of these varieties have been GI tagged such as Joha rice, Boka Chaul and Chokuwa rice, their exports have not picked up. Other varieties such as red rice also have high export potential yet to be realized. By investing in research and development, marketing and capacity building, exports of different varieties of rice may be strengthened considerably.

✓ **Ensure continuity in production and exports :**

The Guwahati Office of Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA) may look at providing access to technical guidance, capacity building and other soft and hard infrastructure such as cold storage, test labs, helpdesk for exporters, trade guide etc. that are required for ensuring continuity in export flows. Efforts could also be made towards harmonising SPS and TBT regulations, conducting business to business meetings for securing contracts and understanding the culture of different countries.

✓ **Diversification of bamboo product line :**

Bamboo finds use in a wide range of sectors. It serves as a key ingredient in Asian cuisine, as a unique material for building structures such as houses and bridges, as a biodegradable alternative in a lot of industries, as a material in handicraft industry etc. Since it is found in abundance in Assam, its versatility should be leveraged by exploring its use in different sectors both domestically and for exports.

✓ **Strive for value addition in exports :**

To stand apart from competing countries and realize higher prices, focus should be placed on creating unique processed products that give the State an edge over other exporters. Among other things, Assam government may like to carry out feasibility studies pertaining to generation of clean energy out of agricultural residues in the State and encourage companies to take up such projects by

providing financial support. Furthermore, formulation of unique products such as jams, fruits concentrates, squashes etc. out of Assam's GI tagged products such as Tezpur Litchi, Kaji nenu etc may be encouraged.

**Strengthen Connectivity and Trade Facilitation :**

To leverage Assam's strategic location as a gateway to neighboring countries in South Asia and to ASEAN, having seamless connectivity and robust trade infrastructure is vital. In this regard, the following strategies are suggested-

✓ **Develop Sri Bhumi as an export hub :**

Sri Bhumi district enjoys a unique advantage of being connected with multiple modes of transportation while sharing borders with Bangladesh. Setting up of industries within its vicinity such as auto-parts, cement, food processing etc. which have high demand in Bangladesh and other neighbouring countries can transform the economy of the district.

Adequate incentives in the form of tax rebates, state financed infrastructural services such as warehousing, cold storage etc. should be provided to incentivize companies to set up production in the district.

✓ **Ensure better utilization of ICD Amingaon :**

ICD Amingaon, since its establishment, continues to witness only tea being exported, majorly. Besides, it deals with Full Container Load predominantly making it inaccessible for small exporters sending their less than container load shipment. The trains to Kolkata port thus run on excess capacity leading to dead freight costs. The trains also return empty from Kolkata port due to lack of import traffic.

The Central government along with the State government may explore value-chain linkages between Assam and Kolkata for generating two-way traffic. As currently rail transportation from the ICD to Bangladesh is inoperational, possibilities of starting cross-border freight and transshipment services with Bangladesh from the ICD may be explored.

✓ **Expedite the operationalization of Jogighopa multi-modal logistic park (MMLP) :**

MMLP at Jogighopa, the first MMLP being built in India under the Bharatmala Project is expected to provide a stimulus to trade and commerce in the North Eastern region. The quick operationalization of the MMLP will provide both mainland India and the NER easy access to eastern markets through Assam.

✓ **Set up infrastructure for enabling cross-border trade between India and Bangladesh:**

Although ICP Sutarkandi provides decent infrastructure for facilitating cross-border trade between the two countries, there are additional facilities required for washing fruits and for plant and animal quarantine along with reefer transportation services, a banking network, well-functioning EDI system and a food testing lab. The cold storage facility present at the ICP also needs to be operationalized at the earliest. (...to be continued)



# The threat of mega dams on Assam's ecology

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

The northeastern state of Assam, located in the biodiversity-rich Eastern Himalayas, is an ecologically fragile region that has been facing severe environmental challenges. One of the most significant threats to its ecology today is the construction of mega dams. While dams are often promoted as engines of development, providing hydroelectric power, irrigation, and flood control, the reality is more complex. In Assam, the environmental, social, and economic consequences of building large dams have sparked intense debate, with growing concern over the irreversible damage they may cause to the state's ecosystems and communities.

Assam's geographic position makes it particularly vulnerable to the impacts of mega dams. The Brahmaputra River, one of the world's largest and most dynamic river systems, flows through the state, supporting a rich diversity of life and providing livelihoods for millions of people. This river, along with its tributaries, forms the lifeblood of Assam's agricultural economy and natural ecosystems. However, the river is also notorious for its annual flooding, which can be both destructive and beneficial. The delicate balance of this natural system is threatened by the construction of large dams, which alter water flow, sediment transport, and the overall hydrology of the region.

The primary argument in favor of constructing mega dams in Assam and its neighboring states is their potential to generate vast amounts of hydroelectric power. With India's growing energy demands, the government has prioritized hydroelectric projects as part of its strategy for meeting the country's renewable energy goals. The Brahmaputra and its tributaries offer significant hydroelectric potential due to their fast-flowing nature, steep gradients, and consistent water supply from the Himalayan snowmelt and monsoons. Proponents of dams argue that they can provide a clean and renewable energy source, reducing India's dependence on fossil fuels and lowering greenhouse gas emissions.

However, the ecological costs of these dams are immense. The construction of large dams requires the submergence of vast areas of land, leading to the destruction of forests, wetlands, and wildlife habitats. The Brahmaputra River basin, where many of these dams are proposed, is home to a variety of endemic and endangered species, including the Indian rhinoceros, Bengal tiger, Gangetic dolphin, and various migratory bird species. The loss of habitat due to dam construction threatens the survival of these species, many of which are already under pressure from habitat fragmentation, poaching,

and other human activities. Wetlands, which act as critical biodiversity hotspots and natural buffers against floods, are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of dams. When wetlands are submerged or their water supply is altered, the delicate ecosystems they support can collapse, leading to the loss of plant and animal species.

The effects of mega dams on aquatic ecosystems are perhaps the most concerning. Dams disrupt the natural flow of rivers, which has far-reaching consequences for the species that depend on free-flowing water. Fish, in particular, are severely affected by the presence of dams, which block their migratory routes and alter the timing and quantity of water flow. The Brahmaputra River is home to a variety of fish species, many of which undertake long-distance migrations to spawn. These migrations are essential for maintaining healthy fish populations and sustaining the livelihoods of communities that rely on fishing. The construction of dams can prevent fish from reaching their spawning grounds, leading to a decline in fish populations and, ultimately, the collapse of fisheries. This has significant implications not only for biodiversity but also for the food security and economic well-being of local communities.

In addition to disrupting fish migration, dams can also alter the physical characteristics of rivers, such as water temperature, oxygen levels, and sediment transport. The Brahmaputra River carries a large amount of sediment from the Himalayas, which is essential for maintaining the fertility of the floodplains and deltas in Assam. This sediment is deposited during the monsoon season, enriching the soil and supporting agriculture. Dams trap sediment behind their walls, preventing it from reaching downstream areas. Over time, this can lead to a reduction in soil fertility, affecting agricultural productivity and leading to the degradation of ecosystems that depend on nutrient-rich sediments. The reduction in sediment transport also has geomorphological consequences, as the river's ability to shape the landscape is diminished. This can result in increased riverbank erosion downstream, altering the natural flow patterns of the river and causing the displacement of communities living along its banks.

The potential for increased flooding is another significant concern associated with mega dams in Assam. While dams are often touted as a solution to flooding, their actual effectiveness in this regard is debated. Large reservoirs behind dams can store water during periods of heavy rainfall, theoretically reducing the risk of downstream flooding. However, the unpredictability of the monsoon season, combined with the siltation of reservoirs, can limit the effectiveness of dams in controlling floods. In



some cases, dam releases during extreme rainfall events can exacerbate flooding downstream, as the sudden release of water adds to already swollen rivers. This has been a concern for many communities living in flood-prone areas of Assam, who fear that the construction of dams will make flooding more unpredictable and severe.

The social impacts of mega dams in Assam are as significant as the ecological ones. The construction of large dams often involves the displacement of thousands of people, many of whom belong to indigenous and marginalized communities. These communities have a deep connection to their land, which is not only a source of livelihood but also of cultural and spiritual significance. When dams are built, vast areas of land are submerged, forcing people to relocate. The process of displacement is often fraught with difficulties, as resettlement programs are rarely able to provide adequate compensation or alternative livelihoods. Displaced communities face the loss of their homes, agricultural land, and access to natural resources, leading to social and economic marginalization. Moreover, the disruption of traditional ways of life can have profound cultural impacts, as displaced communities are often unable to maintain their cultural practices and social structures in new environments.

The construction of dams also raises concerns about the violation of indigenous rights. Many of the areas targeted for dam construction are inhabited by indigenous communities who have lived in these regions for centuries. These communities have developed sustainable ways of managing natural resources, and their knowledge of the local environment is invaluable for biodiversity conservation. However, the voices of these communities are often

marginalized in the decision-making process surrounding dam construction. The lack of meaningful consultation and participation in these processes has led to widespread protests and resistance from indigenous groups, who see the construction of dams as a violation of their rights to land, resources, and self-determination.

The economic benefits of mega dams are also called into question when considering the long-term costs of environmental degradation and social disruption. While hydroelectric power can provide a source of revenue and electricity, the economic costs of environmental damage, displacement, and the loss of biodiversity are often overlooked. For example, the decline in fisheries due to dams can have significant economic repercussions for communities that rely on fishing for their livelihoods. Similarly, the loss of agricultural productivity due to reduced sediment transport and altered water flow can affect food security and rural economies. The costs of managing increased riverbank erosion, flooding, and other environmental impacts can also place a burden on local governments and communities. In many cases, the economic benefits of dams are concentrated among a small group of stakeholders, while the environmental and social costs are borne by the most vulnerable communities.

In recent years, the construction of mega dams in Assam has sparked widespread protests and opposition from civil society groups, environmentalists, and indigenous communities. One of the most controversial projects is the Lower Subansiri Hydroelectric Project, which has been the subject of protests for over a decade. The dam, located on the Subansiri River, a major tributary of the

Brahmaputra, has faced opposition due to concerns about its environmental and social impacts. Environmentalists have raised alarm over the potential for the dam to disrupt the river's ecology, affect fish migration, and increase the risk of downstream flooding. Indigenous groups, meanwhile, have protested against the lack of consultation and the potential displacement of communities.

The resistance to mega dams in Assam has also been fueled by concerns about the region's seismic vulnerability. The Eastern Himalayas, where many of these dams are being constructed, is a seismically active region, prone to earthquakes. The construction of large dams in this area increases the risk of dam failures in the event of an earthquake. A dam failure could have catastrophic consequences for communities living downstream, leading to loss of life, property, and environmental damage. The seismic risks associated with dam construction have been a key argument for those opposing these projects, as the potential for disaster outweighs the perceived benefits of hydroelectric power.

In light of these concerns, there is growing recognition that alternative approaches to water and energy management are needed in Assam. Rather than relying on large-scale infrastructure projects like mega dams, there is increasing interest in exploring decentralized and community-based solutions. Small-scale, run-of-the-river hydroelectric projects, for example, have been proposed as a more sustainable alternative to mega dams. These projects generate electricity without requiring large reservoirs or significant alterations to river flow, minimizing the environmental and social impacts. Community-managed water systems, which prioritize local knowledge and participation, have also been successful in managing water resources sustainably and equitably.

In essence, the construction of mega dams in Assam poses a significant threat to the state's ecology, biodiversity, and communities. While hydroelectric power offers the promise of renewable energy, the environmental and social costs of these projects are immense. Dams disrupt natural ecosystems, displace vulnerable communities, and increase the risk of environmental disasters. In a region as ecologically and culturally rich as Assam, the consequences of these projects could be devastating. As the debate over mega dams continues, it is essential to prioritize sustainable, community-based solutions that protect both the environment and the people who depend on it. *(The writer is the Editor in Chief of the Assamese E-magazine SAMPROTİK. He can be reached at himangshur1989@gmail.com or 9435386040, 9864539966)*

## Earth is heading for 2.7°C warming this century. We may avoid the worst climate scenarios — but the outlook is still dire

By: Sven Teske

Is climate action a lost cause? The United States is withdrawing from the Paris Agreement for the second time, while heat records over land and sea have toppled and extreme weather events have multiplied.

In late 2015, nations agreed through the Paris Agreement to try to hold warming well under 2 degrees Celsius and ideally to 1.5°C. Almost ten years later, cutting emissions to the point of meeting the 1.5°C goal looks very difficult.

But humanity has shifted track enough to avert the worst climate future. Renewables, energy efficiency and other measures have shifted the dial. The worst case scenario of expanded coal use, soaring emissions and a much hotter world is vanishingly unlikely.

Instead, Earth is tracking towards around 2.7°C average warming by 2100. That level of warming would represent "unprecedented peril" for life on this planet. But it shows progress is being made.

### How did we get here?

Global greenhouse gas emissions have risen since industrialisation began around 1850. Carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) is far and away the most common greenhouse gas we emit, while methane and nitrous oxide also play a role. These gases trap the sun's heat in the atmosphere, preventing it from radiating back out to space.

In 2023, 41 per cent of the world's energy-related CO<sub>2</sub> emissions came from coal, mainly for electricity generation. Some 32 per cent came from burning oil in road vehicles and 21 per cent from natural gas used for heating buildings and industrial processes.

The world is certainly feeling the effects. The World Meteorological Organization confirmed 2024 was the hottest year on record, temporarily hitting 1.5°C over the pre-industrial era. In turn, the world suffered lethal heatwaves, devastating floods and intense cyclones.

### How are we tracking?

In 2014, the world's peak body for assessing climate science — the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change — began using four scenarios called Representative Concentration Pathways (RCPs). These four big picture climate scenarios are based on what actions humanity does or doesn't take. They comprise:

- rapid climate action, low emissions (RCP 2.6)
- two scenarios of some action and medium emissions (RCP 4.5 and 6.0)
- no action, high emissions (RCP 8.5).

The numbers refer to how many more watts of heat strike each square metre of the planet.

Of these four, only the RCP 2.6 scenario is compatible with the Paris Agreement's goal of holding climate change well under 2°C.

But Earth is tracking towards somewhere between RCP 2.6 and 4.5, which would translate to about 2.7°C of warming by 2100.

IPCC experts also developed five pathways of possible social, economic and political futures to complement the four scenarios. Of these pathways, we are tracking closest to a middle of the road scenario where development remains uneven, the intensity of resource and energy use declines and population growth levels off.

While effective, these scenarios are now more

than a decade old and need to be updated. In response, my colleagues and I produced the One Earth Climate Model to outline rapid pathways to decarbonise. We set an ambitious carbon budget of 450 gigatonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> before reaching net zero — a pathway even more ambitious than the RCP 2.6. The US, European Union and China together represent about 28 per cent of the global population, but are responsible for 56 per cent of historic emissions (926 gigatonnes). The pathways compatible with 1.5°C give them a remaining carbon budget of 243 Gt CO<sub>2</sub>. China would require the largest carbon budget to reach decarbonisation.

For this to happen, by 2050, the world would have to be 100 per cent powered by clean sources and phase out fossil fuel use. This would limit global warming to around 1.5°C, with a certainty of just over 50 per cent. We would also have to end deforestation within the same timeframe.

### Emissions peak — are we there yet?

Emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases have still not plateaued, despite sharply increasing renewable electricity generation, battery storage and lower-cost electric vehicles.

But there has been real progress. The EU says its emissions fell by 8.3 per cent in 2023 compared to 2022. Europe's net emissions are now 37 per cent below 1990 levels, while the region's GDP grew 68 per cent over the same period. The EU remains on track to reach its goal of reducing emissions by at least 55 per cent by 2030.

Australia's emissions fell by 0.6 per cent last year. The country is now 28.2 per cent below June 2005 levels, which is the baseline set for its Paris Agreement goal of a 43 per cent reduction by 2030.

In the US, emissions are still below pre-pandemic levels and remain about 20 per cent below 2005 levels. Since peaking in 2004, US emissions have trended downward.

The world's largest emitter, China, is finally cutting its emissions. Huge growth in renewables has now led to the first emissions drop on record, despite surging demand for power. This is good news. For years, China's domestic emissions remained high despite its leading role in solar, wind, EVs and battery technology.

China produces almost one-third (31 per cent) of the world's energy-related carbon emissions — not least because it is the workshop of the world. Every cut China makes will have a major global effect. According to the IPCC, limiting warming to around 1.5°C requires global emissions to peak before 2025 at the latest. It now looks like the peak may occur this year.

Despite daily negative news, the decarbonisation train has left the station. In 2024, renewables accounted for more than 90 per cent of growth in electricity production globally. Electric vehicles became cost competitive, while heat pumps are developing fast and solar is on a winning streak. So, is it too late to save the climate? No. The technologies we need are finally cheap enough. The sooner we stop climate change from worsening, the more disasters, famine and death we avert. We might not manage 1.5°C or even 2°C, but every tenth of a degree counts. The faster we make the shift, the better our climate future. *(Courtesy: Down to Earth)*

## India's renewable energy surge: A sustainable revolution

By: Satyabrata Borah

India's renewable energy capacity growth has emerged as a cornerstone of the nation's sustainable development journey, reflecting its commitment to addressing the intertwined challenges of energy security, economic growth, and environmental sustainability.

As the world's third-largest energy consumer and second-most populous country, India faces an ever-increasing demand for energy driven by rapid urbanization, industrialization, and population growth. Traditionally reliant on fossil fuels, the country has recognized the urgent need to transition toward cleaner, renewable energy sources to meet this demand while mitigating the adverse effects of climate change. Over the past decade, India has made remarkable strides in expanding its renewable energy capacity, growing from 75.52 gigawatts (GW) in 2014 to 203.1 GW by October 2024. This growth, fueled by solar, wind, hydropower, and bioenergy, underscores India's ambitious vision to become a global leader in renewable energy and achieve its climate goals.

Solar energy has been the linchpin of India's renewable energy revolution. The launch of the Jawaharlar Nehru National Solar Mission in 2010 marked a turning point, catalyzing the rapid expansion of solar power. In 2014, India's solar capacity stood at a modest 2.82 GW, but by 2024, it had soared to over 108 GW, a staggering 3,450% increase. This exponential growth is the result of a combination of proactive government policies, financial incentives, and growing investor interest. The government's Ultra Mega Solar Power Projects and Solar Park Scheme have been instrumental in this transformation. By approving 50 solar parks across 12 states, each with a capacity of 500 megawatts (MW) or more, India has created the infrastructure needed for large-scale solar projects, significantly reducing the cost of solar energy production. Over the years, the cost of solar power has plummeted by 80%, making it competitive with, and in some cases cheaper than, coal-based electricity. For instance, in a Gujarat auction, solar power was priced at an unprecedented ₹1.99 per kilowatt-hour. Initiatives like the Pradhan Mantri Suryodaya Yojana have further democratized solar energy by enabling 13.3 lakh households to install rooftop solar panels, reducing electricity costs and promoting energy independence at the grassroots level.

Wind energy has also played a pivotal role in India's renewable energy growth. From a capacity of 21 GW in 2014, wind power has grown to 51 GW by 2024, with states like Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, and Maharashtra leading the charge. The National Wind-Solar Hybrid Policy has been a game-changer, combining the strengths of both energy sources to enhance efficiency and optimize land use. The potential for offshore wind energy is also being explored, particularly along the coasts of Gujarat and Tamil Nadu, where wind speeds are favorable. Pilot projects in these regions are expected to unlock new opportunities for clean energy production,

further diversifying India's renewable energy portfolio. The integration of wind and solar power has helped address the intermittency challenges inherent in these sources, ensuring a more stable and reliable energy supply.

Hydropower continues to be a critical component of India's renewable energy mix, providing stability to the grid amidst the variability of solar and wind energy. As of 2024, India's hydropower capacity stands at 47 GW, with an additional 15 GW under construction. The government has set an ambitious target of reaching 67 GW by 2031-32. The northern and northeastern states, with their abundant water resources, hold significant potential for hydropower development, particularly in small and micro-hydropower projects. These projects not only contribute to the national grid but also provide reliable electricity to remote and rural areas, fostering inclusive growth. The government's focus on modernizing existing hydropower infrastructure and investing in new projects reflects its commitment to leveraging this clean energy source to meet long-term energy needs.

Bioenergy, though a smaller contributor compared to solar and wind, has also seen notable progress. India's bioenergy capacity has grown from 8.1 GW in 2014 to 11.5 GW in 2024. The production of compressed biogas (CBG) has gained momentum, with the number of CBG projects increasing from just one in 2014 to 150 by 2024, boasting a daily production capacity of 1,211 tonnes. The Sustainable Alternative Towards Affordable Transportation (SATAT) scheme has been a key driver, encouraging the use of biogas as a vehicle fuel and supporting agricultural and rural economies. By converting agricultural waste, municipal solid waste, and other organic materials into energy, bioenergy projects contribute to waste management while generating clean power.

The growth of India's renewable energy sector is underpinned by robust government policies and international commitments. The 2015 Paris Climate Agreement set the stage for India's ambitious targets, including achieving 500 GW of renewable energy capacity by 2030 and reaching net-zero emissions by 2070. To meet these goals, the government has introduced investor-friendly policies, tax exemptions, and subsidies to attract both domestic and foreign investment. Between 2000 and 2023, the renewable energy sector attracted \$15.36 billion in foreign direct investment, reflecting global confidence in India's clean energy vision. The International Solar Alliance (ISA), spearheaded by India, has facilitated collaboration with other nations, enabling access to advanced technologies and financing. Additionally, initiatives like the Green Energy Corridor have strengthened the transmission infrastructure, ensuring that renewable energy is efficiently integrated into the national grid.

In the context of Assam, the potential for renewable energy is immense, given the state's abundant natural resources. Assam's rivers offer significant opportunities for hydropower, particularly small-scale projects that can power remote areas. The state gov-

ernment has also prioritized solar energy, with plans to develop a 1,000 MW solar project in collaboration with the Assam Power Distribution Company Limited (APDCL) and NLC India. These projects are expected to enhance electricity access in rural areas while creating new employment opportunities. Assam's agrarian economy also makes it an ideal candidate for bioenergy projects, as agricultural waste can be converted into biogas, supporting both energy production and waste management.

The expansion of renewable energy has delivered significant environmental and economic benefits. By reducing reliance on fossil fuels, India has lowered its carbon emissions, aligning with its climate commitments. In 2023, solar energy alone generated 18 terawatt-hours of electricity, placing India fourth globally in solar power production. Innovations such as floating solar panels and bladeless wind turbines are further enhancing the sector's potential, making renewable energy more efficient and accessible. The economic impact is equally profound, with the renewable energy sector creating millions of jobs, from manufacturing and installation to maintenance and research. Rural communities, in particular, have benefited from decentralized renewable energy projects, which provide affordable electricity and stimulate local economies.

Land acquisition for large-scale projects, inadequate grid infrastructure, and the high capital costs of renewable energy projects pose significant hurdles. To address these, the government is exploring solutions such as land leasing arrangements with farmers, promoting agrivoltaics (combining agriculture with solar panels), and establishing Renewable Energy Special Economic Zones (RE-SEZs). Investments in grid modernization and energy storage technologies, such as batteries and pumped storage, are also critical to ensuring the reliability of renewable energy systems. India's renewable energy journey is poised for further growth. The country's favorable geography, with abundant sunlight, wind, and water resources, provides a strong foundation for continued expansion. States like Assam can play a pivotal role by leveraging their unique resources to contribute to the national renewable energy targets. The government's focus on research and development, coupled with international partnerships, will drive technological advancements and cost reductions, making renewable energy even more accessible. Public awareness and participation, particularly through initiatives like rooftop solar programs, will further accelerate this transition.

India's renewable energy capacity growth represents a transformative shift toward a sustainable and inclusive energy future. By harnessing solar, wind, hydropower, and bioenergy, the country is not only meeting its growing energy demands but also setting a global benchmark for clean energy adoption. With continued policy support, technological innovation, and regional efforts, India is well on its way to achieving its 500 GW target by 2030, paving the way for a cleaner, greener, and more prosperous future.



# One killed, 48 wounded when forces fired on crowd overrunning aid site, Gaza officials say

**DEIR AL-BALAH (GAZA STRIP), May 28:** At least one Palestinian was killed and 48 others wounded when forces opened fire on a crowd overrunning a new aid distribution site in the Gaza Strip set up by an Israeli and US-backed foundation, Gaza's Health Ministry said Wednesday.

Crowds of Palestinians broke through the fences around the distribution site on Tuesday, and an Associated Press journalist heard Israeli tank and gun fire, and saw a military helicopter firing flares.

It was not yet known whether the death and injuries were caused by Israeli forces, private contractors or others. The foundation said its military contractors had not fired on the crowd but "fell back" before resuming aid operations. Israel said its troops nearby had fired warning shots.

Ajith Sunghay, head of the UN Human Rights Office for the Palestinian territories, had earlier told reporters in Geneva that 47 people were wounded, mostly by gunfire.

In a separate development, Israel said it had carried out airstrikes Wednesday on the international airport in Yemen's capital, Sanaa, after Iran-backed Houthi rebels fired several missiles at the country in recent days, without causing casualties. The Israeli military said it destroyed aircraft used by the rebels.

Israel last struck the airport in Sanaa on May 6, destroying the airport's terminal and leaving its runway riddled with craters. Some flights resumed to Sanaa on May 17.

Chaos at new aid hub  
The distribution hub outside Gaza's southernmost city of Rafah was opened the day before by the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation, which has been slated by Israel to take over aid operations.

The UN and other humanitarian organisations have rejected the new system, saying it won't be able to meet the needs of



Gaza's 2.3 million people and allows Israel to use food as a weapon to control the population. They have also warned of the risk of friction between Israeli troops and people seeking supplies.

Palestinians have become desperate for food after nearly three months of Israeli border closures pushed Gaza to the brink of famine.

Israel says it helped establish the new aid mechanism to prevent Hamas from siphoning off supplies, but it has provided no evidence of systematic diversion, and UN agencies say they have mechanisms in place to prevent it.

GHF says it has established four hubs, two of which have begun operating. They are guarded by private security contractors and have chain-link fences channelling Palestinians into a what resemble military bases surrounded by large sand berms.

Israeli forces are stationed nearby in what Israel refers to as the Morag corridor, a military zone separating the southern city of

Rafah — which is now mostly uninhabited — from the rest of the territory.

The UN and other humanitarian groups have refused to participate in GHF's system, saying it violates humanitarian principles. They say it can be used by Israel to forcibly displace the population by requiring them to move near the few distribution hubs or else face starvation, a violation of international law.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Tuesday that "there was some loss of control momentarily" at the distribution point, adding that "happily, we brought it under control."

He repeated that Israel plans to move Gaza's entire population to a "sterile zone" at the southern end of the territory while troops fight Hamas elsewhere.

Throughout the war, the UN and other aid groups have conducted a massive operation distributing food, medicine and other supplies to wherever Palestinians are located. Israel says GHF will replace that network,

but the past week has allowed a trickle of aid to enter Gaza for the UN to distribute.

Israel says it destroyed the Houthis' last plane

Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz said the strikes on Wednesday destroyed the last plane used by the Houthis, while the rebel-run al-Masirah TV said they had targeted a plane from the country's flagship carrier Yemenia.

According to FlightRadar24, Yemenia had a total of four aircraft registered.

The Houthis have targeted Israel throughout the war in solidarity with Palestinians, raising their profile at home and internationally as the last member of Iran's self-described "Axis of Resistance" capable of launching regular attacks on Israel.

The Houthi missiles have mostly been intercepted, although some have penetrated Israel's missile defence systems, causing casualties and damage. Israel has frequently struck back against the rebels in Yemen, especially around the vital Hodeida port.

Netanyahu said that Israel would continue to strike as long as the Houthis continued launching missiles towards Israel. "Whoever doesn't understand it by force — will understand it by more force," he said.

The war in Gaza began when Hamas-led militants stormed into southern Israel on October 7, 2023, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducting 251. Hamas still holds 58 hostages, around a third of them believed to be alive. Most of the rest were released in ceasefire deals or other agreements. Israeli forces have rescued eight and recovered dozens of bodies.

Israel's retaliatory campaign has killed over 54,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza's Health Ministry. It says women and children make up most of the dead but does not distinguish between civilians and combatants in its tally. (AP)

## Supporters of Bangladesh's ex-premier Khaleda Zia rally to call for general election

**DHAKA, May 28:** Tens of thousands of students and youths from a leading Bangladeshi political party rallied in the capital, Dhaka, on Wednesday, calling for a general election in December as discontent grows with the interim government appointed after the ouster of former prime minister Sheikh Hasina in August. Activists from three groups linked to the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, or BNP, headed by former prime minister Khaleda Zia gathered on the streets outside its party headquarters, under heightened security.

Wednesday's rally was held after weeks of political tensions after interim leader and Nobel Peace laureate Muhammad Yunus threatened to quit and the influential military chief publicly declared his support for an election in December.

Zia, who has been suffering from ill-health for several years, recently returned to Bangladesh after four months of medical treatment in London, putting further pressure on Bangladesh's interim government to call an election.

Hasina, Zia's arch rival, has been in exile in India since she was toppled last year by a mass uprising. Her party, the Awami League, was also banned by the interim government.

The BNP's acting chairman, Tarique Rahman, Zia's elder son, was expected to address the rally later on Wednesday by video link from London, where he is in exile.

The interim government has been shaken by a series of protests, including by civil servants, primary school teachers and employees at the national revenue service in recent weeks. They accuse the government of failures in prosecuting organised crime figures responsible for killing



and injuring hundreds of people.

Business bodies have also criticised Yunus over the weakness of the economy and labour unrest.

When Yunus came to power, he promised to make reforms in areas including the election law, women's rights and general administration, but the process has been slow and his critics believe he is using delaying tactics to remain in power.

The 10 months of rule under Yunus also marked a visible rise of influence by Islamists in the Muslim-majority country, which is governed largely by a secular constitution and legal system. A fatigued military, which has been out of barracks since July last year to maintain law and order, is unhappy because of the delay in returning to democracy.

The BNP recently met with Yunus and reiterated its demand for an election in December, saying that if Yunus quits, the country will find an alternative leader. But Yunus' associates later said he was staying.

Yunus promised to hold an election by June 2026, depending on the extent of reforms it has undertaken. The BNP, which is hopeful of forming the next government in absence of Hasina's Awami League, said the pace of implementation of reforms should not be an excuse to delay the election and argued that the reform is a continuous process. (AP)

## Britain's biggest water firm hit with record fine over sewage and dividends

**LONDON, May 28:** Britain's biggest water company was fined almost 123 million pounds (\$166 million) on Wednesday for releasing sewage into rivers and streams while paying dividends to its shareholders. Industry regulator Ofwat said that Thames Water must pay 104.5 million pounds for failing to protect the environment, and 18.2 million pounds for breaking rules related to dividend payments. It's the biggest-ever penalty levied by the water watchdog.

Ofwat said that the company, which provides water and sewage services to 16 million people in and around London, failed "to build, maintain and operate adequate infrastructure to meet its obligations" and also paid "undeserved dividends." The UK government said that the fines "will be paid by the company and its investors, and not by customers." Thames Water is at the centre of nationwide anger over sewage spills that have fouled lakes,

ivers and beaches at a time when water and sewage companies are hiking bills to modernise aging systems and cope with the demands of climate change and population growth.

The cash-strapped company has teetered on the edge of insolvency under about 19 billion pounds in debt. It won court approval in March for 3 billion pounds in emergency funding to keep it from falling into government administration. It is currently trying to push through a sale to US investment firm KKR. Consumers and politicians have criticised the company, arguing that Thames Water created its own problems by paying overly generous dividends to investors and high salaries to executives while failing to invest in pipelines, pumps and reservoirs. Company executives say that the fault lies with regulators, which kept bills too low for too long, starving the company of vital cash to fund improvements.

## Bangladesh SC acquits Jamaat leader on death row for 1971 war crimes

**DHAKA, May 27:** Bangladesh's Supreme Court on Tuesday acquitted a senior Jamaat-e-Islami leader, overturning his death sentence by the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) in a war crimes case related to the 1971 Liberation War against Pakistan. ATM Azharul Islam was acquitted by the Appellate Division of the apex court.

"The full seven-member bench chaired by Chief Justice Syed Refaat Ahmed, delivered the verdict, ordering acquittal of Mr ATM Azharul Islam," a state counsel said.

He said the court also directed the prison authorities to release Islam from jail immediately if he was not arrested in other cases.

There was no higher court in Bangladesh or any international forum to reverse the apex court verdict, the counsel added.

According to state and defence counsels, the apex court observed that the death sentence was handed down without any proper assessment of evidence, leading to an "unjust verdict".

The 73-year-old leader of the Islamic party, which was opposed to Bangladesh's independence from Pakistan in 1971, was arrested over charges of committing crimes against humanity during the War.

Bangladesh's International Crimes Tribunal sentenced him to death for multiple charges, including

genocide, murder, and rape.

The Appellate Division upheld the verdict after an appeal hearing on October 23, 2019, prompting Islam to file a petition seeking to review the judgment before the same court on July 19, 2020, presenting 14 legal arguments.

Professor Muhammad Yunus's interim government Law Adviser Asif Nazrul welcomed the acquittal calling it the outcome of last year's student-led movement that ousted prime minister Sheikh Hasina's Awami League regime on August 5. "The credit for creating the scope for establishing this justice goes to the July-August mass movement leadership," Nazrul said in a social media post.

However, hours after the announcement, left-leaning students at the premier Dhaka University (DU) and northwestern Rajshahi University (RU) took to the streets.

Several left-leaning student groups at DU staged a protest march against the acquittal, accusing the interim government of facilitating Islam's exoneration.

"We condemn the interim administration's attempt to rewrite history after 54 years with such assertions," Bangladesh Students' Union General Secretary Shimul Kumbhakar told the rally.

Kumbhakar added: "If the interim government continues releasing Razakars and Al-Badr members

(armed collaborators of Pakistani Army in 1971) and fully absolving them of their crimes, it (interim government) will face the same downfall as the fascist (deposed premier) Hasina's regime."

Revolutionary Student Unity General Secretary Jabir Ahmed Jubel said, "We witnessed someone who was sentenced to death on three separate counts now being cleared of all charges".

According to media reports and witnesses, violence sparked in the RU campus as left-leaning student groups brought out a torch march. It was confronted by activists of Islamic Chhatra Shibir — said to be the student front of Jamaat.

Democratic Student Alliance, a grouping of left-leaning organisations in RU alleged that around 200 Shibir activists attacked their torch march, wounding over a dozen of their supporters on the campus, known to be a Shibir stronghold.

Shibir too claimed that some of their activists were injured in the attack.

In 2009, Bangladesh initiated a legal process to try key collaborators of Pakistani forces in 1971 on charges of crimes against humanity. Following trials, six top Jamaat-e-Islami leaders and one senior figure from former prime minister Khaleda Zia's Bangladesh Nationalist Party were executed after the Supreme Court's Appellate Division upheld their convictions. (PTI)

## World should speak in one voice against terrorism: Italian Senator Craxi

**ROME, May 28:** An all-party delegation on Wednesday met Italian Senator Stefania Craxi, who said the world should speak in one voice against terrorism and proposed India-Italy cooperation to address the global menace.

The eight-member delegation led by BJP MP Ravi Shankar Prasad, which arrived in Rome on Tuesday, briefed Craxi, the head of the Senate's Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee, about India's united stance against terrorism in all its forms, and zero tolerance against cross-border terrorism, the Indian mission in Rome said.

The delegation is one of the seven multi-party delegations India has tasked to visit 33 global capitals to reach out to the international community on Pakistan's designs and India's response to terror, especially in view of the April 22 Pahalgalam terror attack that killed 26 people.

"Senator Craxi stated that we should speak in one

voice against terrorism and proposed India-Italy cooperation to address this global scourge," the Indian Embassy in Rome said on X.

The delegation, upon arriving in Rome, was received by Ambassador Vani Rao, who briefed the team about its packed schedule in the city.

"The delegation will convey India's firm and united message against cross-border terrorism in the context of #OperationSindoor," the embassy said.

The delegation led by Prasad visited France before arriving in Italy. It will then visit Denmark, Germany, the UK, and the European Union in Brussels.

The delegation's discussions in Italy are aimed at strengthening India's bilateral and international cooperation to combat terrorism, according to a statement by the Indian Embassy in Rome.

"The visit will further enhance mutual understanding between India and Italy and strengthen the growing strategic partnership," it said. (AP)

## Indonesia extends support to India's fight against terrorism

**JAKARTA, May 28:** Indonesia on Wednesday extended its support to India's fight against terrorism in all possible forums as an all-party parliamentary delegation led by JDU MP Sanjay Kumar Jha arrived here with a mission to convey New Delhi's unequivocal stance against the menace. The delegation met Indonesian Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Arief Havas Oegroseno and "conveyed that the attack on innocent civilians at Pahalgalam was an attempt to disrupt peace and drive a wedge between communities," the Indian Embassy in Jakarta posted on X.

"(The) Indonesian side reiterated its condemnation of the terrorist act and extended support in the fight against terrorism in all possible forums," it said.

The delegation also met ASEAN Secretary-General Kao Kim Hourn at his headquarters here.

During the meeting, Kao "commended the Indian Parliament's active engagement in promoting inter-parliamentary dialogue and ASEAN-India cooperation,

particularly as an observer in the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (AIPA)," according to the official X account of ASEAN. He highlighted the significance of aligning legislative and executive efforts in advancing ASEAN's regional priorities and reaffirmed the regional grouping's commitment to the comprehensive strategic partnership with India, it said.

They also exchanged views on transnational crime, including combating terrorism and violent extremism.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) members include Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. The delegation also met Muhammad Husein Fadlulloh, Vice-Chairperson of the Committee for Inter-Parliamentary Cooperation, and Muhammad Rofiqi, S.H., Chairperson of the Indonesia-India Parliamentary Friendship Group, to sensitise them on India's strong commitment against terrorism. (PTI)

## 1998 N-tests ensured 'credible minimum deterrence' that guarantees peace: Pak's top leadership

**ISLAMABAD, May 28:** Commemorating the 27th anniversary of Pakistan's first successful nuclear tests, its top leadership on Wednesday said the historic move in 1998 has ensured a "credible minimum deterrence" to safeguard the country's territorial integrity. Pakistan conducted six nuclear tests on May 28, 1998, inside a deeply dug tunnel in the remote Chaghi mountain of Balochistan province, as a response to India's nuclear tests in the same month at the Indian Army's Pokhran Test Range.

Designated as Youm-e-Takbeer, translated as 'the day of greatness' or 'the day of God's greatness', and observed annually with national zeal and fervour, the government has declared Wednesday a public holiday. Pakistan became the seventh nuclear nation in the world and the first Muslim state in 1998, having a nuclear arsenal in its defence stockpile to exercise deterrence. Congratulating the nation on the occasion of Youm-e-Takbeer, President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif in separate messages renewed their pledge to uphold and safeguard the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Pakistan.

In his message, President Zardari said Pakistan's "nuclear capability continues to serve as a credible minimum deterrence that guarantees peace and ensures no one can undermine our sovereignty and national security".

He said Pakistan does not seek conflict and is committed to the principles of peaceful coexistence and respect for international law. He claimed that Pakistan demonstrated its strategic patience and commitment to peace in the recent military confrontation with

India. In his message on the occasion, Prime Minister Sharif hailed Pakistan's nuclear journey and called for renewed unity and determination to transform the country into an economic power.

Sharif linked this year's commemoration with what he described as Pakistan's recent "success" in defending itself in the "war" with India. He urged the nation to carry the spirit of Youm-e-Takbeer beyond defence and into economic transformation.

Tensions between India and Pakistan escalated after the Pahalgalam attack, which claimed 26 lives. India launched 'Operation Sindoor' under which it carried out precision strikes on terror infrastructure in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir in the early hours of May 7, following which Pakistan attempted to attack Indian military bases on May 8, 9 and 10.

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

The army in a statement said the Youm-e-Takbeer commemorates the momentous occasion when Pakistan emerged as a nuclear power, restoring the strategic balance in South Asia and asserting its sovereign right to self-defence.

"This historic achievement epitomises the nation's resolve, unity, and unwavering pursuit of a dignified and peaceful existence... It affirms our doctrine of credible minimum deterrence, rooted in the principle of maintaining peace and strategic stability in the region," it said. (PTI)

## World's nations to gather in France to tackle what UN says is a global emergency in the oceans

**UNITED NATIONS, May 28:** The world's nations are gathering in France next month to tackle what the United Nations calls a global emergency facing the world's oceans as they confront rising temperatures, plastic pollution choking marine life, and relentless overexploitation of fish and other resources.

The third UN Ocean Conference aims to unite governments, scientists, businesses and civil society to take action and raise money to address these and other crises facing the oceans and the people who rely on them for their survival.

Conference Secretary-General Li Junhua told reporters on Tuesday he hopes it will not be another routine meeting but "the pivotal opportunity" to accelerate action and mobilise people in all sectors and across the world.

The conference, co-sponsored by France and Costa Rica, takes place in Nice on the French Riviera from June 7 to June 13. It is expected to bring together more than 60 world leaders, dozens of ministers, about 4,000 government officials and 6,000 members of civil society, Li told The Associated Press.

Costa Rica's UN Ambassador Maritza Chan Valverde said accelerating action to



conserve and use the ocean sustainably "means cutting decision-making time from years to months" and engaging all 193 UN member nations, more than 1,000 cities and over 500 corporations simultaneously.

"What is different this time around?" she said. Zero rhetoric. Maximum results.

Valverde said she expects participants to make commitments totalling \$100 billion in new funding to address the crisis facing the oceans.

France's UN Ambassador J r me Bonafont said his country's priorities for the conference include obtaining 60 ratifications for the treaty to protect biodiversity in the high seas adopted in March 2023, so it goes into effect. The treaty's mission is to ensure sustainable fishing, mobilise support to protect and conserve at least 30% of the oceans' waters, fight plastic pollution, "accelerate decarbonisation" of maritime transportation and mobilise financing.

Conference participants are expected to adopt a declaration that says action is not advancing fast enough to address the impact of "the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution."

"We underscore the central role of a healthy and resilient ocean in sustaining life on Earth, ensuring global food security, and supporting billions of lives," the final draft says.

It supports new scientific research to meet the challenges of climate change and improve the scientific understanding of the oceans. It does not address the issue of deep-sea mining because a consensus could not be reached, Li said.

The Trump administration said last week that it will consider selling leases to extract minerals from the seabed off the South Pacific island of American Samoa, a potential first step in a wider industry push to allow deep-sea mining, which environmentalists oppose because they say it could irreparably harm marine ecosystems.

The declaration and voluntary commitments from governments and all sectors are expected to become the Nice Ocean Action Plan. (AP)



Submits memorandum to Dy CM Chowna Mein

## AAPPDWU reiterates six-point charter of demands

HT Bureau

NAMSAL, May 28: The All Arunachal Pradesh Power Department Workers Union (AAPPDWU) has reiterated its Six-Point Charter of Demands concerning the welfare and rights of Power Department workers. A memorandum outlining these demands was formally submitted to Deputy Chief Minister Chowna Mein, who also holds the portfolio of Power Minister.

Addressing the media, AAPPDWU President Ringu Chapo stated that the Union has long been pursuing the state government for redressal of several pressing and legitimate grievances faced by workers. "We recently met Deputy Chief Minister Chowna Mein and discussed our six-point charter of demands. As a senior leader, we are confident that he understands the concerns of the workers and will take steps in the best interests of our community," Chapo said.

The Six-Point Charter of Demands includes:

### Implementation of 13-Month Salary/Overtime

Field staff, including Junior Engineers, Electricians, Linemen, Wiremen, and Panel Operators, should be granted 13-month salary or adequate overtime compensation, reflecting their field-



intensive duties.

### Accidental Death Benefits and Compassionate Appointments

In the unfortunate event of accidental death, the family of the deceased worker should be prioritized for appointment on a work-charge basis. Additionally, a compensation amount of Rs50 lakh should be granted in such cases.

One-Time Job Regularization

for Long-Term Casual Workers

Workers who have rendered 15 to 30 years of service on a casual or contingency basis should be provided one-time job regularization to recognize their long-term contribution.

### Creation of New Posts for Work-Charge/Casual Staff

The Union highlighted that the current posts under work-charge and contingency categories date

back to the NEFA era, with no new posts created in the last 10-15 years. The Union urged the government to create sufficient new posts to meet growing manpower needs.

### Reduction of Direct Recruitment Quota from Group D to Group C

AAPPDWU demanded minimizing the direct recruitment quota in Group D to Group C promotions to 10% across all categories. Under the current regularity scheme, high direct recruitment quotas are depriving skilled Group D workers of promotion opportunities.

### Grade Pay Revision

The Union demanded an upgradation of grade pay from the existing Rs 1900 to Rs 2400 for work-charge and similarly skilled staff working under government establishments.

General Secretary of AAPPDWU noted that the Pema Khandu-led government has previously demonstrated its pro-worker stance by enhancing the monthly salaries of contingency staff. "We are hopeful that our six-point charter of demands will also be considered and approved at the earliest. We urge the Deputy Chief Minister to take immediate action on our genuine appeals," he said.

## Two Covid cases reported in Arunachal

No cause for panic, says Health Minister

HT Bureau

NAMSAL, May 28: Health & Family Welfare Minister Biyuram Wahge confirmed that two Covid-19 cases have been detected in Arunachal Pradesh. The patients—a mother and her daughter—recently returned from Hyderabad and tested positive for the virus.

Addressing the media, Minister Wahge emphasized that there is no emergency or reason for panic. "There is no alarming situation. So far, only two positive cases have been detected. The present form of Covid is mild, and the central government has also clarified that there is no need to create panic among the general public," he said.

Wahge further stated that, compared to the national figures—where approximately 1,000 cases have been reported across the country—the numbers remain very low. "We are not in a serious state of affairs. Arunachal Pradesh, like the rest of the country, has already experienced the Covid-19 pandemic and most people are aware of its symptoms and preventive measures," he added.

He reassured the public that the state government is well-prepared to handle any situation that may arise. "It is still very early. We are monitoring the situation and will take necessary steps if required. Guidelines for managing viral and communicable diseases are already



in place, so there is no cause for concern," said the Health Minister.

Drawing comparisons with Delhi, Wahge noted, "Even in Delhi, which has a population of over one crore, only around 100 cases have been reported. Here in Arunachal Pradesh, we have just two cases. So, there's no need to worry. Under the leadership of Chief Minister Pema Khandu, the government is fully prepared to face any eventuality."

The Health Minister also used the occasion to stress the importance of personal health. "Health is wealth. Everyone should maintain a healthy lifestyle through regular exercise, sports, and daily yoga to build immunity and stay fit," he advised. He concluded by assuring that, if needed, the state government will convene and take further measures to combat the virus, just as it had done during the earlier waves of the pandemic.

## Arunachal Cycling Association convenes annual general body meeting

HT Bureau

NAMSAL, May 28: The Arunachal Cycling Association (ACA) held its Annual General Body Meeting on Monday, outlining its strategic vision and key initiatives aimed at bolstering the cycling ecosystem in the state. The meeting was presided over by ACA President Mutchu Mithi and saw active participation from senior members, stakeholders, and cycling enthusiasts.

The meeting was conducted in two sessions. The first session focused on the selection and election of new members to the General Body, a vital move aimed at strengthening the internal framework and democratic functioning of the Association.

During the second session, the agenda pivoted to crucial matters such as district affiliations, preparations for the upcoming MTB (Mountain Terrain Biking) Nationals, and enhancing Arunachal Pradesh's participation in national-level cycling competitions. The discussions underscored the need to elevate the state's visibility and performance on the national cycling stage.

ACA Director Ramesh Linggi presented a detailed overview of the ACA Constitution, including its Memorandum and Articles of Association, to provide organizational clarity and reinforce compliance with regulatory frameworks.

## APBB conducts training and capacity building programme for Doimara Biodiversity Management Committee

HT Bureau

NAMSAL, May 28: The Arunachal Pradesh Biodiversity Board (APBB) successfully organised a Training and Capacity Building Programme for the Doimara Biodiversity Management Committee (BMC) on May 26 at Doimara, West Kameng District. The programme aimed to strengthen the knowledge and capacities of BMC members in managing and conserving the region's rich biodiversity.

The event witnessed active participation from BMC members, Gaon Burahs, NGO representatives, staff of the APBB, KS Rab (Technical Officer and Scientist In-Charge, Zoology Division), and various local stakeholders.

In his address, HB Abo, IFS, Member Secretary of the APBB, urged BMCs to take proactive roles in conservation efforts and make meaningful contributions toward safeguarding the state's rich biodiversity. He stressed the importance of involving local communities at the grassroots level to meet the objectives of the State Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (SBSAP) 2025-35, which is aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Dr Ramen Yakang, Research Officer at APBB, conducted an informative session on the Biological Diversity Act, 2002, and the Biological Diversity (Amendment) Act, 2023. She emphasized the sig-

nificance of regularly updating the People's Biodiversity Register (PBR), implementing Access and Benefit Sharing (ABS) mechanisms, and the critical responsibilities of BMCs and local stakeholders in ensuring conservation and sustainable resource use.

DK Thungon, Chairman of the Doimara BMC, shared insights into their ongoing initiatives, including the formation of women's self-help groups focused on pickle-making, vermicomposting, and apiculture.

Dr Ona Apang, Head of the Orchid Division at the State Forest Research Institute (SFRI), delivered a presentation on the distribution of orchids in the Eagle Nest Sanctuary and Doimara Reserve Forest. She elaborated on orchid cultivation techniques, their commercial potential, and advocated for establishing an Orchid Sub-Centre in the region.

Aye Deigo from Transition Consultant Private Limited also spoke about the orchid biodiversity of Arunachal Pradesh and detailed their current project aimed at positioning the state as the "Orchid Capital of the World."

The programme concluded with a vote of thanks by Ngilyang Tangu, staff member of the APBB, who expressed gratitude to all participants and stakeholders for their active engagement and contributions to the successful conduct of the programme.

## From 2-Rupee Mosambi to a Life of Purpose: My Journey as a Woman Entrepreneur in Namsai



Nang Otika Namchoom

I was born and raised in Namsai, a serene district in Arunachal Pradesh, where childhood memories are stitched together by the earthy fragrance of the land and the sight of lush mosambi trees swaying in the wind. My mother, a diligent farmer, grew mosambis in abundance. Yet, I often found myself questioning the sight of those golden fruits being sold for a mere rupees 2 each. It felt like a loss—not just in value, but in potential.

In 2006, I took a small but bold leap. I opened a mosambi juice bar, fueled by a simple idea: instead of selling two mosambis for rupees 4, why not transform them into a glass of fresh juice worth 50? That tiny shift in perspective was the spark that would change the course of my life. What began as an experiment turned into a passion, and eventually, a mission.

A few years into the venture, my family faced a deeply personal challenge. My father was diagnosed with liver cirrhosis, and it was one of the scariest chapters of our lives. Desperate to help, I immersed myself in studying nutrition, detox, and liver health. That period transformed me—and my business. I began developing health-focused detox drinks, each one crafted with care and knowledge, designed to heal from the inside out.

Another turning point came when I decided to combine the juice bar with a car wash—an idea that many initially thought unusual. But I believed in its simplicity: people waiting for their cars often need a place to relax. Why not offer them a rejuvenating drink while they wait? The idea clicked. What seemed unconventional became a local favorite, turning the space into a vibrant, welcoming hub for wellness and community.

At the heart of everything I've built is a commitment to women's empowerment. I believe deeply in the potential of young women—especially those who haven't had the chance to work before. Many of my employees are first-time workers, and watching them grow in confidence, independence, and skill has been one of the most fulfilling parts of my journey.

### Our motto is simple but powerful: Drink well. Live well.

Every juice we serve is made with intention—to nourish, to heal, and to inspire.

Looking back, I'm amazed at how something as small as a 2-rupee fruit sparked a journey that's transformed my life and touched so many others. My journey as a woman entrepreneur in Namsai is still unfolding, but I walk it every day with pride, purpose, and hope—hope for a healthier community, stronger women, and a world where even the humblest beginnings can lead to beautiful destinations.

## A tribute to the region's biodiversity and cultural heritage 'Unexplored Tirap: A Bio-cultural Portrait' book launched in Khonsa

HT Bureau

NAMSAL, May 28: The vibrant forests and rich cultural tapestry of Tirap took center stage today with the launch of the pictorial book "Unexplored Tirap: A Bio-Cultural Portrait" at the PWD Circuit House Conference Hall in Khonsa. The book was unveiled in a ceremony graced by Deputy Commissioner Shri Techu Aran, who served as the Chief Guest and applauded the authors for their commitment to capturing Tirap's unique ecological and cultural identity.

In his address, DC Techu Aran congratulated the authors for their devoted efforts in portraying the region's distinctive biodiversity. Emphasizing the critical roles of insects, birds, and animals in maintaining ecological balance, he stressed the urgency of conservation. "Our survival is intricately linked with the survival of wildlife. Every species, no matter how small, plays a vital role in sustaining the ecological web," he noted.

He urged the people of Tirap to abandon unsustainable practices like rampant hunting and destructive fishing methods involving chemicals, electric shocks, or explosives. The DC also called on the Divisional Forest Officers of Khonsa and Deomali to step up awareness campaigns on wildlife protection and to foster community participation in conservation efforts. He highlighted the importance of protecting fish during breeding seasons to sustain aquatic biodiversity and ensure food security in the region.

Guest of Honour DDSE K.C. Lowangcha commended the authors for their perseverance and deep passion for conservation. Reflecting on the initial hardships faced by Chajo Lowang and Sara Khongsai, she applauded their courage in braving remote and rugged forest terrains to document wildlife through photography.



Nikita Buragohain, Project Coordinator of the Green Hub X Royal Enfield Conservation Grant, spoke about the organization's collaboration with the authors since 2022 in documenting Tirap's ecological and cultural diversity. She mentioned that the initiative aligns with Green Hub's mission to empower youth through storytelling, photography, and community engagement. She praised the authors for shedding light on lesser-known species and landscapes of the region.

The event was further honored by the presence of Veer Nari Smt. Chasan Dada, wife of the late Havildar Hangpan Dada (Ashok Chakra awardee), whose attendance symbolized service and sacrifice.

District Student Union, President of the All Nocte Student Union, and youth associations from Borduria and New Tupi villages.

In her keynote address, co-author Chajo Lowang shared the inspiration behind the book and expressed gratitude to the District Administration—notably former DC Taro Mize, current DC Techu Aran, former EAC Hakraso Kri, and APO/RE Telem Kintya—for their steadfast support. She spoke about the physical and emotional challenges of venturing into dense forests to document rare wildlife moments and acknowledged Green Hub Tezpur for the essential photography and research training that enabled the project's success.

The program concluded with a heartfelt vote of thanks by co-author Sara Khongsai on behalf of the authors and organizing team. She expressed appreciation for all who supported the publication of "Unexplored Tirap: A Bio-cultural Portrait", emphasizing that the book represents not just their work but a powerful call to action for wildlife conservation and sustainable living in harmony with nature.

No.KED/NIT-66/2024-25/3870

### DETAILS TENDER NOTICE

Sealed tender in prescribed form affixing non-refundable court fee stamp of Rs. 8.25 (Rupees Eight & paise twenty five) only subsequently to be drawn up in printed "F-2" form with validity period of "90 (Ninety)" days from the date of receipt of tenders are invited from the Registered Class-I (A, B, C) & Class-II P.W.D. Electrical Contractor under P.W.D. Guwahati Electrical Circle, Guwahati-1 and the Registered Class-III P.W.D. Kokrajhar Electrical Division of 2024-25 and having valid Electrical Contractor licence for the following electrical works and will be received in the Office of the undersigned up to 2.00 P.M. of 03/06/2025 and will be opened at 3.00 P.M. of the same date. The Contractors or their authorized agents may be present at the time of opening tender.

Sl. No.	Name of Work	Approx Estimated Value	Time of Completion	Earnest Money
1	Providing & Installation of Air Conditioner Machine, Geyser, Chimney, Water Purifier etc. to the newly constructed Grade-I Officers Qtr. of Judicial Department at Bhalukdubi, Goalpara	Rs. 15,84,170.00	30 (Thirty) Days	General 2 (Two) P.C. of Tender value (1% of Tender value in case of OBC/SC/ST)
2	Providing and Installation of Public Address System to the newly constructed Addl. Court Building i.e. MACT etc. (G+2) of Judicial Department at Bhalukdubi, Goalpara	Rs. 12,16,214.00	90 (Ninety) Days	

Tender forms can be had from the Office of the undersigned and Executive Engineer, P.W.D. Kokrajhar Electrical Division, Kokrajhar during working hours and up to 2.00 P.M. 02/06/2025 on application mentioned registration No. etc. on payment of Rs. 700.00 (Rupees Seven hundred) only per set by Indian crossed postal order payable to the Executive Engineer, P.W.D. Kokrajhar Electrical Division, Kokrajhar.

Sd/-  
Executive Engineer, P.W.D.,  
Kokrajhar Electrical Division, Kokrajhar

IPR(BTC)/C/2025-26/529

Dated, Kokrajhar the 27 May/2025



# Achievements of Padma awardees will inspire generations, says Amit Shah

**NEW DELHI, May 28:** The Padma Awards ceremony realises Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision to encourage people-led social transformations by honouring individuals who have quietly brought positive changes. Union Home Minister Amit Shah has said. Hosting a dinner in honour of those who were conferred with the Padma Awards on Tuesday night, Shah also said that the achievements of the awardees will inspire generations.

"The Padma Awards ceremony realises Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision to encourage people-led social transformations by honouring individuals who have quietly brought positive changes," the minister said after the ceremony.

Shah congratulated the luminaries who were conferred with the Padma Awards.

"Pleased to have hosted the stalwarts who have been honoured with the Padma awards 2025," he said.

The home minister spoke to the awardees about their unique life journeys and the changes they have fostered in society, and said that it was an engrossing experience.

"At the dinner hosted for the Padma awardees today, (I) had the pleasure of interacting with the distinguished personalities from diverse walks of life who are making



our world better in their own unique ways," he said.

Former chief justice of India Jagdish Singh Khehar, Bharatnatyam dancer Shobana Chandrakumar, actor Anant Nag and King George's Medical University Vice Chancellor Soniya Nityanand were among the 68 eminent personalities conferred with the coveted Padma Awards by President Droupadi Murmu on Tuesday.

A total of 139 distinguished persons were named for the country's civilian awards -- Padma Vibhushan, Padma Bhushan and Padma Shri -- on the eve of the 76th Republic Day on January 25. The President gave awards to 68

chosen ones on Tuesday in the second civil investiture ceremony at the Rashtrapati Bhavan in the presence of Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar, Prime Minister Modi and Shah, among others.

During the first investiture ceremony on April 28, President Murmu conferred Padma Awards on 71 personalities.

In the ceremony held at the Rashtrapati Bhavan's Ganatantra Mandap, President Murmu conferred the country's second highest civilian honour, Padma Vibhushan, on Justice (ret'd) Khehar for public affairs. The awards for Kathak dancer late Kumudini Rajinikant Lakhia and legendary folk singer

late Sharda Sinha were received by Lakhia's grandson and Sinha's son, respectively.

The President also handed over nine Padma Bhushans, the third highest civilian award, to noted personalities, including Chandrakumar, businessman Nalli Kuppuswami Chetti, archaeologist Kailash Nath Dikshit, dancer Jatin Goswami, actor Anant Nag and Sadhvi Ritambhara.

The awards for economist late Bibek Debroy and former Maharashtra chief minister and Lok Sabha speaker late Manohar Joshi were received by Debroy's wife and Joshi's son, respectively.

The awards are given in various disciplines and fields such as art, social work, public affairs, science and engineering, trade and industry, medicine, literature and education, sports and civil service, among others.

Padma Vibhushan is awarded for exceptional and distinguished service; Padma Bhushan for distinguished service of high order; and Padma Shri for distinguished service in any field.

Ever since the Modi government came to power in 2014, it has started honouring the "unsung heroes" with the Padma Awards, thus transforming them into "People's Padma". This year, the Padma Awards were given to 30 "unsung heroes". (PTI)

# J-K statehood talks still alive regardless of Pahalgam attack: Omar Abdullah

**GULMARG (JK), May 28:** Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Wednesday said the April 22 Pahalgam attack has not stalled the conversation around restoration of statehood to Jammu and Kashmir and that he had raised the issue at the recent meeting of NITI Aayog governing council.

"No, not at all. If you were to take out the formal speech that circulated in the NITI Aayog meeting, you will find a categorical mention for return of statehood in that ... which was given to the Honourable Prime Minister and all the members of the governing council of the NITI Aayog," Abdullah told reporters in this tourist resort of north Kashmir, 52 kilometres from Srinagar.

Abdullah was responding to a question whether the Pahalgam terror attack had affected the talk about restoration of statehood to Jammu and Kashmir. "So, the conversation around statehood has not stalled. The only thing I was unwilling to do was to use the special session of the (Jammu and Kashmir) assembly to talk about statehood. But that does not mean the conversation has stopped. The conversation is ongoing," he said.

On the revival of tourism, the chief minister, who chaired a meeting here, said it is the Kashmiris who should be visiting tourist places in the valley before expecting people from other parts of the country to come visiting again.

"There should be publicity and lively activity at these places. I have



asked the Education minister to start picnics for schools and colleges so that we start moving back towards normalcy," he said.

Besides top civil administration officials, the meeting was attended by inspector general of police, Kashmir, deputy inspector general, North Kashmir, and senior superintendent of police, Baramulla.

On Tuesday, Abdullah chaired a meeting of his council of ministers in south Kashmir's Pahalgam.

The aim behind holding meetings outside the fortified Civil Secretariat is to give the people a sense of security and trust. He also said the people elsewhere must not hold the Kashmiris responsible for the attack which left 26 tourists dead.

"The people of Kashmir did not carry out this attack. It was not done with our permission or for our benefit. But still if you punish the people of Kashmir, boycott them, then what shall we do? That is why I want the Centre not to ignore this, it should use the investigating agencies to probe and stop this campaign," he said. On a memorial for the Pahalgam attack victims, he said a decision has been taken by the cabinet in this regard and tasked the Roads and Buildings Department to frame a concrete proposal. "The R&B department has been asked to invite expressions of interest in terms of designs for this memorial. Once it comes, we will take it forward," he added. Abdullah said he was thankful that tourism delegations from various parts of the country have come to assess the situation for revival of tourism in Kashmir. He said that at present some tourist destinations are closed altogether, while there is partial closing down at some destinations. "This was a compulsion after April 22. We have to slowly and gradually review the list. There was a difference between incidents in the past and this incident. People came out to protest on their own. They condemned it," he said.

Abdullah also said that Jammu and Kashmir being a Union Territory, the law and order and security are not the responsibility of the elected government. "Whose responsibility is it? The Lieutenant Governor. Therefore, clearly there are three sets of power centres that need to coordinate to ensure that things go smoothly here. I can promote tourism, I can create the infrastructure, I can ensure that tourists come and have a good visit but the security of the tourists currently resides within the powers of the LG. (PTI)

# PM Modi to lay foundation stone, inaugurate projects worth ₹ 20,900 cr in Kanpur

**KANPUR (UP), May 28:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi will lay the foundation stone and inaugurate multiple development projects worth about ₹ 20,900 crore here on Friday to boost the region's infrastructure and connectivity, an official statement issued here said.

He will launch Chunniganj Metro Station to Kanpur Central Metro Station section of the Kanpur Metro Rail Project worth more than ₹ 2,120 crore. It will include 14 planned stations with five new underground stations integrating key city landmarks and commercial hubs into the metro network.

Besides, he will also inaugurate road-widening and strengthening work of GT Road, the statement said. In order to boost the power generation capacity in the region, Prime Minister Modi will also lay the foundation stone (from Kanpur) of a 220 kV substation in Sector 28 at Yamuna Expressway Industrial Development Authority (YEIDA), Gautam Buddha Nagar. He will also inaugurate 132 kV substations worth over ₹ 320 crore at Ecotech-8 and Ecotech-10 in Greater Noida.

The prime minister will inaugurate a 660 MW Panki Thermal Power Extension Project in Kanpur worth over ₹ 8,300 crore. He

will also launch three 660 MW units of Ghatampur Thermal Power Project worth over ₹ 9,330 crore, the statement said.

Rail over bridges over Panki Power House Railway Crossing and Panki Dham Crossing on Panki Road at Kalyanpur Panki Mandir in Kanpur will also be inaugurated. It will support the Panki Thermal Power Extension Project's logistics by facilitating coal and oil transport while also alleviating traffic congestion for the local population, it said.

Besides this, 40 MLD (million liters per day) tertiary treatment plant at Bingawan in Kanpur worth over ₹ 290 crore will also be inaugurated. It will enable the reuse of treated sewage water. PM Modi will lay the foundation stone for widening and strengthening of Gauria Pali Marg for industrial development in Kanpur, and widening and strengthening of road to connect Narwal Mode (AH-1) on Prayagraj Highway to Kanpur Defence Node (four lane) under Defence Corridor. The prime minister will also distribute certificates and cheques to the beneficiaries of PM Ayushman Vay Vandana Yojna, National Livelihood Mission and PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana, it said. (PTI)

# Odisha lecturer gets life imprisonment for killing two by sending parcel bomb as wedding gift

**BHUBANESWAR, May 28:** A lecturer was sentenced to life imprisonment by a court in Odisha's Bolangir district on Wednesday for killing two persons, including a groom, by sending a parcel bomb as a wedding gift.

Punjilal Meher, a lecturer at Jyoti Vikas College in Bhainsa, had a professional enmity with the groom's mother at the college where she worked as the principal. Due to this reason, Punjilal hatched the conspiracy to kill her son Soumya and sent the bomb as a wedding gift in 2018, the police said.

Sonali Pattanaik, Additional District and Sessions Judge, Patnagarh, has convicted the accused Punjilal Meher (56) and sentenced him to life imprisonment, government counsel Chittaranjan Kanungo said.

The court convicted him under Sections 302 (murder), 307 (attempt to murder) and 201 (destruction of evidence of a crime) of IPC and Sections 3 and 4 of the Explosive Substances Act, he said.

The court sentenced life imprisonment under two sections, 10 years of imprisonment under two charges and seven years imprisonment under another charge. Kanungo said that all the sentences would run concurrently. To prove the case, the prosecution examined 62 witnesses, 100 documentary evidence and 51 material objects, in the court.

"Our submission was to treat it as a rarest of rare cases. However, the court did not observe it as a rarest of rare cases because all heinous crime cases cannot be treated like that," the public prosecutor said.

He said the quantum of punishment pronounced by the court is very encouraging. It will give a positive message to the society at large. The court also imposed a fine of Rs 1.40 lakh on the convict. He will remain behind bars for the rest of his life, Kanungo informed media persons outside the court.

Arun Bothra, a senior police officer, who led the crime branch investigation into the case in 2018, said, "When we took over the case, there was no evidence,

no eyewitness, nothing to lead the investigation. There was no suspicion on Punjilal Meher."

The crime branch got clues from the anonymous letter sent to the Bolangir SP (by Punjilal), Bothra said.

"We collected crucial evidence like the cover of the letter, soft copy of the letter, the printer used to print it, and adhesive used to seal the letter from Punjilal Meher's possession. All were scientifically matched and proved," Bothra told media persons.

Later, the accused narrated the entire episode and also demonstrated the bomb-making procedure before the police, he said, adding that Punjilal admitted to having learnt the process of parcel bomb-making from videos on the internet.

"I feel satisfied after the accused was convicted by the court and justice has been served to the victim's family," Bothra, who is now serving as the ADG of Police, Railways and Coastal Security, said.

"We have suffered an irreparable loss. We were praying for the death sentence. Still, we are satisfied with the judgment of the court," the deceased groom's father, Rabindra Sahoo, said.

Sanjukta Sahoo, the victim's mother too expressed satisfaction with the court ruling while comparing Punjilal with a demon.

Soumya Sekhar Sahoo, a man in his mid-twenties, and his 85-year-old grandmother, Jemamani Sahoo, were killed in the blast. His wife, Rimarani, suffered critical injuries when a parcel bomb, disguised as a wedding gift, exploded at their Patnagarh home in Bolangir district on February 23, 2018. The blast had taken place when the groom opened the gift.

Following a request by the new bride and her family, the then chief minister Naveen Patnaik had ordered the Crime Branch to probe into the incident.

The crime branch took over the investigation on March 23, 2018, and arrested Meher in April 2018. He is currently lodged in the Patnagarh sub-jail. (PTI)

# UDF sets terms for Anvar, awaits his stand on Nilambur bypoll

**MALAPPURAM (Kerala), May 28:** The opposition UDF on Tuesday made it clear that it will not offer an easy entry to Trinamool Congress (TMC) convener P V Anvar, setting a firm condition that he must first clarify his stand on the Nilambur by-poll before being welcomed into its fold.

The development comes amidst a difference of opinion between the UDF and Anvar on the former's choice of candidate for the Nilambur bypoll--Aryadan Shoukath, towards whom the TMC leader is not favourably disposed.

Anvar has questioned what was wrong with him expressing his view about Shoukath when he nor his party were part of the UDF in any form.

"If I were part of the UDF, then their opinion would also be mine," he added.

He also indicated that he was not in favour of just being an associate of the UDF.

Anvar, who had earlier resigned as Nilambur MLA, and the TMC local leadership are also unhappy over the lack of response from the UDF about their inclusion in the front. Some TMC cadres have stated that if the UDF does not decide within two days, Anvar will contest for the Nilambur seat. However, Anvar has not clarified his stand on that.

Following a meeting of the alliance partners, UDF Chairman and Leader of the Opposition in the Kerala Assembly, V D Satheesan, also avoided clearly stating whether the front intends to absorb Anvar's party or treat it merely as an associate, adding to the uncertainty surrounding his possible entry.

As the opposition bloc launched its campaign for the upcoming Nilambur Assembly bypoll on Tuesday, Satheesan said the front would indicate its position only after Anvar clarified his own.

"It is up to Anvar to decide whether he wants to cooperate with the UDF's election campaign; the UDF will express its opinion only after he makes his decision," Satheesan said in response to reporters' questions about whether the TMC convener would be part of the Congress-led front.

Satheesan said that Anvar had not told the UDF that he or the TMC would contest the Nilambur

seat independently if they were not included in the alliance.

"He said that to the media, not to us. He raised the difference of opinion, so he needs to clarify whether he will fully cooperate with us or not. If he cooperates, we will move forward together," Satheesan added.

Regarding the campaigning for the bypoll, Satheesan as well as Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC) chief Sunny Joseph claimed that the UDF was ahead in the race as it has already announced its candidate and launched its poll-related activities.

"We have the upper hand in the campaigning," Joseph asserted.

While the UDF left the ball in Anvar's court about his future with the Congress-led front, the TMC convener held a second round of talks with Congress ally Indian Union Muslim League (IUM).

Anvar, earlier in the day, met with IUM general secretary P K Kunhalikutty and in the evening, visited its Rajya Sabha MP P V Abdul Wahab. He met with Kunhalikutty to "appraise him of what is happening".

Speaking to reporters after the second meeting, Anvar said the discussions with the league will continue.

On being asked whether he will get a seat in the UDF bus or will he have to travel on its footboard, he responded that "while travelling in a vehicle you can sit or stand anywhere in it".

The difference of opinion between the UDF and Anvar arose over the selection of the candidate for the Nilambur bypoll with the TMC convener backing Malappuram District Congress Committee (DCC) president V S Joy and the Congress opting for Shoukath.

During the day, Anvar also met with former Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC) chief K Sudhakaran amidst the political drama in Nilambur.

Following the meeting, the senior Congress leader, who shares warm relations with Anvar, sought to pacify him, describing the former Nilambur MLA as a part of the UDF and an "asset".

"Anvar will be with us. We will keep him with us. He will be a part of the UDF, there is no doubt about that. He is an asset for the front," he said. (PTI)

# Sena (UBT) leader threatens to blacken Rahul Gandhi's face over Savarkar remark

**NASHIK, May 28:** A local office-bearer of the Shiv Sena (UBT) on Wednesday said he would blacken Rahul Gandhi's face for his 'derogatory' comments about freedom fighter Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, drawing a strong reaction from Congress leaders in Maharashtra.

The remark by Bala Darade, a deputy city unit chief of the Uddhav Thackeray-led party in Nashik, could put the opposition alliance Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) under strain.

"We are proud that we live in the birthplace of Swatantrya-veer Savarkar. Rahul Gandhi's statement about Savarkar, calling him 'Mafi-veer', was insulting. We condemn it strongly. We will blacken Rahul Gandhi's face if he comes to Nashik. If we can not do that, we will pelt stones at his convoy," Darade told a Marathi news channel on the occasion of the birth anniversary of the Hindutva ideologue.

The Sena (UBT) is an ally of the Congress in the MVA, and the two parties are also part of the INDIA

grouping of the Opposition.

Nashik-resident Devendra Bhutada has filed a defamation case against Gandhi, claiming that some remarks made by the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha against Savarkar hurt his feelings.

Darade further said he did not care about the consequences of his threat for the MVA. "We will not tolerate anyone using abusive language against Savarkar... Whatever be the future of Maha Vikas Aghadi, we will not tolerate insult to Savarkar," he said.

Sena (UBT) spokesperson Sushma Andhare told reporters that Darade's views were his own and not the official stand of the Uddhav Thackeray-led party.

Maharashtra Congress president Harshwardhan Sapkal termed Darade's threat as "cowardly".

"Rahul Gandhi's father late Rajiv Gandhi and grandmother late Indira Gandhi sacrificed their lives for India's unity. Congress and its leadership are not afraid of such threats," he told reporters. (PTI)

# BJP MLAs join protest by shopkeepers facing eviction in Jammu

**JAMMU, May 28:** At least nine BJP legislators on Tuesday joined a protest by a group of shopkeepers here against their eviction "without a proper rehabilitation plan".

As many as 39 shopkeepers of Nai Basti market are going to lose their business establishments due to ongoing construction of a flyover from Kunjwani to Satwari in the city.

In solidarity with the distressed shopkeepers, nine BJP MLAs joined the shopkeepers' protest, demanding that the government immediately halt their eviction and fulfil its commitment of rehabilitating the affected traders before initiating any demolition or displacement measures.

The shopkeepers, whose establishments will be demolished for the flyover under the Express Highway extension project, have been served fresh eviction notices by the administration, asking them to vacate their premises without delay. The BJP leaders termed this move unjust and urged the government to respect its prior assurance of relocating the affected traders to the designated commercial site at Chandrabhaga.

Among the protesting BJP leaders were MLAs Narinder Singh, Sham Lal Sharma, Yudhvir Sethi, Arvind Gupta, Gharu Ram Bhagat, Choudhary Vikram Randhawa, Mohan Lal, Rajeev Bhagat, and Surinder Bhagat. (PTI)

# Earth's average temperature for 2025-29 likely to exceed 1.5 deg C limit: WMO

**NEW DELHI, May 28:** There is a 70 per cent chance that the average global temperature for the 2025-2029 period will exceed pre-industrial levels by more than 1.5 degrees Celsius, according to a new report published by the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) on Wednesday.

It also said that there is an 80 per cent chance that at least one of the next five years will exceed 2024 as the warmest on record.

Besides being the hottest on record, 2024 was the first calendar year with a global mean temperature of more than 1.5 degrees Celsius above the 1850-1900 baseline, the period before human activities, such as burning fossil fuels, began

significantly impacting the climate.

The 1.5 degrees Celsius threshold is a target that countries agreed to at the Paris climate conference in 2015 to avoid the worst impacts of climate change.

A permanent breach of the 1.5-degree Celsius limit specified in the Paris Agreement refers to long-term warming over a 20 or 30-year period.

Countries are required to submit their next round of nationally determined contributions (NDCs) or national climate plans for the 2031-2035 period to the UN climate change office this year. The collective aim of these climate plans is to limit global temperature

rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius.

The WMO report said that the average global mean near-surface temperature for each year between 2025 and 2029 is expected to be between 1.2 and 1.9 degrees Celsius higher than it was between 1850 and 1900.

There is an 86 per cent chance that for at least one year during this period, the temperature will be more than 1.5 degrees higher than the 1850-1900 average.

The report also said there is a 70 per cent chance that the average temperature for the entire five-year period will be more than 1.5 degrees higher than the 1850-1900 average.

"We have just experienced the



10 warmest years on record. Unfortunately, this WMO report provides no sign of respite over the

coming years and this means that there will be a growing negative impact on our economies, our

daily lives, our ecosystems and our planet," said WMO Deputy Secretary-General Ko Barrett.

"Continued climate monitoring and prediction is essential to provide decision-makers with science-based tools and information to help us adapt," she said.

The WMO said that in South Asia, recent years have been wetter than usual (except 2023) and this trend is expected to continue between 2025 and 2029, although some seasons might still be dry.

According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD), India received above-normal rainfall during the monsoon season in four of the past five years.

The IMD has predicted above-

normal monsoon rainfall this year.

The WMO said the Arctic is expected to warm much faster than the rest of the world over the next five winters (November to March), by about 2.4 degrees Celsius, more than three and a half times the global average.

Sea ice is likely to shrink even more between 2025 and 2029 in parts of the Arctic like the Barents Sea, Bering Sea and Sea of Okhotsk.

From May to September during 2025-2029, some places like the Sahel, northern Europe, Alaska and northern Siberia are expected to have more rain than usual, while the Amazon is likely to be drier than normal, the WMO said. (PTI)



## Claims BJP leader after meeting Governor 44 MLAs ready to form new government in Manipur

**IMPHAL, May 28:** Forty-four MLAs are ready to form a new government in Manipur, BJP legislator Thokchom Radheshyam Singh claimed on Wednesday after meeting Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla.

Singh, along with nine other MLAs, met the governor at the Raj Bhavan.

"Forty-four MLAs are ready to form a government as per the wishes of the people. We have conveyed this to the governor. We also discussed what solutions can be there for the issue," he said.

"The governor noted what we had to say and will initiate actions in the best interests of the people," he added.

Asked if they would stake a claim to form the government, he said the central leadership of the BJP will take the decision.

"However, to inform that we are ready is similar to staking a claim to form a government. Speaker Th Satyabrata has individually and jointly met the 44 MLAs. There is no one who opposes the formation of a new government," Singh said.



"People are facing too much hardship. In the previous term, two years were lost due to COVID, and in this term, another two years have been lost due to the conflict," he said.

Manipur has been under President's Rule since February after BJP leader N Biren Singh resigned as the chief minister, amid criticisms about his government's handling of the ethnic clashes between Meiteis and Kuki-Zos, which

broke out in May 2023.

The 60-member assembly at present has 59 MLAs, with one seat vacant due to the death of a legislator. In the BJP-led coalition, there are 32 Meitei MLAs, three Manipuri Muslim MLAs and nine Naga legislators, totalling 44.

The Congress has five MLAs -- all Meiteis. The remaining 10 MLAs are Kukis -- seven of them won the last election on a BJP ticket, two belong to the Kuki Peo-

ples' Alliance, and one is an Independent.

The development comes amid massive protests in the Meitei-inhabited Imphal Valley over the hiding of the state's name written on the windshield of a government bus by security forces.

Meitei groups have been demanding an apology from the governor over the incident that happened in Gwalitabi on May 20, and the resignation of the chief secretary, DGP, and security advisor.

Since the beginning of the ethnic strife in May 2023, in which over 250 people have been killed, Meitei groups maintain that the territorial integrity of the state is non-negotiable in any peace process, while the Kuki-Zo outfits assert that the only solution to resolve the crisis is creating a separate administration for the hill districts where they live.

The Gwalitabi incident has added to the tensions, which were waning in recent months because of a slew of measures being taken by the Centre to bring back peace to the state. (PTI)

## Series of quakes strike Manipur

**IMPHAL, May 28:** A series of earthquakes struck Manipur on Wednesday, the strongest one being 5.2 magnitude, according to the National Centre for Seismology.

The earthquake of 5.2 magnitude struck Churachandpur district at 1.54 am, it said.

A second one of 2.5 magnitude hit Noney district at 2.26 am, while a third one of 3.9 magnitude struck Churachandpur at 10.23 am, it added. No casualties or damage have been reported so far, officials said. (PTI)

## 4 militants arrested in Manipur

**IMPHAL, May 28:** Security forces have arrested four militants belonging to different proscribed outfits from Thoubal and Imphal West districts of Manipur, police said on Wednesday.

An active cadre of the banned Kangleipak Communist Party (PWG) was arrested from Yairipok Bishnunaba in Thoubal on Tuesday, while two members of PREPAK were apprehended from Leirongthel Pitra in the district on Monday, they said.

Another cadre of the banned KCP (PWG) was arrested from Khonghampat Mantri Leikai in Imphal West on Tuesday, a police officer said.

Meanwhile, the security forces during an operation at Torbung and Teijang villages in Churachandpur district recovered arms and ammunition on Tuesday, including rifles, hand grenades and other explosives, he said. (PTI)

## Former Manipur CM N Biren Singh discusses prevailing situation in state with Governor



**IMPHAL, May 28:** Former Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh on Tuesday said that he discussed the prevailing situation in the state with Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla and urged him to invite the protesters for talks to resolve the Gwalitabi incident.

Over the last week, protests over the Gwalitabi incident have rocked the Meitei-inhabited Imphal Valley.

It was alleged that security forces had stopped a state-run bus, on which journalists were being taken by the government to cover the Shirui Lily festival in Ukhrul district on May 20, near the Gwalitabi checkpoint and forced the Directorate of Information and Public Relations (DIPR) staffers to cover the state's name written on the windshield with a white paper.

Addressing a late-night press conference, Singh said, "Today I meet governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla. I discussed with him regarding the prevailing situation in the state and suggested some points. He listened

and necessary actions will be initiated to resolve the present crisis by inviting the protesters. I hope so."

Singh said he also apprised the governor about the issues of internally displaced people (IDP) staying in relief camps.

"I also apprised him (governor) about the issues of IDPs who are staying in relief camps as well as the sufferings of the valley people due to the non-opening of national highways. People are not able to travel by road and I apprised him of that," he said.

"I also urged him to disarm all those miscreants who are in possession of illegal arms. Only then, we can proceed for peace," Singh said.

The former CM said that the purpose of the meeting included showing appreciation to the Ministry of Home Affairs for setting 30-day deadline to identify illegal immigrants from Bangladesh and Myanmar.

"Today's main purpose of visit was to appreciate the Ministry of Home Affairs for setting a deadline

of 30 days to identify illegal immigrants from Bangladesh and Myanmar... I also submitted all documents which were started in 2021 during which several illegal immigrants were identified under the leadership of then minister Letpao Haokip, who was the chairman of a sub-committee to look into the matter," Singh said.

Later in a post on X, Singh said, "We had a detailed discussion on a range of pressing issues concerning the state, including issues regarding the Gwalitabi incident and to resolve the tensions arising from it."

"We also had a talk on the initiatives taken under the BJP-led government in line with the Ministry of Home Affairs' 30-day directive from biometric registration and verification drives to deportation of undocumented foreign nationals... I requested the Governor to seek an extension of the 30-day deadline issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs. These measures are vital for ensuring national security and preserving Manipur's cultural fabric," Singh added.

More than 260 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in ethnic violence between Imphal Valley-based Meiteis and Kuki-Zo groups, who are the majority in the hill areas, since May 2023.

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

## Tura Secretariat will function as 'additional' secretariat for people of Garo Hills: Conrad



**SHILLONG, May 28:** Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma on Tuesday said the Tura Secretariat will ensure that the people of Garo Hills region of the state will not have to travel to Shillong for different official works.

Speaking at a programme at Samanta and Williamnagar, the chief minister unveiled the architectural drawing of the Tura Secretariat and said it will function as an "additional secretariat" for the people of Garo Hills region.

"Initially, the project was conceptualised as a mini secretariat, but the government felt that the infrastructure should be upgraded to accommodate all department offices, chief minister office, ministers office and bureaucrats," he said.

He opined that the Tura Secretariat will ensure the delivery of government services to the people

of Garo Hills.

"People from Garo Hills have to travel to Shillong for different official works. The purpose of the Tura Secretariat will be to ensure that people from Garo Hills can easily get their official paperwork submitted for further processing at Tura itself," he added.

The initial cost of the mini secretariat at Tura was ₹ 30 crore, which has now been estimated to be ₹ 150 crore.

He also said that the Tura Convention Centre will be adjacent to the Tura Secretariat, as displayed in the architectural 3D drawings.

The CM said that the first phase of the Tura Secretariat will be completed by January 2027.

Earlier in the day, the chief minister handed over smartphones to Anganwadi workers at a programme in Samanta in East Garo

Hills district.

The Ministry of Women and Child Development had funded ₹ 6 crore for the purchase of 6,162 smartphones for the workers, supporting them in their critical roles.

Sangma said the smartphones would enhance the performance and services of Anganwadi workers and "bridge the digital divide and improve service delivery."

The chief minister said that the POSHAN App had been installed on the smartphones, which the Anganwadi workers would use to record data and information and perform other reporting tasks, ensuring better monitoring and implementation of social welfare schemes.

The mobile application digitizes the physical registers used by Anganwadi workers, improving the quality of their work while enabling real-time monitoring.

He also said that Anganwadi workers would be incentivized for regularly monitoring the growth of children up to 6 years old by measuring their height and weight and uploading the data to the POSHAN tracker.

During the programme, the chief minister also distributed IIT Innovation ECO H2O Filters to Anganwadi centres, aiming to provide safe drinking water to children in rural communities.

He also inaugurated the new building of St George Higher Secondary School, Samanta, dedicating it to the students and expressing hope that it would inspire learning, creativity, and growth. (PTI)

## Tipra Motha Leaders, MoS demand action against Tripura DM

**HT Correspondent**

**AGARTALA, May 28:** Minister of State Brishaketu Debbarma and Chief Executive Member of the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAAD) Purna Chandra Jamatia, along with five MLAs of the Tipra Motha Party, have demanded strict disciplinary action against Gomati District Magistrate Tarit Kanti Chakma for allegedly refusing to meet with CEM and Tipra Motha founder Pradyot Kishore Manikya Debbarma.

In a letter addressed to Chief Secretary J.K. Sinha on Tuesday, the leaders condemned Chakma's conduct as insubordination and a blatant show of disrespect toward constitutional authorities. They urged the Chief Secretary to take stringent action to uphold democratic norms and ensure administrative accountability.

According to the letter, on the evening of May 25 around 8:00 PM, CEM Jamatia and Maharaja Pradyot Debbarma, who also serves as Chairman of the AARC, TTAADC, visited the official residence of the DM in Udaipur to discuss pressing public concerns, including lapses in MGNREGA implementation, irregularities in the CM Rubber Mission beneficiary selection process, and the pending construction of forest check dams.

Despite the urgency and public importance of these issues, Chakma allegedly refused to meet them. The letter further alleges that Pradyot had made over 20 unanswered phone calls to the DM over recent months, all of which went ignored. Eventually, his number, as well as that of CEM Jamatia, was reportedly blocked by Chakma.

"This kind of behavior is unacceptable, particularly towards a democratically elected leader and constitutional head of an autonomous council. Blocking calls and refusing communication with public representatives is not only unprofessional but also undermines public trust and governance," the letter states.

The leaders claim this is not an isolated incident but part of a broader pattern of administrative disregard for elected institutions. They asserted that the DM's conduct violates standards of administrative integrity and called for a formal inquiry followed by appropriate disciplinary action.

"We request the immediate appointment of a responsible and cooperative officer in Gomati District—someone who respects the dignity of public office and maintains harmonious relations with elected authorities," the letter concludes.

## Rape accused escapes from police custody in Sikkim



**GANGTOK, May 28:** A 24-year-old man accused of sexually assaulting a 14-year-old minor escaped from police custody in Sikkim's Rangpo on Wednesday, police said.

The accused was arrested on May 27 under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act.

He managed to escape from the Rangpo police station on the pretext of using the restroom, a police officer said.

The Station House Officer (SHO) of Rangpo police station, Dichen Tshomo, said that the accused escaped from custody around 2:30 am after injuring a policeman.

A criminal case has been registered against the absconding accused under Sections 262 and 132 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023, she said, adding that a manhunt is currently underway. "We have all the required inputs and will arrest him soon," she said. (PTI)

## 'Z-Plus' status of ex-Manipur CM intact, excess personnel withdrawn: Officials

**IMPHAL, May 28:** The Manipur administration on Wednesday refuted claims of a security downgrade for former Chief Minister N Biren Singh, clarifying that only surplus personnel deployed with him have been recalled, officials said.

They said Singh continues to enjoy 'Z-plus' security cover, a category that mandates robust protection which includes a pilot and a protection vehicle at rear besides static guards at home.

The officials were responding to some media reports that reported a downgrade in the former chief minister's security.

According to officials, Singh continues to be guarded round-the-clock by the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF), an elite central armed police force responsible for securing vital installations and high-profile people across India.

Under standard protocol, a 'Z plus' protectee is entitled to six personal security officers (PSOs) provided by the respective state or union territory police.

However, during a recent security audit, it was found that during his tenure as Chief Minister, Singh had 23 police personnel assigned to his security detail.

Following this audit, 17 excess personnel were immediately asked to report to their parent units, the officials said. (PTI)

## PM Modi to attend Sikkim's statehood celebrations today

*Commemorative coin, souvenir coin and stamp of 50 years of statehood will be released*

**GANGTOK, May 28:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi is scheduled to attend the golden jubilee celebrations of Sikkim's statehood at Paljor Stadium here on May 29, officials said.

This would be Modi's second visit to Sikkim as the prime minister.

"The PM will inaugurate and lay the foundation stone of several projects, including a 500-bed district hospital worth over Rs 750 crore in Namchi, passenger ropeway at Sangchoeling in Pelling in Gyalshing district, statue of former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee ji at Atal Amrit Udyan in Gangtok, among others," an official release said.

He will also release a commemorative coin, souvenir coin and stamp of 50 years of statehood, it said.

"The PM's visit has been pre-announced and he would be landing at Lingshel Airport at 9:45 am and his motorcade would reach Paljor Stadium at 10 am. He would participate in 'Sikkim@50' celebrations till 11:30 am," Gangtok's Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Tenzing Loden Lepcha told reporters here.

He said that elaborate security arrangements have been made to ensure the smooth conduct of the grand celebrations of 50th year of Sikkim's integration with India as the 22nd state.

Lepcha said that the main function at Paljor Stadium will be from 10 am



to 11:30 am, followed by a brief private meeting till 11:45 am.

PM Modi is scheduled to depart from Sikkim for Alipurduar in West Bengal by noon, the police officer said.

The PM would address a gathering of around one lakh people on the occasion, officials said.

In order to maintain security, the route between Lingshel Airport and Paljor Stadium will be completely sealed off for the public and traffic during the movement of the PM's motorcade, Lepcha said.

Additionally, multiple sectoral routes within Gangtok will remain closed temporarily, he said, adding

around 1,000 personnel, including deputy superintendents of police (DSP), inspectors and sub-inspectors, will be deployed from the Bagdogra to Gangtok corridor, including in areas such as Pakyong, Ranipool, and Rangpo.

All educational institutions and government offices from Ranipool to Gangtok will remain closed on Thursday, Lepcha said.

The SSP appealed to attendees to arrive at Paljor Stadium before 8 am and remain seated until the prime minister's departure.

He said that special parking zones have been designated for visitors and emergency medical vehicles will be

granted movement during the restricted hours, but only under police escort.

In view of PM Modi's visit, authorities have issued a revised public advisory to streamline traffic movement and ensure public safety around the VVIP event at Paljor Stadium.

According to an advisory, all gates of Paljor Stadium will be opened for public entry at 5:30 am.

All vehicles and individuals are requested to reach the venue by 8 am, Lepcha said, adding that after 8 am vehicular movement in and around the stadium will be strictly prohibited, with exceptions made only for authorised shuttle buses and emergency vehicles.

From 8 am till the conclusion of the programme, several areas around the stadium will be converted into traffic-free zones, the SSP added.

Formal invitations have been extended to all officers, from the rank of deputy secretary and under-secretary (and their equivalents) to staff members of various state government departments, PSUs, and central government agencies in Gangtok, the Home Department notification said.

The heads of departments and secretaries have also been directed to ensure the presence of their respective officers and staffers. (PTI)

## Water supply disruption in Kohima

**HT Correspondent**

**DIMAPUR, May 28:** Residents of Kohima town are likely to face water supply disruptions for the next two to three days due to a major breakage of water mainline on Monday evening.

The affected pipeline, which runs from the Jotsoma reserve forest area, burst as a result of aging infrastructure and increased water flow volume.

In a statement on Tuesday, executive engineer of the urban division, Neilhoukholie Chellie informed that the public health engineering department (urban) has begun restoration work on a war footing to restore water supply to the capital town as swiftly as possible.

Chellie appealed to all residents to bear with the inconvenience and continue supporting the division's efforts during this period of emergency repair.

### জাননী

ইয়াৰ দ্বাৰা সমূহ মৰিকলংগ্ৰিত বাছ আস্থানৰ পৰা চলাচল কৰা বাছৰ মালিক, চালক আৰু পৰিচালক সকলৰ লগতে সমূহ যাত্ৰী সকলক আৰু চিভিল গেইটৰ পৰা চলাচল কৰা সমূহ মেজিক আৰু মেজিকৰ মালিক আৰু চালক সকলক জনোৱা হয় যে, তাৰ ইংৰাজী ০৫/০৬/২০২৫ তাৰিখৰ পৰা জিলা প্রশাসনৰ নিৰ্দেশ মৰ্মে সকলো গাড়ী, প্রশাসনে নিৰ্দিষ্ট কৰি দিয়া বৰষাট বাহিৰাৰ আস্থানৰ পৰা চলাচল কৰিবলৈ নিৰ্দেশ দিয়া হ'ল।

উল্লেখযোগ্য যে, আদেশ অমান্য কৰা সকলো যান-বাহনৰ বিপক্ষে আইন অনুসৰি ব্যৱস্থা গ্ৰহণ কৰা হ'ব।

আদেশদাতা --  
জিলা পৰিবহন বিষয়া  
তথা

সচিব, আঞ্চলিক পৰিবহন প্ৰাধিকৰণ  
নগাঁও (অসম)

DIPR /D/HLT/17/29-May-25



**LOS ANGELES, May 28:** Hollywood action star Tom Cruise penned a heartfelt note expressing gratitude to every person involved in bringing his latest film "Mission: Impossible - The Final Reckoning", after the project set a new Memorial Day weekend record at the box office.

"Mission: Impossible - The Final Reckoning" released in India on May 17 and on May 23 in United States. The combined collection of "Mission: Impossible" film and Disney's "Lilo & Stitch", which also came out on May 23, broke the Memorial Day weekend record.

Cruise shared a post on his social media on Tuesday. He also thanked the audience for their constant support.

"This weekend was one of the history books. Congratulations and thank you to every filmmaker, every artist, every crew member, and every single person who works at the studios. To every theatre and every employee who helps bring these stories to the audiences, thank you.

"To everyone that works at Paramount Pictures and Skydance, thank you for your many years of partnership and unwavering support. And most of all, thank you to audiences everywhere—for whom we all serve and for whom we all love to entertain. Sincerely, Tom," the 62-year-old actor wrote.

Directed by Christopher McQuarrie, the film is the eighth installment of the "Mission: Impossible" franchise, which began in 1996. It features Cruise in the role of Ethan Hunt. (PTI)

## TOM CRUISE IS GRATEFUL FOR RESPONSE ON HIS 'MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE' FILM: THANK YOU



## Hrithik Roshan joins hands with production banner Hombale Films



**NEW DELHI, May 28:** Bollywood star Hrithik Roshan is all set to collaborate with the production banner Hombale Films, for an upcoming Pan-India film.

Production banner, known for backing projects such as "KGF" franchise, "Salaar" and "Kantara", shared the news on Wednesday on its official X handle.

"They call him the Greek God. He's ruled hearts, shattered limits and we see the phenomenon he truly is! We are proud to welcome @iHrithik to the @hombalefilms family for a collaboration, years in the making. A tale of grit, grandeur and glory is set to unfold, where intensity meets imagination, the Big Bang begins.. #HRITHIKXHOMBALE," read the caption.

Hrithik said he is looking forward to bring the cinematic experience for the audience.

"Hombale has been home to some very unique stories over the years. I'm looking forward to partner with them and deliver a cinematic experience for our audience. We are dreaming big, and committed to bringing the vision to life," he said in a statement. Vijay Kiragandur, founder of Hombale Films said he is very happy with this collaboration.

"At Hombale Films, our purpose is to tell stories that inspire and transcend boundaries. Partnering with Hrithik Roshan is a step forward in realizing that vision, crafting a film where intensity meets imagination on a grand scale. We are committed to delivering an experience that is both powerful and timeless," he added. Hrithik will next be seen in "War 2" alongside Jr NTR and Kiara Advani.

The film is slated to release on August 14. It is a sequel to "War", which released in 2019. (PTI)

## Can't do movies like these forever: Lindsay Lohan on doing romantic comedies for Netflix



**LOS ANGELES, May 28:** Hollywood actor Lindsay Lohan, who has been a part of three romantic comedies on Netflix back to back, says she wants to 'think about other stuff' as she can't do the same projects forever. Lohan featured in Netflix's 'Falling for Christmas' (2022) alongside Chord Overstreet. Post that she went on to star in "Irish Wish" (2024) and "Our Little Secret" (2024). With each film making it to the top on the streaming platform.

The 38-year-old actor said she loved to make films of that genre, but can't make the same thing forever. "I always want to make movies like that...things that make people happy and bring people together. I love making movies for that reason, for people to escape and find something that they can take into their own life and realize everything's going to be okay," she told Elle magazine in an interview.

"But with Netflix, I was like, 'Okay, now we need to be thinking about other stuff.' I can't do movies like these forever," she added. Lohan will next feature in Disney's "Freakier Friday". The film is a sequel to "Freaky Friday." The first part was directed by Mark Waters and featured Lohan alongside Jamie Lee Curtis, who is also returning for the sequel.

The film revolved around a mother and daughter with a rocky relationship, who find themselves trapped in each other's bodies after a visit to the mysterious Chinese restaurant. The actor said "everything felt at ease" while making the sequel.

"I feel like everything felt at ease when we were making it, and I feel that's the best way to describe how I felt when I watched it. It felt easy and fun, and fresh at the same time. There's not a lot bringing me to the movie theaters personally right now.

"It is a feel-good movie (Freakier Friday), which is what I want to give people. And it's fun. When I saw the second cut, I wanted to get up and dance at the end. I was like, 'Oh, this is cool. I like this song. I want people to do that,'" she said.

"Freakier Friday" is directed by Nisha Ganatra and is written by Jordan Weiss. Slated to release on August 8, the film also stars Mark Harmon, Chad Michael Murray, Christina Vidal Mitchell, Haley Hudson, Lucille Soong. (PTI)

## EOW questions Bollywood actor Dino Morea, brother in Mithi river desilting scam

**MUMBAI, May 28:** Bollywood actor Dino Morea and his brother were on Wednesday questioned by the Economic Offences Wing (EOW) of Mumbai Police in the alleged Rs 65 crore Mithi river desilting scam, officials said.

This is the second time in the last three days that the actor was called for questioning, a police official said. Morea and his brother Santino appeared before EOW officials at the Mumbai Police Commissioner's office in south Mumbai and their statements were being recorded, he said. Among other things, the brothers were being questioned about their alleged links with middleman Ketan Kadam, arrested in the case along with another accused Jai Joshi, the official said. As per the preliminary probe, Dino Morea and his brother had repeated phone conversations with Kadam, the official said, adding the EOW team also found some suspicious transactions of the arrested accused and were probing if the actor had any role in these transactions. Kadam and Joshi were involved in the renting out of 'silt pusher' machines and multipurpose amphibious pontoon machines to contractors who were carrying out Mithi river desilting work in the city. Earlier this month, the EOW registered a case against 13 persons including civic officials and contractors for their alleged involvement in a scam concerning the desilting of the river which flows through the city and drains into the Arabian Sea. It is alleged that tenders for renting specialised dredging equipment were manipulated to favour certain suppliers. (PTI)

## Stardom's evil partner is arrogance; hard to stay grounded: Kamal Haasan

**NEW DELHI, May 28:** In his more than 65-year film career, Kamal Haasan has done it all: acting, direction, scriptwriting, choreography and even makeup. Anything left to do? Many things. But, he declares (without a hint of false modesty), that he stopped learning at some point. Oh! Why? "Avarice," he replies.

Greed for more money got in the way, he says. "I like money. I want it to come to me," Haasan told PTI in an interview this week.

In one of his most candid conversations about life, films, AI, philosophy, legacy and his frailties, Haasan acknowledges the inherent contradictions of a movie star's life: the joy of reaching a "larger demographic" and the regret of not receiving real applause or honest criticism.

He should know, having been in the business almost all his life. He was just three years old when he got a role in a Tamil movie. Since then, barring a few hiatuses, the 70-year-old has been constantly reinventing himself to stay in step with the changing times.

After that extraordinary career and achieving all this, does he feel like patting himself on the back and saying 'well done Kamal'? Haasan's reply makes it clear that he sees success as ephemeral.

"My favourite writer Jayakanthan says 'Once you climb Everest, don't stay on top because there is no place

(to stay). Then you will cling on to it and won't let anyone else climb it'. And you become eccentric, literally, because you're not at the centre of people," Haasan, a self-confessed admirer of the news business, said in the interview after touring the news agency's headquarters.

It can also be lonely at the top, said the consummate heart-tugger who bridged the north-south cinematic divide early in his career when pan-India was decades away from being a buzzword.

The star of films such as "Apoorva Raagangal", "Nayakan", "Thevar Magan", "Sadma", "Pushpak Vimana" and "Chachi 420", each different in mood and treatment, is now getting ready for his latest venture "Thug Life", directed by Mani Ratnam and set for theatrical release in multiple languages on June 5.

The actor, who started a political party like many other stars from the southern film industry, has also directed a range of films, including "Hey Ram" and "Vishwaroopam". He said frankly that it is very difficult for stars because the inner circle is always trying to carry them aloft and not let their "feet touch the ground".

"The beauty of cinema is that you can reach a larger demographic but it also takes you away from the actual witnessing of your applause. So, you distance yourself and arrogance sets in because you don't hear

criticism, nor do you hear applause. It all comes through reporting to us, or when you meet your fans and they cheer you, but that's not the actual data," he added.

As someone who has been in the film industry for more than half of Indian cinema's 120-year existence, Haasan is quick to downplay his achievements and speaks about his early years with rare candour.

"Because of my work schedule, I stopped seeking more gurus. I think my avarice for money stopped me from learning. Otherwise, I would have learned more..." Affluence, according to Haasan, is what people dream of in their 20s and he was not that different.

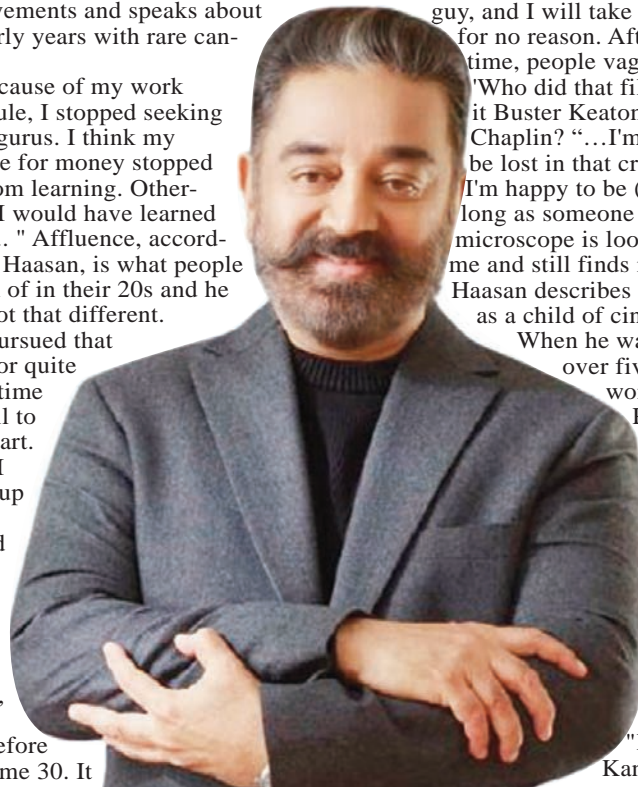
"I pursued that path for quite some time at peril to my heart. Then I woke up and started my own company. Fortunately, I did that before I became 30. It

was a risky thing to do." What does Haasan want someone going through a cinema history book in 2075 to read about him? Let alone a mention in history books, he would be grateful if anyone even remembers him 50 years hence, he said.

"I hope they remember my name. They'll confuse me for some other guy, and I will take his credit for no reason. After some time, people vaguely say, 'Who did that film?' Was it Buster Keaton or Chaplin? "...I'm going to be lost in that crowd, and I'm happy to be (lost), as long as someone with a microscope is looking for me and still finds me."

Haasan describes himself as a child of cinema. When he was a little over five, he won the Presidential Medal for his performance in the 1960 film

"Kalathur Kan-





# Satwik-Chirag make winning return

*Lakshya concedes first match due to back pain*

**SINGAPORE, May 28:** India's top men's doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty made a winning return but there was heartbreak for Lakshya Sen, who was forced to retire midway due to lower back pain at the Singapore Open Super 750 badminton tournament here on Wednesday.

Back on the court for the first time since their withdrawal from the All England Championship in March due to Chirag's back injury, the former world No.1 pair displayed no signs of rust as it beat Malaysia's Choong Hon Jian and Muhammad Haikal 21-16 21-13 in just under 40 minutes in the round of 32.

It was Satwik and Chirag's second win over the 41st-ranked Malaysian pair. The Indians are currently ranked 27th in the world.

Chirag and Satwik had also missed the Sudirman Cup earlier this month, with Satwik battling with health concerns. Prior to that, they had made semifinal appearances at both the Malaysia Open and India Open this season.

India's no. 1 singles player Sen was forced to retire during his opening round clash against Lin Chun-Yi of Chinese



Taipei.

Sen, currently ranked 17th in the world, started strong and took the first game 21-15. But his opponent, world No. 19 Lin, bounced back to claim the second 21-17.

The match was evenly poised in the deciding when Sen trailed 5-13 before he retired due to injury.

"Lakshya had to retire from his Singapore Open match due to lower back pain and spasm, which he had been experiencing since last Saturday during practice in Singapore," Lakshya's father and coach DK Sen told PTI from Singapore.

"Despite trying his best, he wasn't fully fit. The pain worsened during the match,

and to prevent further injury, he pulled out of the third set. Our team will now focus on his recovery for upcoming tournaments.

"Recovery is our top priority now. We're working hard to get Lakshya fit and ready for Indonesia."

In mixed doubles, Rohan Kapoor and Ruthvika Shivani Gadde advanced to the pre-quarterfinals, defeating the American pair of Chen Zhi Yi and Francesca Corbett 21-16 21-19 in 35 minutes.

In the women's singles, Aakarshi Kashyap and Unnati Hooda put up a spirited fight but ultimately went down to world No. 4 Han Yue and world no. 2 Wang Zhi Yi respectively.

While Kashyap went down 21-17 13-21 to Han in a 58-minute contest, Hooda also squandered an opening game advantage to lose 21-13 9-21 15-21 in a 56-minute affair.

However, Anupama Upadhyaya was no match for Sung Shuo Yun of Chinese Taipei, losing 12-21 16-21 in 41 minutes.

Doubles pair of Vaishnavi Khadkekar and Alisha Khan lost 8-21 9-21 to Australian combination of Gronya Somerville and Angela Yu. (PTI)

## India win gold in mixed relay; TJ, 3 others bag silver at Asian Athletics Championships



**GUMI (SOUTH KOREA), May 28:**

India's 4x400m mixed relay team defended its gold with a domineering performance after four individual silvers and a bronze in varying events bolstered the country's overall tally to eight medals on a brilliant second day out at the 26th Asian Athletics Championship here.

The Indian quartet of Rupal Chaudhary, Santhosh Kumar, Vishal TK and Subha Venkatesan won the top honours with a timing of 3:18.12sec. Of these, Rupal also claimed the individual women's 400m silver earlier in the day.

Subha, on the other hand, was a part of the mixed team that claimed gold in the 2023 edition. China's team finished a distant second after clocking 3:20.52s, while Sri Lanka took bronze with 3:21.95s.

The largely US-based Tejaswin Shankar was among the silver-winner for India, finishing second in decathlon after accumulating a score of 7618 following the regulation 10 events. He ended behind China's Fei Xiang (7634) and ahead of Japan's Keisuke Okuda (7602).

Praveen Chithravel also bagged a silver medal in men's triple jump with a best effort of 16.90m.

Earlier, Rupal (400m) and Pooja (1500m) picked up silver medals, Yoonus Shah fetched a bronze in men's 1500m.

The mixed gold was India's second top finish after national record-holder Gulveer Singh's (10,000m) brilliance on Tuesday.

Quarter-miler Rupal opened India's account for the day, clocking 52.68 seconds to finish second in the women's 400m final. Fellow Indian Vithya Ramraj was placed fifth with a time of 53.00 seconds.

The gold went to Japan's Nanako Matsumoto (52.17s), while Uzbekistan's Jonbibi Huk-

moza (52.79s) took bronze.

Pooja followed with another silver, clocking 4:10.83sec in the women's 1500m, just ahead of compatriot Lili Das, who finished fourth (4:13.81sec).

Li Chunhui of China (4:10.58) won the gold while and Japan's Tomoka Kimura ran a season's best time of 4:11.56 to claim the bronze medal.

Rupal had scripted history by becoming the first Indian athlete to win two medals at the World U20 Athletics Championships in 2022, claiming a silver in the 4x400m relay followed by a bronze in the women's 400m events back then.

Hailing from a farming family in Shahpur Jainpur village in Uttar Pradesh's Meerut district, the 20-year-old is being seen as a bright prospect.

In the men's 1500m, Yoonus Shah clinched bronze with a time of 3:43.03, pushing India's medal count to five.

Japanese runner Kazuto Lizawa ran a personal best of 3:42.56 to take home the coveted gold medal while South Korea's Jaewung Lee (3:42.79) finished second.

Aside from national record-holder Gulveer's gold, Servin Sebastian clinched the 20km race walk bronze on the opening day of the competition.

In other results, Vishal Thenarasu Kayalvizhi ran a personal best of 45.57s in the men's 400m but that could only fetch him a fourth-place finish.

Long jumpers Shaili Singh and Ancy Sojan qualified for the final of the women's long jump event.

Shaili had a best effort 6.17m, the third best in the 20-woman field. Ancy 6.14m sealed her place in the final.

Hurdler Jyoti Yarraji qualified for the next round after finishing with a time of 13.18secs in her heat. She crossed the line in third position. (PTI)

## Bollipalli-Barrientos exit French Open

**PARIS, May 28:** Rithvik Bollipalli's search for his maiden win in a Grand Slam main draw continued as the Indian and his Colombian partner Nicolas Barrientos suffered a tame straight set defeat in the French Open men's doubles opening round, here Wednesday.

Canada's Gabriel Diallo and Briton Jacob Fearnley, who knocked out Stanislas Wawrinka in the singles on Monday, dominated the contest, winning 6-0 6-2 in just 56 minutes at Court 8.

Bollipalli and Barrientos, who won the ATP 250 Chile Open in March, struggled to serve well and make returns, gifting away easy points to their rivals. Often the Indo-Colombian combo left the gap on the court for their rivals to exploit.

The Indian was broken early with Diallo and Fearnley making some superb returns on his serve. His partner Barrientos too struggled badly to get going and in no time the Canadian-British pair had raced to a commanding 4-0 lead.

Fearnley's ferocious forehands from the baseline were already too hot to handle and Bollipalli's lack of control while serving made it too easy for the Canadian-British team.

The Indian struggled to pick a half-volley at 15-30 to offer two set points to the rivals and made a volley error on the following point to surrender the opening set.

There was no twist in the tale except that Barrientos managed to hold his serve in the second game of the second set while Diallo and Fearnley continued to spit fire.

Bollipalli served a double fault to be down by a match point but saved the chance in game eight. Barrientos could not return a powerful Diallo forehand and then sent a ball wide on the next match point.

Later in the day, India's Yuki Bhambhani, Rohan Bopanna and N Sriram Balaji will also be in action in the men's doubles. (PTI)

## Serena awarded Spain's Princess of Asturias Prize for Sports

**MADRID, May 28:** Serena Williams has been awarded Spain's Princess of Asturias Prize for Sports for her stellar tennis career, organizers said Wednesday.

The 43-year-old American won 73 career singles titles including 23 Grand Slams. She said in 2022 that she was stepping away from tennis to focus on her family and business interests.

The 50,000-euro (\$57,000) Princess of Asturias Award is one of eight annual prizes covering different areas, including arts, literature and science among others.

The awards ceremony, presided over by Spain's Princess Leonor, takes place each fall in the northern city of Oviedo.

Past winners of the sports prize include skier Lindsey Vonn, the IOC Refugee Olympic Team and the New Zealand rugby team. (AP)

## Erigaishi hands world champion Gukesh second defeat in two days in Norway Chess

**STAVANGER (NORWAY), May 28:** World champion D Gukesh finds himself in deep trouble as compatriot Arjun Erigaishi broke through his defences in the second round to move into joint lead, while Hikaru Nakamura stunned Magnus Carlsen in the Armageddon tie-break on an eventful day in Norway Chess here.

Labelled as the favourite in the six-player double round-robin "Open" category, Gukesh is scraping the bottom of the points table having lost the opening two rounds.

World No.4 Indian Erigaishi has emerged the joint leader with American Grandmaster Nakamura on 4.5 points.

In an all-Indian tension-filled clash, Erigaishi, playing with white pieces, seized the early initiative but Gukesh's resilient defence created a somewhat equal endgame.

As the clock became a decisive factor, the position erupted into chaos before Erigaishi finally broke through to secure victory in a slugfest that lasted over four hours.

Erigaishi, who had also spoilt Gukesh's party at the Tata Steel Chess earlier this year by taking a game away from him just when he looked set to win the title, again dealt a huge body blow to the teenage world champion -- who turns 19 on Thursday, beating him in 62 moves.

Erigaishi, playing here for the first time, forced Gukesh to resign after giving him a check with his knight.

The victory for the 21-year-old, who achieved his peak rating of 2801 making him the 15th highest-rated player in history

and only the second Indian after Viswanathan Anand to ever to cross the 2800 threshold in December, had on Monday overcome Chinese GM Wei Yi in Armageddon to secure 1.5 points.

Erigaishi, who enjoys a stunning 6-0 record in Classical wins against Gukesh, was "surprised" why Gukesh took so much time in the initial moves to find himself under time pressure.

Just before the 17th move, Gukesh found himself behind his opponent on the clock by more than one hour.

"I'm a bit surprised Gukesh is thinking this early on...the way he played this c3 move quite early on, I think it's not known at the highest level or it is not popular," said Erigaishi.

He will play American GM Fabiano Caruana in Round 3, while Gukesh will hope for a revival against Nakamura, one of the best in rapid and blitz chess.

**Carlsen vs Nakamura**

The much-anticipated clash between world No.1 Carlsen and No.2 Nakamura began with a deceptively quiet classical game. The Norwegian defending champion emerged satisfied from the opening.

However, after a series of precise moves on both sides, the game dissolved into a draw.

In the Armageddon, Carlsen got a dangerous attack out of the opening and seemed to have everything under control.

However, Armageddon can be unpredictable, and after a mistake in the endgame Nakamura found a brilliant

move, winning the game.

**Humpy, Viashali lose**

In the women's section, Ukrainian Anna Muzychuk claimed a convincing victory over two-time world rapid champion Koneru Hunka. The Ukrainian gained a structural advantage from the opening and methodically increased the pressure.

However, both players made several mistakes in the endgame. Eventually, it was Koneru who made the last mistake, as a result of which Muzychuk won the game.

The other two women's games -- between R. Vaishali Rameshbabu and China's Tingjie Lei, and Spanish-Iranian player Sarasadat Khademalsharieh vs Ju Wenjun, ended in draws.

Lei Tingjie and Wenjun Ju then won their Armageddon games, winning the extra half-point.

The tournament's scoring system gives three points to the winner in the Classical format. If the Classical game is drawn, the players gain one point each and then play for another half-point in Armageddon.

**Results:**

**Open:** Arjun Erigaishi (Ind - 4.5) bt D Gukesh (Ind - 0) Hikaru Nakamura (USA - 4.5) bt Magnus Carlsen (Nor - 4) in Armageddon; Wei Yi (Chn - 1) lost to Fabiano Caruana (USA - 3).

**Women:** Sarasadat Khademalsharieh (Esp - 2) beat Ju Wenjun (Chn - 2.5) in Armageddon; R Vaishali (Ind) lost to Lei Tingjie (Chn - 3) in Armageddon; Anna Muzychuk (Ukr - 4.5) bt Koneru Humpy (Ind - 3). (PTI)

## Relief for Delhi FC, SC Bengaluru as relegation from I-League stayed

**NEW DELHI, May 28:** In a major reprieve for Delhi FC and Sporting Club Bengaluru, the All India Football Federation's Appeal Committee has stayed their relegation from I-League until a final decision is reached on their submissions challenging the AIFF's disciplinary panel ruling.

The two interim orders, dated May 24 and currently in possession with PTI, revealed that both the clubs had appealed against the AIFF Disciplinary Committee's decisions that would have demoted them from the 2024-25 I-League season after they finished among the bottom two of the 12-team competition.

Chaired by Justice (Retd.) Rajesh Tandon, with Ashok K Tripathi and Priyanka Mishra as members, the Appeal Committee noted that the circumstances warranted keeping any relegation-related action "in abeyance" until the final hearing.

"On behalf of AIFF, time has been sought for 2 days to file the objections however, the circumstances of the case warrant that any order passed for relegation shall remain in abeyance and shall not be acted upon till the final hearing of the present appeal itself," both the orders stated. In its appeal, Sporting Club Bengaluru argued that Namdhari FC had fielded an "ineligible player" during a match, a breach that they claim entitles them to three points. Their advocate argued that

the Disciplinary Committee overlooked crucial provisions (Article 57 of the AIFF Disciplinary Code), and that relegation has penal consequences, infringing Article 19 of the Indian Constitution (protection of rights).

If granted, this would also impact the standings and potentially push Aizawl FC into the relegation zone instead. Delhi FC, meanwhile, questioned the process and rationale behind their demotion, citing AIFF's own past precedents where relegation had been waived.

Their legal counsel contended that relegation constitutes penal consequences, thereby invoking Article 19 of the Indian Constitution.

The Appeal Committee observed in both cases that the Disciplinary Committee appeared to have overlooked key aspects of the relegation process and noted the seriousness of the implications involved.

The Committee has also directed that a copy of the appeal documents be sent to Aizawl FC, allowing them the opportunity to join the proceedings if they want.

As per the official standings after the conclusion of the I-League last month, SC Bengaluru (21 points) and Delhi FC (14) took the last two spots -- 11th and 12th respectively -- in the table.

The next hearing for both the appeals is scheduled for Thursday at the AIFF office in New Delhi. (PTI)

## Ranveer tied 4th after opening round of APGC Junior Golf Championship

**HONG KONG, May 28:** Ranveer Mitroo led the Indian charge by carding a steady two-under 69 to be placed tied fourth after the opening round of the Asia-Pacific Golf Confederation Junior Championship here.

The Indian Golf Union (IGU) has sent a four-member team to compete in the prestigious tournament.

The 16-year-old Ranveer began his round with birdies on the second and fifth holes before stumbling upon a bogey on the ninth on Tuesday. The Delhi amateur bogeyed on the 16th after six straight pars but the junior India number one for 2024 showed glimpses of top form by making quick amends with back-to-back birdies on the remaining two holes for his eventual tally. "I made some good recoveries but also some silly errors. I think an overall improvement about decision-making and execution is something I would want to work on," the youngster said of his performance on the day. His compatriot Krish Chawla, the current junior India No.1, was placed tied 16th after carding a modest one-over 72. Krish had a topsy-turvy round as he sank an eagle and three birdies against three bogeys and a triple bogey.

The Indian pair of Ranveer and Krish were placed fifth in the boys team competition with a combined total of one-under 141. The Australian duo of Hamish Farquharson and Cooper Giddings were placed on top of the standings with an overall tally of three-under 139. (PTI)

## India beat Argentina in junior women's hockey

**ROSARIO (ARGENTINA), May 28:** Goalkeeper and captain Nidhi pulled off four consecutive saves as India edged past hosts Argentina 2-0 on shootout following a 1-1 deadlock in the Four Nations junior women's hockey tournament here.

Kanika (44') scored India's lone goal during regulation time, while Lalrinpui and Lalhantluangi netted in the shootout to secure the victory in their third match of the tournament. Argentina got off to a strong start, with Milagros Del Valle (10') giving the home side the lead in the first quarter before India responded in the third quarter through Kanika's strike.

With no further goals, the match stayed tied and went into the penalty shootout. India will take on Chile in their next fixture on Friday. (PTI)

## Pant's calibre and ability was never in doubt: LSG mentor Zaheer

**LUCKNOW, May 28:** Lucknow Super Giants mentor Zaheer Khan has asserted that skipper Rishabh Pant's calibre and ability were never in doubt despite his underwhelming performances for most of the IPL season and the charismatic stumper will emerge stronger after this learning curve. Bought for a whopping Rs 27 crore at the mega auction, Pant endured a lean patch, managing just 269 runs from 13 innings. He found his trademark big-hitting touch only in the last game of the season with a 61-ball 118 but that too ended up in a losing cause against Royal Challengers Bengaluru here on Tuesday.

"He's been good as a leader. That was a positive for us throughout the season. The form with the bat was definitely a learning experience for him, having this kind of season."

"But the ability and calibre -- no one had any doubt about it," Zaheer said in the post-match

press conference on Tuesday.

The former India pace spearhead said it was good to see the swashbuckling keeper-batter, end the season on a high.

"We're happy he finished on a really strong note - that's the calibre he has, and the impact he can have on the game," Zaheer added.

It was a disappointing season for LSG, who finished seventh with six wins and eight losses. A spate of injuries to key bowlers disrupted their rhythm and consistency.

"When you start off the IPL season, your first goal is to think of the playoffs, how you are going to get there...We obviously made the conscious effort of (trying to handle) the challenges which we are facing in the beginning of the season, which is losing a few of our main bowlers to injuries," he said.

"We made an effort to not pay too much attention to that...and finding ways of winning the

match," Zaheer said.

"That is the process which everyone was aligned to and looking at that, we have had a decent season...but yes, we fell short and putting the game together was a challenge which was evident right through the season..." Zaheer said.

Despite the bowling woes, Zaheer said the stability in the batting unit was a major positive. The overseas trio of Aiden Markram, Mitchell Marsh, and Nicholas Pooran -- the team's standout performer with the bat -- brought solidity to the line-up.

"There are positives, a lot of positives -- the stability was evident with regard to batting."

"But with regard to bowling, we were trying to figure out the combinations, we were trying to figure out the options which can get us over the line and that is something that was the story right throughout the season," he conceded. (PTI)

## Big surprise in sumo; the sport has a new Japanese champion

**TOKYO, May 28:** Japan has a new sumo grand champion -- or yokozuna -- and the big news is he's Japanese.

Onosato, the new grand champion, weighs 191 kilograms (421 pounds) and he is the first Japanese competitor to reach the top rank since 2017. By comparison, the average weight of an NFL lineman is about 140 kilos, or just over 300 pounds.

The sport has recently been dominated by Mongolians and prior to Onosato, six of the previous seven yokozunas have been from Mongolia.

"I'll devote myself to training so that I will not disgrace the title of yokozuna," Onosato said Wednesday, dressed in a formal kimono and bowing as he sat on the floor. "I will aim to become a one-and-only yokozuna."

Onosato, whose real name is Daiki Nakamura, is only 24 and was promoted Wednesday to sumo's top



rank by the Japan Sumo Association. Onosato was promoted by winning last week's Summer Grand Sumo Tournament, which came after he won another prestigious tournament in March.

Onosato is from Ishikawa prefecture, which was hit on Jan. 1, 2024, by a devastating earthquake and

tsunami that killed about 600 people in the prefecture and caused widespread damage. Much of the destruction was centered on an area known as the Noto Peninsula.

"I will work hard as a yokozuna to encourage and cheer up the Ishikawa prefecture and the Noto region," he said.

He then added: "I determined that yokozuna should be my goal once I entered the world of sumo," he said. "It's not easy to achieve and I'm really delighted."

Sumo is regarded as Japan's national sport, or most sacred sport, and many of the ritual elements are connected to Shinto, Japan's indigenous religion.

Sumo's origins date back more than 1,000 years, and Japan is the only country where it is contested on a professional level.

The sport is highly regimented with many wrestlers living in communal training facilities where food and dress are controlled by ancient traditions. Onosato's promotion will set up an instant rivalry with Mongolia-born Hoshoryu, who is the other wrestler in Japan to hold the yokozuna title.

The Japanese news agency Kyodo said the two sumo stars are due to meet in a tournament in July in the central city of Nagoya. (AP)



# Iyer's tact up against RCB's flair in battle of equals

Iyer-Ponting partnership has resulted in a stellar turnaround for Punjab Kings



**MULLANPUR (CHANDIGARH), May 28:** Shreyas Iyer's inspiring leadership will face its toughest test yet when Punjab Kings host an equally upbeat Royal Challengers Bengaluru in Qualifier 1 of the Indian Premier League here on Thursday.

Having earned the cushion of a top-two finish, one can expect both teams to have a no holds barred approach knowing they will get another shot at reaching the final even if they come up short on the opening night of the play-offs.

Punjab Kings find themselves in unfamiliar territory having made the play-offs for the first time since 2014 but they are not carrying the baggage of the past in the Iyer-Ricky Ponting (head coach) era.

RCB, on the other hand, are way too familiar with heartbreaks of the knock-out stages and like every season, are hoping to end their title drought. In their own words, the job is only half done for both title contenders.

The Iyer-Ponting partnership has resulted in a stellar turnaround for Punjab Kings, who have finally cracked the consistency code after more than a decade of under-performance.

The combination has managed to get the best out of the players making them a well-oiled unit.

The opening duo of Prabhsimran Singh and rookie

Priyansh Arya has laid the platform for the likes of Iyer and Josh Inglis to build.

Finisher Shashank Singh continues to improve his game with each passing season and more recently, Australian import Marcus Stoinis finding his range with the bat makes the batting look more formidable.

The concerns lie in the bowling department, especially after the departure of South African Marco Jansen, who has returned home for national duty.

Jansen bowled the crucial overs both in the powerplay and death and the team will certainly miss him on Thursday night.

Kyle Jamieson showed promise in his debut for the franchise but will need to bowl better upfront to make an impact. Batting all-rounder Azmatullah Omarzai could take Jansen's spot.

Leg-spinner Yuzvendra Chahal, who missed the last two games due to a finger injury, is expected to return for the big game and bowl alongside the ever accurate Harpreet Brar.

Arsheep Singh has been the standout pacer for his longtime franchise, delivering in all phases of the game.

RCB too had injury concerns going into the business end of the tournament but they have been al-

laid to a good extent.

Pacer Josh Hazlewood is expected to regain full fitness and Tim David too would be available for selection, lending more balance to the side.

RCB have been branded as a top heavy outfit for years but that appears to be changing with the likes of Jitesh Sharma realising their potential in the middle-order. Jitesh played the best innings of his IPL career on Tuesday night and his confidence will be sky high going into the play-offs.

It would be important from the team's point of view that Phil Salt is at his destructive best in the powerplay and Virat Kohli keeps batting like he has been through the season, racking up fifties with ridiculous ease.

RCB will take positives out of their win over Punjab Kings at this venue in the league stage. The pitch has been rather unpredictable with 200 scored only once in the first innings of the four games played here.

But Punjab Kings will have the belief of winning from the brink at their home ground having defended 111 against KKR last month.

The stakes will be high but both teams will treat the game as a stepping stone to their ultimate goal.

**Squads:**

**Punjab Kings:** Nehal Wadhwa, Harnoor Singh, Shreyas Iyer, Musheer Khan, Pyla Avinash, Prabhsimran Singh, Vishnu Vinod, Josh Inglis, Marcus Stoinis, Praveen Dubey, Priyansh Arya, Azmatullah Omarzai, Aaron Hardie, Harpreet Brar, Suryansh Shedge, Shashank Singh, Yuzvendra Chahal, Arsheep Singh, Xavier Bartlett, Kuldeep Sen, Vijaykumar Vyshak, Yash Thakur, Mitchell Owen, Kyle Jamieson.

**Royal Challengers Bengaluru:** Virat Kohli, Rajat Patidar (c), Swastik Chikara, Jitesh Sharma, Philip Salt, Manoj Bhandage, Tim David, Krunal Pandya, Liam Livingstone, Romario Shepherd, Jacob Bethell, Swapnil Singh, Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Josh Hazlewood, Nuwan Thushara, Yash Dayal, Rasikh Dar Salam, Suyash Sharma, Mohit Rathee, Abhinandan Singh, Mayank Agarwal, Blessing Muzarabani, Tim Seifert.

Match starts 7.30 PM. (PTI)

# India series will be real test for Crawley, Pope: Geoffrey Boycott



**LONDON, May 28:** Legendary Geoffrey Boycott remains unconvinced that England's Zak Crawley and Ollie Pope have overcome their "technical and mental issues" despite scoring centuries against Zimbabwe, insisting that their real challenge will come in next month's five-Test series against India.

Crawley has endured a tough few months, struggling in New Zealand where he averaged under nine and fell to Matt Henry in all six innings.

Pope, too, had a rollercoaster 2024. His brilliant 196 in the opening Test against India in Hyderabad stands among the finest overseas knocks by an Englishman, but he has been extremely inconsistent since.

"We cannot say suddenly that Crawley and Pope have solved the technical and mental issues that have dogged their careers because the Zimbabwe bowling was so average," the former English opener wrote in his column for the 'Daily Telegraph'.

England's top-three of Crawley, Ben Duckett, and Pope all struck dominant hundreds as the hosts piled up 565/6 declared against what Boycott termed a Zimbabwean "club-bowling" attack, en route to an innings and 45-run victory in the recently concluded one-off Test.

"They were medium pacers not good enough or consistent enough to expose any flaws in Crawley and Pope's batting. We

will have to wait until the India series to see if there really is any improvement against better bowlers. That will be the real test and give us a better idea of where they stand."

The 84-year-old however acknowledged that the runs would boost confidence for England's top-order.

"The top three of Zak Crawley, Ben Duckett and Ollie Pope made hundreds. Well done. It is not their fault the bowling was so poor."

"It was exactly what any batsman wants early season: easy runs. Runs breeds confidence, confidence sets you up for the summer. Form and confidence is everything. They did their job but, if we're honest, it was not a great advert for Test match cricket."

"It flattered one team and knocked seven bells out of the other one. But England's top three go into the Test series against India full of confidence. They have no excuse now."

Describing the game as a "mismatch", he added: "It was like putting a heavyweight boxer in with a flyweight. The heavyweight toyed with the flyweight before knocking him out with one punch."

"Zimbabwe were just out of their depth. Anyone could see it. England batted first on a flat pitch and took advantage of club bowling and enjoyed easy batting practice."

England will face India in a five-Test marquee series beginning June 20 at Leeds. Their next assignment in the World Test Championship cycle will be the high-profile Ashes series in Australia, starting November 21.

"My worry for the Ashes series later this year has always been England's bowling and I saw nothing at Nottingham to change my mind. "The seamers were made to look very ordinary by a Zimbabwe team that were not much better than a minor county side." (PTI)

## FRENCH OPEN

# Novak Djokovic is bothered by the weather more than anything in 1st-round win

**PARIS, May 28:** Novak Djokovic experienced the lowest of lows — pulling out of the French Open after tearing the meniscus in his right knee — and the highest of highs — winning a long-sought Olympic gold medal for Serbia — at Roland-Garros last year. This trip to the site went smoothly, once he got going.

Other than some first-set interruptions by, and lengthy discussions about, the windy, wet weather, the 24-time major champion was unbothered during a 6-3, 6-3, 6-3 victory over 98th-ranked Mackie McDonald of the United States at Court Philippe-Chatrier in the first round.

"He makes it seem like a video game, almost, for him," said McDonald, a 30-year-old Californian who played college tennis at UCLA and twice has been to the fourth round at Grand Slam tournaments. "He's able to just do so much. I don't even think he was playing his best tennis or his highest level. But if I pushed him to a different point, he would bring it up."

One example: When McDonald earned his first break points, getting to love-40 at 3-2 in the second set, Djokovic came up with three big serves, a 120 mph (193 kph) ace, a 123 mph (199 kph) ace and a 122 mph (197 kph) service winner.

Djokovic compiled 32 winners — 18 more than McDonald — and just 20 unforced errors in a match that eventually was played with the lights on and the retractable roof closed.

"I'm a competitor, and losing stings," McDonald said, "but playing Novak on that court is something I'll remember."

Before Djokovic, who just turned 38 and won his 100th career title last weekend, walked onto the playing surface, he was identified by the stadium announcer by his total number of Slam trophies, the three he's won at the French Open, and the Summer Games gold he won "here in Paris."

"I still remember last year's Olympic Games. It was the last time I was here," Djokovic said afterward. "The emotion is very strong."

**The medal that means so much to him?**

"I don't have the medal with me. But I have a picture of the medal in my bag," he said. "The medal is with my father. My dad likes trophies more than I do, so I gave him mine."

**What else happened at the French Open on Tuesday?**

Once Coco Gauff found her rackets — a relatively important piece of equipment for a tennis player — all was well for her in the first round. Gauff showed up on court, opened her bag and peered inside to find it was missing her rackets. The start of the warmup was delayed, but then everything went Gauff's way, and the 2023 U.S. Open champion got past Olivia Gadecki 6-2, 6-2.

Unseeded American Alycia Parks, ranked 52nd in the world, beat No. 14 seed Karolina Muchova 6-3, 2-6, 6-1 in the women's last match of the day. Muchova was the runner-up to Iga Swiatek at Roland-Garros in 2023. Other winners included the No. 3 seeds, Jessica Pegula and Alexander Zverev, and 18-year-old Mirra Andrejeva, but 2021 U.S. Open champion Daniil Medvedev, who was seeded 11th, lost to Cam Norrie 7-5, 6-3, 4-6, 1-6, 7-5 across nearly four hours. Other seeded men were sent home when 18-year-old João Fonseca dispatched No. 30 Hubert Hurkacz 6-2, 6-4, 6-2, and when No. 16 Grigor Dimitrov quit while leading American qualifier Ethan Quinn two sets to one. This is the fourth consecutive major tournament at which Dimitrov retired.

**Frenchman Gael Monfils Advances**

Frenchman Gael Monfils rallied from two sets down and beat Hugo Dellien of Bolivia 4-6, 3-6, 6-1, 7-6 (4) 6-1, in a match that lasted more than three hours. Monfils was injured on the fifth point of the match when he fell and crashed into a side billboard. The 38-year-old Monfils was moving to his right as he returned a shot into the net. He scraped his hands trying to break his fall and required a few minutes of medical treatment before play resumed.

Monfils, ranked 42nd in the world and with a history of right knee and leg injuries, was a point away from breaking the 90th-ranked Dellien's serve and ended up losing the game and going behind 3-0 in the first set.

After dropping the second set, Monfils battled back and, helped by a 19-2 advantage in aces, advanced to the second round.

**Who is playing at Roland-Garros on Wednesday?**

The second round begins on Day 4, with a schedule that includes defending champions Iga Swiatek and Carlos Alcaraz, 2024 runner-up Jasmine Paolini and two-time finalist Casper Ruud. Swiatek meets 2021 U.S. Open champion Emma Raducanu in the day session's last match in the main stadium. (AP)

# Anwar returns in build-up to Asian Cup qualifiers

Suhail earns India call-up for Thailand friendly

**KOLKATA, May 28:** Suhail Ahmad Bhat on Wednesday became the latest footballer from Jammu and Kashmir to earn an India call-up as head coach Manolo Marquez announced a 28-member squad for an international friendly against Thailand on June 4.

The fixture in Thailand is part of India's preparations for the AFC Asian Cup Saudi Arabia 2027 Qualifiers Final Round, where the Blue Tigers will face Hong Kong on June 10 in Kowloon City.

The 20-year-old central forward, who hails from Bannia region of Srinagar, was a key figure in Mohun Bagan Super Giant's triumphant Indian Super League campaign last season and is seen as a promising attacking talent.

The squad announcement also marks the return of East Bengal's dependable central defender Anwar Ali, who had been sidelined since February due to a hamstring injury. He last featured in competitive action against Bengaluru FC in the ISL.

The squad, which includes talismanic striker Sunil Chhetri, who came out of retirement in March to bolster a struggling side, had been camping in Kolkata for the past 10 days.

In Kolkata, Marquez's men underwent six full days of training, with gym sessions in the mornings and on-pitch training in the evenings.

The Blue Tigers played two practice matches on May 26 and 27.

On Monday, they won 2-1 against Santosh Trophy Champions Bengal, with Brandon Fernandes and Ashique Kuruniyan finding the net.

# Mind coach recalls gritty Karun's fight to stay afloat after Test snub in 2018



**MULLANPUR (CHANDIGARH), May 28:**

Karun Nair's fall into a world of despair back in 2018 is a well-documented tale of frustration but what pulled him out of that rut? The answer lies with Bengaluru-based mind coach Shree Advani, whom Karun consulted at his most vulnerable and the one who ensured that the talented batter did not allow his axing from the team, despite a rare triple ton in Tests, become a defining moment for his self-worth.

Shree, brother of 28-time World Champion cueist Pankaj Advani, worked with Karun for a year and was left impressed with his dedication towards the game that had not returned his love back at the time.

"We had to make him realise that the drop was not a reflection on his ability. And we had to keep the

confidence in his ability high and make him understand that there is so much cricket left in him," Shree recalled in an interview to PTI, expressing his joy at Karun's comeback to the Test squad for the tour of England next month.

Though he didn't do much wrong after becoming the second ever triple centurion from India in December 2016, Karun did not get too many chances the following year and when he warmed the bench for the entire tour of England in 2018, his frustration hit its peak. "Karun has gone through a lot in his career. After not getting opportunities on the entire tour of England, Karun was frustrated to say the least. It hit him hard and there were bound to be self doubts. You tend to question your self-worth. Like 'what more do I need to do?'..." Shree remembered. (PTI)

They registered a 3-0 victory over North 24 Parganas as Chhetri, Chinglensana Singh Konsham and Udanta Singh Kumam scored the goals on Tuesday.

The Blue Tigers are placed in Group C of the AFC Asian Cup 2027 Final Round Qualifiers alongside Bangladesh, Hong Kong, and Singapore. The group stage will follow a home-and-away round-robin format.

"All 28 players participating in the ongoing camp in Kolkata will travel to Thailand for the FIFA friendly against the hosts, scheduled for June 4," the All India Football Federation said in a release on Wednesday.

Before Suhail, midfielder Danish Farooq was the most recent Kashmiri to play for India, featuring in two friendlies against Bahrain and Belarus under Igor Stimac in 2022.

Mehrajuddin Wadoo remains one of the most prominent names from the region, having earned 32 caps between 2005 and 2011.

Wadoo, hailing from Srinagar's Rainawari area, famously scored the winning goal against Bangladesh in the 2005 SAFF Cup final in Karachi.

He was also part of India's victorious campaigns in the 2007 and 2009 Nehru Cup and the 2008 AFC Challenge Cup. India had a lacklustre showing at the AFC Asian Cup 2023, where they failed to earn a single point or score a goal in their group-stage matches against Australia, Uzbekistan, and Syria.

The current qualifying campaign also began on a shaky note, with a goalless draw against Bangladesh on March 25. (PTI)

# Opponents of French players at the French Open deal with insults and whistling

**PARIS, May 28:** In all sports, there are advantages to being at home. At the French Open tennis tournament, being a visitor playing against a French player can feel as though the whole world is against you.

The crowds don't just cheer. They boo, they whistle, they make noise between serves, they hurl insults — and, at least once, even gum — at the locals' opponents. That sort of behavior is why the tournament organizers banned alcohol from the stands last year, a policy still in place. Some of the non-French athletes who deal with that sort of negativity in Paris, such as 19-year-old Jakub Mensik of the Czech Republic, who eliminated Alexandre Müller in front of a rowdy crowd at Court 14 on Tuesday, compare the high-intensity atmosphere to that of a soccer game. Others choose stronger terms.

**One player says French Open fans can be disgusting**

"Disgusting. Worst experience of my life," was what Nicolás Jarry of Chile said this week when asked to think back to last year's rowdy loss at Court Simonne-Mathieu to France's Corentin Moutet, whose coach had implored the spectators to make life "hell" for Jarry after the

two had a contentious meeting in Santiago earlier in the season. Jarry blamed that on Moutet, saying that everything was calmer during his loss Monday to another Frenchman, Arthur Fils, whom the Chilean called a "good guy" and a "gentleman."

"It's a battle out there, you know. Sometimes, it's not just a battle with the player," said Novak Djokovic, who is scheduled to face the irrepressible Moutet in the second round Thursday. Expect an antagonistic atmosphere. Djokovic sure does.

**Roland-Garros spectators can be louder and more passionate**

"They're going to have the crowd on their side. It's nothing strange about it. It's expected," the 24-time Grand Slam champion said. "But it is true that here in France and in Paris, comparing to other Slams, the people are louder and more passionate and just give more support, louder support, more energy to their player, which for some (opponents) can be annoying. It's not the kind of ideal environment you want to be playing in, but you have to be ready for it." So much for the supposed silence usually found in a tennis arena. (AP)

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